Editor's Foreword • Bruce Greyson, M.D.

Neglected Near-Death Phenomena • Carlos S. Alvarado, Ph.D.

A Study of Near-Death Experiences and Coping with Stress • Kristin Brumm, M.N.M.

Experiences of Light in Gay and Lesbian Near-Death Experiences
• Liz Dale, Ph.D.

Book Review: The Trickster and the Paranormal, by George P. Hansen
• James McClenon, Ph.D.

Book Review: Talking with Angel: About Illness, Death, and Survival,
by Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino • Pim van Lommel, M.D.

Letter to the Editor • Diane Willis
Editor's Foreword
   Bruce Greyson, M.D.

ARTICLES
Neglected Near-Death Phenomena
   Carlos S. Alvarado, Ph.D.

A Study of Near-Death Experiences and Coping with Stress
   Kristin Brumm, M.N.M.

Experiences of Light in Gay and Lesbian Near-Death Experiences
   Liz Dale, Ph.D.

BOOK REVIEWS
The Trickster and the Paranormal, by George P. Hansen
   Reviewed by James McClenon, Ph.D.

Talking with Angel: About Illness, Death, and Survival, by Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino
   Reviewed by Pim van Lommel, M.D.

Letter to the Editor
   Diane Willis
JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES (formerly ANABIOSIS) is sponsored by the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). The Journal publishes articles on near-death experiences and on the empirical effects and theoretical implications of such events, and on such related phenomena as out-of-body experiences, deathbed visions, the experiences of dying persons, comparable experiences occurring under other circumstances, and the implications of such phenomena for our understanding of human consciousness and its relation to the life and death processes. The Journal is committed to an unbiased exploration of these issues, and specifically welcomes a variety of theoretical perspectives and interpretations that are grounded in empirical observation or research.

The INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES (IANDS) is a worldwide organization of scientists, scholars, healthcare providers, near-death experiencers, and the general public, dedicated to the exploration of near-death experiences (NDEs) and their implications. Incorporated as a nonprofit educational and research organization in 1981, IANDS' objectives are to encourage and support research into NDEs and related phenomena; to disseminate knowledge concerning NDEs and their implications; to further the utilization of near-death research by healthcare and counseling professionals; to form local chapters of near-death experiencers and interested others; to sponsor symposia and conferences on NDEs and related phenomena; and to maintain a library and archives of near-death-related material. Friends of IANDS chapters are affiliated support groups in many cities for NDErs and their families and for healthcare and counseling professionals to network locally. Information about membership in IANDS can be obtained by contacting IANDS, P.O. Box 502, East Windsor Hill, CT 06028-0502, USA; telephone: (860) 882-1211; fax: (860) 882-1212; e-mail: office@iands.org; Internet website: www.iands.org.

MANUSCRIPTS may be submitted by e-mail or on computer disk or CD-ROM or in hard copy to Bruce Greyson, M.D., Division of Perceptual Studies, Department of Psychiatric Medicine, University of Virginia Health System, P.O. Box 800152, Charlottesville, VA 22908-0152; telephone: (434) 924-2281; fax: (434) 924-1712; e-mail: cbg4d@virginia.edu. See inside back cover for style requirements.

SUBSCRIPTION inquiries and subscription orders, and ADVERTISING inquiries should be addressed to IANDS, P.O. Box 502, East Windsor Hill, CT 06028-0502, USA; telephone: (860) 644-5216; fax: (860) 644-5759; e-mail: office@iands.org.


JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES (ISSN: 0891-4494) is published quarterly in the Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer by IANDS, Allen Press, 810 East 10th Street, Lawrence, KS 65044. Subscription rate is U.S. $62.00 per year for individuals who are not members of IANDS and $398.00 for institutions and libraries. Periodical postage paid at Lawrence, KS, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Journal of Near-Death Studies, IANDS, P.O. Box 502, East Windsor Hill, CT 06028-0502.

COPYRIGHT 2006 by the International Association for Near-Death Studies. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the Publisher, with the exception of any material supplied specifically for the purpose of being entered and executed on a computer system, for exclusive use by the purchaser of the work.
Editor’s Foreword

We start this issue of the Journal with a review by psychologist Carlos Alvarado of a number of near-death phenomena that, although described in the scholarly literature during the past century, have been neglected by researchers in recent decades. Extending his scope beyond the classical near-death experience (NDE), Alvarado discusses a variety of visual and auditory experiences, unexplained effects on physical objects at the time of death, and apparitions and emanations such as mists and lights that bystanders report coming from a dying person's body. He concludes with some thoughts on why these phenomena have been neglected and on promising avenues for future research.

Next, private consultant Kristin Brumm reports an empirical study of the effects of NDEs on experiencers' ability to cope with stress. She found that experiencers overwhelmingly reported that their NDEs positively affected how they responded to stress, and that they reported finding meaning in stressful life events more frequently than did nonexperiencers. However, she also found that nonexperiencers reported that their awareness of NDEs also had positive effects on their responses to stress and their sense of meaning in stressful life events, suggesting that “secondhand” exposure to NDEs may have significant therapeutic value.

In a qualitative research report, psychologist Liz Dale presents illustrative cases of light in the NDEs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered experiencers, and places these accounts within the context of historical conceptions of spirituality among gay persons.

This issue also includes book reviews of parapsychologist George Hansen’s The Trickster and the Paranormal by sociologist James McClenon; and of Swiss near-death researcher Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino’s fictional account of the therapeutic value of NDEs in coping with terminal illness, Talking With Angel: About Illness, Death, and Survival, reviewed by Dutch cardiologist Pim van Lommel. We conclude this issue with a Letter to the Editor on the future and scope of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), in response to previous letters on that topic in our Winter 2004 and Fall 2005 issues, from Diane Willis, coordinator of Chicago IANDS.

Bruce Greyson, M.D.
ABSTRACT: There are a number of important near-death phenomena that have not received much research attention in recent times. These include visual and auditory experiences, as well as such physical phenomena as breakage or falling of objects reported to take place around the time someone dies. Furthermore, some bystanders at deathbeds have reported seeing apparitions and a variety of emanations coming from the dying person's body, such as mists, lights, or replicas of the dying person's body. In addition to presenting examples of these phenomena, I suggest several topics for further work in this area. Research needs to be conducted on the prevalence and the psychological characteristics of the experiencer. We also need to explore further interrelationships between the features of the experiences, and between near-death phenomena and other veridical experiences that take place in relation to living persons who are not dying and who are dead. Research could follow a variety of assumptions, including parapsychological and conventional explanations. Studies of near-death phenomena are particularly difficult due to the apparent rarity of some experiences, and the rarity of researchers interested and willing to get involved in this type of research.

KEY WORDS: near-death phenomena; deathbed apparitions; deathbed physical phenomena; deathbed emanations; selective perception; collective perception.

Although there have been recent discussions and research on “after-death communication” (Wright, 2002) and near-death experiences (NDEs) (van Lommel, van Wees, Meyers, and Elfferich, 2001), there are several other phenomena reported to occur around the moment of
death that are currently neglected by researchers. I am referring to visions, voices, impressions, and physical phenomena coinciding with someone's death, as well as the experiences of bystanders at deathbeds.

In the past there was more attention to these manifestations, as seen in the publications of William Barrett (1926); Ernesto Bozzano (1923); Camille Flammarion (1921/1922); Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore (1886); and others (Sidgwick, Johnson, Myers, Podmore, and Sidgwick, 1894), but there are some modern exceptions (Piccinini and Rinaldi, 1990; Rhine, 1963; Wright, 2002).

My purpose in this paper is not to present a detailed literature review. Instead I will present examples of some of these currently neglected phenomena, and I will outline some possible research topics, with the hope that others will be inspired to study them in a systematic way. Some of what follows has been discussed in this journal from a different perspective by Glennys Howarth and Allan Kellehear (2001).

**Examples of Near-Death Phenomena**

**Visions, Voices, and Impressions Around the Moment of Death**

Perhaps the best known phenomena related to dying persons are the experiences perceived around, or coinciding with, the moment of death, a topic explored in detail by members of the Society for Psychical Research during the 19th century. In an early classic representing some of the best work of the Society, Gurney, Myers, and Podmore's *Phantasms of the Living* (1886), the first author argued that telepathy could provide information about distant individuals, most of whom were passing through a crisis or were close to death. Such information could be expressed by the percipient as apparitional or other visual experiences, as well as through dreams, intuitions, auditory and tactile impressions, and physical and emotional reactions. Death was a major topic of the distant agent's situation. Out of 668 telepathy cases, 399 were death-related "in the sense that the percipient's experience either coincided with or very shortly followed the agent's death" (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 26). Furthermore, 79 out of 149 veridical dreams "represented or suggested death" (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 1, p. 303). Both in *Phantasms of the Living* and in the later "Census of Hallucinations" (Sidgwick, Johnson, Myers, Podmore, and Sidgwick, 1894), the authors argued on the basis of statistical considerations that the coincidence of such experiences with death could not be the result of chance.
In many visual experiences, it seems as if a person was physically present in the room or in the immediate surroundings of the percipient, as in the following example:

One day while I was shaving Earl stood before me in his army uniform and looked me over for a few minutes and then disappeared ... Several weeks later I found out that he had been killed in action at the time he appeared to me. (Rhine, 1961/1968, p. 84)

In other cases, the person sees what seems to be an image of the dying individual and its surroundings projected from a slide. This was the case of a lady who was attending a concert with her husband when she had an unexpected visual experience. In her words:

... I saw with perfect distinctness, between myself and the orchestra, my uncle ... lying in bed with an appealing look on his face, like one dying ... The appearance was not transparent or filmy, but perfectly solid looking; and yet I could somehow see the orchestra, not through, but behind it. (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 37)

She had not heard from the uncle in months and did not know that he had been ill. Soon after, she learned that the uncle had died around the time of her vision.

Experiences collected by Flammarion (1900) in France show cases in which more than one sensory modality was involved. One woman who had both a visual and an auditory experience said she saw a figure standing upright, surrounded by a circle of light ... I recognized my husband's brother-in-law ... who said: "Warn Adolphe [her husband] – tell him I am dead." (Flammarion, 1900, p. 140)

Another case combined a visual and an intuitive aspect. The percipient was awakened by a light:

I looked up and saw at the foot of my bed ... a shining disk ... Without seeing any figure, without hearing any noise, there came into my mind the persuasion that I had before me one of my cousins ... who was very ill. (Flammarion, 1900, p. 84)

Finally, in the next case we have an example of physical sensations, uncontrolled emotion, and a vision:

I dined quietly at noon, but about two o'clock I felt excruciating pains. I went up to my room and flung myself into an easy-chair, where I burst into tears. I saw my mother lying on her bed, wearing a white muslin cap with ruffles, such as I had never seen her wear. (Flammarion, 1900, p. 79)

Other experiences that apparently coincided with deaths occurring at a distance evoke different responses in the percipients. The
following four accounts reported by Sylvia Hart Wright provide examples. One percipient saw the bedroom becoming “dark as if death itself was at the doorstep.” Another “saw a black cloud obscure the light shining in the kitchen.” Still another felt the person’s “presence” and “closeness,” and the fourth percipient unexpectedly “broke into sobbing” (Wright, 2002, pp. 21–23).

Sometimes these experiences are collectively perceived, as in the following case in which a mother and daughter saw their father and grandfather, respectively, around the time of his death:

My mother and I were doing the supper dishes. ... Suddenly at the window we saw my grandfather standing there looking in, with his black overcoat on and a lantern in his hand, smiling. ... We both ran to the door ... but when we opened the door there was no one there. (Rhine, 1957, p. 28)

Other cases show selective percipience, in which some people have experiences while others do not. On other occasions, individuals perceive different things. One such case involved two persons in the same house hearing a voice while a member of the family was dying at a distance. They both found themselves in a corridor thinking that the other had uttered a call. But what they heard was different. One of them heard her name called three times, while the other heard the word “uncle” also three times (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 1, pp. 227–229; for a similar experience, see Sidgwick, Johnson, Myers, Podmore, and Sidgwick, 1894, pp. 318–319). In another case, a man saw a female figure but could not recognize her features. His wife felt a presence and saw a “misty shadow passing through the chamber.” That evening the man’s mother fell ill and died (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, pp. 236–237).

