

“There is nothing to fear about dying. This Earth is not our home and what lies beyond is marvellous.”
An IPA exploration of the out-of-body experience -
single participant case study.

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is an account of my own work undertaken as a student in the University of Northampton, Division of Psychology and it includes nothing, which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. No part of this dissertation has been or is being submitted for any other degree, diploma or other qualification at this or any other University and specific acknowledgment is made in the text where I have availed myself of the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to contribute to our understanding of OBEs by exploring the lived experience of one advanced meditation practitioner with over 25 years experience of consciously inducing hundreds of meditative OBEs. Two face-to-face, semi-structured interviews along with one previously published article of the participant's life story were analyzed according the principles of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Three themes emerged including: (1) The OBE as mystical experience and initiation, (2) astral body as immortal soul, and (3) astral body as vehicle of consciousness. The findings reveal the OBE to be a spiritually transformative experience resulting in a fundamental shift in the research participant's world-view and belief governing personal immortality. The research also highlights the role of meditation as a development process, which may inform how we conduct OBE studies based on the projection-model in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Has anyone seen my soul?

In August 2015, The British Heart Foundation launched its "Heart disease is Heartless" campaign in an effort to raise public awareness about the sudden devastation caused by heart disease (Faull, 2015). What made this campaign especially interesting and worthy of its inclusion at the start of my dissertation, was the use of a television ad which begins with a scene of a young boy attending class becoming totally confused by the strange and sudden appearance of the his father's apparition (Foundation, 2015). We know this immediately to be the case as the father tries his best to say goodbye before disappearing from sight at the exact time the boy is interrupted and asked to join his upset mother in another room. It's an incredibly powerful campaign, reminding us all of the preciousness of life and it links directly to the fascination with some of the more novel findings of OBE research (Laws & Perry, 2010; Peake, 2011; Puthoff & Targ, 1975; Tart, 1998) that has been interpreted from a transpersonal or survivalist perspective as providing proof of the immaterial soul's existence (or an aspect of consciousness) and its ability to survive the physical body permanently at death – by the fact it appears to on occasion, temporarily function outside the body in life (Bozzano & Gobron, 1937; Crookall, 1973).

For many people, the belief in a "soul" is considered to be a question of religious faith and in sharp contrast with the current scientific worldview which rejects the notion of the traditional soul or any theory of mind that is ontologically distinct from the brain (Musolino & Stenger, 2015). However, as many as 1 in 10 people claim to have at least one OBE in their life (Blackmore, 1984a) and with new extraordinary cases gaining international media attention such as that of a young female Canadian student described by researchers at the University of Ottawa as possibly the first person studied to be able to voluntarily leave her body at will without any detection of brain abnormalities (A. M. Smith & Messier, 2014), science may very well be in a future position to re-evaluate what it is to be human - with a soul - that's beyond opinion or speculation. For this to be achieved more OBE research is clearly required and my dissertation contributes to the existing body of knowledge by exploring how one advanced meditation practitioner

with 25 years practice applies meaning to hundreds of voluntarily induced meditative OBEs.

But what exactly is an OBE? The OBE has been defined as an experience in which "the centre of awareness appears to the experient to occupy temporarily a position which is spatially remote from his or her body" (H.J. Irwin & Watt, 2007). Also known as astral travel, astral projection, bi-location or exteriorisation, the idea that a person's soul can temporarily leave the body is a widely accepted belief in 95% of 70 non-western cultures (Sheils, 1978). Thanks to over 100 years of OBE scientific research (Alvarado, 1989), many of the core features are extremely well documented for example, it's very common for people to report feeling a definite sense of separation and feelings of floating/flying and looking down at their own bodies (Green, 1968). Some people claim to have a heightened sense of vision and hearing during the OBE (Crookall, 1973) and to be in a possession of a second body similar in appearance of their own (Poynton, 1975). Others see themselves as a cloud, fog or ball of light (Alvardado & Zingrone, 2015) while many others report having no form at all (Alvarado, 1984).

During the onset or termination, many people indicate hearing high-pitched whistling or cracking sounds in their heads (Bruce, 1999) and others experience muscle twitching, stiffness or paralysis (Zingrone, Alvarado, & Cardena, 2010). The ability to travel to distant locations (Monroe, 1971) is also frequently reported and in some special cases, obtaining veridical and detailed information that would have been inaccessible by ordinary means occurs (Carrington & Muldoon, 1969; Crookall, 1973) such as patients becoming aware of activities in a different wards while at the same time being confined to their hospital beds (Green, 1968) or people who observe events taking place at the homes of their family or friends when their physical bodies remains motionless in their bedrooms (Zingrone et al., 2010). Less frequent are the cases where the apparition or spirit of a person is seen publically whilst outside of the body at about the time their physical body is located elsewhere (Hart, 1954), instances where a silver cord is observed connecting the second 'OB body' to the physical (Blackmore, 1984b) or cases where people are simultaneously aware of sensations

arising from their physical body while in the out-of-body state (Alvarado, 2005).

In addition, the research literature also reveals OBEs can occur in a variety of different circumstances such as being on the verge of sleep when the body is relaxed and the mind is still alert (Alvarado, 1984), while being medically ill or in a state of unconsciousness (Laws & Perry, 2010; Murray, 2009; Van Lommel, van Wees, Meyers, & Elfferich, 2001), during periods of intense psychological stress (Green, 1968), as a result of drug use (Luke, 2012; Tart, 1971), by undergoing hypnosis (Terhune & Cardeña, 2009), through the use of innovative technology (Sadigh & Kozicky, 1994) and following direct stimulation of the brain (Cheyne & Girard, 2009). It appears the OBE can happen pretty much at any moment, with spontaneous cases occurring while walking (Crookall, 1978), driving a car (Green, 1968), giving childbirth (Twemlow, Gabbard, & Jones, 1982) at work assisting in a medical operation (Muldoon & Carrington, 1951) or conducting police procedures in connection to an arrest (Alvarado, 2000), having a bit of fun on the dance floor (Crookall, 1978) or participating in extreme sports as reported by a 32 year-old Scottish woman who after running approximately 13 miles in preparation for a marathon, started to feel as though her direct experience of the world was originating from a point outside of her physical body (Alvarado, 2000, p. 184):

“I felt as if something was leaving my body, and although I was still running along looking at the scenery, I was looking at myself running as well. My ‘soul’ or whatever, was floating somewhere above my body high enough up to see the tops of the trees and the small hills.”

Other studies more closely aligned to my dissertation have focused on instances where the OBE is voluntarily induced at will by a small number of exceptionally gifted people. In an attempt to show how different investigative approaches have tried to validate experiential claims historically, three groundbreaking cases are presented in greater detail below:

1. **Miss Z** - Miss Z was the name given to a special research subject of Dr. Charles Tart who reported having regular OBEs since her childhood (Tart, 1968). As a young woman in her early twenties, she had grown accustomed to regularly floating outside of her body during the course of nights sleep and would frequently observe her physical body lying on the bed from a viewpoint near the ceiling. The OBEs would last on average between several seconds to nearly half a minute in length and once complete, Miss Z's awareness would simply return to normal and she would resume sleeping. In 1968, she agreed to participate in Tart's OBE experiment (over four consecutive nights) and was asked to identify a five digit number that had been placed on a shelf above her while she lay asleep with EEG electrodes attached to her head. On the first three nights, Miss Z reported not being in sufficient control of her OBE to be able to position herself high enough to see the target number but succeeded on the fourth night reporting '25132' correctly.
2. **Ingo Swan** - Another research subject who claimed to be able to induce meditative OBEs at will was Ingo Swann. Considered to be one of the most extensively tested psychics in the field of parapsychology, Swann is credited for helping to advance our understanding of human potential in the field of remote viewing having participated in thousands of experimental trials (Peake, 2011) including working with the U.S military and intelligence agencies. During 1971-73, Swann agreed to have his OBE abilities tested by The American Society for Psychical Research and during the course of one of the experiments, successfully projected his consciousness into sealed boxes to identify the target objects (Puthoff & Targ, 1975). The boxes were placed on a shelf located several feet above his head near the ceiling while he remained sat down attached to electrodes that were designed to detect movements of any kind. The odds of success were calculated at 40,000 to 1.
3. **Keith Harary** - Like Ingo Swann and Miss Z before, Keith Harary claimed to also be able to voluntarily induce OBEs at will (Targ & Harary, 1984). In 1975, he was recruited in an unusual OBE

experiment involving a cat named Spirit that would in theory, serve as a means of 'psychic detection' and react to the presence of Harary's projected consciousness (if indeed it's presence was genuinely felt). The kitten was taken to a second room where it was keenly observed by researchers and the test ran four times, but Harary was asked to project and make contact with the kitten on two occasions only. The cat 'froze' both times Harary was asked to project and did not meow at all during the OBE trial-phase compared to thirty-seven times during a non OBE trial.

Not only did these authors approach the study of the OBE with an open-mind, they were clearly prepared to think 'outside of the box' and injected a very refreshing and exciting experimental stance into the OBE research equation. Their predecessors, working a century before, were just as forward thinking; and explored the topic by different means.

