

BOOK REVIEW

Lee Kinsey, M.S., LPC Intern
University of North Texas

Science and the Near-Death Experience: How Consciousness Survives Death by Chris Carter, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2010, 320 pp., \$18.95 pb (ISBN 978-1594773563); Kindle ed. \$9.99 e-book.

The Fun of Dying: Find Out What Really Happens Next! By Roberta Grimes, Normal, IL: Greater Reality Publications, 2010, 149 pp., \$14.95 pb (ISBN 978-0980211115); Kindle ed. \$7.50 e-book.

The Science of Life after Death: New Research Shows Human Consciousness Lives On by Stephen Hawley Martin, Richmond, VA: The Oaklea Press, 2009, 191 pp., \$16.95 pb (ISBN 978-1892538529).

There is Life after Death: Compelling Reports from Those Who Have Glimpsed the Afterlife by Roy Abraham Varghese, Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books, 2010, 288 pp., \$15.99 pb (ISBN 978-1601630957); Kindle ed. \$9.99 e-book.

Over the past three years, a spate of authors have published books in which they argued for the survival of consciousness after death and used near-death experiences (NDEs) as supportive evidence. Among these are Chris Carter (2010), Roberta Grimes (2010), Stephen Hawley Martin (2009), and Roy Abraham Varghese (2010). Without knowing anything more than this, people seeking to read scholarly treatments of these topics might assume that each of these books could contribute to the advancement of their thinking. In this review, I will provide my conclusions regarding that assumption: that the books rep-

Lee Kinsey, M.S., LPC-Intern, is a doctoral student in the Counseling Program at the University of North Texas. His primary area of scholarly inquiry is the relationship between sexual and spiritual identity developments. Correspondence regarding this review should be sent to Mr. Kinsey at: Lee.Kinsey@unt.edu.

resent a range of approaches and of both non-scholarly and scholarly value to readers.

Carter (2010) offered the reader a chance to examine the more philosophical discussion on the nature of science and how materialism presents a limited view that fails to account for transpersonal phenomena like NDEs. In Part One of his book, Carter provided a compelling argument for how consciousness might survive death and how materialism does not adequately address the mind/brain dilemma. He asserted that the strongest argument against life after death is the assumption that consciousness cannot exist apart from the brain. Materialists reject any research that violates this assumption as inherently ludicrous and unworthy of serious consideration. Carter analyzed theories and logic from the fields of neuroscience, physics, and philosophy to offer highly persuasive arguments for the existence of consciousness outside of the brain. Although he did not cite its original source, Carter asserted the metaphor of the brain as a two-way receiver-transmitter wherein the brain serves as both a receiver and transmitter of consciousness. I found the first part of Carter's book to be well-argued and to offer substantial clarification and hard-hitting arguments to anyone seeking to be armed with challenges to a materialist worldview.

In Parts Two and Three, Carter presented NDEs and deathbed visions as evidence that the materialist worldview is flawed and that scientists should seriously consider the possibility of life after death. Citing out-of-body experiences (OBEs) as the only empirically verifiable portion of an NDE, Carter proceeded to describe the features of NDEs and the research that contradicts materialistic assumptions. (It may be worth noting that Holden (2009) cited evidence that veridical perception is possible in the non-material portions of NDEs as well.) In this section, Carter offered specific and detailed counter-arguments to common materialist explanations for specific characteristics of NDEs. Some of these materialist arguments include oxygen deprivation, drug interactions, and the dying brain hypothesis. Carter not only provided evidence but demonstrated clear and concise reasoning within the domains of empirical scientific theory to offer strong counterclaims to these common lines of reasoning against the validity of NDEs and the possibility of life after death.

Although Carter's arguments were both insightful and well argued, I found the title of his book to be somewhat misleading; instead of offering insight into *how* consciousness survives death, Carter proposed compelling and effective arguments *that* consciousness survives

death. Carter utilized his contentions to highlight materialism as an ideology that can be rejected based on the evidence the study of experiences like the NDE provides. He employed the principles of science apart from materialism to entertain the possibility that consciousness could exist outside of the body and therefore possibly exist after the body is dead. To his credit, Carter did not reject the principles of science but rather rejected the principles of materialism in efforts to include empirical evidence for life after death.

Contrastingly, Varghese (2010) asserted that science cannot prove that there is an afterlife nor can the afterlife be studied empirically. He rejected the principles of science in favor of what he termed a new paradigm that encompasses many viewpoints, religions, and cultures to offer a new “grand scheme” that connects the dots. Using what he termed “the smoking gun,” Varghese argued that NDEs offer the most compelling and irrefutable evidence that life exists beyond death. He assumed many things including that there is a God, that there is an afterlife, and that the afterlife offers both a pleasant and an unpleasant alternative: heaven and hell.