Louisa Rhine (1957) reported an analysis of 114 veridical death-related hallucinations in which 12 percent were realistic or life-like, 67 percent were lifelike except that the dying person was in an unexpected location (such as the percipient’s bedroom), and 21 percent were unrealistic, including cases in which an apparition was beatified or symbolic.

**Physical Phenomena**

Physical phenomena have been reported to coincide with the death of distant persons (Bozzano, 1923; Flammarion, 1921/1922; Piccinini and Rinaldi, 1990; Rhine, 1963). Table 1 shows the variety of physical effects reported in four case collections. The most commonly reported
Table 1
Variety of Physical Effects Related to Dying Individuals in Four Case Collections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 14</td>
<td>N = 13</td>
<td>N = 95</td>
<td>N = 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clocks stopping or starting</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects falling</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects rocking or shaking</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects breaking or exploding</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lights turning on or off</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doors opening, shutting, locking, or unlocking</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects moved</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind felt</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plants affected</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: I calculated the percentages of the four case collections. Rhine (1963) presented actual numbers, while those for the other studies were counted from case descriptions. Following Rhine, I did not include auditory phenomena. Furthermore, I did not include cases that Bozzano quoted from Flammarion.

Phenomena are clocks starting or stopping and objects falling. However, we should keep in mind that some of the authors of these collections did not present all the cases at their disposal.

The following case is illustrative. The phenomenon took place around the time the person in question was accidentally shot and killed:

When the rest of us had chicken pox, my brother Frank was sent down to my grandmother's ... which was about forty miles from where we lived ... Two days after Frank left, Mom and our neighbor were having their morning coffee and talking .... All of a sudden, this cut-glass dish that Frank had given Mother popped and broke right in two. It was just sitting on the sideboard. Mother screamed and said, "My God! Frank has been killed." Everyone tried to quiet Mother, but she said she just knew. (Rhine, 1961/1968, pp. 245–246)

On occasion the physical event takes place in the same room where the dying person is located, as is the following account. The patient was given water with a spoon from a glass placed on a table besides the bed. When he died, three persons who were present heard tinkling sounds: "It came from the glass in which there was only a little water, and before our eyes, the glass split in two parts, a rim about a half
inch from the top breaking from the rest of the glass” (Whitmer, 1924, p. 575).

Other cases suggest that physical phenomena may take place in connection with other manifestations such as apparitions (Piccinini and Rinaldi, 1990, pp. 110–111), and sometimes continue after death. The latter was one of the main features in a case of two friends who had agreed to give evidence of survival of death to the other after their death (Caltagirone, 1911).

**Bystanders’ Perceptions of Deathbed Phenomena**

Bystanders’ perceptions of deathbed phenomena include cases in which either another individual shares the experience of a dying person, or others perceive the experiences irrespective of the testimony of the dying individual.

Many fascinating cases of music heard around a dying person have been compiled by Bozzano (1923, 1943/1982) and by Scott Rogo (1970, 1972). In one case, a child named Lilly died on a Tuesday evening. Several members of her family, but not the child herself, heard music, a manifestation starting the previous Saturday and heard both on Sunday and on the day of her death. Her father described the music as “the soft, wild notes of an Æolian harp, which rose and fell distinctively, and increased gradually, until the room was full of sound” (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 222). The music was heard both in the patient’s room and in other parts of the house. The servant and a daughter were downstairs and heard the music. Lilly’s mother reported that on one occasion:

... my old nurse and aunt came up to see how Lilly was, and were, with my husband, all in the room with the child. I had gone down into the kitchen ... when the same sounds of Æolian music were heard by all three in the room, and I heard the same in the kitchen. (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 222)

In addition to hearing music, some persons other than the dying individual sometimes see apparitions around a deathbed. In one case, two sisters, Emmeline and Susanna, were around the deathbed of their sister Charlotte when they saw the faces of two deceased brothers. One of the sisters wrote:

... I saw a golden light above Charlotte’s bed, and within the light were enfolded two cherub’s faces gazing intently upon her ... I put my hand across the bed to Susanna, and I only said the word: “Susanna, look up!” She did so, and at once her countenance changed,
“Oh, Emmeline,” she said, “they are William and John.” Then both of us watched on till all faded away like a washed-out picture; and in a few hours Charlotte died. (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 629)

Another interesting case concerned the American poet Horace Traubel (1858–1919), a student and admirer of the work of Walt Whitman (1819–1892) (Prince, 1921). As Traubel was dying he saw and heard Whitman, among other individuals. A Lieutenant Colonel L. Moore Cosgrave, who had been with Traubel the last three nights of his life, shared one of his visions (he was said to have had have similar experiences in the past). He looked at the same place Traubel was staring at and, in his words:

Slowly the point at which we were both looking grew gradually brighter, a light haze appeared, spread until it assumed bodily form, and took the likeness of Walt Whitman, standing upright beside the bed, a rough tweed jacket on, an old felt hat upon his head and his right hand in his pocket ... he was gazing down at Traubel, a kindly, reassuring smile upon his face, he nodded twice as though reassuringly, the features quite distinct for at least a full minute, then gradually faded from sight. (Prince, 1921, p. 119)

Cosgrave also stated that Traubel acknowledged seeing Whitman. He added:

At the same moment, Walt passed apparently through the bed towards me, and appeared to touch my hand, as through in farewell, I distinctly felt it, as though I had touched a low electric charge, he then smiled at Horace, and passed from sight. (Prince, 1921, p. 121)

In another case, two witnesses perceived different things (Hyslop, 1915). A lady was nursing a young woman, and the woman’s doctor was also present. At one point the patient showed “adverse” symptoms but they did not call her mother, who was exhausted and resting in an adjoining room. The nurse wrote:

As I looked there passed around from the head of the bed the figure of a woman in white whose face was turned away from me, and who paused for a moment by the girl’s side before passing by the doctor and myself, still with averted face, and going out of the door back of me which led into the room in which the mother was sleeping ....

Immediately after the figure passed the doctor, he started and said sharply:

“Who hit me on the shoulder just then?” (Hyslop, 1915, p. 393)

The patient was still alive and conscious, but she died a day later in her mother’s arms. The physician in attendance added that he “can unhesitatingly endorse the above facts” (Hyslop, 1959, p. 393).
More recent reports of bystander perceptions have been presented by Karlis Osis (1961, pp. 75–76) and by Peter Fenwick and Elizabeth Fenwick (Fenwick and Fenwick, 1995/1997, pp. 251–253).

Another type of observation is that in which different sorts of “emanations” have been seen emerging from the bodies of dying persons. Robert Crookall (1967, pp. 37–44) has mentioned many cases of this sort. The well-known medium Eileen Garrett wrote that while attending the death of a friend, “I perceived two small clouds emitted from his body – one from the right side of the torso, at the level of the spleen, the other from the top of his head” (Garrett, 1943, p. 151). While most of these visions are seen by only a single individual, sometimes they are collectively perceived (Monk, 1922; Tweedale, 1921). Dorothy Monk reported how she, and other members of her family, saw the following around her moribund mother:

... I and three sisters all at once noticed a pale blue mauve haze all over her as she lay. We watched it and very gradually it deepened in colour until it became a deep purple, so thick that it almost blotted out her features from view, and spread all in the fold of the bed clothes like a purple fog. Once or twice she feebly moved her arms and the colour travelled with them. (Monk, 1922, p. 182)

There are also cases in which the observer sees a replica of the dying person’s body. The following is an example:

I approached the ward as the child drew its final breath. Then I saw mist above the little body. It took the shape of the body which lay on the bed. This was attached by a very fine silver cord. The replica was about three feet from the body on the bed. It rose gradually to above five feet above the body, then gradually lifted itself into an upright position. It then floated away. (Crookall, 1967, p. 40)

Further Research with Near-Death Phenomena

It is my hope that a new generation of researchers will systematically study the experiences discussed here so as to increase our knowledge of these phenomena. In what follows I offer some suggestions for further studies.

Issues of Prevalence and Chance Occurrences

How common are reports of apparitions, physical phenomena, music, and the like? It would be useful to assess the prevalence of
near-death phenomena among randomly selected samples of the general population, following previous surveys of general psychic experiences (Palmer, 1979), apparitions of the dead (Haraldsson, 1988–89), and hallucinations (Ohayon, 2000). Surveys could also target particular groups such as persons known to have reported psychic experiences, and individuals who have been present at deathbeds, such as physicians, nurses, and hospice workers, among others.

Some phenomena may be more rare than others. For example, while Osis (1961) found many cases of visions experienced by the dying, he found very few bystander experiences. I suspect that physical phenomena are also less frequent than other experiences such as apparitions. But more needs to be done to determine these frequencies in a systematic way. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile following up previous attempts to assess statistically the coincidental happening of many apparitional experiences with a distant death (Sidgwick, Johnson, Myers, Podmore, and Sidgwick, 1894).

Chance is a difficult variable to deal with in assessing the incidence of physical phenomena. In real life, many things break and fall in unexplained ways without coinciding with death. My wife and I experienced an event of this sort when we heard a noise in an adjoining room. On investigation, we found that a picture of my mother-in-law had fallen out of the frame, something that struck us at the moment as very odd. We did not feel any intuitive feeling or awareness carrying conviction of a death but, knowing about death-related physical phenomena, we worried about my mother-in-law. We phoned her and she was all right; nothing warranting our worry had taken place (nor had anything happened to other family members).

It is likely that cases of this sort are forgotten while the more memorable and meaningful coincidences with death are remembered. Although I do not think this can account for cases such as those collected in Italy by Graziela Piccinini and Gian Marco Rinaldi (1990) or by others before them (Flammarion, 1921/1922; Rhine, 1963), it is a problem to be considered in the scientific study of these occurrences. Perhaps researchers should collect cases of this sort without appealing for death coincidences, but instead asking for strange breakages, falls, movements, and other physical phenomena witnessed by people. This would allow us a more accurate estimation of the number of actual cases that may have a normal explanation, as well as those that seem to correspond to a death, regardless of the causal agency.
Features of Near-Death Phenomena

Future research should explore further the different ways the features manifest, such as different sensory modalities of the experience, and collective and selective percipience. Researchers might investigate the development of telepathic hallucinations, including various forms ranging from incomplete to complete apparitions, following the early work reported in *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 1, chapter 12). This classic work documented the presence of a variety of features accompanying veridical death- and crisis-related experiences, such as occasional observations of luminous manifestations and mist. Myers described the importance of careful classification and study of features such as these:

> Just as, in trying to trace the causes, say, of a paralytic seizure, we feel it needful to note all smaller symptoms which precede, accompany, or follow the principal shock, so also in tracking the genesis of a veridical hallucination we are bound to note all such minor hallucinatory percepts as have grouped themselves about the central phantasm. These subsidiary hallucinations cannot be meaningless, cannot be arbitrary; they must in some way indicate the mode in which the unknown energy is operating to produce the main result. (Myers, 1890, p. 331)

Such work may also teach us about differential patterns of features clustering in near-death phenomena. This work could follow analyses such as Bruce Greyson's (1985) study of clusters of NDE features and work comparing the features of out-of-body experiences (OBEs) reported to take place in what the experiencers believed to be near-death or non-near-death conditions (Alvarado, 2001).

Furthermore, other features deserve more attention. In some rare cases, different experiences are reported in different locations around the time of the same death. For example, on the death of the reporter’s grandmother in Alsace, a clock stopped near her. Around the same time, the woman’s son, living in the United States, saw his mother by his bed (Flammarion, 1921/1922, p. 307). In another case, the effects were reported in three locations. While someone was dying in Spain, sounds like a clock were heard in Buenos Aires, a silhouette was seen on a wall in a city in the interior of Argentina, and dogs were heard howling in Spain (Flammarion, 1921/1922, pp. 139–140). Cases of this sort need to be studied in more detail.

Our research should not be limited to documenting the occurrence and variety of experience features themselves. It could also explore the interrelationship of features, their clustering, or their relationship to
other variables, following work on deathbed visions (Osis, 1961; Osis and Haraldsson, 1977), and NDEs and OBEs (Alvarado and Zingrone, 1997; Greyson, 1985; Ring, 1980). Are the experiences more frequent in some conditions or circumstances than in others? Perhaps the experiences taking place in relation to violent death are different in some ways from those that are related to non-violent deaths.