Literature Review

Much of the early literature and writings on the subject of OBEs were based on case collection studies. Robert Dale Owen (1860) examined exceptional cases where experients reported having OBEs and then travelling to distant locations and speaking to friends - who subsequently testified to the experientier's presence and conversing with them. He classified these types of OBEs as "visionary excursions" and like many of time, supported the subtle body theory where an aspect (soul, spirit, double, or using his terminology,- spiritual portion) was able to exteriorise itself from the physical body. This idea was similar to William Stainton Moses (1876) who describes OBEs as, "action of the ego outside of bodily treatment". After reviewing the testimonials of psychic mediums, Moses was led to believe that certain individuals possessed a constitution that allowed their spirits to more easily separate from the physical body and travel to scenes, "removed from that which they know their bodies to be". Gabriel Delanne believed that recurrent apparitions indicated the ability for the soul to temporarily detach itself from the physical body based on his review of OBE case studies from the archives of the Society of Psychical Research (Alvarado, 2011) and finally Ernesto Bonnanzo investigated both OBE and NDE cases but took a keen interest in veridical OBEs as these distinguished them from other cases

that could be potentially argued as hallucinatory. The OBE for him, was evidence that the spirit could temporarily leave the body and survive bodily death (Alvarado, 2005; Bozzano & Gobron, 1937).

The noticeable exceptions to subtle body theories during this period came from William H. Harrison (1879) who was largely impressed by the cases where apparitions of the living were collectively perceived. He explored the role of altered states of consciousness (trance, sleep) to induce the spirit release from the body. However, he argued for other possible explanations to the veridical OBE cases including ESP clairvoyance or even insight by spirit communion. Psychological explanations were put forward by very distinguished figures like Edward Guerny (1886) who suggested OBEs were hallucinatory experiences for non-veridical cases and a form of telepathic interaction for the veridical type, Frank Podmore (1894) and Charles Richet (1887) who both questioned the underlying meanings of hypnotically induced OBEs with Richet declaring it to be a mistake to consider OBEs to be anything other than elaborate dreams which he felt was created by the experients' imagination and memory and finally, by James Hyslop (1912) who attributed OBEs as a result of the creative capacities of the subconscious mind.

From the 1950's, we begin to see the development of more systematic OBE research methods including the introduction of research surveys that revealed for the first time the rate of incidence for the OBE. Hornell Hart (1954) analysed the responses of 155 sociology students at Duke University and discovered 27% had experienced at least one OBE. Celia Green (1966, 1967) polled 115 students from Southampton University and then 380 students from Oxford University the following year and discovered a 19% and 34% OBE incidence rate respectively. In a similar fashion, Susan Blackmore (1980) questioned both University of Surrey and University of Bristol students if they ever had an out-of-body experience and the results of both studies were almost identical at 13 to 14%. Blackmore analyzed both sets of study participants and came to the conclusion that it made very little difference whether the students knew a great deal about OBEs beforehand or not (Blackmore, 1982a). This conclusion was tested in separate study with students from the University of Amsterdam (Blackmore,

1980) where the study participants were split into two groups with the first group being told a great deal about the OBE and the second group was told nothing. The rate of OBE incidence of both groups was closely matched at 18%. Finally, a survey conducted by Richard Kohr (1980) using members of The Association of Research and Enlightenment revealed 50% of the 400 study participants reported having at least one OBE – which isn't surprising when you consider members are drawn together by the inspired writings of Edgar Cayce who is widely considered to be a pioneer of holistic medicine and one of the most extraordinarily gifted spiritual healers and deep-trance mediums of the 20th century (Stearn & Lazar, 1967). Larger population studies were also carried out by John Palmer (1975) in Charlottesville, Virginia where 14% of 534 townspeople who responded to the survey reported having at least one OBE while university students from the same town reported a 25% incidence rate and Harralsson and colleagues from the University of Reykjavik found only 8% (of the of 1132 randomly selected people living in Iceland between the ages of 30 and 70 who completed the survey) reported having at least one OBE.

The 1980s ushered in the development of the first psychological OBE theories with testable predictions by authors John Palmer, Susan Blackmore and Harvey Irwin. Palmer (1978) proposed the OBE to be a response to a change in body concept that threatens the identity of a person. The mind in this theory, works to reinstate the sense of identity by producing a hallucinatory OBE experience. Blackmore (1984b) suggested the OBE to be imaginary psychological misrepresentation. When an individual's most coherent and stable model of reality is deprived of sensory input, it can break down, and Blackmore theorized other models of reality like the OBE could take over and appear to be real. Irwin (1985) advanced a theoretical account of the OBE as a non-pathological condition of dissociation correlated to psychological absorption. When an individual's total attention including perceptual, motoric, imaginative and ideational resources are completely engrossed, one's normal everyday sensory mode of experience (static body image) is transformed for another (disembodied OBE image). Thanks to these new testable ideas, researchers began exploring the OBE in relationship to a person's attentional capacities and imagery (Blackmore, 1987; Harvey J Irwin, 1980; Myers, Austrin, Grisso, & Nickeson, 1983), to

different states of consciousness (Blackmore, 1982b; Kohr, 1980; Palmer, 1979) and to personality variables (Gabbard & Twemlow, 1984; Tobacyk & Mitchell, 1987).

Finally, a literature review on the subject of OBE would not be complete without a mention (however brief) of the neurological explanations for the OBE, which have been proposed over the last 80 years (Ajuriaguerra & Hecaen, 1952; Brugger, Regard, & Landis, 1997; Frederiks, 1969; Menninger-Lerchenthal, 1935; Todd & Dewhurst, 1955), but have only recently become popular and mainstream. The earlier research found the occipital, temporal and parietal lobe to be the neuroanatomical basis for the OBE while new studies by Blanke and colleagues (2002) propose the OBE to occur as a result of impairment or disruption to the Temporal-Parietal Junction (TPJ) of the brain. In a pioneering study, Blanke was able to induce an OBE-like experience in a patient under evaluation for epilepsy by electrically stimulating the TPJ and in a follow up study, by evaluating damaged TPJ brain areas in five other patients who suffered from autoscopic hallucinations (Blanke, Landis, Spinelli, & Seeck, 2004).

Though the level of OBE research has been on the decline, interest in near-death experiences hasn't (Knoblauch, Schmied, & Schnettler, 2001; Laws & Perry, 2010; Sam Parnia et al., 2014; S Parnia, Spearpoint, & Fenwick, 2007; Van Lommel et al., 2001) and because of the many phenomenological overlaps, it proves extremely relevant to those interested in OBE research, revealing yet again how it mysteriously continues to occur under wide-range of different circumstances.

Research Rationale and Justification

Though we may have a great deal of understanding of what a typical OBE entails as previously mentioned or benefit from access to a wide range of studies that attempt to explain the OBE in terms of theories or underlying processes (Alvarado, 1982; Blackmore, 1984b; Blanke, Ortigue, Landis, & Seeck, 2002; Cheyne & Girard, 2009; Harvey J Irwin, 2000; Neppe, 1982; Palmer, 1978; Persinger, 1999; Wettach, 2000; Whiteman, 1980), the literature is largely nomothetical and quantitative in nature and several authors have been critical of contemporary OBE research as lacking in

systematic work that offers insight into the subjective experience of how people perceive and crucially make sense of their OBEs (Alvarado & Zingrone, 2003; Marsh, 2010). These are precisely the kinds of questions that my dissertation aims to explore and so in an effort to address this shortcoming in the existing literature, I argue for the use of qualitative research approach that is better placed to understand the psychology of the individuals having these experiences such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

IPA is firmly committed to, "understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people in a particular context" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Because its development is based on three disciplines including phenomenology, ideography and hermeneutics, - which is a process of interpretive activity which allows researcher to get as close to the participant's psychology as possible (Seebohm, 2007), IPA is ideally suited for the close examination and meaning making aspects of the study rather than other qualitative research approaches including grounded theory, which is better placed for developing a theory about the OBE itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) or an ethnographic approach which would be perfect for examining the OBE from a cultural, organisational or group perspective (Huberman & Miles, 2002) and would present an excellent alternative to nomothetical analysis. The case study according to Yin (2013) is meant to demonstrate existence not incidence and Platt (1988, 1992) argues is justified when describing something intrinsically interesting and has the potential to point out flaws in existing assumptions, preconceptions and theories for a population. My study participant has accumulated hundreds of voluntarily induced meditative OBEs over the course of over 25 years practice, and is in an extremely rare and privileged position as subject matter expert. As such, the OBE research community stands to benefit more from an in-depth analysis of his experiences and considerations than choosing to dilute the potential research gains and instead studying two or more novice practitioners, which is also incredibly important, but has already been done before (Wilde & Murray, 2009).

Dissertation Proposal

This study contributes to our understanding of OBEs by exploring the lived experience of one advanced meditation practitioner with over 25 years experience of consciously inducing hundreds of meditative OBEs. My research paper is primarily designed to understand how the participant applies meaning to his OBE experiences.

