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University of Birmingham leads new study into out-of-body experiences: volunteers needed

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Only few sensations could be considered stranger than the extraordinary feeling of floating outside your own body and experiencing the world from another vantage point in space. These out-of-body experiences have baffled scientists for centuries, yet they are widely documented as affecting around 20% of the wider population at some-point during their lives.

University of Birmingham scientists are looking for volunteers who have had these types of experiences to come forward and be involved in a new study which seeks to identify the scientific causes behind these bizarre phenomena.

Previous research on hallucinations has typically focused on indirect questionnaire responses to examine the brain-based factors underpinning such experiences. The **Selective Attention & Awareness Laboratory (SAAL) (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/psychology/labs/saal/index.aspx)** at the School of Psychology, University of Birmingham is pioneering new and more objective research into the complex neuro-cognitive processes connected to out-of-body experiences in non-clinical cases.

Dr Jason Braithwaite from the School of Psychology explains the science behind brain mechanisms involved during out-of-body experiences and the importance of these tests. He said "We are beginning to understand how it is that the brain produces the everyday 'in-the-body' experience by looking at instances when these processes go wrong. For some people, and under certain circumstances, these brain processes become dysfunctional and can result in quite strange and bizarre situations like the out-of-body experience. We are exploring the neuroscience that may predispose some people to have these striking experiences and make them more vulnerable to such occurrences."

Dr Braithwaite's team is asking people who have experienced these types of hallucinations to take part in a few simple laboratory-based experiments. Volunteers will also be measured for specific physiological responses during the experiment to see how their brains respond to the experiment. For example, in one task scientists will present individuals with a series of visual patterns to view while concurrent brain-driven physiological reactions to these patterns will be measured. Certain responses to these patterns are now known to be associated with visual hallucinations in people who suffer from migraine and epilepsy, and this research will investigate if this is also the case for out-of-body experiences as well.

In addition, another study will investigate what is known as the "rubber-hand illusion" where, after a short period of time, observers can become absolutely convinced that a fake rubber hand is indeed their own and belongs to their body. Researchers want to know if this illusion is easier or indeed harder to induce in people who have out-of-body experiences.

Researchers are particularly interested in hearing from people who have experienced out-of-body sensations at some point in their life. If you have experienced an out of body experience and would like to take part in this new and exciting research please contact Dr Jason Braithwaite directly at **j.j.braithwaite@bham.ac.uk (mailto:j.j.braithwaite@bham.ac.uk)** for further information.

Notes to editors

Experiments are not suitable for those with epilepsy or photosensitive epilepsy.

Image caption: Dr Braithwaite demonstrates the "rubber hand illusion"

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