

Reincarnation Beliefs Among Near-Death Experiencers

Amber D. Wells
University of Connecticut

ABSTRACT: Several researchers have found that near-death experiences (NDEs) tend to increase belief in reincarnation. This study was designed to examine the factors underlying this belief shift. I used a questionnaire to compare the tendency toward belief in reincarnation among NDErs, individuals merely interested in NDEs, and a non-experiencer, non-interest control group. In addition, I interviewed 14 NDErs to gain insight into the factors influencing NDErs' beliefs. NDErs' reincarnation belief shift appeared to be due to (a) direct knowledge of reincarnation gained by some NDErs in the NDE itself; (b) knowledge of reincarnation gained through a general psychic awakening following the NDE; or (c) exploration of alternative perceptions of reality following the NDE.

Previous research has indicated that following a near-death experience (NDE), experiencers tend to exhibit a significant shift in their beliefs on a wide range of subjects, including an increased acceptance of others, a significantly greater belief in life after death, and a decreased emphasis on material success (Atwater, 1988; Flynn, 1986; Grey, 1985; Morse and Perry, 1992; Ring, 1984, 1992; Sutherland, 1992). These belief changes have also included a general tendency toward an increased openness to the idea of reincarnation (Gallup and Proctor, 1982; Ring, 1980, 1984, 1992; Sutherland, 1992).

It is this belief shift that was the focus of the present study. The question of what precipitates the shift toward belief in reincarnation has not yet been systematically addressed in the literature. In this

Amber D. Wells was a student at the University of Connecticut at the time of this study. This paper is based on her senior honors thesis under the direction of Kenneth Ring, Ph.D. Reprint requests should be addressed to Ms. Wells at 2950 Bixby Lane, Apt. A213, Boulder, CO 80303.

study, I attempted to answer this question and, additionally, to determine if a consistent picture of the purpose and process of reincarnation would emerge from the accounts of near-death experiencers.

Previous researchers such as Kenneth Ring have suggested that near-death experiencers' increased openness toward the idea of reincarnation may be less a factor of the NDE itself than a result of life changes following the experience:

Of course, there is no reason why an NDEr's openness toward reincarnation must stem directly from his NDE. In fact, I am quite convinced that in many cases it is more likely to be a response to an NDEr's reading and other life experiences following an NDE. (Ring, 1984, p. 160)

Ring's study also suggested that belief in or openness to reincarnation among NDErs was often accompanied by a more general endorsement of Eastern religions. This has also been noted in the work of Cherie Sutherland (1992). Other researchers (Twemlow, Gabbard, and Jones, 1982) found a similar shift in religious beliefs among individuals having not near-death experiences but out-of-body experiences. Thus it is possible that the NDE is simply one of many catalysts for an increased openness to reincarnation. In fact, it has been suggested that simply an interest in near-death phenomena can serve as a catalyst for many of the value changes expressed by NDErs, including an increased openness to the idea of reincarnation (K. Ring, personal communication, 1991).

If it is true that the NDE influences individuals' reincarnation beliefs simply by causing them to consider new religions or spiritual ideas, then one would expect that individuals who exhibited an interest in the NDE would also be prompted to undergo a similar belief shift. If, on the other hand, it is something inherent in the NDE itself that leads individuals to consider the possibility of reincarnation, then one would expect that individuals who were merely interested in such phenomena but who had not experienced it themselves would have reincarnation beliefs that differed significantly from those of near-death experiencers and would instead be similar to those of individuals who have no such interest in NDEs.

In this study, questionnaires were used to determine the reincarnation beliefs of a group of NDErs, a group of subjects who were interested in near-death experiences but had not had an NDE, and also a group of subjects who were chosen to represent the general non-experiencer,

non-interest population. Interviews of NDErs were also conducted to gain a deeper insight into the origins and structure of their beliefs concerning reincarnation.

Method

Subjects

There were four separate subject groups employed in this study. The first group, the near-death experienter interview group (or NDEI group) consisted of 14 near-death experiencers currently residing in the state of Connecticut who were selected from among Ring's files and from individuals who attended Friends of IANDS (International Association for Near-Death Studies) meetings that convene monthly in Farmington, Connecticut. The second group, the near-death experienter (NDE) group, consisted of 43 near-death experiencers from various locations throughout the United States who responded to a mailed questionnaire regarding their beliefs about reincarnation. These individuals were also selected from among Ring's files. The third group was composed of 34 individuals who have not had a near-death experience, but who indicated an interest in the near-death phenomenon through correspondence with Ring at the University of Connecticut. This group also responded to the mailed reincarnation beliefs questionnaire and will be referred to as the interest group. The fourth and final group consisted of 30 individuals who were approached outside a grocery store in Willimantic, Connecticut, and who agreed to fill out the reincarnation beliefs questionnaire. This group will be referred to as the control group.