Personal OBE experience and importance of research

As a direct result of my thesis research, I discovered that I too have previously experienced what Robert Bruce describes as a low level OBE called 'remote eye projection'. According to Bruce (2005), "a remote-eye projection occurs when an overtired person suddenly sees a vision of a remote scene very clearly, as if with physical eyes. This is usually a real-time scene fairly close to the projector's actual location in the real world. Remote-eye projectors are usually, but not always, able to see in all directions at once. They are also usually unaware of having any type of body or mind at their remote eye's location, although they will be fully aware of their physical body and its surroundings. They also usually have only limited influence over the movement of their remote-eye aspect, if any."

This happened to me, exactly as described above, ten years ago one early Saturday morning in 2005. I started the day with a 45-minute meditation session and decided to return to sleep. I remember lying on the right side of my body, mentally alert and feeling very relaxed when suddenly a gentle wave of energy/warmth was felt over my face. The normal blank canvas of my mind became illuminated with the vision of an abandoned oil refinery and immediate surrounding areas. It was as though someone had turned on a television set inside my head and without any instruction I simply 'knew' this was an opportunity for 'exploration' and so began to direct my attention to different areas within my field of awareness. As I did, my vision would follow instantly around the facility (as if the footage was being broadcast directly from an unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicle) and would even penetrate into the earth or metallic structures if they happen to be in the way of my chosen attentional path. At no point throughout the experience did I become unconscious or felt I was dreaming or floating in any way. I was fully aware of lying next to my wife in bed at all times and trying my

best to remain physically still and mentally focused. In all, the remote eye projection lasted a few minutes only, never to be repeated and largely forgotten until now.

Importance of Research

This OBE dissertation project is incredibly important to me for several personal and academic reasons including:

1. **Inform my spiritual practice** – Many of the current leading proponents for astral projection see the ability of extending one's consciousness as an incredible opportunity for spiritual growth. Authors CL Weschcke (2012), "Astral projection is one of the major keys to psychic development for spiritual growth and self-empowerment and the most important single development opportunity at this critical time". Robert Bruce (2012) continues along the same lines emphasizing the importance of experiential knowledge to support religious faith saying, "Other worlds exists all around us that very few people ever see or step into, even though they may believe may be there" and finally Graham Nichols, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in London while attending his one-day OBE workshop, says, "OBEs allows us to explore for ourselves the reality of life after physical death and afford us the freedom to travel to any place in the known universe in an instant." For Nicholls, one of the real benefits of OBEs are their ability to assist the process of individual healing and transformation saying, "It allows us to come into contact with our spiritual nature and find harmony and peace at many levels".

Beyond the respect of their peers, what adds to the above author's credibility is their continued involvement with psychical research, and it would be very interesting indeed if during or at the end of this dissertation process, I will feel inspired to integrate any new techniques into my own spiritual practice or even change my spiritual outlook in any way. Having OBEs explained to me first-hand by someone with considerable experience is an extremely rare opportunity so willing to allow for the possibility of growth that is

beyond the academic scope of this dissertation project.

2. **Helping to raise public awareness** – During a recent family visit to the United States, I discussed my study with my nephew and was shocked to discover his story of suffering with mental confusion as a result of experiencing high pitch sounds and body vibrations during sleep for many years. Without knowing whom to turn to for advice, he suffered in silence but ultimately found 'salvation' courtesy of Hollywood after watching a film that helped him to begin to make sense of what he was experiencing. This negative aspect of OBEs is consistently noted in the accounts of the uninitiated (Green, 1968) including Robert Monroe (1971), who is largely considered a modern pioneer in the investigation of human consciousness, suffered with intense body vibrations for several weeks prior to his first OBE. Very concerned for his well being, he sought medical attention only to be prescribed pills to help with anxiety. Though there isn't a general consensus today in terms of explanation, it is my sincerest hope that this study could potentially help ordinary people like my nephew realize that this experience isn't unique to them and encourage them to learn more about the various perspectives on the subject.

3. **Help to raise academic research interest in OBE** – If veridical OBE perception can be consistently achieved as result of prolonged meditation practice, then this would strengthen the argument for a radical rethinking of our scientific world-view including our understanding of reality and mind-brain ontology. To date, one of the key issues with OBE research is repeatability (Blackmore, 1999) and so it hoped that my participant's unique accounts, specifically those which relate to how physical reality is observed from outside the body, may one inform how OBEs veridicality studies could be conducted in the future to increase the likelihood of success. For example, when deliberately attempting to project into his mother's home as part of an experiment (1, 462-483), my research participant was only partially successful and prevented from entering into the lounge that was his mother's primary dwelling place by an invisible force or 'energy' as he describes it. He noticed this phenomenon

occurring mostly in built up areas and believes it to be mental constructs created by the residents unconsciously that manifest in very real ways in other dimensions. Future OBE veridicality research studies could possibly take this into consideration when designing studies by constructing purpose built-labs in rural areas for example or tailoring existing test spaces to serve as temporary homes say for 2-3 weeks before beginning studies to strengthen a research participant's 'connection' to the lab-controlled area. Though veridicality research is not my study's primary focus, it does offer one example of how insights from this dissertation could potentially inform future OBE research.

METHOD

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is firmly committed to, “understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people in a particular context” (Smith, 2011) and as a method of qualitative research, it’s development has been informed by three philosophical areas of knowledge including:

- **Phenomenology** – IPA is phenomenological and explores individual perception of experience in its own terms. Of particular interest to IPA researchers are those experiences that take on importance, which normally occurs when something significant happens in people’s lives. First developed by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (2014) who believed that it was experience that was the source of all knowledge and to understand the essence of what one was experiencing required a shift of attention from the object of experience towards our perception of those objects. For Husserl, the systematic examination of lived experience or content of consciousness requires the ‘bracketing’ of one assumptions and preconceptions to prevent being distracted away from arriving at the essential qualities of experience of a given phenomenon.
- **Hermeneutics** – Hermeneutics originated as a theory of text interpretation of biblical scripture but has grown into a discipline that also includes the interpretation of verbal and nonverbal communication (Seebom, 2007). IPA researchers have the responsibility of attempting to become as intimately familiar with their research participant’s psychological world as possible. Since this cannot be achieved directly, access to another person’s psychological world is made available through process of interpretive activity – hermeneutics, of which is dependent on the researchers own conceptions. This explains why in IPA, the researcher is considered to be engaged in a ‘double hermeneutic’ process because he/she is trying to understand and make sense of the participant trying to understand and make sense of an experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith,

2014).

- **Idiography** – Idiography is defined as relating to unique facts or the particular and as an approach to knowledge, it was described by Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband as an effort to understand the “contingent, unique, and often subjective phenomena” which is direct contrast to the nomothetic approach that has the tendency of generalising and “derive laws that explain objective phenomena” (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010). In terms of its influence on IPA as a qualitative, psychological approach, it can be readily seen with IPAs commitment to understanding meaning of something for a small number of purposely-selected research participants or an individual as a single case study. The value of the single participant case study has been argued by Gillham (2000) when it could potentially point out flaws in existing theoretical claims within a population and IPA research method with its particular, detailed examination of the human lived experience allows for its findings to inform and challenge our assumptions and preconceptions of what it is to be human.

Development of pre-collection materials

The research participant’s life story had already been published in “The Meaning and Purpose of Life: the Big Jigsaw Puzzle” by Brian Sadler in 2011. This detail-rich, first person account (See Appendix C) allowed me to get a clear appreciation of what the participant sees as meaningful and its critical review became an important source by which the first interview schedule was constructed. For Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009), “The process of developing a schedule requires to think explicitly about what we expect the interview to cover” and what I felt was missing was additional data to contextualise the research participant’s OBEs and interpretations thereof, and so proceeded to design the interview schedule using a semi-structured format, - which has tended to be the preferred means for collecting data in IPA studies (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), around five main topic areas including personal history, training, OBE phenomenology, advance practice, and self-perceived benefits. The objective for an IPA interview is to allow participants to, “tell their own stories, in their own words” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) as so special care was taken in designing the interview

schedule that used the same OBE terminology as detailed in the participant's life story and contained mostly open-ended questions to allow for his experiences to be readily shared at considerable length.

Participant Recruitment

I first met the research participant briefly in February 7th 2012 at Brian's Sadler's book signing event and subsequently on a monthly basis as we both attended Brian's philosophical discussion group meetings in Leighton Buzzard. We eventually became better acquainted and overtime I realised his extra-ordinary experiences consciously inducing meditative OBEs. I asked him informally if he would consider participating in my research study of which he agreed and so in terms of the recruitment process, the participant was selected purposely due to his subject matter expertise and later provided with a verbal explanation of the study background and copy of the research participant information pack (See Appendix B) by email.