Another possibility for the study of interactions among features is a replication of Émile Laurent’s (1907) observations with auditory cases from Flammarion’s (1900) collection. Laurent noticed that in some cases the sound ceased when the percipient recognized they were related to death, whereas it continued to be heard (at least once more), if such recognition was not achieved. Can that pattern be replicated in other case collections?

Researchers could study the interactions of features statistically, as Sybo Schouten did (1979, 1981, 1982) with three case collections of extrasensory perception (ESP) from different countries, some of which were related to death. In his three studies, Schouten found that death-related veridical cases, such as apparitions or impressions, had fewer details as part of the experience than cases related to less serious events, such as illness and accidents.

Regarding physical effects, we need to be aware that some of them are accompanied by the feeling or realization that someone, or a particular individual, has died. Is this an inference derived from experiencing an anomalous physical event, as Laurent (1907) suggested in the case of sounds, or is it a veridical aspect of the experience? The latter is suggested in those cases in which there was no reason to expect the person was going to die. In fact, Rhine (1963, 1981) has proposed that psychokinesis (PK), like dreams, intuitions, and hallucinations, may be one of the ways the subconscious mind uses expresses ESP-acquired information. The only difference is that spontaneous PK is much rarer than other means of expressing ESP. Rhine further speculated that the person around whom PK takes place may express the ESP knowledge when “the information is blocked at the level of consciousness” (Rhine, 1981, p. 204). In her view, PK represented “side effects, fragments, signs of repressed information” (p. 204). This idea, which assumes living agency, deserves to be tested in future work.

Future research should also go beyond impressionistic estimates of differences between veridical and nonveridical hallucinations (West, 1960) and include systematic comparisons of specific features. Such analysis would yield empirical data that could show different or similar features between the experiences in question. For example, a
survey of hallucinations among the general population sample in Iceland found that 22 percent had experienced an hallucination (Lindal, Stefánsson and Stefánsson, 1994). The most commonly reported visions were those of strangers (59 percent), which does not seem to be the case with collections of veridical hallucinations (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886; Piccinini and Rinaldi, 1990). But more specific comparisons could be made. The researchers of this general population survey also found that out of those reporting hallucinations, 7 percent experienced perceptions of such undefined features as lights and silhouettes in mist. Once again, more precise comparisons could be made with death-related veridical experiences.

In the next two sections I will discuss further topics of research with the features of near-death phenomena.

The Experiences of the Dying and of the Dead: Dimensional or Categorical Perspectives?

Some writers have postulated that similarities of features between experiences related to the dying and to the dead imply a common source. That is, they assumed that experiences related to the dying are of the same nature as the experiences of the dead. British spiritualist William Harrison, commenting on apparitions of the dying and those perceived after death, said that “there is no break of continuity in the phenomena of apparitions in consequence of the death of the body” (1879, p. vii). Such a continuity model of apparitional experiences has been defended by others who suggested such experiences indicate survival of bodily death (Bozzano, 1923; Myers, 1903). “We gradually discovered,” wrote Myers, “that the accounts of apparitions at the moment of death . . . lead without perceptible break to apparitions occurring after the death of the person seen” (Myers, 1903, Vol. 1, p. 8). A few years later, another student of apparitions affirmed the existence of a “perfect resemblance between the extra-sensory manifestations of the soul during life, and after death. A phantom of the dead is identical to a phantom of the living” (Delanne, 1909, p. 12).

In a classic trilogy of books, Flammarion (1920/1922, 1921/1922, 1922/1923) grouped a variety of phenomena according to the time at which they took place: whether before, during, or after death. He described what appeared to be similar features among the three groups of cases. In his view, phenomena happening around death “will bring us gradually to a knowledge of what exists after death” (Flammarion, 1921/1922, p. 83).
Many features of apparitions of the living also appear in apparitions of the dead. The collective and selective percipience mentioned above, for example, also appears in manifestations of persons who have been dead for hours or days, as seen in a fairly recent compilation of cases (Guggenheim and Guggenheim, 1995/1997, chapter 21).

Several studies have suggested a similarity between the two groups of cases. Among these were studies of veridical hallucinations (Sidgwick, Johnson, Myers, Podmore, and Sidgwick, 1894; Rhine, 1957), physical effects (Rhine, 1963), and the hearing of music (Bozzano, 1943/1982; Rogo, 1970, 1972). In all these studies, cases that occurred in near-death circumstances were compared to those that occurred in relation to living persons who were not close to death, as well as to those that occurred after the death of the individual represented by the manifestation.

As valuable as the previous observations have been, their support for the idea of continuity of features is somewhat fuzzy and non-specific, being based on general case descriptions. We need to study these issues empirically in more systematic ways and with large numbers of cases, quantifying the comparisons so as to get precise indications as to the specific similarities of differences in case features. Hornell Hart’s work (Hart and Collaborators, 1956) was an important and generally forgotten attempt to do so. He reported that there were few differences between the features of apparitions of the living and of the dead. Hart analyzed published cases and coded them for specific features such as collective percipience, and whether the apparition was seen as a full figure, performed normal movements, spoke, was luminous, disappeared suddenly, moved objects, or was seen repeatedly, among many other features.

In some analyses, Hart found differences between the specific features or aspects of one type of apparition and those of a combination of other types. For example, apparitions of the dead perceived more than 12 hours after death showed significantly higher frequencies of instances of being seen repeatedly, and of having an emotional bond to the location where they were seen, than the combined apparitional cases of dead persons seen less than 12 hours after death, persons near-death, living persons without memory of being seen as apparitions, and living persons with awareness of having been seen at a distant location. While I believe that Hart’s combining diverse types of apparitions complicated the interpretation of the results, his work provides an example of what may be done in future research.

In Table 2, I examine Rhine’s (1957) data to show the possible relevance to the continuity model. I found a significant difference in
Table 2
Rhine's (1957) Cases of Visual and Auditory Veridical Hallucinations Related to the Living, the Dying, and the Dead

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensory Modality</th>
<th>Living  ((N = 414))</th>
<th>Dying ((N = 244))</th>
<th>Dead ((N = 88))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(\chi^2 = 100.22, \ df = 2, \ p < .0001.\)

The number of cases of visual and auditory impressions related to living, dying, and deceased individuals. Further analyses showed that the significance focused on the contrast between the cases of the living and each of the other two groups. With the living, visual cases were less frequent and auditory experiences were more frequent than each of the other groups. The meaning of this trend is unclear, and it certainly needs to be replicated with other samples before it can be taken too seriously.

The topic needs to be explored in different ways that might test assumptions other than the idea of survival of bodily death. For example, approaches in the psychiatric and psychological literatures suggest more statistically sophisticated studies of the dimensional or categorical aspects of the features of near-death phenomena (Serper, Dill, Chang, Kot, and Elliot, 2005; Waller, Putnam and Carlson, 1996). In one recent study, researchers reported that the factorial structure of a hallucination scale based on specific experience features was similar among three samples consisting of undergraduate students, schizophrenics with current hallucinations, and schizophrenics without current hallucinations (Serper, Dill, Chang, Kot, and Elliot, 2005). These researchers concluded that their findings supported the "notion of the continuity of hallucinatory expression across nonclinical and psychiatric samples" (Serper, Dill, Chang, Kot, and Elliot, 2005, p. 271). Researchers could follow a similar strategy in exploring the features of near-death phenomena: after coding cases for many features, such as the ones tabulated by Hart and his collaborators (1956) among others, they could compare the phenomenological structure of specific experiences referring to the living, the dying, and the dead.
A possible analysis following the above-mentioned approach could be done following the observations of Myers (1890), who suggested that there is a continuity in the forms of near-death phenomena. Myers noted that experiences occurring around death, postmortem cases, and non-death-related phenomena such as spontaneous telepathy all seemed to share: "(1) hallucinations of the senses; (2) emotional and motor impulses; [and] (3) definite intellectual messages" (1890, p. 334). The latter consisted of words and imagery. Such phenomena, which Myers thought were the means by which the subconscious mind communicated to the conscious, could be explored using the same approach of the above-mentioned hallucination study (Serper, Dill, Chang, Kot, and Elliot, 2005).

We also need to consider the possibility of a categorical model in which there may be differences in the features to the point of suggesting different types of experiences. Perhaps we may find that there is some continuity (or similarity of features), but that this continuity breaks down at a certain point. In fact, this was reported in the above-mentioned hallucination study, whose authors stated that there was evidence in their study to support the idea that "hallucinatory behavior becomes discontinuous after a certain critical severity threshold is surpassed" (Serper, Dill, Chang, Kot, and Elliot, 2005, p. 271).

With near-death phenomena, we are not dealing with severity of pathology, but it may be possible that phenomenological continuity is limited, or that there are exceptions with certain features. My analysis in Table 2 may be suggestive of categorical phenomenological patterns. But, of course, this needs to be investigated more systematically. Qualitative and quantitative approaches ideally should complement each other in the study of this issue.

**Characteristics of Experiencers**

Do persons experiencing these near-death phenomena have a propensity to experience other phenomena? Survey work on a variety of parapsychological experiences such as waking and dream ESP, OBEs, auras, and psychokinesis have shown statistically significant interrelationships between the experiences (Kohr, 1980; Palmer, 1979). I have found in more than one study that those having OBEs report more claims of ESP and other phenomena than a nonOBE group (Alvarado and Zingrone, 1999; Alvarado, Zingrone and Dalton, 1998–99). Work with NDEs has shown that some experiencers report a variety of apparent parapsychological experiences (Sutherland,
1989) and auditory hallucinations (Greyson and Liester, 2004) after the NDE. There are indications that other near-death phenomena are also related to a variety of experiences. For example, nurse Joy Snell (1918/1959) reported her many visions of spirits leaving the body at the moment of death and apparitions around dying persons. She also experienced apparitions of the dead in other circumstances, music, smells, lights, and travels to other dimensions. She represents that type of person who is particularly open to repeated experiences and whom we need to study more systematically.

During the 19th century it was speculated that there was a “special susceptibility on the percipient’s part” behind the perception of telepathic hallucinations, including those taking place at or around the moment of a distant death (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 171). More recently, positive significant relations have been found between different psychic experiences and psychological constructs, such as openness to experience (Alvarado, Zingrone and Dalton, 1998–1999), absorption (Irwin, 1985), dissociation (Richards, 1991), and fantasy proneness (Wilson and Barber, 1983). Some research also suggests significant positive interrelationships between psychic experiences and dream recall and lucid dreams (Kohr, 1980; Palmer, 1979). Are the near-death phenomena discussed in this paper related to these variables?

Perhaps this research may be used to explain some of these phenomena in terms of purely imaginal constructions of the mind. This may apply, for example, to some single-percipient cases, such as Colonel Cosgrave’s experience at Traubel’s deathbed presented above. In these cases, a high capacity for hallucination, perhaps related to high absorption, hypnotic susceptibility, or fantasy proneness, may interact with beliefs (such as the action of the spirit without the body or communication with the dead) or with the context (such as grief or an emotional death scene) to produce some experiences (see also Houran and Lange, 1997). Following Podmore (1890), veridical experiences such as Cosgrave’s would be explained through telepathy from the living. In his view, the dying person may be the telepathic agent for the hallucinations of the bystanders.

Such speculations about individuals’ tendency to hallucinate fail in cases in which the person had a veridical experience without previous knowledge or expectation of the death, as well as in collective percipience cases, such as the musical sounds heard by the family of the dying girl Lilly mentioned above. Although selective percipience may be consistent with varying abilities to experience hallucinations,
it may also be a manifestation of a varying ability to perceive psychic events. In this view, apparitional experiences should take “various forms according to the projector’s idiosyncrasies” (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 171). That is, we should expect different percepts or sensory modalities in those having veridical experiences, “one of them embodying it in sound, and another . . . in visible shape; or one of them embodying it in sound or shape, and another conscious of it as an inward idea; and so on” (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 172).

Unfortunately, these ideas have not been followed up empirically. One way to do so is to conduct new studies such as the one reported by Harvey Irwin (1979). He studied the relationship between cognitive coding preferences (verbal and visual styles) and the modality of spontaneous ESP experiences (intuitive and visual experiences). In addition to personality and cognitive variables, we may focus on other aspects related to the experiencers, such as their early developmental histories. Early experiences such as trauma have been suggested as risk factors for NDEs (Ring, 1992) and other death-related experiences (Wright, 2002). It is likely that we may find that many variables interact to create a susceptibility, proneness, or openness to near-death phenomena.