Varghese (2010) explored the NDE and other related phenomena as evidence for the afterlife and his other basic assumptions. One of his assertions I found disturbing, that there is a heaven and a hell, he based on the fact that there are both pleasant and unpleasant NDEs. According to Varghese, pleasant NDEs are evidence of heaven, and unpleasant NDEs are evidence of hell. However, Bush (2009) argued that distressing NDEs are not evidence of God’s punishment for wrong-doing, as they are usually permeated with the theme of grace and forgiveness, learning from mistakes, and typically end with less distressing feelings. Bush also pointed out that feelings of distress are often associated with initial confusion, trepidation, and uncertainty about dying and entering the afterlife rather than some hellish experience related to God’s absence or punishment. Unfortunately, in Varghese’s rejection of science as a means to better understand and document NDEs and related phenomenon, he also failed to acknowledge scientific evidence that disagreed with his most basic assumptions.

Grimes (2010) proposed a more lighthearted view of the subject in *The Fun of Dying*: Instead of arguing for the viability of the science, she attempted to show the reader how the afterlife might look and feel based on anecdotal reports. In the first half of her book, Grimes offered alternative descriptions of reality, matter and energy, the mind/brain connection, and consciousness. In the second half, she described the afterlife and its apparent features both pleasant and unpleasant.

Grimes' (2010) unscientific approach was manifest in that she appeared to take as fact every anecdote that complemented her painting of the afterlife without actually critically examining the evidence. For example, she asserted that NDEs as a result of suicide tend to be unpleasant and utilized distressing NDEs as evidence to propagate her belief in some kind of purgatory. She repeatedly drew conclusions without citing the evidence from which she claimed to draw those conclusions. To her credit, she offered a study-guide in the last pages of her book that presented interested readers the chance to examine some of the evidence. Unfortunately, Grimes seems to have gotten lost in her religious views and interpretations and failed to offer sufficient corroboration. Although I found Grimes' work a pleasant read, I would not suggest her book to those new to NDE research or anyone looking for a scholarly interpretation of the evidence. Some people might justify using her book as a means of consoling those who have lost loved ones in that it paints a positive picture of the afterlife as free of pain and sorrow.

Divergently, Martin (2009) attempted to present the evidence that consciousness survives death; he focused not only on NDEs but also on other related transpersonal phenomena. Throughout his book, Martin presented stories and anecdotes—some from scientific journals, some from popular books, and some from his own personal experiences and those of acquaintances and friends. Unfortunately, I found his material disorganized, his arguments poorly written, and his approach unscientific. Although he did draw from some scientific sources, he did not cite them or otherwise offer the reader justification for his claims. I consider the title of Martin's book to be misleading, as what he presented was not a rigorous and circumspect presentation and critique of scientific evidence coupled with an open-minded discussion of all viable explanations and interpretations. Rather, his book was a collection of subjective accounts that, I believe, scholarly investigators of the question of afterlife are likely to find unhelpful in advancing their thinking.

Conclusion

In my view, of the four books reviewed here, I found Carter (2010) offered the most scholarly viable contribution to the discussion of the possibility of life after death and the role of NDEs in that possibility, falling only slightly short of the intent implied in his book title. Grimes (2010) painted an arguably "fun" picture of what the afterlife might look like based on reports of those who claim to have seen

it, but her casual, rather than systematic scholarly, approach left me unconvinced of her assertions that life after death exists and that it is somehow “fun.” I found Martin’s (2009) anecdotal approach to be interesting at times but ultimately no more effective than Grimes’ approach in advancing a scholarly understanding of the topics. Similarly, Varghese’s (2010) seemingly religiously-motivated arguments seemed to be based only on evidence that fit his a priori perspective, thus taking into account only a limited portion of the broader available scientific data as presented in books like Ring and Valarino’s (1998); Kelly, Greyson, and Kelly’s (2007), or Holden, Greyson, and James’ (2009). My impression is that scholars in the field of near-death studies who are interested to see in general how authors are using NDEs to support the claim of an afterlife will find all of these books of interest, whereas those seeking specifically to advance their own thinking with a robust and systematic treatment of existing NDE research will want to focus on Carter’s (2010) work.

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BOOK REVIEW

Ryan D. Foster, Ph.D.
Texas A&M University-Commerce

The Spiritual Anatomy of Emotion: How Feelings Link the Brain, the Body, and the Sixth Sense by Michael A. Jawer with Marc S. Micozzi, Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2009, 558 + 10 pp., \$24.95 paperback, ISBN 978-1-59477-288-7; Kindle ed. \$9.99 e-book.