Research Participant

Chris (Male, White British, age 54) earliest OBE experience occurred as an infant at age of two. He remembers looking at a wall while at home one day and it appearing to "jump" in front of him to a distance about an inch or so from his face and then "jump" back. As an adult now, he remembers this experience vividly as if it only happened a few minutes ago, seeing every detail of the wall including associated feeling of claustrophobia and breathlessness. In addition, at the age of 16 and then for several years after, he would sometimes experience a strange high-pitched whistling sound and body vibrations/paralysis when going to sleep. It would be twelve years later at the age of 28 before Chris would introduced to Robert Munroe's book, "Journeys out of the Body" (courtesy of Brian Sadler after Chris joined his home meditation / philosophical discussion group in the late 80's) that he would come to associate the high-pitched whistling sound, vibrations and body paralysis with the first stage astral projection. He then committed the next three years of his life (1989-1992) to learning and then successfully mastering Robert Munroe's astral body projection techniques motivated entirely by an intense desire to validate the reality of life after death.

Chris describes the initial three-year period as a time of 'trial and error'. As a home-based freelance illustrator, Chris was able to dedicate up to three hours per day on average to practising Robert Munroe's meditation concentration techniques which involved focusing one's mind on the present moment continuously. He found this practice incredibly hard at first, but over time learned to deeply relax his body and mind and this combination allowed for the natural onset of conditions (high-pitched whistling sound, vibrations, paralysis) referred to as "first stage". Chris found the actual paralysis associated with first-stage to be very uncomfortable initially comparing it to having an anaesthetic,- being completely awake but not in control. Over time, Chris became accustomed to the paralysis and began directing his efforts to next phase of training called "second stage" which involved the act of separating the astral body from the physical. Chris experimented with three different techniques including visualisation, imagining rolling out of the body, and "force of will" and experienced of measure of success. For example, he was able to partially release the arm of the astral double on one occasion and the insight gained from that experience and from other similar experience helped him to grow in confidence and sustain his training until in December 19th 1991 at the precise time of 16:38hrs he achieved his first successful consciously induced full-body meditative OBE.

Chris remembers that day well; he was very frustrated having spent 2 ½ hours using the techniques without any results. He remembers lying on the bed thinking how to improve things and as he started to relax, Chris heard the very distinct high-pitched sound and felt the wave of vibrations. His immediate reaction was to focus his entire attention to the sound and this allowed him to achieve 100% body paralysis. Once he was able to control his nerves and the onslaught of fear and doubt, he decided to "go for it" and mentally "pushed" his astral body which floated sideways across the bed and he became aware that he possessed two bodies at the same time. Chris remembers the experience lasted no more than a few seconds, but during that time, he observed his wife's digital alarm clock which read 16:38, - which was highly significant for him, because it proved the veridicality of his OBE as the pillows would normally obstruct the clock from his normal line of sight while in bed. Chris estimates having hundreds of consciously induced

partial and full OBEs since 1991, and currently lives in Buckinghamshire and continues work in a freelance capacity.

Informed Consent and Ethics

The research study was designed in keeping the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct and ethical approval was obtained prior to research start from the University of Northampton Psychology Department Ethical Committee. The participant was asked to read the research information sheet (See Appendix B) which explained the purpose of the research project, why he had been chosen, the benefit of taking part of the study and the right to withdraw at any time, the interview process and what it would entail, matters of confidentiality regarding the management of audio files and their destruction at the end of the dissertation project and full details regarding anonymity. My primary contact details were provided and as well as my project supervisors for added assurance. The dissertation participant consent form (See Appendix A) had to be signed before the participant was allowed to take part in the research study which emphasised the previously discussed main points of right to withdraw, privacy, and anonymity, etc. After the transcription had been completed, it was emailed to the participant for review to ensure accuracy and validity of content. In addition, the research participant's name was altered in keeping with the promise of the anonymity agreement.

According to Anderson & Braud (2011), "It may be difficult for someone who is close to the researcher to participate in a study in a truly voluntary manner or to truly feel that she or he can withdraw from the study at any time". Both of those requirements are essential aspects of informed consent of which my participant was well aware of and compliant based on signed agreement. It's worth mentioning again that the idea for this research project had evolved out of our personal conversations and that he has engaged with others on this topic before.

Data Collection Process

The participant was emailed a copy of the proposed schedule ahead of the interview and was given guidance on what to expect in keeping with good practice on how to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews (Smith et

al., 2009). In addition, the option of having the interview conducted in his home was offered, but the participant decided against this and instead agreed to use mine. This proved ideal as it allowed me a chance to prepare the interview room in advance including discreetly setting up both audio recording devices and providing a range of soft drinks, snacks and lunch to make the participant feel as comfortable as possible. Prior to beginning the first interview, the participant was briefed again on the study background, his right to withdraw from the study and asked to sign the consent form, - only if he was happy to proceed, of which he did.

According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), "A good interview is essential to IPA analysis. Unless one has engaged deeply with the participant and their concerns, unless one has listened attentively and probed in order to learn more about their life world, then the data will be too thin for analysis". By the time the first interview was conducted in January of 2014, which was eight months after committing to the this research project, not only had I become more familiar with my participant's life story, but I was better informed on the subject of the OBE in general having read the autobiographical writings and case collections of Robert Monroe (1971), Sylvan Muldoon and Hereward Carrington (1970), Robert Crookhall (1961) and modern-day OBE pioneers Robert Bruce (1999) and Graham Nichols (2012). This preparation made me feel more relaxed on the day as interviewer and I began the data collection process using my interview schedule as a guide asking many open-ended (and probing) questions to solicit rich detailed responses for example, "In Brian Sadler's book you mentioned your personal search into the afterlife had finally ended. Can you briefly explain when that search began detailing any relevant childhood experiences?".

The interview kept a good pace, moving seamlessly through the various topics and I felt the participant's enthusiasm, preparation, and generosity by sharing his many spiritual experiences – some of which he had never shared before made the process thoroughly enjoyable and illuminating. In addition, I was very pleased to see how the interview process had even helped him to arrive at a new understanding on the day for example, when describing the state of lethargy and exhaustion as two additional OBE induction methods

as evidenced by the following extract taken from the first interview (395-397), "When I was first experiencing these I had no idea how the different states could both induce this out of body state but I realise now from today's perspective I was simply messing around with my body clock."

Due to my inexperience at interviewing, I significantly underestimated the amount of time that it would take to cover all of his astral dimensional experiences in sufficient detail and this proved a real worry. Thankfully, my study participant agreed to a second interview session and like before, I emailed him the interview schedule in advance (See Appendix G) and this allowed me the opportunity to ask additional questions regarding his participation in psychic development circles (to see if there was a link to his OBEs) and also follow-up on the detailed list of insights provided at the very end of the interview (1, Lines 691-742).

Data treatment – Transcription

As a rule of thumb, IPA requires a semantic record of the interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and the audio for both interviews were recorded using my Sony camcorder and then converted into audio files for transcription with the assistance of my desktop computer and Final Cut Studio software. Each interview was fully transcribed by myself and the completed transcripts were emailed to research participant for final review (of which he made several changes and corrections) before they were considered ready for analysis.

ANALYSIS

The aim of my dissertation was to understand how my research participant applies meaning to his many meditative OBEs. Since access to another person's psychological world is not directly possible, in qualitative research it is achieved through the process of sustained interpretive activity and engagement with the data transcripts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). For an IPA study, this typically involves several iterative stages including becoming intimately familiar with the transcripts, identifying emerging themes, clustering themes to the development of super-ordinate themes, and creating a summary table of master themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). This process in turn helps researchers move from the 'particular to the shared' and from the 'descriptive to the interpretive' and arrive at point where he/she can better understand the participant's point of view (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 1:

My participant's life story and both interview transcripts were analysed in accordance with the principles of IPA, which involves the researcher first immersing themselves in the original data in an effort to step into the participant's life-world as far as possible (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Both audio recordings were listened to once again and all three transcripts (See Appendix C, E, G) were read multiple times (line-by-line) to ensure I had a very good understanding of the participant's experiential claims and concerns. Areas that I felt were significant were highlighted using coloured markers with additional annotations placed along the right side of page (See Appendix H).

The annotations were widely varied including for example, the participant's mental attitude during the period of training, the varieties of OBEs with unique features, and emotionality wherever it was found to help build a more comprehensive personal profile. As I continued to re-read each transcripts and make further notes (See Appendix H), initial themes began to emerge from within the experiential material (see Appendix I), and were recorded on the right hand side of pages in keeping with IPA guidelines

(Smith et al., 2009). I also found myself engaging and playing with the data in several unexpected and intuitive ways including creating a visual representations (see Appendix J). Using very simple block diagram (See Appendix K), I began to stack the various multi-dimensional experiences in relation to each other and in relationship to the period of intense training that culminated in the participant's breakthrough moment. In the end, I produced what appeared to be a model of spiritual development consistent with many of yoga traditions and philosophical schools of thought including those of the Platonic philosophers who boldly argued in support of the soul's existence. I felt my initial themes were coming alive and 'speaking to me' for the first time and the more I meditated on the drawing, the more I could understand how the participant's absolute determination to realise the truth regarding survival claims would be negotiated by heaven - and the 'price' it would command in return for that very privilege. Anderson and Braud (2011) encourage everyone involved in research to, "engage the possibility of being transformed in some way by their participation" and the process of self-transformation became more noticeable when I started to meditate on his spiritual journey and this changed the way I started to relate to my participant's experiences but also to him as a person in a way a student would behave in the company of a most revered and accomplished spiritual teacher (which I discuss in greater detail in the transpersonal reflexivity section at the conclusion of this work).