Materials

A questionnaire consisting of 16 statements about reincarnation was developed specifically for this study to evaluate respondents' degree of belief in reincarnation. The questionnaires were mailed with a cover letter explaining the nature of the study and requesting the individual's participation was included. The interview schedule used with the NDEI group consisted of questions referring to NDErs' beliefs about reincarnation and the factors that shaped their beliefs (see Appendix). A tape recorder and cassette tapes were used to tape the interviews.

Three of the interviews were not tape recorded because the situation, usually too much background noise, prevented it. These interviews were recorded using paper and pen.

Procedure

Fifty questionnaires were mailed to the near-death experiencer group, of which 29 were returned; while 50 questionnaires were mailed to the near-death interest group, of which 34 were returned.

In addition, 30 individuals who were approached outside a grocery store in Willimantic, Connecticut, agreed to respond to the reincarnation beliefs questionnaire. These subjects were told that I was a student at the University of Connecticut conducting my honors' thesis on the subject of reincarnation, and were asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding their reincarnation beliefs.

The questionnaire consisted of eight statements favorable to the idea of reincarnation and eight statements unfavorable to it, and was designed using a Likert format. The subjects were asked to respond to each statement with a +2 to indicate strong agreement with the statement, a +1 to indicate a tendency toward agreement, a 0 to indicate no opinion, a -1 to indicate a tendency toward disagreement, and a -2 to indicate strong disagreement.

Finally, 14 near-death experiencers from the NDEI group were contacted by phone and interviews were arranged. In the course of each interview, the subject was asked to fill out the reincarnation beliefs questionnaire. Because the NDEI group's mean reincarnation beliefs score did not differ significantly from that of the NDEr questionnaire only group ($t=1.62$, $df=13$; $p < 0.2$), these two groups were combined for the purpose of questionnaire analysis, and are referred to as the NDEr group.

Each subject was then assigned a reincarnation belief score from -32 to +32 by subtracting the sum of their responses against reincarnation from the sum of their responses that were pro-reincarnation. A score of +32 meant that the subject had responded with a +2 to all of the statements considered favorable toward the idea of reincarnation and with a -2 to all of the statements considered unfavorable to the idea and thus constitutes a perfect pro-reincarnation score. A -32 constitutes a perfect score in the other direction. A constant of +32 was then added to each subject's raw score, resulting in scores ranging from 0 to 64.

Analysis

A one-way analysis of variance including Scheffe's post-hoc test was performed on the questionnaire data in addition to a chi-squared test. The interviews were analyzed to answer these questions: How do near-death experiencers feel about reincarnation? Were there any commonalities among their beliefs? Have their beliefs changed since their experience? And if so, what factors led to these changes—was it the experience itself or life changes that took place following the experience? The last two questions of the interview directly addressed this issue.

Results

Questionnaire Data

The mean reincarnation belief score for the NDErs was 46.19; for the NDE interest group the mean was 46.94; and for the non-interest control the mean was 33.09.

An analysis of variance revealed that there was a significant difference among the reincarnation belief scores of the three groups ($F=9.79$; $df=2, 109$; $p < .01$). Further statistical analysis with Scheffe's post-hoc test indicated that no significant difference existed between the reincarnation belief scores of the NDErs and the NDE interest group ($F=0.03$; $df=2, 109$). However, a significant difference was found between the scores of the non-interest control group and both the near-death experience and the near-death interest groups ($F=7.60$; $df=2, 109$; $p < .01$ and $F=7.67$; $df=2, 109$; $p < .01$ respectively).

The range of possible scores from 0 to 64 was divided into thirds, with scores from 0 to 21 representing strong belief that reincarnation does not occur, scores from 22 to 42 representing neutral beliefs, and scores from 43 to 64 representing strong belief in reincarnation. Table 1 shows a breakdown of scores of the three study groups into these three categories. Seventy percent of these NDErs and 71 percent of the NDE interest group indicated a strong belief in reincarnation, while only 30 percent of the control group did so.