As assistant editor for media reviews for the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, it is my responsibility to decide which books may or may not be suitable for review in the *Journal*. We receive many invitations and requests for reviews, and ultimately I must decide whether or not a particular book is written with a scholarly focus, a precondition for consideration for review, and might be of interest to our readers. From time to time, I might decide to review a book myself because I have interest in reading and learning about a topic with the potential to extend my knowledge. Such was the case with Michael A. Jawer and Marc S. Micozzi's (2009) book, *The Spiritual Anatomy of Emotion: How Feelings Link the Brain, the Body, and the Sixth Sense*.

About a year ago, this book came across my desk. I was unfamiliar with either author's prior works, and I was excited to anticipate reading material from a point of view with which I was unfamiliar. Additionally, as a counselor educator and practicing psychotherapist, I am constantly on the search for material that will help me teach future professional counselors and also help my own clients resolve their emotional, cognitive, and spiritual struggles. According to the back cover of the book, Jawer is an "emotion researcher and expert on 'sick building syndrome,'" and Micozzi is a noted author on alternative medicine. I was excited to see what these authors had to say about the structures of and connections between neurobiology, emotion, physiology, and spirituality, so I decided to give the book a read.

Ryan D. Foster, Ph.D., LPC-S, NCC, at the time of authoring this review, was ad interim assistant professor in the Department of Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education and Director of the Harold Murphy Counseling Center at Texas A&M University-Commerce. He is now assistant professor in the Department of Counseling at Marymount University. Correspondence regarding this Review should be addressed to Dr. Foster at Department of Counseling, Marymount University, 2807 N. Glebe Road, Arlington, VA 22207; email: rfoster@marymount.edu.

Jawer and Micozzi's (2009) central thesis focused on the notion that anomalous or transpersonal experiences could be understood through neurobiological processes—which, to the authors, are not limited to those processes that happen in the brain, but also beyond the brain—linking the entire body, mind, and, ultimately, human emotion. Emotion, according to the authors, “is the catalyst” (p. 12) of transpersonal experiences. And do not confuse emotions with feelings: Nay, say the authors—or the author, in some cases, because Jawer and Micozzi often confusingly change from saying “I” (as in a single author), to “we” (as in two or more authors), to “we” (as in the human species) throughout the book—feelings and emotions are two different concepts. Admittedly, as a psychotherapist, I was quite confused at this point. Apparently, Jawer and Micozzi defined feeling as sensory perceptions such as “sense of weight or balance . . . cognition of heartbeat . . . smell and taste . . . humor and playfulness” (p. 19), to name a few. According to their conceptualization, emotions are “feeling[s] that make [their] presence known through a need, desire, or tendency to express it: whether by laughing, crying shouting, jumping” (p. 24). However, interestingly, depression does not quite make the cut as an emotion, according to the authors. I believe the authors meant this discussion to clarify, but I came away from it confused.

Because these authors were unknown to me, I appreciated their attempt to communicate their strenuous process of writing this text. I believe readers deserve to know what has influenced authors of scientific inquiry. However, to say that Michael Jawer is an emotion “researcher” is, from my point of view, exaggerating a bit. Perusing both the book's footnotes and bibliography, I found no research cited with Jawer as either sole, lead, or co-author. It might have been more accurate to describe him as a “scholar” of emotion, but the authors used primarily books rather than peer-reviewed journal articles to support their complex theories; I also noticed several newspaper and magazine articles summarizing new research. I consider this approach not to meet prevailing standards of scholarship and to be laden with potential but certainly not intentional bias. At best, the authors surrounded themselves with qualified scholars from whom they drew during their literature review process. They also used big words in light of which I sometimes felt a bit underqualified to write this review. I detected an overabundance of confidence in their theory and conclusions throughout the book—not uncommon among books sent to this *Journal* for review. From a professional point of view, such confidence is inconsistent with the tentative and cautious tone of good science. I also

perceived that Jawer and Micozzi were frequently insulting in tone when referring to neuroscientists who worked from a materialist point of view. Not that I completely buy into materialism—I so appreciate what Charles Tart had to say in *The End of Materialism* (2009)—but Tart’s approach was more scholarly and substantive than Jawer and Micozzi’s. Having commented on these elements of the authors’ points of view and style of writing, I will go on to summarize major sections of the book.

Structure and Content of the Book

Jawer and Micozzi did well in building a case for their thesis, primarily because they explained both basic and advanced components of current views from the literature on concepts from emotion to the brain, the self to anomalous experiences, and more. Brevity, in my view, would have been helpful in many places; however, overall the authors took care to ensure that readers could understand many of their key concepts.