As a result of this process, I developed a more holistic interpretation of how the participant makes sense of his OBEs, however, I still felt uneasy about the possibility of some of the data being overlooked (as my annotations were by now scattered over dozens of pages of interview transcripts) and so decided to restructure the information in a more simplified way (See Appendix L) to reduce this possibility.

Step 2:

Using four simple categories (Personal history, Personality, OBE training, and OBE events), I was able to consolidate all the available data into a three pages total and my concerns regarding potential oversights disappeared. By this point, I was fully immersed in the participant's world as understood by his immediate conscious awareness. It wasn't until I was sufficiently removed from this perspective, made possible by the new data

consolidation, that I was able to take a 'longer view' and see the subtle hand of the Unconscious Mind at work, priming the participant's mind from as early as two years of age, in preparation for the expansion of consciousness many years later.

Step 3:

Four master themes emerged once the process of indentifying patterns and connections in the transcripts had ceased and these were presented to my dissertation supervisor to be independently audited for transparency and coherence. It was suggested that my fourth theme was questionable and not grounded in the participant's words (See Appendix M - Unconscious Mind as regulating agency of the OBE) and after some consideration, I agreed and decided to highlight this topic in others areas throughout this work. A final table containing three master themes was then constructed (See Appendix N).

Validity

There are many frameworks available for ensuring rigour in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004; Yardley, 2008) and this study employed various strategies to help maintain the integrity of the research findings. Right from the start for example, I met up with the study participant on two separate occasions to discuss his OBE experiences and this helped to build rapport and very importantly confirm his willingness to take part in the research study that meant agreeing to share his most treasured and meaningful spiritual insights. To develop further sensitivity to context, I read the participant's previously published life story several times and Robert Monroe's book (1971) as his writings and meditation induction techniques in particular were understood to be of great significance to the participant.

During the data collection process phase, the first interview schedule was deliberately designed using the same terminology familiar to participant, 'first' and 'second stage' etc. and this combined with semi-structured interview format of mostly opened-ended questions ensured he was given the best possible opportunity to share his experiences in great detail - free from any bias on the part of the researcher. Commitment and Rigour were also demonstrated by my attentiveness to what was being said during the

data collection process with my action of “probing, picking up on important cues and digging deeper” during each interview as recommended by Yardley (2008).

In addition, in an effort to promote research transparency, the entire data collection process is described in great detail to include how the participant was recruited and the emergence of themes and subsequent analysis. One of the central concerns with validity in qualitative research is the extent of researcher interpretations are grounded in those whom they studied (Flick, 2008). In an effort to help promote transparency, a significant amount of interview extracts were used in support of the findings and the transcripts are available for readers to interpret for themselves if so desired. In addition, an independent audit of the table of master themes was conducted to ensure they were rooted in the data but were also coherent and hanged together logically.

Researcher Reflectivity

As the researcher, I believe the OBE provides proof of the existence of the soul and the multidimensional nature of human existence and reality. This belief has been informed by my spiritual experiences and study of Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Both healing systems explain the OBE in terms of subtle body theories with Ayurveda describing it in terms of chakra activation (Lad & Durve, 2008) and TCM from the psycho-spiritual aspect where the ‘Hun’, - translated as the “Ethereal Soul” is understood to, “be able to leave the body temporarily at night during or just before sleep (Deadman, Al-Khafaji, & Baker, 1998; Dechar, 2006; Maciocia, 2009), and in this case, intentionally projected as a means of acquiring spiritual knowledge for the benefit of others and attaining spiritual enlightenment (Rogo, 1968).

One of the tensions I felt when first approached this subject was not so much in the veridical nature of the OBE itself, but whether it should be practiced at all outside a well-established mystical frameworks and community support and this led me to initially treat the writings of Monroe and others with great suspicion. After a considered review of Monroe’s (1971) publication in particular, I became convinced otherwise and found

his candidness regarding his sexual impulses and how they manifested themselves during his early OBEs a truly unique and invaluable contribution to existing literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participant was asked to speak openly about his many OBEs and the analysis of the two interview transcripts and previously published life-story identified three interconnected master themes:

1. The OBE as mystical experience and initiation
2. Astral body as immortal soul
3. Astral body as vehicle of consciousness

The OBE as mystical experience and initiation.

This theme is concerned with the impact of the participants' OBE training has had on his spiritual and psychological development as it relates to inducing OBEs voluntarily using meditation. When Chris decided to master the teachings of Robert Monroe at the age of 28, he was determined to learn how to consciously induce a meditative OBE motivated entirely by his search for spiritual truth, and as such, began treading the mystical path where many traditions claim that abilities such as the OBE emerge as a direct result of spiritual training (Satchidananda, 1990; Wangyal, Rinpoche, & Dahlby, 1998; Winkelman, 2010).

M&P, Lines 4-54

... Between 1989 and 1992, I devoted many hours of spare time to techniques that would allow me to separate my astral body from my physical body at will whilst fully conscious. I had read Robert Monroe's book "Journeys out of the Body" which involved deep meditation and mind focusing.

The first stage of the projection would start with a high pitched whistling sound followed by a wave of vibrations that swept through my body. These vibrations brought about a state of paralysis, which initially caused me to panic. I found the high pitched whistling to be directly linked to the paralysis, and experienced this stage at least 50 times.

In December 1991, I attempted the second stage whilst lying on my side on the double bed. I had already spent a frustrating two and a half hours trying to induce the first stage, when suddenly there was a high pitch whistling noise and paralysis. I immediately pushed, and simply floated sideways out of my body across the bed. I could clearly see the bedroom around me, and soon realised that I possessed two bodies at the same time. I reckoned that about two per cent of me was monitoring the physical body, while 98 per cent was focused in the second body – my astral counterpart. At that point, I regarded my physical body as you would dirty clothing.

This first experience lasted a matter of seconds, during which time I had noticed my wife's digital alarm clock that read 16:38. I had made a mental note of this because I couldn't see this from my side of the bed due to the obstruction caused by the pillows. The moment I separated, I was aware of an irresistible force pulling me back to my physical body. I used every essence of will-power to stay projected, then – blackness. I was suddenly thrust back into my physical body that had its eyes shut. I opened my eyes and sat up immediately to check the alarm clock that was reading 16:38.

This experience proved to me that an element of me had non-physically acquired this information. But more than that, it was a demonstration of a non-physical existence and that the mind, personality and character had a vehicle for transportation in this non-physical realm. What was unexpected about this experience was that the body I was floating in felt solid, in fact, identical to my physical body. The only difference being that it felt weightless.

From that moment at 16:38 on the 19 December 1991, my search into the afterlife ended. I knew without question that when my physical body – for whatever reason – cannot support my subtle astral body, my astral will permanently separate and reside in another dimension. Since then I have had hundreds of partial and full out-of-body experiences. I am aware of the first stage of a projection virtually every night, and the now familiar floating in and out of my physical body just before sleep.

Chris's approach to training would appear more aligned to ancient Daoist (Eskildsen, 2015) and Yoga (Feuerstein, 2014; Wilberg, 2007) mystical traditions where the OBE is induced using various concentration techniques. Contrast this to the Shamanic or Sufi traditions for example, where 'soul flight' is achieved through more physical training methods including sensory deprivation, near starvation and music/drumming rituals (Winkelman, 2010) or induced by continuous spinning as a form of active worship meditation (Friedlander & Uzel, 1992). However different these approaches may seem on the surface, fundamental to the transmission of spiritual knowledge, gnosis or insight is the notion of mystical initiation (Louismet, 2013). According to Rosicrucianism (Incognito, 2010), mystical initiation is designed to mark the student's progress along the mystical path and essentially works to ensure only the most spiritually prepared students advance to higher teachings. For Chris, that process of initiation could be argued to have begun very early in his infancy when he experienced his first OBE and the tender age of two then again at the age of 16 when this time 'heaven's knock' and its message of pending spiritual awakening would be unmistakably felt - though clearly not ready to be understood.

1, Lines 20-36

... One of my earliest memories being at the age of two or three - although it was 50 odd years ago I have a very clear memory of this experience and this is the same for most of my astral experiences it seems somehow to be indelibly engraved into my mind as if it happened only a few minutes ago, I can remember very clearly laying on my bed and looking at my wall and suddenly have my wall jump towards me and then it would jump away. What I remember so clearly is that when it was an inch or so from my face - I could see every detail in the wall and the sensation I had when it was an inch from my face made me feel almost like I would have to shallow breath like the claustrophobic feeling you get when your in an enclosed space, then when the wall would jump away, I have a sense of relief and I could start breathing a little easier. That feeling has stayed with me all these years. Seeing the wall jump back and forwards was an experience that happened a lot at that age. Of course being that age I didn't question it - it was just a part of what is, and it wasn't until I was bit older that I realise that it simply doesn't happen to everyone.

