

The extended mind:  
can we sense when  
someone is staring  
essay sample



The extended mind is a concept that is becoming increasingly popular among many different disciplines to determine the separation point of the mind and the surrounding environment. A well-known man, Rupert Sheldrake, is particularly interested in the concept of the extended mind and has written many books, articles and papers expressing his experiments.

In Rupert Sheldrake's *Seven Experiments That Could Change the World: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Revolutionary Science*, there are multiple reasons why Sheldrake believes that the mind extends into the environment in which he explains using brain and heart metaphors as well as ancient religious and general beliefs from around the world. Sheldrake (2002, 100) describes the exhibit in the Natural History Museum in London as the brain being "the cockpit of a modern jet plane, with banks of dials and computerized flight controls" as well as the "two empty seats" representing the left and right hemispheres of the brain.

Sheldrake then goes on to explain traditional peoples as well as the Tibetans beliefs of the heart as "more than a center of emotion, love and compassion: [but being] a center of thought and imagination" (Sheldrake, 2002, 102). Lastly, Sheldrake expresses that "if [images] are both within the mind and outside the body, then the mind must extend beyond the body. Our minds reach out to touch everything we see" (Sheldrake, 2002, 106). This concept plays into the specific topic of whether or not you can feel when someone is staring at you.

If the mind can reach out and touch everything we see, then when we stare and concentrate on one thing, we should be able to feel it, right? By using a

select few of Sheldrake's papers as well as some of his critics' reviews, we should be able to get some kind of opinion on whether or not a stare can physically and/or psychically be felt. The critical responses used are Robert A. Baker's *Can You Tell When Someone is Staring at Us* and David F.

Marks and John Colwell's *The Psychic Staring Effect: An Artifact of Pseudo-Randomization*. Based on all the experiments and research done on the concept of the sense of being stared at, Sheldrake makes it very obvious how much he believes that it can be felt through the mind and that it extends into the surrounding environment. Sheldrake "found that about 80 percent of the people [he] asked claimed to have experienced [the sense of being stared at] themselves" (Sheldrake, 2002, 107-108).

When talking to friends about the topic of this essay, many were enthusiastic about mentioning that they, too, have felt like they could sense when someone was staring at them from a distance. I can say that I have personally felt like I have sensed someone staring at me, but from readings from *Seven Experiments That Could Change the World* and *The Psychic Staring Effect*, it seems that it may have a rational explanation.

In 1898, E. B. Titchener shared the first discussion in scientific literature that gave the rational explanation as to why we feel that we can sense when someone is staring at us. To paraphrase and shorten, Titchener had five rational reasons: 1. "We are all of us more or less nervous about our backs" (Sheldrake, 2002, 114) where Titchener observed women smoothing and patting their hair and men glancing around and smoothing their jackets. 2. When men and women do the actions is reason one, they feel the need to

look around behind them to sweep the room. 3. “ Movement in an unmoved field” (Sheldrake, 2002, 114) meaning when someone is moving in the peripheral vision, it is known that the eyes are drawn to that movement, and because of that, there are several people watching, and the person smoothing the hair or jacket sweeps the room and happens to catch the eye of one of these people, accidentally.

4. The sensation at the back of the neck is a made up feeling relating to the strain and pressure, which results from the feeling of must. 5. Is merely the conclusion in which Titchener states that “ the experiments were, therefore, a waste of time, I can only reply that they seem to me to have their justification in the breaking-down of a superstition” (Sheldrake, 2002, 115). Another example of a rational explanation was by David A. Marks when his eight-year-old son Michael felt like he was being stared at while walking in their neighborhood. Marks had then “ asked Michael how he knew that unless he had already been staring at them” in which he realized the truth and became less disturbed.