A chi-squared test of these data revealed that the reincarnation belief scores for the NDE group and the NDE interest group were significantly more positive than that of the non-interest control group, whose scores tended to fall in the neutral region (chi-squared=78.15;

df=4; $p < .005$). Percentages of subjects in each group who expressed agreement with each statement are listed in Table 2.

Interview Data

NDErs' Belief in Reincarnation. A review of my interview data revealed that 13 of the 14 NDErs either believed in reincarnation or were at least open to the idea. Seven of the NDErs I interviewed did not believe in reincarnation before their experience, but did believe in it afterwards. Four individuals did not believe in reincarnation before their NDE or afterwards. However, although these respondents did not definitely believe in reincarnation, they were at least open to the possibility. Two individuals had considered reincarnation prior to their NDE, but the experience led them to change the way they looked at it; one subject now believed in reincarnation on more of a collective level rather than as an individual process, and the other came to think about reincarnation more seriously and consider it more in depth following his experience. One subject did not believe in reincarnation before her NDE, and the experience had no effect on her views.

No strong common pattern of beliefs about the process or purpose of reincarnation surfaced in my interviews. However, a few commonalities were seen in some of the respondents' answers. No one claimed

Table 1
Belief in reincarnation of NDErs, NDE interest group,
and control group

	<i>NDErs</i> (<i>N=43</i>)	<i>Interest</i> <i>group</i> (<i>N=34</i>)	<i>Control</i> <i>group</i> (<i>N=30</i>)	<i>Total</i> (<i>N=107</i>)
Strong belief in reincarnation (score = 43-64)	30	24	9	63
Neutral belief (score = 22-42)	8	9	15	32
Strong belief that reincarnation does not occur (score = 0-21)	5	1	6	12

Table 2
Percentage of subjects agreeing with each statement on reincarnation belief questionnaire

<i>Questionnaire statement</i>	<i>Interest Group (N=34)</i>		<i>Control group (N=30)</i>	
	<i>NDErs (N=43)</i>	<i>Group (N=34)</i>	<i>Group (N=30)</i>	<i>Group (N=30)</i>
1. The idea that we live more than once in a physical body makes a great deal of sense to me.	70	71	50	50
2. Persons who claim to remember past lives are really just fantasizing.	16	9	33	33
3. The experience of meeting someone for the first time yet feeling that you have "known them before" may well be explained by having known that person in a past life.	74	65	37	37
4. Lessons that we do not learn in this life will carry over into the next.	65	76	37	37
5. The doctrine of reincarnation may be comforting to some, but there is no good evidence for it.	23	12	50	50
6. We only live once.	16	9	40	40
7. All things are cyclic—therefore, reincarnation is a plausible doctrine when it comes to human life.	33	74	53	53
8. The idea of reincarnation is just wishful thinking.	7	9	27	27
9. Certain exceptional talents, such as those of musical prodigy, are probably carryovers from a past life.	53	68	30	30
10. Reincarnation is just plain bunk.	14	3	20	20

Table 2 Continued

<i>Questionnaire statement</i>	<i>NDErs (N=43)</i>	<i>Interest Group (N=34)</i>	<i>Control group (N=30)</i>
11. There is a lot of evidence for reincarnation, such as very young children being able to report accurately events of a past life which they couldn't have know about by normal means.	72	82	43
12. When persons claim to remember a past life under hypnosis, it is more likely to be merely the result of their imagination or perhaps something that they read about long ago but have forgotten.	9	12	43
13. Reincarnation makes sense to me because it helps to explain life's injustices.	40	56	23
14. It is no more remarkable that we live more than once than that we live at all.	70	68	57
15. Experiences suggesting reincarnation do occur, but they are likely to have conventional explanations when examined closely.	16	24	57
16. The notion of karma—that one's actions in this life affect one's future lives—is hard to swallow in a modern age like ours.	12	21	47

to have gained any direct understanding of the nature or process of reincarnation during his or her NDE. Three of the 14 respondents, however, claimed a "sense" or "perception" during their experience of having lived before. Only one respondent claimed to have had a past-lives review, in which she re-experienced events from a past life, during an NDE.

