

# Review of: "What is it like to be Out-of-Body? Phenomenal accounts of experiencers"

Marc Wittmann<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health (IGPP)

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

This article is a report on the phenomenology of out-of-body experiences (OBE) based on 13 individuals who had either been hypnotized ( $n = 6$ ) or had a spontaneous or self-induced ( $n = 7$ ) experience. As such the report is an interesting building block for understanding the phenomenology of this peculiar experience. Here are some ideas / suggestions for a potential revision of the manuscript. I formulate the points in a typical review format as they concern partly detailed issues.

Maybe the main issue is that in the abstract (in one sentence) and then as the largest part of the conclusion the question of whether the OBE is bound to brain processes (forming a hallucinatory representation) or whether one has a veridical impression of actually floating above/outside the body (decoupled from the brain) is prominently discussed. However, the inquiry through the interview does not address this (for sure) most interesting/important question. The article is about the phenomenology of OBEs and does not test the assumption that OBEs are veridical impressions of the mind residing outside the brain/body. The Conclusions section is one page long and the major part is concerned with this question, although no conclusions can be drawn. Conclusions can only be drawn related to the phenomena of OBEs.

Question: Are there known difference between the two groups (hypnosis/spontaneous and self-induced) or in the interview data presented here? Would that be worth investigating?

A methodological question: In Table 1 one can see the article sources of the participants are in 7 cases the two authors. The other cases are derived from other authors' articles. This is also a remark in general in that more detailed information could be given concerning the source of the data. The authors seem to have retrieved the participants' interview contents from sentences found in the articles. Then it would be an analysis of content from publications and not based on direct interviews. This issue should be clarified. The authors use the word "transcribed" on page 4, line 1 which could imply that content is taken from transcribed interviews.

It took a while for this reviewer to realize that the abbreviations in the Results section (A, AL, etc.) refer to the individual participants. That could be explicitly stated.

Perhaps a few more sentences could be written about the Content Analysis method. What was the procedure of the content analysis? There is hardly anything written about it. For example, did two independent raters analyze and categorize the participants' responses and the two outcomes were compared? What were the decision criteria to assign a sentence to a given category? For example, some phrases could also have been located in other categories such as "the colors merge into whiteness" could have been put into "color perception" and not "consciousness status" (by the way,

“status”?, not state?). Or: Statement by participant D in “Color Perception” has no color in it. Concerning the naming of categories: Is “Object Perception” really a good description of the statements, wouldn’t “visual sense” be more appropriate since it is about perspective shifting, a panoramic view, attention, etc.?

General Synthesis and Conclusion: Couldn’t one put the General Synthesis one-by-one directly after the categories in the Results section? The General Synthesis is more a Result than already a Discussion. Also, individual references are given (like: Josipovic, 2019) which would fit in a real discussion and not in the synthesis. That is, I miss a real discussion of the typical sorts. The OBE have communalities with other altered states of consciousness (ASC); a link and (real) discussion with findings in ASC such as induced through meditation, near-death experiences, psychedelics, similar show self-boundary dissolution, distorted time, etc. This could be prominently done in a discussion. Now the conclusion is about the question of the coupling of OBEs with the brain (as mentioned above) but it should be more about the phenomenology of OBE and the relation to other ASC.

Minor stylistic findings:

Line 6 of the abstract: in one sentence you have twice the word “emerged/emerges”; (and the whole sentence is not constructed well).

Page 2, line 4-6: The sentence is hard to understand: “a person in this state ... perceives himself/herself out of his body almost always seen as it was before having had such a type of experience.”

Reread carefully, I spotted instances of merging British English and American English (color, colour).