In Chapter One, the authors began with brief case examples of transpersonal experiences from the literature, highlighting that each case indicated presence of strong emotions. They went on to state their basic thesis, that emotion is “a key to unlocking the dynamics of the anomalous” (p. 15). In Chapter Two, they defined and elaborated on their view of differences between feelings and emotions and helpfully outlined valuable functions of emotions. Additionally, however, they confusingly remarked that “dreams . . . fantasies, daydreams, or anything chiefly having to do with images” (p. 33) could not be categorized as feelings or emotions because these kinds of images are not associated with bodily processing. This point struck me as polar opposite of what I have experienced within myself and with clients in my psychotherapy practice—and I am guessing Carl Jung (1961) and Eugene Gendlin (1986) might disagree as well.

In Chapter Three, the authors reviewed particularly complex processes involved in feelings. Examples of these processes and structures included consciousness, the autonomic nervous system, the amygdala and prefrontal lobe of the brain, emotional memory, and the physiology of laughing and crying. In Chapter Four, Jawer and Micozzi discussed the self and relationships between touch, smell, brain development, prenatal stress, and development of selfhood from fetus to adulthood.

In Chapter Five, the authors returned to anomalous experiences. They began by introducing notions of energy and electrochemical pro-

cesses and their relationships to stress from both a brain anatomy perspective and a personality perspective. They discussed concepts such as phantom pain, dissociation, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Throughout this chapter, Jawer and Micozzi contended that people who have had traumatic experiences in which their neurochemical processes were activated by extreme stress—present throughout the body and brain and linked to emotional “bodymind” memories of such experiences—were more likely to have transpersonal experiences.

The subject of Chapter Six was the electromagnetic spectrum and the human ability to detect wavelengths throughout the spectrum. The authors provided case examples in which certain people reportedly “heard” electromagnetic radiation outside the average detectable range of humans. Additionally, they contended that people who carry trauma memory in their bodyminds may “displace the energy of repressed feeling” into the atmosphere, including the electromagnetic spectrum. In addition, the authors indicated that this displacement of energy acts as a catalyst to apparitions and related anomalous experiences.

In Chapter Seven, the authors returned to the case examples they briefly introduced in Chapter One. The hallmark of this chapter was their application of the major concepts from Chapters Two through Six on each of these cases. They focused most on neurobiology, emotion, and energy. I was impressed that they made a concerted effort to apply complex theory to case examples.

Chapter Eight included a heavy focus on personality traits, in which Jawer and Micozzi outlined a rationale for personality characteristics of people who were more likely to experience apparitions. The most influential personality trait, according to the authors, is sensitivity: a capability to perceive, respond to, and have susceptibility to minute changes in external environments and attunement to others’ internal experiences. Whereas the concept of sensitivity is not new in the transpersonal literature, Jawer and Micozzi took a novel approach to this phenomenon. They contended that the foundation of sensitivity could be found in neurobiology. Jawer and Micozzi shifted their focus in the remainder of Chapter Eight to explaining results of a survey that Jawer administered, which I will subsequently review.

In Chapter Nine, Jawer and Micozzi continued their discussion on environmental sensitivity, referring to medical and psychological conditions and sensitivities. They, too, contended that these types of conditions heavily influence human capacity to perceive transpersonal experiences, primarily perception of apparitions.

To explore his hypothesis that sensitivity has its roots in neurobiology, Jawer designed and administered a survey to 112 participants in which they responded to a variety of questions intended to gather information on demographics, trauma experiences, medical history, sensitivity to electrical and chemical perceptions, sound and light, and psychotherapy experiences. The survey also included questions about perceptions of apparitions.

Whereas Jawer's survey seemed to fit standards of research design, I found a striking error in his approach to data analysis. He labeled 62 participants as sensitives and 50 participants as a control group. According to survey research methodology, descriptive studies cannot have a control group (Rubin, 2008); only experimental studies may include a control group. Furthermore, the only data on which Jawer based his conclusions were interval continuous data—in layman's terms, percentages. He did not report any correlational analyses, the most common form of data analysis in survey research. Moreover, he did not report other common analyses such as statistical significance testing in attempts to support his hypotheses. Regrettably, these major methodological flaws render Jawer's conclusions scientifically unsupported.

In Chapter Ten, Jawer and Micozzi expanded on concepts they mentioned earlier in the book: thin-boundary and thick-boundary people. According to the authors, thin-boundary people connect more readily to experiences of their own minds and bodies, making them more susceptible to anomalous experiences. On the other hand, thick-boundary people do not connect as readily to their minds and bodies and hence are much less susceptible to perceptions of transpersonal domains; however, thick-boundary people also more readily cause anomalies because of their repression of emotional and bodily experiences.

In Chapter Eleven, Jawer and Micozzi shifted their focus to relationships between time and the self. They reviewed philosophical, psychological, and biological correlates of time and the phenomenological experience of the self.