The Nature of Reincarnation. In response to the question about the general process of reincarnation, four respondents mentioned one consciousness separating into individual souls to be embodied in matter. One respondent took this idea further, to state that reincarnation takes place more on a collective rather than an individual level. In other words, she felt that a collective energy recycles itself through matter and that our sense of individuality is a product of our present incarnation only. One respondent believed that a higher power created a finite number of individual souls, some of which then are placed in human embodiments in order to learn lessons.

A strong minority of respondents, six of 14, saw individual choice as the initiating force behind the reincarnation process. Three other individuals mentioned karmic patterns or ties to other souls as influencing the reincarnation process.

Eight of 14 subjects mentioned learning or enlightenment as the main purpose underlying reincarnation. One respondent said, "The spirit needs to embody itself in matter to experience it and learn. There are karmic patterns to learn lessons and to work spirit in matter." Another commented, "Life itself is a series of learnings. The lessons are universal, the two most important being truth and forgiveness."

Ten of 14 interviewees believed it is possible to remember past lives, while two remained unsure and one saw claims of past life remembrances as most likely the result of fantasy.

Eleven of 14 subjects believed in the concept of karma or at least were open to it. Five of the 11, however, qualified their affirmation with further explanation of their beliefs:

Yes, but not in that sense. We progress at our own rate to reach the light. If you do things that take you away from the light, then you are perpetuating your time here.

[I] don't believe in karma as some people do—that it is pre-destiny. We have karma but we can change it.

Karma is misunderstood; it's not just negative. Everything is karma, even thoughts.

Consequences carry over to some degree, but the emphasis is not so much on the physical act, but more on what is going on inside.

Definitely, but there are no rights or wrongs—it just is. We all have light and dark and we need to balance them out.

When asked what goes on during the period between incarnations, seven subjects mentioned learning as the main activity of the soul. Four mentioned resting, rejuvenation, and/or connecting with God, and one subject indicated that individuals are involved in setting up the circumstances of their next life during this time. When asked if one's personal awareness and sense of personal identity remained intact in the afterlife realm and for how long, two subjects answered affirmatively, one believing that the personality would continue forever and the other unsure as to how long this sense of "self" would remain.

The majority of respondents, however, eight out of 14, gave more qualified endorsements of this proposition. Here are three examples of their responses:

Not intact. The inner quality is there, the inner self remains, but the external aspect that may have seemed very strong is dissolved.

Individuality wasn't the same there. I was the same as everybody and everybody was me.

Your spirit is always you. You are not the personality that you are on earth. In the other realm you are everything, light is everything.

Finally, eight of the 14 respondents said that they felt the cycle of reincarnation would eventually come to an end. They indicated that at this point there would be existence as pure spiritual being and/or a merging with God. One respondent said, "Then you exist as pure spiritual form, as a pure spiritual being." Another responded, "You become an integral part of God. When everyone reaches that point it is nirvana." Two of 14 subjects indicated that the cycle of reincarnation would probably come to an end for earthly embodiments, but that one would continue to incarnate into other realms or dimensions.

Factors Underlying the Shift Toward Belief in Reincarnation. A more definite pattern emerged in the subjects' responses to the question about which factors led to the change in their reincarnation beliefs. Three causes for changes in beliefs in a direction favorable to reincarnation were mentioned.

One cause for this belief shift, for which I found only limited evidence in this study, is direct knowledge imparted during the NDE itself. Three of my 14 interview subjects claimed to have a "sense" that they had lived before during their NDE. For two of my subjects this factor would qualify as the main event influencing their reincarnation beliefs. One subject, however, had several NDEs and also exhibited a significant psychic awakening, involving direct information concerning reincarnation, following her experiences. She claimed to have had a past-lives review during one NDE, but did not indicate which one. Therefore, I do not know which came first: the direct reincarnation knowledge through her psychic awakening, or the past-lives review. Thus, I do not know for certain which was the influencing factor in her belief shift. However, because her post-NDE experiences were so many, so extensive, and obviously so influential in her beliefs, it is more likely these experiences, rather than her NDE past-lives review, that shaped her beliefs, and she is consequently categorized as such.