1, Lines 66-71

... I could identify with some of the things Robert Monroe was saying about what he called the first stage of a projection and that is you hear a high pitched whistling sound you feel the vibration and you have paralysis and that you will panic and I actually had them experiences myself when I was a lot younger when I was 16 years old I remember I used to get that a lot and the few years after.

By being introduced to Robert Munroe's (1971) autobiographical account twelve years later at the age of 28, he was able to for the first time understand the deeper significance of his earlier first stage experiences and this fuelled his determination to master the techniques. However, he would soon learn there was a heavy price to pay for admission into the inner mysteries. Heaven had directed his attention to the door – but withheld the key until he was ready, and this involved meditating on average three hours per day (while continuing to work from home as a freelance illustrator and attending diligently to his domestic/family responsibilities) and the cultivation of virtue required for successfully navigation the out of body experience including:

Development of superior mental concentration and patience:

1, Lines 111-117

Robert Monroe asked you to do just one thing and that is to focus your mind on the present moment continuously so you have no thoughts of future or past of what you're going to be doing or you have done. Extremely hard to do and this is where the work comes in. This is why it took three years to still the mind so it could stay sharply focused in the present moment. Eventually with practice you can create these spaces between the thoughts of pure silence and stillness.

1, Lines 734-742

...To achieve a fully conscious OBE at will takes much practice and one can become unconditioned to this practice and distracted or disheartened. When out of the body at any level 'thought is action' so it is crucial to develop a tamed still mind that will keep to the program. Beforehand it is important to pre-program yourself to adhere to a plan – 'Once free of the body I will project to location 'X' and explore'. The most prominent thought in your mind will be played out and can be distracting.

2, Lines 62-66

...Working freelance allowed me to devote training time to Monroe's techniques as time and conditions became available. For three years, I dedicated my spare time to consciously inducing an out-of-body projection achieving my first full separation in 19th December of 1991 at precise time of 16:38.

Development of superior will power

1, Lines 187-192

The first stage is when you actually complete the first stage of paralysis and you fully aware and focused in the present moment. The second stage is to use your will power to push away from the paralysed physical body and that will power is the same sort of drive that you have when you're sitting in the chair and you say 'right I want to get up'. It's that same sort of approach – just a matter of thinking yourself out – but as I said it's not easy.

1, Lines 196-203

Again the book gave me techniques so they suggested you could roll out of your body – I couldn't really achieve. Another technique was to simply visualize yourself in another part of the room and if your intention is strong enough you should be able to instantly project to that part of the room, The one that I found worked for me is to simply use force of will, as if I'm lying on the floor and I'm forcing myself to get up – the body is not going to move so something must give and this is when second body separates from the paralysed physical if that makes sense.

Development of courage, physical toughness, and surrender

1, Lines 168-181

It's a big step to suddenly realise 'I'm about to jump out my body' and 'I'm going to jump into another dimension' I don't know what to expect on that side will I be safe. Will I be able to return? All these questions so I was taking it very very slowly. I was having partial projections during that three-year period where I could release and arm or a leg from the physical and explore all around the bed. Gradually becoming more comfortable with it. Also, the actual paralysis is very uncomfortable to experience to be fully conscious and paralysed. I mean it's like having a general anaesthetic and being completely awake so you're not in control and that not very nice but given time you will become accustomed to the paralysis. It was real gradual process of learning and becoming familiar with how it feels. Eventually I realised there is no danger involved every experience I had has turned out positive and that gave me the confidence to take it a bit further.

1, Lines 233-241

The actual experience was very nerve wracking – in my mind I was thinking maybe this is a medical condition and I’m going to do damage to myself and bring about a coma or something like this. On the other hand it could be that I’m going to jump into another dimension – I had no idea what I’m going to find. So I just decided to go for it and I simply slipped out of the body.

Development of equanimity to prolong the OBE experience

2, Lines 70-83

I can remember lying there paralysed on one occasion. But I was aware I could move my left astral hand and arm but not move my astral body. It was shocking because the bed had gone. I could not sense the physical bed with my astral hand as it was passing right through it. To say this was a bit of a shock is an understatement and the excitement interfered with the relaxed train of thought required by the technique resulting in the experience to last no more than 10 seconds. I had to learn very quickly to remain neutral no matter what happened to prolong the experience. Another time, I was able to partially project my left astral leg and could not feel my bed as before and the uncontrolled reaction and excitement brought me back. The more I did this the more I began to gain confidence and train my mind to stabilise and not get excited.

Development of spiritual maturity to deal with the unexpected and remain aware and relatively in full control of OBE induction phase

M&P, Lines 52-62

During the autumn of 1992, I experienced a spontaneous astral body projection. I had been asleep for a couple of hours when I awoke to get a drink of water. I sat up in bed but was acutely aware of something lying behind me. Suddenly, I realised that I had sat up in my astral body, and the ‘thing’ lying behind me was my physical body. The shock of this sudden realisation sent me reeling into the air.

1, Lines 263-267

Well I was on the sofa and had not been well for three or four days and I was very relaxed and was lethargic but my mind was wide awake being in the middle of the afternoon and the postman dropped something through our letter box and the immediately with the letter hitting the floor I jumped out of the body and found myself and inch or two above the letter by the front door.

M&P, Lines 51-54

Since then I have had hundreds of partial and full out-of-body experiences. I am aware of the first stage of a projection virtually every night, and the now familiar floating in and out of my physical body just before sleep.

Over the course of three years of training, Chris would be exposed to many fears of the unknown and would have learn to overcome them all and in doing so, developed a rock-solid psychological foundation that would prepare him to truly enjoy many wonderful years of OBEs to come. It must

be said however, there are no guarantees along the spiritual path (Assagioli, 2011), and according the Swami Satchinanda (1990), there is a real risk for students to become obsessed or distracted with the acquisition of powers. Instead, he advises that these powers or experiences should come to student naturally when he or she is ready - which is clearly illustrated in Chris's case. Even though it can be interpreted Chris' expansion of consciousness or extensive OBEs was destined, he had to exercise his free-will and intentionality every-step of the way to develop the skills needed to induce them voluntarily. This process has proven nothing short of transformative helping Chris to redefine his understanding of reality and fulfilling a very deep, transpersonal aspiration that was at the very core of his being.

Astral body as immortal soul.

This theme relates to the OBE as a profound, spiritually transformative experience and is concerned with the impact it has on the participant's understanding of Self and his relationship to death. By experiencing his first full-body, veridical OBE, Chris realized his 'real' spiritual nature for the first time and left him convinced of the principle of personal immortality:

1, Lines 543-554

Right from that first experience in 1991 it was really obvious what was going on because before that I had no idea really. I was neutral - no religious bias --so I was just exploring to see what was out there. But from that first experience, the overwhelming thing that I brought back with me was that I was indestructible. My core is way more than the physical, which I know, is going to perish and all physical things do. The actual fear of dying stopped. I realised quickly I was part of a much bigger picture but the overwhelming aspect that my core is indestructible. Just knowing that really changes the way you live your life. You're not so fearful of getting old for a start. I knew without a shred of a doubt 100% that there are many dimensions that consciousness can be focused in.

M&P, Lines 159-162

Because of my out-of-body experiences, I know that we all survive the death of the physical body and live on in other dimensions. There is nothing to fear about dying. This Earth is not our home and what lies beyond is marvellous.

The notion of the immortal soul is still further reinforced in another situation but in most unexpected, dramatic and deeply profound manner:

M&P, Lines 159-162

One interesting experience revolved around my wife. On one occasion I found myself separate and 2-3 inches above my physical body after half an hour sleep. I became aware of my wife's astral body hovering close to the ceiling directly above her physical body. Her astral body was in the foetus position, which is exactly how she sleeps and this fascinated me. Many years later, I decided to partially project my astral arm to touch her astral body and see if I could feel her and what happened next took my breath away. Immediately upon coming in contact with her astral body, I was overwhelmed by this indescribable feeling of her true nature and personality – which was beyond anything I had ever known and imagined from a person who I fell in love and known for more than 25 years. I remember this very powerful feeling of 'Awe' of which stayed with me for 2-3 weeks after the occasion and made me emotional every time I thought about it. I used to get this 'buzzing' feeling in my chest too when thinking of this and all this from one very innocent curious touch. It leads me think that a bigger part of us remains hidden from our awareness and exists in eternity. Our everyday personality is a minor reflection of 'what is'.

One of the common characteristics of spiritually transformative experiences is their ability to permanently change our personality and behaviour (Anthes, 2014) and by being able to function independently from the physical body, Chris would no longer fear dying or the prospect of growing old, and instead adopted the outlook where death itself is seen as a continuation and not an end.