Chapter Twelve may be of particular interest to readers of this *Journal*, as Jawer and Micozzi discussed specific transpersonal phenomena, such as ESP, telepathy, precognition, out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences. In this chapter, the authors reviewed a substantial amount of published literature on each phenomenon. They continued their central thesis that the catalyst for all of these experiences lies in the intersection of emotions, mind, body, neurobiology, environment, and trauma.

In Chapter Thirteen, Jawer and Micozzi wrapped up their work with 13 major conclusions. They discussed candidly that both materialist and non-materialist views of transpersonal experiences likely have some validity. It is in this chapter that I detected a refreshing sense of humility in the authors that I had not previously perceived. Whereas they were firm in their conclusions based on their admittedly extensive literature review, Jawer conceded that he was a “novice” in this field of inquiry (p. 458).

Overall, this book certainly sparked novel questions in my mind as an NDE researcher. It provoked me to think about the link between emotions, perception, and spirituality in ways I had not before. For that reason, I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in exploring these issues. However, based on the methodological flaws I outlined above, I would caution potential readers of this book to take Jawer and Micozzi’s scientific conclusions very tentatively; although I consider their hypothesis both testable and worthy of testing, I didn’t find their methodology adequate to substantiate their conclusions. Though this book does not meet rigorous scholarly standards, I believe its greatest value is for a general audience with interest in transpersonal phenomena—those that transcend the usual limits of space and/or time—and with little knowledge of neurobiology, the brain, and emotional experiences.

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BOOK REVIEW

Madelaine Lawrence, Ph.D., RN
Queens University of Charlotte
University of North Carolina Wilmington

Dancing Past the Dark: Distressing Near-Death

Experiences by Nancy Evans Bush, Cleveland, TN: Parson's Porch Books, 2012, 289 + xxxvi pp., \$24.95 pb (ISBN 978-1-936912-53-7); Kindle ed. \$9.99 e-book.

As a doctoral student at the University of Connecticut in the 1980s, privy to the early development of the field of near-death studies, I heard numerous stories. Over many lunches and at multiple meetings, Nancy Bush and I commiserated about aspects of both “positive” and “negative” near-death experiences (NDEs). As office manager—and quickly becoming executive director—of the newly formed International Association of Near-Death Experiences (IANDS), Bush played a key role not only in managing the organization but also in promoting information about NDEs as the field of near-death studies grew. Bush facilitated appearances on popular television shows and interviews for well-known magazines and newspapers, thus energizing the public with facts and figures about NDEs and with exposure to the researchers who were investigating them. Videos of some of those television programs are available to this day on YouTube. Although the publicity was and still is rampant about what are now termed “pleasurable” NDEs—during which the individual experiences mild to intense pleasurable emotions such as peace, joy, and love—few people wanted or want to hear about distressing experiences—during which the individual experiences mild to intense distressing feelings such as confusion, isolation, terror, or horror.

After a decade of managing IANDS, Bush came forth as a major contributor to the field of NDE research. She herself had an NDE—of the almost unspoken distressing variety. In 1992, Bruce Greyson and

Madelaine Lawrence, Ph.D., RN, is an Associate Professor on adjunct faculty appointment at Queens University of Charlotte in North Carolina and a Lecturer on part-time faculty appointment at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She is a certified hypnotherapist, a certified hypnotherapist instructor, and a life coach (www.hypnosisinfo.org). Correspondence regarding this review should be addressed to Dr. Lawrence at email: lawrencecenter@yahoo.com.

Bush published the first detailed description of over 50 distressing near-death experiences, and in 2009 she contributed the chapter on distressing NDEs to *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*. Now we have from Bush an entire book about distressing NDEs, including how they impact those who have them, how to cope with them, and prevailing religious and cultural beliefs toward them. Bush's personal experience, her master's degree in pastoral ministry, her broad knowledge of NDEs, and her broad reading of spiritual and cultural descriptions of hellish experiences lend great credibility to her writings.

This is also more than a book about distressing NDEs. This book contributes greatly to the field of near-death studies. It is now an aphorism that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Indeed, greatness often cannot be seen until the whole range of phenomena is revealed. This book on distressing NDEs fills an important gap in the near-death literature.