The second cause for the reincarnation shift was found in events taking place after the NDEs' experience that seemed to be part of a general psychic awakening. This general psychic awakening has been documented by other researchers as well (Greyson, 1983; Ring, 1985). Ring presented this idea as his "spiritual catalyst" hypothesis, which implies that NDEs tend to lead to psychic development. For five of the 14 subjects in this study it was this psychic awakening following their NDE, rather than the experience itself, that provided them with direct knowledge of reincarnation. One subject explained:

Before any of these events, I call mine kind of a two-part event, because I had the NDE in 1979, and then another car accident in 1985 that brought about what I call a kundalini awakening, which is similar to an NDE without the death part of the physical body. So, what happened to me is, before either of these experiences happened I didn't believe in reincarnation at all. . . . After these experiences what one of the things that happened to me was I started getting memories of my own past lives. A lot of times just spontaneously something would trigger it and I'd get this memory, and I see visions, and then I started getting them of other people's lives.

Two other experiencers noted similar phenomena:

This didn't come about from the experience but afterwards, since then. [I've received] messages, my brother-in-law [deceased] had a message . . . that his soul would be reincarnated into my sister's son.

I had ongoing experiences after the near-death experience. In that after process I experienced souls. On one occasion it's like I followed a soul, went through a process with a soul, in how they were reborn, how it came about that they were reborn.

Finally, as the third source of the reincarnation belief shift, the NDE opened the individual up to greater possibilities in his or her perception of reality. It made them more willing to explore a wider range of spiritual possibilities, including reincarnation. This exploration was manifest in the form of reading, discussions with others, and personal reflection. Six of my 14 subjects fell into this category. One respondent said of her NDE: "It opened up a dimension that I never really knew existed." Another commented: "It [his NDE] didn't help me conclude anything, it just threw the doors of possibility wide open." Still another said:

I didn't even know what reincarnation was before I had an NDE. It was afterwards that I was led to find out what it was. Some of the things I'm telling you [about reincarnation] came out in other conversations and some in the reading that I've done, and some just thoughts I've had. And it made total sense to me.

And finally one woman I interviewed said:

[I] hadn't given it [reincarnation] much thought before that [her NDE]. I was brought up in a fairly conventional religion—Catholicism. I was not a particularly practicing Catholic at the time, but more or less hadn't explored much Eastern philosophy. After the experience, I did. I read a great deal of different philosophies, not just Eastern, but all of them, and found that it [reincarnation] was plausible.

Discussion

In this study, 70 percent of the sample of NDErs demonstrated belief in reincarnation. In contrast, a Gallup Poll (Gallup and Proctor, 1982) found that only 23 percent of the general population endorse this belief, while 30 percent of my control group help views favorable to reincarnation. These data confirm the findings of earlier studies with respect to

NDErs' reincarnation beliefs. While I found that the near-death experimenter group exhibited a significantly greater tendency toward belief in reincarnation than my general public sample, I also found that my NDE interest group exhibited beliefs that did not differ significantly from those of the NDErs. These data are consistent with the hypothesis that there is nothing inherent in the near-death experience itself that causes the shift in experiencers' beliefs about reincarnation.

Additionally, my data failed to reveal any consistent pattern among NDErs' beliefs about the purpose or process of reincarnation. There were, as I already noted, many similarities, but no one "truth" emerged. Furthermore, the beliefs expressed by the NDErs in my study are not unique; they tended to follow the standard view of reincarnation as expressed in much of the New Age literature. By way of example, the following excerpts taken from Irving S. Cooper's book, *Reincarnation: A Hope of the World* (1979), are representative of this view and are quite similar to many of the statements made by my NDEI sample:

The chief purpose of reincarnation is education. To this end we are born again and again on earth, not because of any external pressure, but because we, as souls, desire to grow. (p. 14)

It is a universal process, and prevails not only in the human kingdom but throughout the whole of nature. Whenever we find a living form, the consciousness of that form is also evolving, using temporarily for that purpose the physical form in order that it may gain physical experience. (p. 19)

In each incarnation we have a different physical body, a different name, and may have different souls acting as parents, but these changes do not in the slightest imperil our individuality. (p. 24)

Reincarnation is not an endless process, and when we have learned the lessons taught in the World-School we return no more to physical incarnation unless we come back of our own accord to act as Teachers of humanity or as Helpers in the glorious plan of evolution. (p. 47)

With respect to the question of what in fact underlies the reincarnation belief shift, I can offer three possibilities suggested by my data, but which would require further research to verify. First, in some cases, it does seem to be the NDE itself that influences one's reincarnation views. Although I did not find extensive evidence for this in my study, it has been documented by other researchers (Morse and Perry, 1992; Ring, 1985). In those cases, individuals claimed to have received direct

knowledge of reincarnation during the NDE itself. An example of this type of knowledge can be seen in a letter written to Ring by John Robinson:

It is a matter of personal knowledge from what the Being with whom I spoke during my NDE told me about my older son, that he had had 14 incarnations in female physical bodies previous to the life he has just had.