Astral body as vehicle of consciousness

This theme is concerned with the impact of the participants' extensive OBEs has on his understanding of the nature of reality as it relates to the liberated soul, which once freed from its physical encasement, is able to explore the multidimensional universe unrestricted by physical laws governing time and space. Many of the mystical traditions support the idea of subtle bodies (Robishaw, 2015; Sturgess, 2014), which help to explain how man's astral body is intimately connected with other worlds or levels of being. For Chris, the insights afforded by the astral body were distinct and instantaneous beginning with his first full projection:

1, Lines 289-305

This was totally unexpected. I always imagined that the astral body could be ethereal and vapour-like so it can pass through solid objects but when you're actually focused in that body it is as solid as your physical and it's the physical that then becomes ethereal. I remember very clearly and that very first occasion rubbing my astral fingers together and thinking I got warm astral fingers and felt the details on them as I'm lying there in the air. And that was just so unexpected for me to be able to feel that solid body - the second body.

M&P, Lines 17-45

I could clearly see the bedroom around me, and soon realised that I possessed two bodies at the same time. I reckoned that about two per cent of me was monitoring the physical body, while 98 per cent was focused in the second body – my astral counterpart. At that point, I regarded my physical body as you would dirty clothing.

1, Lines 310-315

It's exactly like how when you have a haircut and the hair that's left on the floor you couldn't care for you know it's going to be put in the bin --- but that's part of you. It's exactly that sort of approach. I really can't go into it any further. My focus was in this new second body and the one behind me, I didn't have a lot interest in. It just was what it was.

The shift in perception from the physical to the astral, was clearly a defining moment, where all of sudden, the sense of solidity, which defines our physical reality was lost in one sense. Chris had to quickly adjust to new conceptual and operational frameworks while in the out-of-body state like dealing with the sense of detachment from the physical body while simultaneously being aware of sensations arising from it for example. Having achieved a major spiritual milestone, he was more than poised to immerse himself in new models of realities and began exploring the many insights they stood to offer.

M&P, Lines 137-152

Since 1992, I have experienced many varied projections. I have passed through our physical plane, unseen and not sensed, whilst moving through material objects. During some projections I am in the astral copy of our world where things appear solid to me. Several times I have found myself in a much higher plane; I think it is known as "Summerland" in spiritualist philosophy. During one projection, I was standing in a field and utterly awe - struck by the vibrancy of the grass. It gave off a colour that affected me emotionally. There appeared to be an apricot golden glow and warmth that permeated everywhere, and a feeling of absolute bliss and complete contentment. No worries or fears, just a simple feeling of being at home – I didn't want to leave. I remember bending down to touch the grass and becoming distracted by the sight of my astral hand – it was perfect. With no blemishes or scars my skin was as pure as an infant's. Everywhere I looked it was immaculate. The pavement had no cracks and the plants, bushes and trees were in their prime condition. My senses had become heightened and somehow fused together. The whole environment felt as if it was an energy that I had an empathy with because I was made of it too.

The Higher Planes would be prove enthralling to Chris, not only by the aesthetic qualities which left him mesmerised in terms of colour and vibrancy, but by the all consuming feeling of Bliss and well-being that profoundly altered his state of mind to experience the very nature and "Oneness" of reality itself.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate the OBE to represent actual experiences in a non-physical body and as such are largely consistent with the body of research that suggest OBEs are more than just hallucinations or psychological experiences (Bozzano & Gobron, 1937; Crookall, 1973; Muldoon & Carrington, 1951). The OBE for the study participant, proved time and time again to be a spiritually transformative experience, revealing not only the existence of the immaterial soul at every turn, but it's higher purpose as a vehicle of consciousness for spiritual illumination and Self-realisation - as understood by the few and privileged consciousness pioneers before him (Bruce, 1999; Monroe, 1971; Muldoon, 1936; Nicholls, 2012). Similar to near-death experience studies that reported anomalous experiences could contribute to a person's sense of meaning in life (Gallup Jr & Proctor, 1982; Greyson & Stevenson, 1980; Ring, 1980), the OBE was a facilitator for deeply profound changes in the study participant's personality and behaviour, helping him to bring closure to existential concerns and permanently remove his fear of death in keeping with other research findings (Green, 1968; Twemlow et al., 1982). He did not develop new problem-solving skills, enhanced creativity or increased health as some authors would suggest (Weschcke & Slate, 2012) but instead found his meditative OBE practice of 25 years to be a constant source of insight and inspiration.

Phenomenologically speaking, ...

According to Weschcke and Slate (2012), "Whatever actions are taken on the astral plane will in some manner manifest on the physical plane and visa versa" and this certainly resonates with one of the more fascinating features of my study participants many OBEs where thoughts appear to manifest in very real and powerful ways in the astral dimensions. During one his earlier OBEs, The study participant projected to his friend's home and tried to make contact with him while he was asleep but was prevented from doing so by an invisible magnetic force:

MP, Lines 83-110

I found myself downstairs in Brian's lounge. I was upright, about 30cm (12 inches) above the floor and facing the inglenook fireplace. Although it

was the early hours and dark, I could see the room clearly. There was no sense of travelling the 10 miles from my house to his; it was instant, exactly like an edit on a film. I then had the sensation of being on autopilot, because I gently floated upwards and felt that I was about to pass through the ceiling and make contact with Brian. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, I felt a force gently push me back down. I was determined to make contact with Brian, so, once again, I drifted upwards, and at about the same point this force, again, gently pushed me back! It was like the repelling action between two magnets – the harder I pushed the harder the force pushed me back (I have since felt this force on many occasions, particularly when I have tried to astral project to someone in the privacy of their own home). I made one last attempt to contact Brian but was again pushed gently down.

Having tried to project to his mother's home on several occasions for experimentation purposes and encountering the same difficulty, he began to relate this force of resistance to pure thought energy.

1, Lines 453-456

The way I see all this is the higher up this graduation we go the closer to pure consciousness were moving and the dimensions are made from your thoughts. So if you are living in a house and you feel this is your house and private area then you create an energy just by that thought of privacy in a certain room let's say. Or if it's a room where you invite guests in then that could be a kind of open energy where you know it would be easy to go. Of course, on that occasion, I tried to pop into Brian Sadler's bedroom in the middle of the night. Now of course, his bedroom is going to be a private area and that energy was strong enough to actually stop me getting any closer. And it was the same when I went to my mum's house. She virtually lives in her front room - this is where she is happiest and I thought this is her private area and I tried to project into that room and the exact same force was pushing me back. I would say it was pure thought energy.

The study participant began to understand how pure thought energy of the unconscious variety is experienced but in the next example, the OBE is able to yet again provide further insight how his active thoughts, in this case, a prayer of protection, would manifest from a different viewpoint in the here and now:

1, Lines 122-128

On one occasion, I was in my home lying on my sofa and decided to try to separate the astral body but before doing I try saying a prayer of protection and imagined a white light surrounding me. The idea to do this came from Martin's mother who I was sitting at the time in circle and was aware of my out of body projections. When I separated, I was unexpectedly dazzled by the brilliance of this white light, which was encasing the area where my physical body was lying. I turned around and noticed my houseplant was transformed into a big tropical plant and the furniture and walls appeared palatial in stature. Also, the apricot glow was present and really obvious. The light was so dazzling that it shocked me back into the body. It did teach me one very important lesson and that our thoughts and thinking manifest on other levels.

Another feature more commonly reported describes feelings of being able to access or acquire hidden information whilst outside-the-body (Alvarado, 2012; Green, 1968). During his interview, the study participant shared three examples of such cases:

1, Lines 246-259

Upon separation the room appeared to me just the same with normal eyesight. But it was only a good year and half or so later that I was able to see things that I normally couldn't see - and this is just things hidden by location - I'm not saying I could actually see inside a wall - it's more like seeing a location I couldn't immediately access - for example. I projected behind the sofa into a little small space near the floor - I couldn't actually get to this without moving the sofa, which was very big - but I had projected behind the sofa right down near the floor and saw three crumbs that must have been knocked off the table. I noticed their positions against the wall making a triangular shape and there's no way I could have actually seen that from the physical body was just too well concealed. When I pulled the sofa out the crumbs were there and position verified.

1, Lines 263-276

Well I was on the sofa and had not been well for three or four days and I was very relaxed and was lethargic but my mind was wide awake being in the middle of the afternoon and the postman dropped something through our letter box and the immediately with the letter hitting the floor I jumped out my body and found myself an inch or two above the letter by the front door and just the first envelope I was looking at I could see there was nine digits broken into groups of three - that was easy to memorise - so I did and also memorised the actual font that these letter were made from which was little dots - anyway I returned to the body - I wasn't actually that well to get up and look. My wife brought the letters in and put them on the table managed to drag myself off the sofa and check one of the envelopes and it was exactly the nine digits I had seen - Again that verified for me that an element of me acquired that information non-physically and that's astral projection.

1, Lines 422-436

Yes. One occasion that is really clear in my mind - the house I live in I believe was built in 1850 and so it has a lot of history. I remember lying down on my sofa in the house - wasn't trying to go for projection but the conditions had come about. I was very relaxed and my mind was still and peaceful. I could feel myself lifting out naturally. The moment I lifted out - the whole environment changed the roads went quite outside - because I live off quite a busy main road. The road went very quiet, the room got much darker and that atmosphere changed. The wall materialised right where I was lying in the sofa and I could see the room around me - roughly the same room but there was lots of differences - dark dingy wallpaper. There is some architrave on the ceiling that we haven't got. I believe I was looking back at a time of probably in the 40s of that house. That only lasted a few moments and I didn't expect to see any of that and the shock knocked me back in the physical body and I couldn't get out again. Maybe that was a glimpse into the past.