Concluding Remarks

As I have argued, there is much to explore regarding near-death phenomena, including both the features of the experience and the characteristics of the experiencers. In addition, we need to study other near-death phenomena not mentioned in this paper, such as apparitions of persons who died hours or days after their apparitions were seen, death-related precognitive experiences, and the ESP experiences of dying persons.

Furthermore, several explanatory concepts can be tested, if we remain open to different assumptions, something that can only augment our knowledge of these phenomena. Among these possible hypotheses may be those guided by conventional explanations, such as James Houran and Rense Lange’s ideas about deathbed visions (Houran and Lange, 1997) and Schouten’s (1979, 1981, 1982) approach to ESP experiences. But it is also important to consider ideas that require an extension of such concepts as chance, hallucinations, and the like. While some cases may be explained in this way, others seem to indicate that
information is acquired from some source outside of the individual's mind. Research based on the concept of ESP and designed to test the idea of survival of death deserve more systematic exploration.

The challenge may be particularly difficult due to the rarity of some of these cases and the rarity of researchers interested in these topics. In terms of the latter, it is unfortunate that some parapsychologists shun spontaneous phenomena and the survival question, because they feel such topics tarnish the scientific nature of research on parapsychological experiences. These arguments by some parapsychologists mirror those of their critics (Alvarado, 2003). Just as some critics find the idea of psychic phenomena absurd and detrimental to science and to the education of the general public, some parapsychologists would like to separate their endeavors from the study of near-death phenomena and from any ideas that imply survival of death or involve spirituality. Having been attacked by those outside the field, some parapsychologists display similar attitudes within the field, and thus hinder the efforts of the very few colleagues who do this work. The number of those who investigate psychic phenomena is small enough, without intolerance within the field making the task at hand even more difficult.

Nonetheless, it is my hope that these considerations will not hinder those in a position to conduct empirical studies, so that these manifestations will be more widely and more scientifically studied in the future.

References


A Study of Near-Death Experiences and Coping with Stress

Kristin Brumm, M.N.M.
Olathe, KS

ABSTRACT: This study investigates the effect of a near-death experience (NDE) on an experiencer's ability to cope with stress. The intent of the study is to determine whether changes reported by experiencers have a practical, psychological application in their day-to-day lives. The test group included 18 participants of support groups sponsored by the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), all of whom reported having experienced an NDE. The control group consisted of 25 participants of the same support groups, none of whom reported having experienced an NDE. Questionnaires were distributed to all individuals. Results showed that 94 percent of experiencers felt their NDE positively affected how they responded to stress, and 86 percent of the control group felt that exposure to NDEs had the same positive effect on their response to stress. One hundred percent of experiencers and 91 percent of nonexperiencers felt that significant life events, whether positive or negative, were imbued with meaning. The findings suggest that a philosophical framework that imparts meaning to life events, and not necessarily a NDE, has a positive effect on a person's ability to cope with stress.

KEY WORDS: near-death experience; coping; attitude to death; meaning in life.

Over the ages, both religious and secular literature has explored the question of what lies beyond death. From the 4,000-year-old *Gilgamesh* (Mitchell, 2004/c. 2000 BC) to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Evans-Wentz, 1957/11th century) to *The Divine Comedy* (Alighieri, 1955/14th century), humanity has claimed knowledge of the afterlife that was garnered from visits to otherworldly realms. In modern

Kristin Brumm, M.N.M., is private consultant in nonprofit management. This paper was based on her undergraduate honors thesis presented to the University of Kansas in 1995. Reprint requests should be addressed to Ms. Brumm at 1909 West Oak Street, Olathe, KS 66061; e-mail: kbrumm@mrxmas.com.
Western society, this journey is described most often through the narrative of the near-death experience (NDE). Best-selling books and talk show circuits are replete with accounts of near-death visions, and survivors tell of traveling through a dark tunnel, encountering deceased loved ones, being bathed in love, and deciding reluctantly to return to the body.

According to Michael Sabom (1982), 40 percent of near-death survivors report having these deathbed visions. A great deal of research has been done on NDEs in an effort to gain an understanding of the experience. At first, scholarly research focused primarily on trying to determine the authenticity of the experience, but trying to gain an objective understanding of a subjective experience proved problematic. As Carol Zaleski suggested (1987, p. 112), “we can only study the literary and oral retelling, not the direct experience.” Today, the majority of research concerns the aftereffects of NDEs. These studies indicate that people who have had such an experience consistently report attitudinal changes, often dramatic, following their NDE.

This study attempts to explore how these changes might manifest in practical life experience, such as dealing with trauma and stress. It explores the relationship between NDEs and coping behavior through analysis of the experience and its effects as described by the survivor. The changes in attitude and behavior I am measuring are perceived changes, since it is not possible to measure a person’s responses to stress accurately prior to a NDE. Since my focus is on the NDE narrative, I present experiences and attitudes as they were described by respondents, without repeated qualifications such as “alleged” and “purported.” This study does not attempt to establish the validity of NDEs or analyze causal theories, but looks only at the effects NDEs are perceived to have on survivors’ ability to cope with subsequent life stressors.

After analyzing responses from the study, it became clear that both experiencers and nonexperiencers felt that either having had a NDE or having been exposed to NDE narratives helped them to better cope with stress. The philosophy popularly associated with NDE phenomena, such as a belief in life after death and in a benevolent god, provided an interpretive framework for these individuals that served to infuse life events with meaning and thus positively impact their coping behavior.

Presented below are a synopsis of previous NDE research, the method used in carrying out the present study, the results of this study, and a discussion of possible conclusions which can be drawn from these results.
Literature Review

Raymond Moody is often credited with being the "father of near-death studies." His landmark book, *Life After Life* (1975), was the first to present a systematic study of the phenomenon. From interviews with various individuals who claimed to have had an NDE, he culled what he felt to be the common elements of the experience: a feeling of peace, travel through a dark tunnel, meeting others, encountering a Being of Light, reviewing one's life, and deciding to return. His findings have played a significant role in subsequent studies, as most researchers adopted his model as the starting point from which to begin their work. Enthusiastic fans, as well as the popular press, often touted his work as "proof" of life after death, much to Moody's dismay. When asked whether he had any concerns about the way his work has been interpreted, he answered:

One of the central misgivings I have is that as much as I have emphasized to the contrary, occasionally you still find people who want to look at this as though it gives what they think of as "scientific evidence" of life after death. Words like "evidence" and "proof" have precise meanings to me, as a person who comes from a background and methodology (and I taught symbolic logic for a while), it's still upsetting to me to see that kind of thinking bandied about. (Kastenbaum, 1995, p. 94)

Sabom was intrigued by Moody's work, but initially highly skeptical. He attempted a systematic study of NDEs in an effort to test the validity of Moody's findings scientifically. His findings did indeed coincide with Moody's. He was also surprised to find that patients who had reportedly looked down upon the scene while in surgery could provide an accurate and detailed account of the procedure, including readings on machines that were out of their line of vision.

Bruce Greyson did a study of NDEs among survivors of suicide attempts. He went on to do studies on death anxiety and psychic sensitivities of experiencers. His findings largely corroborated those of Melvin Morse and Kenneth Ring, as outlined below.

Zaleski has written a scholarly book, *Otherworld Journeys* (1987), in which she compared modern NDEs with those from medieval times. In that book, she discussed the impact of the researcher on his or her research. She believes that the NDE narrative reflects collaboration between the researcher and the subject, and that the expectations and biases of both can affect the findings.

Morse, a pediatrician, first became interested in NDEs after hearing children tell of their otherworld experiences. He wanted to discover
whether or not there were transformative effects of NDEs that could be documented. His subjects were all adults who had experienced NDEs as children. He concluded from his study that there is a "core" NDE, and added to this are secondary cultural embellishments. He referred to these embellishments as "emotional archetypes incorporated into the experience by the beholder to help make sense of it" (Morse and Perry, 1992, p. 120). He found that experiencers reported the following aftereffects: (1) decreased death anxiety; (2) increased psychic abilities; (3) a higher zest for living, and (4) a feeling of having evolved spiritually (Morse and Perry, 1992).

Another researcher who has studied the effects of NDEs is Kenneth Ring. In his first study, the Connecticut Study, he concluded that "the key to the meaning of NDEs lies in the study of their aftereffects" (Ring, 1984, p. 27). This search for a more profound understanding of the NDE led him to conduct the Omega Study. In contrast to the first study, most of the subjects in the Omega Study sought out Ring after reading his book in order to tell him their stories. As such, he admitted that the selection of subjects was neither random nor representative, and that some interviews were done on a more informal level than in his previous study. Ring found the same aftereffects as Morse, as well as additional ones, such as a desire for a universal religion embracing all humanity, and openness to the doctrine of reincarnation. He went on to propose the controversial hypothesis that NDEs are deep spiritual experiences that tend to accelerate one's personal development. He believed their purpose was to facilitate a current global movement toward spiritual enlightenment (Ring, 1984, pp. 258–259).

When analyzing the results of studies that seek to explore a subjective religious experience such as the NDE, one must not overlook the researcher's impact on the research. A researcher generally approaches a study with certain expectations in mind. Ring, for instance, specifically tried to see if he could duplicate Moody's findings. As a result, the questions he asked were designed to determine the presence or absence of elements Moody had identified as being part of the core NDE. Such an approach may overlook other elements that have not been identified by previous researchers. In addition, asking questions designed to elicit specific information may cue the subject to what the researcher is expecting to find, and the subject may then answer accordingly.

Bias can also affect test results. Once an interpretive framework such as Moody's is accepted by researchers, information received is constantly filtered through this paradigm as the researcher looks for
"matches." If it is not accepted, the researcher may emphasize differences. The researcher’s bias is reflected not only by what is included in the study and how it is interpreted, but also by how it is presented. Language plays an important role in how the information is received by the reader. Morse, for instance, lent credibility to his subjects and their experiences when he described how “these stories are told with such beauty and simplicity by children and adults alike who have nothing to gain by making them up” (Morse and Perry, 1992, p. 50).

Finally, research can also be affected by how the subjects are chosen and whether or not they constitute a representative mix of experiencers. Researchers who advertise in supermarket tabloids are likely to attract subjects who are not averse to sensationalism. Subjects in Ring’s Omega Study consisted mainly of people who had read his first book, Life at Death (1980), and approached him to share their stories. These subjects, having been exposed to Ring’s interpretive framework on NDEs, may have communicated their stories in a fashion that reflected his earlier findings.

An understanding of previous research and its potential problems is important, as many of these findings have become popularized and affect how the public, including experiencers, interpret these experiences. Moody’s model has become so well-known that many experiencers no doubt couch their narratives in his language. Whether or not subjects have been previously exposed to contemporary data on NDEs, they will have tried to make sense of their experiences in some way. Most likely, they will have tried to reconcile it with their current beliefs. As a result, their narratives will also reflect the cultural context in which the NDE occurred.

**Methods**

To examine the effects of NDEs on coping behavior, I distributed a questionnaire to individuals who felt they had had an NDE. It consisted of a combination of yes/no, multiple choice, and open-ended questions designed to elicit from respondents information on perceived changes since their NDEs. I attended a local meeting of the International Association of Near-Death Studies (IANDS) in Seattle, WA, where I introduced my study before the group, stated research objectives, and distributed the questionnaires. Surveys were also handed out at IANDS meetings in Austin, TX, and Overland Park, KS. Since study participants were garnered, for the most part, from
IANDS gatherings, they cannot necessarily be considered representative of the NDE population in general. Experiencers whose NDEs do not resemble the now popular model of the experience, including such elements as a tunnel, a light, and feeling of peace, who have had negative experiences, or who do not wish to share their experiences may not be attracted to such meetings.

I was concerned that responses might reflect changes resulting from exposure to popular philosophies on NDEs as presented at meetings, and not from the NDE itself. Therefore, I distributed a second questionnaire to individuals at IANDS meetings who had not had a NDE, but attended the meetings because of an interest in the phenomenon. They formed the control group. This second questionnaire also served the purpose of determining whether studying or listening to accounts of NDEs might result in changed attitudes similar to those reported by experiencers. I hoped that by comparing these two groups I could determine to what degree changed beliefs and behavior resulted from actually having a NDE.