Ring has also heard testimony of this kind of direct knowledge in some of his interviews. One NDEr, whose account is recorded in Ring's audiotape archives, commented:

My whole life went before me of things I have done and haven't done, but not just of this one lifetime, but of all the lifetimes. I know for a fact there is reincarnation. This is an absolute. I was shown all those lives and how I had overcome some of the things I had done in other lives. There was still some things to be corrected.

Another NDEr whose testimony is included in Ring's audiotape archives gave this account:

I had a lot of questions, and I wanted to know what they [light beings she encountered in her NDE] were doing—why are you just kind of milling around here? And someone stepped forward . . . it wasn't just one . . . I got information from a number of them . . . that they were all waiting for reincarnation.

Additionally, in a case documented by Melvin Morse, a girl who had her NDE when she nearly drowned at the age of 7 reported seeing during her experience two adults waiting to be reborn (Morse, 1983).

Second, some NDErs may gain direct knowledge of reincarnation through other psychic or mystical experiences following their NDE. In this way, the NDE becomes a catalyst for openness to reincarnation through its ability to propel the experiencer into a general psychic awakening.

Finally, for other NDErs their experience serves mainly to spark their interest in various "New Age" phenomena that leads to often extensive outside reading and research. It makes sense that when one becomes open to the idea of life after death, the idea of life after life becomes much more plausible.

The fact that my NDE interest group exhibited reincarnation belief scores so similar to those of my NDE sample can be explained by two hypotheses. First, it is possible that some of my NDE interest subjects may have gained direct knowledge of reincarnation through other psychic or mystical experiences even though they have not had an NDE. Second, my NDE interest group may be very similar to those in my NDE sample who were prompted to explore "New Age" material following their experience. Both groups became interested in the near-death phenomenon, one group through direct experience and the other through unspecified means, and thus were led to explore the concept of reincarnation. My study is limited by the fact that I have no data on the factors influencing the beliefs of the subjects in the NDE interest group.

Future research would be well directed towards determining what it is about an interest in near-death experiences that promotes an openness to reincarnation, or if in fact both the interest in NDEs and openness to reincarnation are the result of some other factor or occurrence. Using a larger, more randomly assigned subject pool would also help to strengthen the findings.

References

- Atwater, P. M. H. (1988). *Coming back to life: The after-effects of the near-death experience*. New York, NY: Dodd, Mead.
- Cooper, I. S. (1979). *Reincarnation: A hope of the world*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House.
- Flynn, C. P. (1986). *After the beyond: Human transformation and the near-death experience*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Gallup, G., Jr., and Proctor, W. (1982). *Adventures in immortality: A look beyond the threshold of death*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Grey, M. (1985). *Return from death: An exploration of the near-death experience*. London, England: Arkana.
- Greyson, B. (1983). Increase in psychic phenomena following near-death experiences. *Theta*, 11, 26–29.
- Morse, M. L. (1983). A near-death experience in a 7-year-old child. *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 137, 959–961.
- Morse, M. L., and Perry, P. (1992). *Transformed by the light: The powerful effect of near-death experiences on people's lives*. New York, NY: Villard.
- Ring, K. (1980). *Life at death: A scientific investigation of the near-death experience*. New York, NY: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan.
- Ring, K. (1984). *Heading toward omega: In search of the meaning of the near-death experience*. New York, NY: Morrow.
- Ring, K. (1992). *The Omega Project: Near-death experiences, UFO encounters, and mind at large*. New York, NY: Morrow.

- Sutherland, Cherie. (1992). *Transformed by the light: Life after near-death experiences*. New York, NY: Bantam.
- Twemlow, S. W., Gabbard, G. O., and Jones, F. C. (1982). The out-of-body experience: A phenomenological typology based on questionnaire response. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 139, 450–455.

Appendix

Interview schedule for NDE and Reincarnation Study

In this interview, I'd like to ask you some questions about your beliefs concerning reincarnation—the idea that we live more than one life in a physical body.