The paper mentioned that this was also what Titchener “ attributed to the cause of the feeling of being stared at to the staree, not the starrer, and so the attribution of causality to the starrer is false, a misinterpretation” (Colwell and Marks, 2000). Sheldrake’s investigations consisted of two types of experiments; a feedback experiment where they find out whether or not they were right about thinking they were being stared at immediately or the second experiment where no feedback was given back. Many people replicated these experiments using different people and slightly different time intervals.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-extended-mind-can-we-sense-when-someone-is-staring-essay-sample/>

Robert A. Baker used methods similar to those of Sheldrake's. Baker wrote an article in response to Sheldrake's methods and the reasons why he did not believe that they proved the extended mind. Sheldrake then wrote a review against Baker's procedures and results. In Baker's second experiment, he decided to have 20- one minute intervals, in which five of the randomized minutes would be when the experimenter stared at the subject and the other 15 minutes would be when the experimenter concentrated on a completely different topic.

The five minutes would be separated throughout the 20 minute time period. Sheldrake countered saying that the experiment had too many distractions and were biased. " Each subject was allowed only five guesses. If guesses were entirely random, misses would be three times more probable than hits" (Sheldrake, 2000, 2). At this point, Sheldrake felt as though it was necessary to have an equal amount of staring. In my opinion, if staring at a person and concentrating on that should make them feel weird, that it should be easy to record regardless of the number of times.

If the subject being experimented on is lying about being able to feel when being stared at for the sole reason to fit in with a crowd, then that person has a better chance of lying with an equal amount of staring and non-staring compared to only 25% of the time. Second, Sheldrake expressed his worries about the distractions like the observation cards that the subjects had to fill out. Personally, when i first read the cards, I knew immediately what they meant, and the instructions on the card did not confuse me at all.

And from experience with participating in studies, I know that if one is confused, all the subject has to do is ask for clarity. In Baker's first demonstration, he used an uncontrollable situation by going out of the laboratory and watching subjects without anyone else noticing, then going up to them and asking whether or not they knew they were being stared at for the last five minutes. 35 out of the 40 people were completely unaware of Baker staring at them for the past 5 minutes.

Sheldrake used the remaining five people from this study to say that " he retrospectively introduced another criterion" (Sheldrake, 2000, 2) because it did not match Baker's hypothesis. Baker discarded two of the subjects' results because one was completely paranoid thinking that she was always being spied on and the other because he stated that he " had extrasensory ability" (Sheldrake, 2000, 2). Sheldrake felt that " if the sense of being stared at really exists, people with paranoid tendencies might be more sensitive than most, and so might people who claim to have extrasensory abilities" (Sheldrake, 2000, 2).

It is hard to determine whether someone who claims to have these abilities are telling the truth or are the kind that would lie specifically for the attention of the media. Baker's experiments were proven that knowing when the subject felt they were being stared at was by chance because when the four subjects guessed three out of the five stares correctly, they went through three additional trials all the exact same as the previous trial, where none of the four subjects were able to accurately detect more than one of the five minute intervals of the twenty in which they were stared at (paraphrased, Baker, 2000).

<https://assignbuster.com/the-extended-mind-can-we-sense-when-someone-is-staring-essay-sample/>

With all of this information, I feel that it is easy to go through the work of another and pinpoint every little thing that could possibly be wrong or done differently to prove something else. I feel that this is a very biased topic and it is hard to prove one side of the story to a person from the other side and vice versa. For this topic, or concept rather, the scientist, philosopher, psychologist, etcetera, has to be open minded and not have a view before doing any research or investigations.

Sheldrake repeated throughout a few of his articles that he felt Marks, Baker and Colwell were more doing experiments to prove it didn't exist rather than trying to find the truth, while Sheldrake is so convinced that staring is in fact felt, it is hard for Sheldrake to see any scientific knowledge as to why people are so skeptical of the concept.

With all the new technology and concepts in the world today, it may be that the extended mind can be proved, but as of this day in time, I feel that it does not exist, but is rather the off-chance that you just happened to be looking around and made eye contact with someone who saw you moving in their peripheral vision and Sheldrake's methods are hard to tell if they are valid.