Participants were asked to rate any changes in attitude in several areas, including self-esteem, fear of death, sense of life purpose, and ability to cope with day-to-day stress. They were also asked to list major life stressors, such as divorce, job loss, illness, or death of a loved one, that they had undergone since their NDE, or, in the case of the control group, since learning about NDEs, and to relate whether or not they felt their NDE or knowledge of NDEs had affected the ways in which they dealt with such stress.

The study group consisted of 18 respondents: 10 women and 8 men. Sixteen were IANDS participants, and two were individuals who had heard about my study, but were not involved with IANDS. They ranged in age from 26 to 78 years, with a mean age of 47. The ages at which their NDEs occurred ranged from 3 to 40, with a mean age of 28. The control group consisted of 25 respondents: 15 women and 10 men. They ranged in age from 29 to 78 years, with a mean age of 50. I present below their tabulated and analyzed responses.

Results and Discussion

In the study group, 100 percent of respondents reported both a decreased fear of death and an increased sense of life purpose. The majority also reported an increase in the following areas: sense of control over life, contentment with lifestyle, self-esteem, ability to cope
Table 1
Changes in Attitudes Among Near-Death Experiencers and Nonexperiencers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Near-Death Experiencers (N = 18)</th>
<th>Nonexperiencers (N = 25)*</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ (df = 2)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear of death</td>
<td>0 18 0</td>
<td>0 23 2</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of control over life</td>
<td>9 6 3</td>
<td>17 3 5</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contentment with lifestyle</td>
<td>13 3 2</td>
<td>17 2 5</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>.646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>15 0 3</td>
<td>20 1 3</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of life purpose</td>
<td>18 0 0</td>
<td>21 1 3</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to cope with crisis</td>
<td>15 1 2</td>
<td>20 0 3</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>.624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to cope with daily stress</td>
<td>14 2 2</td>
<td>20 1 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not all 25 respondents answered all questions.

with crisis, and ability to cope with day-to-day stress. Similarly, respondents in the control group also reported increases in all of the above areas, with no significant differences from the experiencer group, as shown in Table 1.

When asked to measure their level of anxiety in stressful situations, 61 percent of respondents in the study group rated it as significantly less than others. The majority of respondents in the control group ranged between “the same as others” and “significantly less than others,” as shown in Table 2. The difference between the experiencer and control groups was not statistically significant.

Ninety-four percent of the study group felt that their NDE affected the way in which they responded to stress, while 86 percent of the control group were similarly affected after learning about NDEs. Seventy-five percent of the study group felt that major life crises were predetermined, whereas only 50 percent of the control group agreed. When asked whether these crises had purpose or meaning for them, 100 percent of the study group and 91 percent of the control group answered in the affirmative. None of those differences between the experiencer
Table 2
Respondents' Ratings of Level of Anxiety in Stressful Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Near-Death Experiencers (N = 18)*</th>
<th>Nonexperiencers (N = 25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly greater than others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat greater than others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same as others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat less than others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly less than others</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

χ² (df = 4) = 6.30, p = .178.
* Sum of responses is 20 because two experiencers marked two answers each.

and control groups was statistically significant. When asked whether exposure to information on NDEs changed how they viewed life, 100 percent of the control group answered yes, as shown in Table 3.

An overwhelming majority of the study group (94 percent) felt that having had a NDE affected the way they responded to stress. Based on their answers, they perceived most of these effects as positive. Additionally, 86 percent of nonexperiencers in the control group felt that exposure to NDEs had had a similar positive impact on them. I discuss below some of the areas in which these changes occurred and their impact on respondents' lives.

Decreased Fear of Death

100 percent of the study group reported a decrease in fear of death after their NDEs. Below are some of the answers to a question asking respondents to describe how their feelings on death have changed:

Knowing without a doubt that the spirit can separate from the body assures me that my spirit will live beyond the body.

Zero fear.

I now feel as though our life here is precious, but I now also realize, when I didn't before, that death is most likely not (the) horrible experience many believe it to be. I feel it is in the least just a different existence and likely a much more pleasant one.

It is nothing to be feared. It is the greatest opportunity to change into a glorious new way of being.
Table 3
Respondents' Ratings of Role of NDEs in Coping with Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Near-Death Experiencers (N = 18)*</th>
<th>Nonexperiencers (N = 25)</th>
<th>χ² (df = 1)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did having an NDE/exposure to NDE information affect the way you responded to stress?</td>
<td>Yes: 17, No: 1</td>
<td>Yes: 18, No: 3</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were these stressful events predetermined?</td>
<td>Yes: 12, No: 4</td>
<td>Yes: 9, No: 9</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did these stressful events have a particular purpose or meaning for your life?</td>
<td>Yes: 17, No: 0</td>
<td>Yes: 20, No: 2</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has exposure to information on NDEs changed how you view life?</td>
<td>(not asked)</td>
<td>Yes: 25, No: 0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not all 18 respondents answered all questions.

Studies on post-NDE attitudinal changes have corroborated this finding. Sabom compared experiencers’ attitudes on death with those of a control group of survivors of near-death crises who had not had a NDE. The vast majority of experiencers reported a decrease in fear of death, but in the latter group of 45 respondents, only one reported a decrease, and the majority (87 percent) reported no change. He concluded: “This indicates that the decrease in the fear of death following a NDE is due to the NDE per se, and is not a result of merely having survived a near-death crisis event” (Sabom, 1982, pp. 60–61).

In his Connecticut Study, Ring also used a control group of nonexperiencers who had come close to death, and his findings mirrored those of Sabom. He drew the same conclusion, explaining, “it is not ‘merely’ coming close to death that tends to convince one that there is life after death; it is, apparently, the core experience itself that proves decisive” (Ring, 1980, p. 169).

Most of the nonexperiencers I polled did report a decreased fear of death. These were not people who had had a close brush with death,
however, but rather ones who showed an interest in studying near-death phenomena. Here are some of their comments:

I no longer think of death as an end. I see it as a transformation, a next step, an exciting opportunity after shedding a broken, useless, confining body.

The combination of being a hospice volunteer and my interest in the NDE have strengthened my religious beliefs. There is no fear in the mystery of death. My involvement with these groups has also influenced my family's attitude. This became very evident upon the death of my husband. My children and grandchildren were able to accept the loss with minimum stress because of our discussing the NDE stories and experiences.

Of the 25 respondents in the control group, 23 reported decreased fear of death, and the other 2 reported no change. Perhaps the decreased fear results not necessarily from the NDE itself, as Sabom and Ring suggested, but from a belief in a peaceful, loving afterlife, something shared by experiencers and nonexperiencers alike at IANDS gatherings.

Nevertheless, decreased fear of death appears to have a positive effect on coping behavior. Belief in an afterlife mitigates some of the grief and loss felt at the death of a loved one. In one study, 121 people who were recently bereaved were interviewed, and it was found that the feeling of recovery following bereavement was enhanced by belief in afterlife (Smith, Range, and Ulmer, 1991–1992). People surveyed in my study seemed to view death as a transition, not an end in itself. Many reported seeing previously departed loved ones during their NDE. With a belief system that includes a peace-filled afterlife, death does not spell the end to relationships with loved ones, but merely creates a temporary separation.

A few respondents who had lost loved ones since their NDEs reported that their changed attitudes toward death helped them to deal with the loss. After his NDE, one 53-year-old man experienced a succession of deaths in his family. In less than four years he lost two brothers, a brother-in-law, a sister, and a sister-in-law. He said of these losses:

I was much more at peace within myself, and was outwardly much calmer than most or many of the other family members. I have absolutely no fear of death. I see the thing called death as being an event much like birth or marriage — a significant ... starting or transition point between different phases of existence. Does that mean that I believe in life after death? Life is not a good word because it is tied to biological functioning. But I feel there is an infinite existence both prior to birth and after biological death here on this earth.
Similarly, a 37-year-old woman who had a 1991 NDE had since lost two close friends, an uncle, and a cousin. She, too, drew comfort from her experience. She said:

I still mourn very much for all of them. However, because of my own death experiences, I know that they are continuing elsewhere, which brings some comfort to both myself and their loved ones.

Respondents in both the study group and the control group reported a decreased fear of death since either having a NDE or learning about the phenomena. Apparently the belief in life beyond death and the pleasant nature of death itself as portrayed in near-death narratives have a positive affect on coping behavior.

**Sense of Control Over Life**

Fifty percent of respondents from the study group felt an increased sense of control over their lives since their NDE. For many, this seemed to take the form of a more accepting attitude toward life, in which the negative aspects of problems are minimized and there is not as strong a need as before to control outcomes. While outside circumstances in their life may not always be going as well as they'd like, they seemed to have a general acceptance of these adversities, which helped to minimize stress. Here are some representative statements:

I lost my job six months ago [during the NDE, God told me I'd get laid off]. I'm dirt broke now, but I'm coping. I know that my life has a purpose. If I lose all I have, my soul still survives, so who cares?

I realized that the worst that could happen in any situation was that I'd die, and that wasn't too bad. That renewed my courage and my sense of invulnerability to life.

Financially speaking, my life is more difficult now. Physically, I suffer greatly. Mentally, I do well most of the time. Spiritually, I can feel the existence of my soul, which sometimes soars.

Thirty-three percent of respondents in the study group reported a decrease in their sense of control over life. However, 75 percent also felt that major life events were predetermined. There could be a correlation between the two attitudes: if events are predetermined, one necessarily has less control over them.

A greater percentage of the control group (68 percent) reported feeling an increased sense of control over their lives since learning about NDEs. However, only 50 percent of this group felt events were predetermined, which, again, would fit with the inverse relationship
between the two beliefs. Following are some of the comments from the control group that reflect the same relaxed and accepting outlook expressed by many experiencers:

In losing my job, I had more faith and confidence in obtaining a new one. That happened within a month, and I have been much better off since. Things work out.

I have experienced several major life changes in the past year, and rather than catastrophize them or get caught up in the melodrama, I can see all of the events as opportunities or openings for my own personal and spiritual growth.

Self-Esteem

Eighty-three percent of both experiencers and nonexperiencers reported an increase in self-esteem. For experiencers, this often seemed to be a result of a sense of total acceptance and forgiveness they felt directed toward them during their NDE:

I was experiencing so much love and forgiveness from God, and I could see that God wasn't judging me at all.

[Christ] could see everything about me, more than I could see or know about myself. He even knew my thoughts before I did. It was scary to be so totally known and exposed, and yet so totally loved and accepted. I became aware that I was being harder on myself than He was.

It was peaceful and calm and warm. And that feeling of love, just unconditional love!

Feeling this sense of unconditional acceptance apparently helps experiencers to accept themselves better, thus raising self-esteem. Since an equal percentage of the control group also experienced an increase in self-esteem since learning of NDEs, it is implied, again, that this change is not necessarily a product of the NDE itself, but perhaps of the philosophy associated with them.

It should not be overlooked, however, that increased self-esteem has been found to be a natural by-product of the maturing process (Aldwin, 1994). An average of 19 years had elapsed between the occurrence of subjects' NDEs and the time of this study, so it is plausible that some increase in self-esteem would have occurred, with or without a NDE.

Contentment with Lifestyle

Seventy-two percent of experiencers and 71 percent of nonexperiencers reported an increase in contentment with their lifestyle. As some of the above quotes indicate, though respondents may have been
experiencing difficult setbacks, such as job losses and financial problems, most seemed to possess a generally accepting attitude toward these difficulties, and thus a sense of contentment with their lives.

In some instances, however, the changed perspective resulting from the NDE caused the survivor to see problems that had not been recognized as such before. This new sense of discontent spurred them to make changes. One man said that after his NDE, he felt and disliked the negativity in his marriage, and had since divorced. A 37-year-old woman who had a NDE after experiencing organ failure and cardiac arrest in 1991 said her NDE was the catalyst for her decision to seek treatment for alcoholism. So while after the NDE there was sometimes an immediate discontent with aspects of one’s lifestyle, the experiencer was often moved to make the necessary changes to create a situation which was more tolerable.

**Sense of Life Purpose**

Another way in which NDEs appear to enhance meaning is by instilling a renewed sense of life purpose. All 18 of the experiencers surveyed reported an increase in life purpose since their NDE. The woman mentioned above credited a sense of purpose garnered from her visionary experience with helping her to overcome alcoholism:

> Strangely, dying has increased my will to live. After getting out of the hospital after my most serious bouts with death, I joined Alcoholics Anonymous, got a sponsor, and continue my activities with this great organization. The meaning or purpose I get is that I was to continue with my life, in a sober manner, helping people, writing about my experiences, doing meaningful volunteer work, appreciating life, and trying to live life in a positive, thankful manner.