The book begins with a Foreword by Bruce Greyson, a leading researcher in the field of near-death studies and the Chester F. Carlson Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences Director in the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. In his Foreword, he makes the following comment about this book:

A major obstacle for people who have had distressing near-death experiences has been the almost complete absence of any helpful information about such events, from simple facts about how common they are and who has them, to what they might mean and how to cope with them. *Dancing Past the Dark* is the first comprehensive look at these experiences and at how we regard them, both collectively and individually. More importantly, this book is the first effective guide to understanding, living with, and learning from these experiences. (p. vi)

In the Introduction and Preface of the book, Bush described her purpose as author and provided an overview description of the book. Her basic premise is that humans know darkness because of light and light because of darkness and that both darkness and light make up the mantle of human life. Likewise, pleasurable and distressing NDEs present different aspects of a whole phenomenon, describing spiritual heights and spiritual depths.

In Part I of the book, Bush described the history of the contemporary development of the field of near-death studies and the birth of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). An

important thrust of this initial introduction was to describe how enamored people generally were initially with near-death experiencers' (NDErs') descriptions of peace and love and beautiful scenes of an afterlife. Few descriptions of distressing NDEs were documented.

In Chapters 1–5, Bush detailed distressing NDEs. I found the descriptions to be vivid, informative, and well presented. Historically, people who have had NDEs have been reluctant to come forth to describe their experiences for fear of being called crazy. Those with distressing NDEs fear being called both crazy and bad. I believe that for any person who has had a distressing NDE, this section of the book can help to normalize the experience. Experiencers will relate to the research finding that in the aftermath of such an experience, profound distress can last decades.

Some near-death researchers describe distressing NDEs as having similar components to pleasurable NDEs, including an out-of-body episode, a sense of journeying, and encounters with presences. Greyson and Bush (1992) classified distressing experiences into three distinct types, and Chapter 3 provides some helpful descriptions of each classification. The first type involves the classic pleasurable NDE perceived as frightening, the second type involves an experience of nothingness while being in a void, and the third type involves the popular images of hell. Bush provided representative examples of each.

In the Preface, Bush mentioned the media image of the Grim Reaper virtually disappearing as the representative of death, replaced by a Being of Light often portrayed in pleasurable NDEs. Although I totally agree with the statement about the media, the Grim Reaper has been known to be present in NDEs and during other times when a person is near-death. In my study (Lawrence, 1995) of 111 subjects who had been unconscious, in addition to several reporting out-of-body experiences not associated with an NDE, pleasurable and distressing NDEs, and near-death visits from dead friends and relatives (different from deathbed visions because the individuals were close to death and recovered, not imminently dying), two subjects reported seeing what they described as the Grim Reaper in their hospital rooms, and one saw this apparition in the middle of a pleasurable NDE. As one can imagine, these Grim Reaper apparitions were extremely frightening and confusing to those experiencing them. This characterization of a distressing experience was not mentioned by the subjects in the Greyson and Bush (1992) study; however, Bush referred to one in Appendix 2 that occurred to the German actor Curt Jurgens during an episode of clinical death during heart surgery with the famed Dr. Michael

DeBakey (p. 296). According to articles by Chorvinsky (1992; 1993), however, NDErs and those having near-death visits do occasionally describe encountering a Grim Reaper-type entity.

Apparitions of the Grim Reaper may seem more like a fantasy or a hallucination than other NDE accounts that provide veridical reports of actual occurrences in the surrounding environment (Ring & Lawrence, 1993). However, some descriptions of this apparition do connect with the actual environment. In one case, a person described the Grim Reaper as having alerted him to his wife's attempted suicide (Chorvinsky, 1993).

These descriptions seem consistent with the process involved in the first type of distressing NDE in which experiencers react negatively to NDE components found in pleasurable NDE. For example, in one of my reports of the Grim Reaper, a man described him as a faceless man wearing a grayish, hooded robe standing at the foot of his hospital bed. He interpreted the presence as the Grim Reaper. In another account by a man during a pleasurable NDE, he saw a faceless man in a hooded, purple robe that he interpreted as being Jesus.

In Chapter 5, Bush addressed the question of the reality of distressing NDEs. This is also a question brought up about pleasurable NDEs. I found this chapter to be particularly well executed. There is no doubt distressing NDEs happen—just like pleasurable NDEs. Best estimates indicate that 17% to 35% of people who come close to death will report an NDE (Zingrone & Alvarado, 2009). Bush has estimated that 19% of those individuals will report a distressing experience (N. Bush, personal communication, March, 2012). What is not known, as Bush pointed out, is the degree to which distressing NDEs predict a type of hell in the afterlife. Works like Greyson's (1981) indicate that suicide attempters often have pleasurable NDEs that include visions of a beautiful afterlife, despite the fact that suicide is considered by many religions to be soul damning and worthy of hellish torment. Similarly, not all pleasurable NDErs have lead exemplary good lives. Most distressing NDErs appear to have lead good lives. One person who experienced a distressing NDE expressed the belief that being good is not the ticket to heaven. I was left with the question that, if not, then what is?