First, however, I'd like to ask you whether your own near-death experience gave you any insights into this matter of reincarnation. Did anything in your NDE itself touch on this question, and if so, what exactly was it? [Pause for answer]

Some people say that during their NDE they had a “life review” in which various events of their life are seen again, usually in a very vivid way. A few people, however, say that they seem to see events from their “past lives” as well. Did this kind of “past lives” review happen to you during your NDE? [If yes, as respondent to elaborate]

Sometimes people say that during their NDE they were given a kind of direct understanding of the general process of reincarnation. Did anything like this happen to you during your NDE? [If yes, ask respondent to elaborate]

Occasionally, near-death experiencers report that during their NDE they appeared to see “souls waiting to be reborn”. Did you glimpse anything like this? [If yes, ask respondent to elaborate]

OK, in this next part of the interview, I'd like to ask you some questions having to do with your views about reincarnation. If you yourself believe in reincarnation, or are inclined to, or are even open to the possibility that reincarnation might be true, I have one set of questions I'd like to ask you. If, however, you do not believe in reincarnation or have never given much thought to it, then I have another set for you. Which set of questions would be appropriate for you? [Wait for

respondent to clarify his/her status. If respondent is not a believer in reincarnation or hasn't thought about it, give him/her the Reincarnation Questionnaire to fill out. In that case, simply wait for that to be done before concluding the interview by asking respondent the last set of questions concerning changes in his/her views about reincarnation since his/her NDE]

[Interview continues thus for respondents who are open to or believe in reincarnation]

My first question is a very general one: (1) In your view, what is the process of reincarnation? In short, how does it work? [For this and all questions that follow in this series, allow plenty of time for respondent to elaborate, and encourage further elaboration if necessary]

(2) What initiates the process that leads the individual to reincarnate into another body?

(3) Does the individual have a choice about whether to reincarnate? If so, what factors affect that choice? Does anyone outside the individual guide the individual here?

(4) Why does a person reincarnate? That is, is there a general purpose that underlies reincarnation? Or does it differ from individual to individual?

(5) In your view, does an individual about to reincarnate choose his/her parents, the general circumstances of his/her life, etc., or is that determined by factors outside the person's own control?

(6) When does the person's soul enter the body? Does this vary?

(7) Once "in", can the soul occasionally "go out" again at or around the time of birth?

(8) Some people claim to be able to remember past lives. Do you think this is possible?

(9) Do you believe in the concept of karma—the idea that whatever we do has consequences, and that these consequences can carry over from one life to another? [If yes, then:] How does this tie in for you with the concept of reincarnation?

(10) When you die, what in general terms do you think happens afterward?

(11) If there is a period between lives, what goes on during that interval?

(12) Do you think that there is any kind of a "life review and assessment" during this interval? [If so, then:] How is it related, if at all, to one's eventual next life?

(13) Does the individual's personal awareness and sense of personal identity remain intact in the afterlife realm? For how long?

(14) What happens to that personality after the individual begins the process of reincarnation? Does it in some sense continue to exist or does it simply cease as an independent entity?

(15) Does the cycle of reincarnation for a given individual ever come to an end? [If yes, then:] What brings it to an end? What happens to the individual then?

Thank you for taking the time to answer all these questions of mine. Before we conclude this interview, though, I have just a few more things to ask you about reincarnation.

The first is very straightforward and won't take you long. I have a brief questionnaire that I'd like you to fill out for me now. It simply lists a series of statements about reincarnation and asks you merely to indicate whether you agree or disagree with these statements. It will just take a few more minutes of your time. [Give respondent questionnaire, and wait for him/her to finish]

My last set of questions—and there are just a few of them—have to do with some of the factors that may have shaped your beliefs about reincarnation. [These questions are to be asked of both the believers in reincarnation and those who indicated at the beginning of the interview that they did not believe in reincarnation or hadn't thought about it]

First, have your views about reincarnation changed since your NDE? [If yes, then:] How so, and what brought about these changes? Do you think it was the experience itself or was it the result of life changes after the experience? For example, new religions you may have explored, groups you've joined, workshops you've taken, books you've read, etc.? [Have respondent elaborate freely, and follow up to clarify the sources which have influenced the respondent's beliefs and understanding about reincarnation]

Well, that concludes my interview, [respondent's name]. Thank you so much again for taking the time to answer my questions so thoughtfully. Now, can I answer any questions for you about my project? [Engage the respondent as much as he/she would care to concerning the research, what has been learned so far, etc.]