She went on to say that she felt that everybody has a purpose in life, regardless of whether or not they have experienced a NDE.

A 35-year-old woman suffered a concussion in 1990 after being hit by a car. She was unconscious for six hours, and during that time felt herself floating through space. Though she remembered thinking, “I am dead,” she felt peaceful and unafraid. When interviewed four years later, she said:

> I feel my life has a purpose. My purpose is to love and to share love and to teach. I love to teach and to help others learn. I love to learn, too. In the big picture, I hope that my life will have made a difference on its own little, small scale. [I want] to try to make the world, in this little, tiny corner where I am, a little bit better.
A 49-year-old woman was a passenger on a boat that capsized during a thunderstorm. While almost drowning, she had a NDE and came back with a renewed sense of purpose:

The boat turned on its side and we were forced to hold onto a railing as the waves beat over the boat and down upon us. Though I was wearing a life jacket, I was repeatedly pushed under the water. Each time I would think, “I'll bounce back up and be able to breathe.” Until one time when it was as if I went down ... in a black void. All was darkness. I did have a conversation with some higher power about my will to keep living.

She said she learned from this experience that the purpose of difficulties in life was “to teach me the preciousness of life and what we can learn when we love each other and show each other we do.”

Previous studies have also found an increased sense of life purpose to be a common aftereffect of NDEs. In his Connecticut Study, Ring did not specifically ask respondents to comment on life purpose, but when asked whether their NDE had changed them in any way, 24 percent mentioned a renewed sense of life purpose (Ring, 1980). He concluded that

Persons who survive a near-death episode sometimes assert that afterward they felt a sense of rebirth ....

Almost always, however, there is an implied or explicit sense that one has been spared for a reason — that one has been given a renewal of life for a purpose. This sense that one's life is meant to fulfill some objective is fairly common. (Ring, 1980, p. 147)

Zaleski noted that this sense of life purpose was generally connected to a “commission” the visionaries were given or a message they had to bring back: “Just as in the medieval narratives, these messages condense the overall didactic intent of the narrative and provide the rationale for the otherworld journey itself” (Zaleski, 1987, p. 133).

Some of the “commissions” reported by study participants are as follows:

[He said,] “You have to learn and teach more about loving and forgiving.”

He hesitated, as though deciding about whether to say something. With that he impressed in my mind a picture, a memory of my original agreement for coming to earth to begin with. It was like a contract. And with that I remembered and I went, “Oh, right. Right!” I started toward them, then realized I had some task to finish on earth.

Studies on coping suggest that high life purpose helps individuals to better deal with life crises. For instance, a survey of 119 recently
bereaved adults found that a sense of life purpose had a moderating effect on their reaction to the loss. A high sense of purpose was found to be associated with a more favorable response to bereavement, regardless of the cause of death (Ulmer, Range, and Smith, 1991).

The woman mentioned above who credited the NDE she had during a boating accident with giving her a renewed sense of life purpose felt that the experience helped her to better deal with subsequent life crises. Since the accident she had dealt with a divorce, job loss, major illness, and the illness and death of a loved one. She said:

I believe I was given a strength to persevere I may not have had before the experience. This is not to say I can handle the stress with ease, but I feel I have an underlying sort of support inside me now and somehow, through stressful times, I keep on dealing with the situation and am more able to accept things as they are.

Near-death researchers have found that even those who had a NDE during a suicide attempt afterward reported a renewed appreciation for life and a sense of life purpose (Greyson, 1981). Though none of the respondents in my study reported trying to commit suicide, one 33-year-old woman acknowledged that, prior to her NDE, she had contemplated suicide as an escape from constant pain resulting from a medical condition. Then, while undergoing surgery in 1990, a nurse accidentally gave her an overdose of morphine, and she had to be resuscitated with paddles. She described an NDE during this time wherein she encountered God. He showed her a review of her life and pointed out the qualities she needed to work on developing. She said:

Every time He spoke to me He radiated a total, unconditional love that filled my energy, that is the most intense thing I have ever experienced. It filled me with not only the sensation of, but a “knowing” of love, forgiveness and understanding that I really can’t explain. Then He started showing me my life. It just kind of appeared. I experienced the feelings of everybody I’d come into contact with, and remembered every little thing I had ever done, most of which were sad things to do. I remembered fights with little friends, or when I was older, talking behind peoples’ backs, or when I was older still, being directly in peoples’ faces, screaming. I experienced my life and I felt terrible. I couldn't cry, but I had the sick feeling that goes with that. He told me, though, that I could work on learning to love, and on forgiving, because I never forgave. The angry lines I drew were forever. Then I totally forgave everybody of everything. I think I did this because I was
experiencing so much love and forgiveness from God, and I could see that God wasn’t judging me at all. (Chenaur, 1995, p. 1)

She described how this experience changed her attitudes toward suicide and death:

I used to want to die when I was in constant pain from endometriosis. I contemplated suicide after a hysterectomy. Driving in traffic, I would cry and be swearing and flipping off people. I was terrified of death. I was distraught at a possible job loss. Now I don’t fear death. I would never commit suicide now. When horrible things happen to me, I just look at it as a learning experience. (Chenaur, 1995, p. 1)

This increase in life purpose was not expressed solely by those who had experienced an NDE. When asked whether they felt an increase in life purpose since learning of NDEs, 84 percent of the control group also answered in the affirmative. Their responses were very similar to those of the study group:

I used to believe you lived, you died, and that was it. I couldn’t figure out the meaning of life, so I didn’t think there was one. Now I believe life is to learn to love unconditionally.

All things or events have the potential for growth opportunity in them. My sense is that we’re all here to learn and grow and love, and that every life event presents a unique opportunity to do so.

**Ability to Cope**

The vast majority of respondents in both groups reported an increase in their ability to cope with both day-to-day stress and larger crises. Problems did not seem to carry the same weight or importance as they had before. Here are some responses from the study group:

I don’t worry so much about money. If you’re healthy, none of that really matters. My NDE definitely changed my priorities.

People say I come up with answers to problems no one else thinks of. I regard most all things as part of a larger scheme of things that have good outcomes.

I think I now deal with life much better and I look at things much differently.

Having seen life from the other side, I realize that the traumas and dramas of life are quite simply opportunities to learn and grow.

These findings are not surprising, as studies show that after undergoing an extreme stressor, such as combat trauma or nearly dying, everyday hassles often seem less important (Aldwin, 1994).
A slightly greater percentage of nonexperiencers than experiencers reported an increase in their ability to cope. Some responses from the control group were:

I am able to be stronger for myself and others.
I am much more inclined to seek comfort and guidance through prayer. I believe in putting myself or others in God's hands when troubles seem overwhelming.
When my father was sick and died, and the father of a friend died, I wasn't afraid for them. I know we are never alone, but always surrounded by love.

The sense of an order to life and the belief in a benevolent divine power seemed to provide a resource of strength that helped these individuals better cope with stressors. Again, the results could in part have stemmed from the natural maturing process. Individuals who have previously encountered and successfully dealt with life stressors could draw from these past experiences and better gauge how to deal with subsequent crises and stress.

Some experiencers felt, however, that their experience complicated their ability to cope by adding additional stress to their lives. One woman said that since her NDE, she felt the repressed emotions of others “as if a current is running through me.” She added, however, that she did not tend to resist life as much as she did before, and this helped to minimize stress. Another woman said, “It's as if a NDE makes the tough things in life tougher, and the good things better.” One man says that since his NDE, his psychic sensitivities had increased and he was much more bothered by crowds. He said, “It is like a psychic roar engulfs me in these situations.”

A couple of experiencers said they felt both an increase and a decrease, simultaneously, in their ability to cope with stressors. So while diminishing the importance of problems and lending emotional strength to survivors, the experience can also create complications that add to the stress already in their lives.

Religion and NDEs

Though participants were not asked specifically about their religious affiliations or beliefs, there is relationship between religion and coping behavior. The studies on coping cited above all drew a positive correlation between the ability to successfully cope with life stressors and the ability to infuse those same events with meaning, whether it be a belief in an afterlife, a sense of life purpose, or a feeling that
all things happen for a reason. Religion provides a framework for assessing how meaning should be assigned to various life events. One study that interviewed parents who had lost a child to sudden infant death syndrome found that the importance of religion in the parents' lives was positively related to cognitive processing and finding meaning in the death. Additionally, active religious participation was also related to greater well-being and less distress among the parents (McIntosh, Silver, and Wortman, 1993).

It is common among experiencers to reject affiliation with organized religion, even though most have well-articulated beliefs on God, life meaning, and life beyond death. Most prefer the term "spiritual," which they feel has less rigid and dogmatic connotations. Cherie Sutherland interviewed experiencers in Australia and found that prior to the experience, 24 percent described themselves as religious, and 16 percent as spiritual. After their NDEs, 6 percent described themselves as religious, and 76 percent as spiritual (Sutherland, 1990). Responses from this study group appear to support these findings:

I am [now] more spiritual than I would be otherwise.

My values in life have changed from tangible and material items to a desire for spiritual serenity.

Not every respondent, however, shied away from religious affiliation. One woman said that she had always had a deep religious faith, and it was only strengthened by her NDE. In fact, the distinction between religion and spirituality seemed to be most markedly made by respondents in the control group:

Knowledge of NDEs has allowed me to feel more spiritual and to validate a view of spirituality that is not tied to fundamentalist, judgmental religions.

I no longer fear death. I've become much more spiritual [not religious].

[Since learning of NDEs] I've lost all interest in religious dogma.

[Exposure to NDEs] has helped me to deal with the adverse effects of organized religion.

This may be due to the fact that people who already hold non-traditional or nondogmatic beliefs would more likely be attracted to phenomena such as NDEs, which appear to support their beliefs. Nevertheless, whether preferring the label "religious" or "spiritual," respondents overwhelmingly espoused well-defined belief systems which infused meaning into their lives. In regards to religious participation, though many chose not to attend traditional church ceremonies or other religious gatherings, they all (with the exception of
two respondents) attended IANDS meetings. Though IANDS is not a religious organization, these meetings appeared to share many similarities with organized religious gatherings: people with similar beliefs and experiences congregated together to share their thoughts and interpretations of their experiences. Having a supportive network such as this likely provides the same benefits as standard religious participation when it comes to coping with life stressors.

Conclusion

The thread that ties all of the above categories of change together is their relationship to meaning. The changes outlined in this study, such as increased life purpose and reduced fear of death, resulted from a philosophical framework that imparted meaning to both positive and negative life events. This worldview embraced by most participants in this study included a benevolent and personally-involved divinity, a view of life problems as opportunities for spiritual growth, a personal mission for each individual, and a peace-filled afterlife.

An unexpected finding from this study was the almost identical pattern of responses given by experiencers and nonexperiencers alike. All participants in the control group reported that they viewed life differently since being exposed to NDE narratives. They seemed to embrace these visionary experiences with the same enthusiasm as the visionaries themselves. Below are some of the descriptions given about their changed attitudes and beliefs:

If anything, my already held beliefs and attitudes were enhanced. I more fully believe we are here to love and to learn to love one another. To forgive and be forgiven. Yes, I have been affected!
[I am now] more open to others’ beliefs – not so judgmental as before.
[Previously] I was agnostic. Now I believe there is a higher power and that we will live on after we die.
It is reassuring to hear about various points of understanding about death. One loses the strong fear of death and takes an interest. This reduces fear.
Information on NDEs, particularly personal accounts of NDEs, has been of vital significance to me in my healing of past traumas and pain.
Knowing about NDEs is helping me to heal from the pain and bitterness I feel because of my infant daughter’s death 24 years ago.

Nonexperiencers appeared to embrace the same general philosophy on life as experiencers, and to reap from it the same beneficial coping
responses. This finding echoes prior reports that learning about NDEs may confer some of the beneficial attitudinal aftereffects of having an NDE oneself (Flynn, 1986; Ring and Valarino, 1998).