Part I leaves the reader knowledgeable about the history of the field of near-death studies and how distressing NDEs have been a neglected part of this domain. The descriptions of actual distressing experiences, including the author's, not only informed me but also lead

me to feel great empathy with these experiencers, motivated to provide support to them, and desirous of more research in this area.

Part II, the middle section of the book comprised of Chapters 6–11, Bush described as “looking at the most common expectations about (distressing) experiences—the ideas, beliefs, and fears our culture brings to them and that influence our understanding” (p. xi). In Chapter 6, she continued discussion of the common belief that the deserving will be rewarding with heavenly experiences and the undeserving with hellish ones. Bush made a powerful statement regarding this common belief: “There is, as of this writing, *absolutely no evidence* to support the conventional wisdom that deservingness has anything to do with having a glorious or dismal NDE” (p. 73).

In Chapter 7, Bush described historical writings and descriptions of hell and other underworld places. I found Chapter 8 to be a well-conceived chapter in which Bush made comparisons between pleasurable and distressing NDEs and several other pleasurable and distressing experiences, including deathbed visions, shamanic experiences, UFO abductions, hallucinations, and lucid nightmares. The remainder of Part II includes a description of a broad perspective on the nature of heaven and hell and all that is in between. Bush described the heavy influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage so fundamental to Western humans’ image and understanding of ourselves.

Part II includes a treasure trove of historical information about hellish descriptions as well as a global view of culture, both historical and current, and the ways that culture influences current understanding of pleasurable and distressing NDEs. I would have been intrigued for Bush to have elaborated on the three types of distressing NDEs using some of the material described in this section and other data as needed.

In Part III, the final section comprised of Chapters 12–18, and in the Appendices, Bush offered directions for assisting those who have had a distressing NDE. A first step any helper must take to be of service is to face one’s own reluctance to hear about distressing NDEs. Bush described the necessity of understanding the perspective she had offered with regard to distressing NDEs and the perspective of experiencers to help them not only deal with their emotional reactions to their experiences but also craft their symbolic interpretation of them. Following is a quote from Chapter 13 by Wayne Rollins, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of Theology at Assumption College in Massachusetts and scholar of both the New Testament and Jung, about distressing NDEs that exemplifies the depth of discussion of this aspect.

“Whether personified with gaping throat and jaws, devouring, or as emptiness—these experiences read like dream material. They are signposts of invitation to true maturity, the promise of integration precipitated by despair: Erikson’s ‘ego integrity.’ Fear is psychological; anxiety is ontological: Kierkegaard’s ‘dread.’ Ecclesiastes and ‘all is vanity’—that’s a canonical statement of ontological dread. The anxiety is objectless—ontological—from the threat of destruction, of non-being. It is indigenous to the human condition—Henley’s ‘Invictus’—the anxiety resolved by discovery of his unconquerable soul. The crisis [the horrifying or terrifying NDE] precipitates an answer to the problem of dread; it reflects one’s unconscious state. For some individuals, this is the first time they have confronted the issue of their own mortality at a deep level. Irrespective of any objective referent, the experiences are intensely meaningful, the promise of integrity precipitated by despair, and the fatalistic despair after the experience crystallizes the recognition so it can be dealt with. The experiences are crying for integration. In the classical creeds, the descent to hell—that’s not for nothing. It’s recognition of the very real existence of evil, of emptiness, of nothing as a real presence but not the end. It’s very Joban, driven to recognize apparent evil, destruction, chaos. The presence of apparent evil does not mean the absence of God; that will come as a more mature recognition. This is not simple resurrection theology but resurrection symbolized, not literal but real, a deep recognition of the power of Being that overrides Non-Being, with integration as representing true maturity.” (Rollins, n.d., cited in Bush, 2012, pp. 226–227)

IANDS and its local chapters were initiated to promote research in the field of near-death studies and also to provide support for those individuals who seek to put the experiences into a perspective they could integrate into their life framework. In the true spirit of IANDS, in 2006 a group of 25 NDErs, having either pleasurable or distressing events, gathered to discuss the challenges they faced. Six categories of challenges were identified: processing a radical shift in reality, accepting the return, sharing the experience, integrating new spiritual values with earthly expectations, adjusting to heightened sensitivities and supernatural gifts, and finding and living one’s purpose (Stout, 2006). Appendix 1 includes many more descriptions of how caregivers can intervene with someone who has had a distressing NDE. The four essential steps are preparation, assessment, acting, and responding.

