THE EXPERIENCE OF TOTALITY
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ABOVE YOU
The only time you can see the ethereal solar corona, and some beautiful features such as the diamond ring, Baily’s beads, prominences, and chromosphere.

AROUND YOU
The temperature drops as the Moon’s shadow dramatically casts an eerie darkness, with gorgeous sunset colours on the horizon.

WITHIN YOU
A range of unexpected and intense emotions occur over a short period of time. For some, the experience is profound.

The totality experience is INEFFABLE - difficult to describe coherently using words, and impossible to convey in short media soundbites in a way that can be easily understood. As an eclipse-chasing psychologist, I continue to collect experiences and share my research widely.

The crowd would cheer whenever the Sun would appear from behind the clouds. The total eclipse was a very surreal experience. I felt at one with the world, belonging to a greater good. A feeling of being connected.

I felt a sense of calm during totality, almost as though everything ‘stopped’ just for that two minutes. I have felt in awe before, but this was something else entirely.

It was similar to the feeling of goosebumps, the intense emotions that everybody said it was like. It was there.

I was so excited in the build-up to the eclipse. I had a lot of butterflies in my stomach, but it didn’t last too long.

I interviewed experienced eclipse chasers, with the diagram below attempting to visually capture the totality experience.

The slow build-up during the partial eclipse was as much an excitement in itself. Then I wondered if it would all go wrong, with some cosmic force intervening and we would never see the Sun again.

If we weren’t aware of the eclipse, would it feel like a cataclysmic was happening? Would it feel like nothing was happening?

The very last shining light was a surprise, as it really did transform the very bright diamond flash of light before it was finally covered.

If I had seen the Sun before - it was a beautiful sight through the solar filters.

If it was beautiful in the darkness, the change in light was dramatic and the wind sprung up. It was very eerie.

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TOTAL ADDICTION: THE LIFE OF AN ECLIPSE CHASER (Springer, 2012)
I interviewed experienced eclipse chasers, with the diagram below attempting to visually capture the totality experience.

TOTALITY: THE TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE OF 2012 IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND (2013)
I captured the experiences of everyday people experiencing totality for the first time, with some quotes included here.

BEING IN THE SHADOW: STORIES OF THE FIRST-TIME TOTAL ECLIPSE EXPERIENCE (2017) These are detailed in-depth accounts from totality first-timers who were able to coherently describe ‘the ineffable’.

Fig. 13.1 An visual overview of what it is like to experience totality.

- SENSE OF WRONGNESS
- PRIMAL FEAR
- AWE
- CONNECTEDNESS
- EUPHORIA
- DESIRE TO REPEAT