Before drawing any definitive conclusions from this study, it is important to reiterate a few points. First, as Zaleski asserted, any study of an experience such as the NDE represents a collaborative effort between the researcher and the subject. Because respondents were aware of research objectives—namely, studying the connection between NDEs and coping behavior—they may have presented their experiences in a way that suggested a positive relationship between the two. Answers were subjective and reflected respondents’ personal perceptions. Secondly, because the majority of participants were drawn from IANDS gatherings, the findings of this study can not be generalized to represent the NDE population at large. And lastly, because the populations of both the study group and the control group were small, it could be argued that the study lacked sufficient statistical power to show differences between the two groups.

Despite those cautions, it is clear that the majority of experiencers and nonexperiencers alike in this study felt that NDEs significantly affected the way in which they dealt with stress. Coping behavior was enhanced by a decreased fear of death and an increase in the following areas: sense of control over life, contentment with lifestyle, self-esteem, sense of life purpose, and ability to cope with both day-to-day stress and major crises. NDE narratives were instrumental in forming or affirming belief systems and worldviews that served to infuse life events with meaning, thus allowing respondents to deal with stress more effectively. Actually having a NDE did not prove necessary for achieving the above-mentioned benefits, as nonexperiencers in the study expressed an equal level of life satisfaction as experiencers.

These findings are relevant for people in the helping profession, such as doctors, nurses, social workers, and clergy, who may encounter patients who have had a NDE. Many experiencers have reported that sharing their experience with caretakers often engendered skeptical or dismissive responses, and added to their physical recovery the burden of trying to deal with a personally significant, but externally unwelcome experience. If caretakers can view an NDE as significant and ultimately beneficial for the patient, regardless of their own personal feelings about its validity, they can perhaps ease the patient's awkwardness at relating such an experience, and help him or her in the healing process.
References


Experiences of Light in Gay and Lesbian Near-Death Experiences

Liz Dale, Ph.D.
San Pablo, CA

ABSTRACT: This article illustrates the concept of divine light in stories of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender near-death experiencers.

KEY WORDS: near-death experience; gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender; spirituality; divine light.

In Crossing Over and Coming Home, I recorded numerous personal accounts of near-death experiences (NDEs) from within the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) community (Dale, 2001). In his endorsement of that book, Stanislav Grof wrote that the "study of near-death experiences in the gay community... is also a major contribution to the general understanding of the phenomenology of near-death states and their effects on survivors" (Grof, 2001, unpaged frontispiece).

Before describing examples of the impact of divine light within gay NDEs, let me address the reason it is important to document GLBT near-death stories. Christian de la Huerta wrote in his groundbreaking book, Coming Out Spiritually, that there was a time when gay people "were the shamans, the healers, the visionaries, the mediators, the peacekeepers, the 'people who walk between the worlds,' the keepers of beauty" (1999, p. 3). As can be seen by the following excerpts from their stories, the men and women who wrote accounts of their NDEs were very courageous. Melvin Morse wrote:

The near-death experiences that gays and lesbians report are powerful reminders that all human beings share a common truth: We will have near-death experiences when we die.... Gay or straight,
brown skin or white skin, or rich and poor alike, we will all have one when we die. (Morse, 2001, p. i)

The concept of light is one of the key images one experiences in an NDE. The Dalai Lama described the metaphor of light as:

a common image in all the major religious traditions. In the Buddhist context, light is particularly associated with wisdom and knowledge; darkness is associated with ignorance and a state of misknowledge. (1999, p. 304)

Within the stories of the GLBT near-death experiences, divine light is an essential component. The majority of GLBT near-death experiencers whose accounts I collected (73 percent) reported such experiences. For example, one experiencer who had taken an overdose of sleeping pills and alcohol wrote the following:

All of a sudden I felt as though I was moving through a corridor. It was dark but not at all frightening. I sensed the presence of others. Some of these “spirit entities” were moving more slowly than others toward the light .... Suddenly, I was in a place that appeared to be room suffused with light. There were no walls or ceilings or floors. Light seemed to extend into infinity. (Dale, 2001, p. 100)

GLBT near-death experiencers offered a reason for the presence of light. The majority of experiencers whose accounts I collected (73 percent) felt a sense of comfort within the light. The divine light emanated either from the NDEr or from others in the NDE scenery. One woman described her childhood NDE from a near-drowning in the following way:

I do not remember struggling or being afraid. I felt only deep peace and happiness. While my body was at the bottom of the river, I remember looking up toward the surface. I enjoyed watching a beautiful array of dancing, brilliant sparkles of color from the yellow sunlight coming through the river water. I was calm and fascinated by the beauty of the light and the reeds coming through the mud. (Dale, 2001, p. 40)

These GLBT NDE stories illustrate the message of a powerful connection between light, love, and spirituality, over and over. Why do GLBT near-death experiencers consider the NDE to be so inspiring? Historically, there was a time when gays and lesbians were looked upon favorably by society. But in recent times, quoting again from de la Huerta:

Many [gays] have attempted to reject their spirituality – a tragic and fruitless endeavor as ludicrous as waking up one day and deciding
that one no longer needs to breathe because someone, somewhere decreed that breathing is an evil, sick, sinful or immoral act. (de la Huerta, 1999, p. 5)

Malidoma Patrice Somé of the Dagara tribe of Burkina Faso described gays as having a higher "vibrational" level that enables them to be guardians of the gateways of the spirit world. In an interview in 1993 at the Mendocino Men’s Conference, he described indigenous people's view of gay men:

At least among the Dagara people, gender has very little to do with anatomy. It is purely energetic. In that context, a male who is physically male can vibrate female energy, and vice versa. That is where the real gender is .... In the culture that I come from ... these people are looked on, essentially, as people ....

The earth is looked at, from my tribal perspective, as a very, very delicate machine or consciousness, with high vibrational points, which certain people must be guardians of in order for the tribe to keep its continuity with the gods and with the spirits that dwell there .... Any person who is at this link between this world and the other world experiences a state of vibrational consciousness which is far higher, and far different, from the one that a normal person would experience. This is what makes a gay person gay. (Somé, cited in Hoff, 1993, pp. 1–2)

The GLBT persons whose accounts I collected “came out of the closet,” so to speak, so that we can all see what is true and beautiful to the NDE: that there is a world just beyond this one in which all people, regardless of skin color, gender, age, lifestyle, or sexual orientation, are viewed as equal. The crosscultural context within each of these stories, although highly valuable to the reader of NDE accounts, can reveal more than some GLBTs would be willing to expose. For instance, when it came time to publish my book, some of the contributors refused to have their stories published. Although the accounts were all anonymous, some potential authors felt that there might be a way they could be identified or that there was something “wrong” with recording such spiritual stories. Unfortunately, these stories have remained unpublished.

The GLBT NDE stories I have collected contain account after account of deeply meaningful experiences. Some of the most deeply inspiring of these accounts provide examples of this newfound spiritual growth. For example, one man who had had an NDE during an extended coma following an emergency appendectomy at age 17, wrote:

I will say that my near-death experience dramatically changed who I was and how I lived. I live not by what I read and “think” is right; I
live by what I "know" is right for me. This doesn't mean that it's right for you. I still go to church and worship God but God doesn't "need" people to worship Him. One doesn't have to do anything to go to heaven....

We are here on earth to learn from each other and help each other. If we want to "learn," we must keep an open mind.

Just like everyone else here, I am not simply a human being. I am a spirit with a human shell. Someday I will leave my body and continue in the spiritual, non-material realm again. (Dale, 2001, p. 121)

I would like to conclude this paper with a perspective on the concept of divine light from Ken Wilbur's *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*:

The observer in you, the Witness in you, transcends the isolated person in you and opens instead – from within or from behind, as Emerson said – onto a vast expanse of awareness no longer a respecter or abuser of persons, no longer fascinated by the passing joys and set-apart sorrows of the lonely self, but standing still in silence as an opening or clearing through which light shines, not from the world but into it – "a light shines through us upon things." *That which* observes or witnesses the self, the person, is precisely to that degree free of the self, the person, and through that opening comes pouring the light and power of the Self, a Soul, that as Emerson puts it, "would make our knees bend." (2000, p. 289)

References


Dale, L. (2001). *Crossing over and coming home: Twenty-one authors discuss the gay near-death experience as spiritual transformation*. Houston, TX: Emerald Ink.


BOOK REVIEW

James McClenon, Ph.D.
Elizabeth City State University


In The Trickster and the Paranormal, Hansen argues that psychic phenomena (psi) have an inherent quirkiness, making them intrinsically difficult to investigate. He refers to this quality as the "trickster," something not necessarily personalized but coinciding with the trickster archetype found in the folklore of many societies. Although this book focuses on perhaps the most important issue facing parapsychologists today, it is caught in the paradox it reveals. Scientists tend to ignore issues that cannot be resolved, and the trickster, almost by definition, defies resolution. Religious people may label the trickster as demonic, or deny its existence, since it interferes with their belief. Although this book is not for everyone, I strongly recommend it.

George Hansen's work is scholarly and well-referenced. The sections reveal detailed knowledge of example cases from a wide variety of contexts and cultures. As a result, there is often insufficient space for complete reviews of each topic. This problem is reduced through extensive citation. One value of this book is that it assembles obscure references on topics often overlooked.

This book lacks the linear flow that characterizes most academic discourse. Something funny is going on here. The style is academic, yet quirky, reflecting the trickster's nature. Hansen's claims are not proven through analysis but illustrated through examples. In a way,

James McClenon, Ph.D., is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Social Sciences at Elizabeth City State University. Reprint requests should be addressed to Dr. McClenon at the Department of Social Sciences, Elizabeth City State University, Elizabeth City, NC 27909; e-mail: jmmcclenon@mail.ecsu.edu.
this is a form of sociology, similar to the writing of Irving Goffman; but few sociologists would categorize Hansen's work as within their field.

Considering its topic, this book has a strangely "careful" quality. Hansen rarely speculates. Although *The Trickster and the Paranormal* does not fall within an established paradigm, Hansen's background in parapsychology gives him a cautious foundation for evaluating unusual cases. Yet this book does not advocate typical parapsychological positions. Hansen does not fully support either believers or skeptics but offers something beyond standard thinking. This work surpasses others' previous attempts to characterize the trickster's role in modern times.

Hansen covers a wide range of categories with reference to the trickster: mythology, folklore, anthropology, shamanism, prominent psychics, sociological theory, conjurors, alternative religions, hoaxes, governmental disinformation, laboratory research on psi, and literary criticism. It is difficult to summarize this book because it lacks a strong organizing principle. I provide a synopsis through selective quotes:

This book is about foretelling the future, the occult, magic, telepathy, mind over matter, miracles, power of prayer, UFOs, Bigfoot, clairvoyance, angels, demons, psychokinesis, and the spirits of the dead. These all interact with the physical world. This book explains why they are problematical for science. (p. 19)

Several issues are addressed in this book. One is the ongoing controversy over psi's existence — despite extensive research and a massive amount of published data, the scientific debate has continued for over a hundred years. Another issue concerns the unexpected consequences of direct attempts to elicit psi; these are rarely recognized. A third issue is the paranormal's relationship with institutions. (p. 15)

My central thesis is that psychic phenomena are associated with processes of destructuring. If one keeps this rather abstract formulation in mind, the assortment of seemingly disjointed examples will make a bit more sense. I have included a variety of specific instances in order to demonstrate the generality and consequences of the central idea. (p. 16)

Several readers of early drafts of this book found it difficult to perceive an overall theme; the ideas seemed scattered, even incoherent. This is indeed how the trickster appears in our current rationalistic paradigms. (p. 273)

Hansen knows the trickster well; he has seen it up close. When he worked at the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man (now known as the Rhine Research Center) in 1982, he and I coordinated
effects to evaluate the Society for Research on Rapport and Telekinesis. On different occasions, we traveled to Rolla, Missouri, seeking to witness psychic phenomena produced by a spiritualist group. We confronted bizarre events such as rapping sounds from the floor spelling out messages, interacted with sincere people, and gathered evidence implying fraud. Hansen acknowledges the unusual quality of this social environment and dedicates this book to William Edward Cox, the principle investigator of this case. Cox confronted psi as it actually occurred: in field environments where controlled investigation was difficult. Cox (2004) was convinced that he witnessed authentic psi but was unable to compel belief in many others.