Chapter 17 ends the book with a summary of facts about distressing NDEs. Bush left readers with these words of encouragement for experiences with the darker side:

No one would wish for such experience; yet, once it arrives, one wishes

to meet it with courage and compassion, recognizing that eventually the world will be remade, the dead given the respect they deserve. Some workers will be crushed by the burden; for most, the gift may be to recognize themselves as part of such an archetypal restoration, marked to perpetuity by a depth and knowledge of suffering. These are not the gifts one asks for, but in the incomprehensible fullness of human experience, they are sometimes those we are required to find. One can draw similar conclusions about dark near-death experiences. They are neither trivial nor meaningless. As radiant experiences represent the heights of numinous encounter, those that are distressing represent the depths. Neither is conclusive about the perfection or brokenness of the experiencer nor the reach of the heavens. (p. 272)

Some authors have postulated pleasurable NDEs as proof of the existence of an afterlife. Few will want to make that connection with distressing NDEs. Distressing NDEs encourage us humans to tread lightly in areas that have been nice to believe but not substantiated by evidence. Descriptions of distressing NDEs support some previous findings about pleasurable NDEs but encourage researchers to reconsider other findings and assumptions. For example, research has now made it clear that pleasurable NDEs are not necessarily associated with leading 'good' lives as described by Judeo-Christian religions and that distressing NDEs do not correlate with 'bad' lives. Both types of NDEs compel an exploration of avenues beyond current religious thought to explain their occurrences. With two dimensions of the seemingly same phenomena, researchers and theorists have more comparisons to make, more questions to investigate, and better understanding to achieve.

In Appendix 2, the reader is given more descriptions of distressing NDEs. In one account a man remembered the ice-cold fingers of a female death image touching him.

"In any event, she moved closer to me and put her hands on my bare breast so that I would again be under the spell of her magnetic force. I could feel her ice-cold hands on my skin, and the empty eye sockets were fixed immovably on me. I concentrated all my thoughts on living, so as to escape death in this womanly guise." (p. 297)

Here is a description of a person from my study (Lawrence, 1995) who reported an apparition of the Grim Reaper: "The next thing I remembered was feeling very cold-below freezing. At the foot of my bed on the right side was a dark, gray, cloaked stranger. He had no face" (p. 142).

Feeling cold, below freezing, was a common description of people in shock without having an NDE. Why do these individuals feel so cold? How is that feeling connected to having or not having an NDE? All three reports I collected described the Grim Reaper as a man, yet there were no identifying male details about the figure. When I asked why they referred to the Grim Reaper as “he,” they didn’t know. The account in this book describes this death figure as a female. Why is this image female? These are the types of questions that arise with the addition of this book to the near-death literature.

Authors have published many scientific books on the topic of NDEs. To date, I am aware of no author who has looked at how people determine the *meaning* of their experiences and the role of their religious and/or cultural backgrounds in the derivation of that meaning. It is a valuable and refreshing viewpoint that Bush has brought to open consideration of that aspect of the discussion.

I am looking forward to Bush writing an article in which she uses the three types of distressing NDE as an organizing framework. To focus on explanations of components of the pleasurable NDE seen negatively, experience of the void, and hellish experiences would, I believe, continue to make a valuable contribution to the field of near-death studies. To expand that wish list further, an article that marries the interventions from Chapter 17 and Appendix 1 would be so helpful to those who have experienced distressing NDEs and those who are counseling and supporting them.

One of the subtle benefits of this book is the presentation of descriptions of distressing NDEs, such as the void and the hellish experiences, different from the classic NDE characteristics. Even though the field is called near-death studies, the focus in the field has been primarily on pleasurable NDEs. However, many other experiences surrounding the dying process are worthy of investigation, such as distressing NDEs as described in this book, deathbed visions, near-death visits (a term I coined; Lawrence, 1995) which included figures at the foot of hospital beds of individuals not near-death, and after-death communication, that could be more extensively encompassed in the field of near-death studies than they have been.

I agree with Bruce Greyson in his depiction of this book as written with clarity, compassion, and authority. Nancy Bush knows the field of near-death studies well, and to this book she has brought to bear not only her vast conceptual knowledge but also her own personal experiences. Being someone who has been involved with the field of near-death studies since its modern day beginning and someone who has

had a distressing experience and gone through the process of coming to terms with it makes Bush the best possible person to have written this book.

My conclusion about this book is that it provides much-needed details about distressing NDEs and recommended interventions for people who have had them. In the midst of their practical, work-a-day worlds, distressing NDErs are suddenly thrown into an area of darkness that seems hellish to them. Their lives typically are in turmoil from this experience as they question their sanity, their goodness, and their worldviews. I found that Bush presented these experiences with compassion, with great detail, and with a rational, fearless approach to assisting people who have them. I believe that anyone who has had a distressing NDE, who provides support and counseling to a distressing NDEr, or who deeply questions the nature of consciousness and reality, will benefit greatly from reading this book.

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