What's particularly interesting about the first two spontaneous examples is the feeling that they were both regulated somehow (as I wouldn't have imagined he would consciously choose to project behind his couch to look at some crumbs! Both experiences as veridical projections (and possibly the third with photographic evidence) could be argued to have served to sustain his commitment to meditation practice by cross validating his experiences – whose importance goes without saying along the spiritual path.

Silver Cord

Some studies have reported as much as 18-20% of cases seeing a silver cord or a connecting cord of some description (Alvardado & Zingrone, 2015; Crookall, 1964) and in 25 years of practice, the study participant has managed to only see it once:

1, Lines 672-282

I've always heard of the silver cord but I've never really seen it but I have an experience of it. One afternoon, I had the house to myself and lying on my bed I had my hands behind my head I was very relaxed and naturally felt the vibrational/paralysis condition come over me, just as I was lifting out I felt there was something directly behind my head and I actually thought I was laying on a something that had been on the pillow like a dressing gown belt maybe. When I touched it - it felt like a dough - 2 inch in diameter - coming out the back of my head. It felt cold and clammy when I squeezed it, which brought about the paralysis very strongly and I popped out my body and lost consciousness. So that is my experience of the silver cord.

Time Displacement / Mind-split

Green (1968) noticed that the sense of time during the OBE as reported by her study participants fell into three distinct categories: no change, time passed more slowly than usual, and time was non-existent - with the latter more in line with the study participant's personal accounts:

2, Lines 290-306

It should be made clear that this is all the case for all my out of body projections and its only when I get back to the physical body that I 'decode' and apply linear time to experience to make more sense of it. I mentioned in our first interview being aware of the mind split where 2% of me was aware of the physical body and the rest on my astral body I believe this split occurs naturally whilst in the astral body and allows us experience these dimensions. For instance, during my out of body projection on the higher astral plane in the field of grass I was simultaneously in four different places. One was looking at the grass which was mesmerising, one was being aware of the row of houses that I had moved closer to, one was being in the hallway at my mother's home and one was looking at the curb outside of my mother's home which

appeared to be made of exceptional craftsmanship. It felt as though my attention had split four ways and I was simultaneously aware of the being at these places for different amount of times which is the only way I can explain how I felt I spent more time looking at the grass that in my mother's hallway. Why this happens is beyond me.

Self perception in the OBE / Encounters

The last of the OBE features have to with how study participant's self perception during this OBE experiences which has been demonstrated to range from his normal appearance to being formless:

1, Lines 353-366

Well for a good twenty minutes on this one occasion, I was near a field where I grew up. At this high level, everything was way more alive and vibrant in optimum condition. I was mesmerised simply by the colour of the grass for what felt like maybe twenty minutes. Eventually I wanted to touch this grass to see how it felt as I reached down I could see my own hand and realised wasn't the one I got here now. It was the hand of a 17 or 18 year old, but it was immaculate - no marks at all or creases. A bit later on during that experience I projected to my mum's house and into a version of her hallway, which is way more elaborate - everything in this house was like a work of art. I happen to look into a mirror and I saw my reflection of myself at that level. I had a much smaller body, was completely hairless, and smaller. The skin was almost glowing radiating health and well-being. I didn't look much like the person I am now.

2, Lines 371-298

I only visited that state twice because it's quite hard to achieve and I've tried other times. I would separate from the physical and lay in the air in my astral body. And then I would try for a second separation away from the astral body going through the whole process again, this time focused on the astral body then pushing out. When I've done that, I slipped into this high level where there is no form - feels like I'm in a very very large area that the ceiling is so high you can't see and the floor is far away - you feel like you're in a volumous space and you can't see anything around but you are away of the space. More than that you are aware of these beings that occupy that empty space simply by their thoughts. On that occasion, the moment I popped into that dimension, I was little bit nervous - again because I didn't know what I was going to find, or if I would be able to return so I thought a bit like going to a party and standing on the outside edges and seeing what sort of people are there and that's what my approach was is to simply stand back and observe what was going on that level. I had a personality trying to communicate with me asking me questions. It started asking me why I'm not participating and not joining in and my reply was that I wasn't sure where I was and don't really belong in this area. And this personality was asking question after question about what am I doing and where do I keep going and I was trying to explain to this being I'm from a physical plane and where we have linear time. The more I explained the more questions were coming back - it had no idea what I was referring to and two months later I managed to achieve that state again and that personality was there as though the conversation hadn't finished from the first time. He was firing questions at me - where did I go and can I come with you. I try to answer him I had no idea how he could follow me, so but I am very much a learner at that level

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study could potentially lead to a new generation of testable projection-model research studies where groups of carefully selected participants, ideally with previous OBE experience but certainly with high-levels of enthusiasm, capacity to meditate regularly and incredible will-power, could follow the same methodical procedures as taught by Robert Munroe's (1971). The study design could focus around achieving 'first-stage' whistles and body vibrations initially then extended to monitor the rate partial, full or spontaneous OBE occurrence over time. The simplicity of the techniques themselves make them perfectly adaptable to western audiences and if done in collaboration with the Arthur Findlay College for example or other universities or institutions sympathetic to psychical research, then participants will have a chance to meet up, share experiences and support one another's progress which would I think would prove to be great fun and extremely worthwhile indeed. And with the latest mobile phone apps for example, it would be easy to keep track of levels of meditation engagement, changes in dreaming or dream content and/or anomalous experiences. I'm getting excited just thinking about it! Let's go yeah!

Anyway - it would also be very interesting for me personally and perhaps to the study participant to revisit this topic again in say five years time and engage in a form of transpersonal enquiry together to explore if our participation in this study has helped us moved forward along our individual spiritual paths.

TRANSEPERSONAL REFLEXIVITY

What I found quite extraordinary and completely unexpected about this process was how much my relationship as researcher to my study participant 'transcended' the normal academic boundaries to the level of what many spiritual traditions would call the 'Guru-Chela' relationship. According to Paramahansa Yogananda (2008), the term guru in Sanskrit is defined as a "dispeller of darkness" and the role of the Guru is to, "help his disciples find liberation in God". By reading the transcripts multiple times over the course of two years, it made me realise how unnecessarily complicated I had made my spiritual path and identified a real need in me to 'simplify' not only my approach to meditation but to my understanding of what God 'is' which I felt had become too inflated.

Taking part of this dissertation project has also helped me to develop a greater understanding of the role of the Unconscious Mind in the every-day as I could see its influence carefully guiding the footsteps of my research participant right from a very early age. The Unconscious Mind (which has also been called the Self, Higher Self or Transpersonal Self) is described by Dr. Roberto Assagioli (1971) is, "A source of wisdom and guidance within the person, a source which can operate quite beyond the control of the conscious personality" and for me is the true Guru or inner teacher. In some ways I feel I have been taught many lessons over the last two years and perhaps the single most important is to have greater faith in my Higher Self, and to begin the 'loosen the reins' on the process of spiritual unfoldment. Case in point, I experienced the 'first stage' or high-pitched whistling sound in April 2014 without any conscious attempt to induce it. This was followed a month later with a partial release of what I can only describe as my right astral hand. Both experiences were shocking to say the least and convinced me I wasn't ready to move forward with this spiritual practice. I was however, eternally grateful nevertheless to have those insights and the thought of this aspect of my development being placed under the jurisdiction of my Higher Self to develop possibly, very gently in the background is for me - a real sign for personal growth, as my typical

response would be to approach this subject 'head-on' in an almost reckless manner. For the research participant, the timing and circumstances leading up to his OBE training & commitment was perfect and so it's not surprising after 25 years practice, he remains grounded and just as excited about working 'in this world' - learning about the latest digital illustration tools as he does 'investigating the next' which I think says a lot about the process of initiation, the teachings of Robert Munroe, but most of all about the study participant who I think is a real inspiration.

Of all my research participant's OBEs, the one that truly 'jarred' me for lack of better expression was the few comments made regarding the silver cord towards the end of the first interview (1, 672-682). I couldn't quite understand why this was and decided to do some basic research on the subject and follow up with a meditation. For Williams, "This silver cord is our spirit body's "lifeline" to our physical body in the same way that our umbilical cord is our "lifeline" to our mother's body during the birth process" and in biblical scripture, the silver chord is linked directly to Death in the book of Ecclesiastes (12:v6-7), "Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Publishers, 2006). As I pondered this I felt a need to revisit the topic of death and my relationship to it to get an insight into the real significance of OBEs. When I did, I felt I was being made aware that there was something more profound beyond the age-old mind-brain and soul-body philosophical debates and could only realise this by being willing to symbolically 'cut the silver-chord' to my present way of thinking about what it is to be human and the nature of reality. Very much work in progress!

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