Following this line of exploration, Hansen observed the social contexts surrounding psi's incidence. He describes how people in groups react to psi, providing a kind of social psychology of the paranormal:

The primary data of this book concern side effects of using psychic abilities and engaging supernatural phenomena. Those effects can be discovered by analyzing the social milieu around the phenomena. Of particular interest are the repercussions to groups and institutions, including families, academe, governments, science, religion, and industry. There is a pattern, and generally the phenomena either provoke or accompany some kind of destructuring—a concept discussed at length in this book. For instance, the phenomena do not flourish within stable institutions, and endless examples illustrate this ....

The central theme developed in this book is that psi, the paranormal, and the supernatural are fundamentally linked to destructuring, change, transition, disorder, marginality, the ephemeral, fluidity, ambiguity, and blurring of boundaries. In contrast, the phenomena are repressed or excluded with order, structure, routine, stasis, regularity, precision, rigidity, and clear demarcation. (p. 22)

Hansen expresses optimism regarding the possibility of gaining an increased understanding of the trickster. At the same time, he implies that scientific paradigms may not be suitable. Psi has qualities that thwart its investigation.

This line of research points to testable hypotheses. We can predict the environments where psi will be more prevalent (unstructured, unstable situations with small informal groups of people whose lives reveal fluid cognitive boundaries) and where it will not occur (around people with strong cognitive boundaries in formal, large organizations in rigid, structured environments). Laboratory experiments, where researchers struggle to achieve complete control of an environment, may not be best for investigating psi processes.
For me, the trickster is all too real. It has permeated my life. How can I convey the nature of the trickster? Like Hansen, I relate anecdotes. For example, I witnessed paranormal spoon bending. In 1982, I watched researchers conduct an experiment with Masuaki Kiyota. A spoon was propped up in a manner so that if it were touched it would fall over. Kiyota bent the spoon without touching it, but later it began unbending. Two video cameras set up to document this experiment failed to function and everyone laughed at the absurdity of the situation (the trickster was at work). I felt around the spoon for wires and found none. The spoon continued to unbend while I placed it on a table in another room. I put it in my luggage and later found that it had continued to unbend during an airplane flight. After I photographed it to document my observations, it stopped bending (the trickster avoids verification).

I have witnessed enough deception to realize that my memories of this event could be due to misperception. I have no way to prove the validity of my experience to skeptics. The trickster fools both believers and skeptics, and neither position is always valid. After many similar experiences, I formed the opinion that psi hides (McClenon, 1994). It has characteristics that make it difficult to detect. If proving psi exists were easy, skeptical scientists would verify it and believe as a result.

Hansen’s argument goes beyond this. He suggests that the trickster works on social and cultural levels. Groups and even whole societies are affected by the trickster’s actions. Even highly reputable people are fooled, and these people can affect history.

Charles Honorton’s ganzfeld research illustrates this argument. Daryl Bem and Honorton (1994) conducted a meta-analysis of ganzfeld studies and concluded that parapsychologists had devised a replicable experiment, proving the existence of extrasensory perception (ESP). The evidence was very clear. The probability that the overall results of these experiments occurred through chance was infinitesimally small. Yet Julie Milton and Richard Wiseman (1999) analyzed later studies and concluded that the ganzfeld procedure did not generate replicable results. More recently, researchers have struggled to replicate the effect. In the end, believers and skeptics engage in a rhetorical process; the two sides continue to argue. The trickster seems active even within decades-long research programs.

Hansen notes that established professionals sometimes accept extremely far-fetched ideas as a result of group anomalous experiences. Such collective phenomena can take strange forms and generate unusual reactions. Governmental agencies may engage in
bizarre attempts to generate rumors, conceal findings, and thwart logical analysis. Certain types of unstructured environments seem particularly conducive to anomalous experience. People in small groups within unstructured environments are particularly prone to unusual perceptions.

Does the trickster affect near-death experiences? Kenneth Ring (1984) described convergences within near-death accounts during the era preceding publication of his book *Heading Toward Omega*. Many people providing cases described perceiving social and ecological catastrophes within their near-death experiences. They specified events and years coinciding with each other’s accounts. Yet these predictions did not come true. Social scientists note that prophesy often fails; yet people still believe. Is this the trickster at work?

Charles Darwin’s evolutionary paradigm allows a way for thinking about anomalous experiences. I argue that biological evolution has shaped the human capacity to perceive such events (McClenon, 2002). This may explain the existence of the trickster. The relation between culture and anomalous experience has been forged through the human use of suggestion within healing rituals. Those people who tend to dissociate have had survival advantages for many millennia: they tend to benefit from healing and therapeutic rituals more than others. As a result, dissociative genes have been shaped by ritual practices, becoming more prevalent. People with the capacity to dissociate tend to experience apparitions, psychokinesis, ESP, and out-of-body and near-death experiences. These perceptions generate belief in spirits, souls, life after death, and magical abilities – the foundations for shamanism.

How is this related to the trickster? Shamanism, humankind’s first religious form, often involved deception. The shaman goes into trance and produces “tricks” that generate placebo effects and hypnotic healing. Those who are more open to hypnotic suggestion are more often healed, and, as a result, more often pass on their genes to future generations. In the end, humans increased their capacity to dissociate, to accept therapeutic suggestions linked with trance performance, and to be religious. Rituals, which seemingly facilitate psi experiences, enhanced the human capacity for self-deception. Psi, derived from our collective unconsciousness, became intrinsically linked with the trickster, since collective delusions were therapeutic. When allowed, psi bubbles up among us, leading us to accept religious explanations; but intrinsic to this experience is the capacity to be tricked.

Hansen’s discussion of the trickster portrays some of the results of
this evolutionary process. His work focuses on a topic that must be considered if we are to understand anomalous experiences. Through social psychological, anthropological, and physiological research we can further explore this issue.

References


BOOK REVIEW

Pim van Lommel, M.D.
Velp, The Netherlands


Talking With Angel is about a young girl confronted with a serious and life-threatening disease; her process of coping with hope, pain, decline, and despair; and ultimately the progression of her leukemia, ending with her transition into the Light. This is an amazing book, because Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino has written this intimate story in the first person, from the “inside” of the girl, with all her thoughts and feelings. And this is why you become so intimately connected with her as she is confiding her innermost thoughts, and all her heart-rending emotions become your own emotions. While reading the book you become one with her, with her illness, with everything what happens around her and within her, including the realization that she will have no future like other boys and girls of her age.

And by identifying yourself with this girl you become a part of her process of spiritual growth, a lesson for living and dying. During the progression of her illness she is comforted by her “inner communication” with her doll Angel, a gift from her deceased grandmother. Her doll Angel explains to her that death is not the end, but only a transition into another form of being. Ultimately, towards the end of her life in the ward for terminally ill children, she hears about the

Pim van Lommel, M.D., is a cardiologist, formerly on the staff of the Hospital Rijnstate in Arnhem, The Netherlands. Reprint requests should be addressed to Dr. van Lommel at Achtsprong 2, 6881 HA Velp, The Netherlands; e-mail: pimvanlommel@wanadoo.nl.
deep and transforming near-death experience (NDE) of James, up to then a rather skeptical fellow patient, who has a miraculous cure of the malignant course of his illness following his NDE. The description of this near-death experience is very impressive and very complete, and one of the best accounts of an NDE I ever have read. Her fear of death is ultimately lifted when she reaches the moment of leaving her body, and while seeing her grandmother, going towards the Light.

As Ken Ring writes in his foreword, this girl could be anyone; and while reading you realize that it could be you, the empathetic reader of this moving book. While reading the book I was wondering if it was especially meant for adults, or also for children with life-threatening illness. The words the doll Angel uses during her communication with the girl seem to be more suited for adults than for children, as does the impressive description of James's NDE, but the emotional impact of this book will be the same for older children and parents, and for anyone who has been confronted with death and dying or is facing a life-threatening illness. But this book is also a very special gift for caregivers working in hospitals and in hospices, because it is all about the lessons we can learn from NDEs about a new insight into life and death.

Elsaesser-Valarino has an extensive knowledge of NDEs. She has been working in this field for more than 20 years, and has written two books about this subject: *On the Other Side of Life: Exploring the Phenomenon of Near-Death Experience* (Elsaesser-Valarino, 1997), and *Lessons From the Light: What We Can Learn From the Near-Death Experience*, in collaboration with Ring (Ring and Elsaesser-Valarino, 2000). In this very good and most important and comforting book she uses a totally new and emotional approach by confronting the reader with the spiritual lessons to be learned from NDEs by becoming intimately involved in the story of a girl facing leukemia, and her transformation during the progression of her disease.

Before concluding this review I would like to share some endorsements of *Talking with Angel* that currently appear on the Internet website of the American distributor (http://www.steinerbooks.org/detail.html?id=0863154921):

Honestly, I was very moved by the story's emotional power and the depth of the teachings it conveys. I found the story gripping from the very beginning, but I think what hit me the most was the account Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino wrote, in epistolary form, of James' near-death experience. It is simply one of the best and richest accounts (even if it is fiction) of an NDE I've ever come across. I don't think
it is saying too much to claim that in itself this bit of writing is a masterpiece. (Kenneth Ring)

So intimate that you feel yourself “inside” the girl, caring what she thinks and feels during crucial moments. The description of the near-death experience is among the most riveting accounts I have yet read about the phenomenon and its after-effects. The book is simply incredible! Highly recommended for older children, parents, and anyone coming to grips with life and death issues – regardless of age. (P. M. H. Atwater)

A powerful story of a young girl who becomes a woman during her intense struggle with a life-threatening illness. I recommend this book highly to everyone who values personal growth and spiritual transformation. (Bill Guggenheim)

Gripping reading .... The format is a tour de force. The simplicity of the narrative structure provides the vehicle through which spiritual wisdom is formulated and transmitted in an eminently palatable fashion. The reader feels a natural empathy for the girl's situation, which is ultimately that of every reader of this review. Once you read this book you will understand why human life is such a gift and can be passed on to those in need. (David Lorimer)

In conclusion, I am very happy that Elsaesser-Valarino has written this book, and I am obviously not the only one. I recommend it highly for everybody who is willing to be open to the spiritual wisdom that death could well be a mere passing from one state of consciousness into another.

References


Letter to the Editor

More on the Future and Scope of IANDS

To the Editor:

I have enjoyed the exchanges between Kenneth Ring (2005) and Ken Vincent (2005) and others in the most recent issues of the Journal. I agree with Ring that mystical religious experiences should not be included in the work of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). To me, one of the greatest lessons of the near-death experience (NDE) is that religion is man-made, but I don’t want to get started on that here.

However, ignoring all varieties of experiences in this present day seems to me very short-sighted. Our group, Chicago IANDS, began in May 1998 and now, after seven years, we have a database of 1500 people and more than 100 people coming every month (150 in October) to an auditorium in one of the largest hospitals in Chicago to discuss these things. In a rough estimate, over half of those attending have had some kind of experience. I would estimate about 30 percent have actually had an NDE. The rest have had either an out-of-body experience, an “Other” experience, or a loss of some kind that triggered a mystical experience or curiosity about death, as well as those who are just interested and/or curious.

Scientific research is important and we must continue to do that, not only for the answers produced, but also for credibility. But unlike the early meetings of IANDS, when most of those involved in the organization were scientists, doctors, or other professionals, most people involved now are people who have seen a greater reality and really don’t care what the research shows. They already know the answer, and that is: the experience is real. So rather than spin their wheels trying to prove it, their needs have turned in another direction: they need support in their knowledge and guidance for the future. Socialization with like-minded others, a chance to hear the stories of others, and presentations by those who have had an experience and are using it to benefit their fellow human beings in some higher way provide a real service and guidance that needs to be available to these people.
One can't help but ask why, when the numbers of NDEs are increasing daily, are the membership levels of IANDS decreasing? I don't think the answer is only that more information is available on the internet, as Vincent (2004) suggested. There seems to be a larger picture of the NDE now forming that depicts the NDE as part of a series of mystical happenings, which is changing how the world, God, religions, and our existence are being perceived. NDErs often come back with a sense of a mission, of being part of a larger picture. I believe that it is those concerns that now need to be addressed in order to make membership more appealing.

Whether that is something that the current IANDS organization can deal with remains to be seen. It is possible that IANDS could continue to be the hub of scientific research and a new sister organization might be developed that can better address the needs of these millions of people who, for whatever reason, have embarked upon a search for a way to integrate this new knowledge of an expanded reality into their everyday lives.

References


Diane Willis
Facilitator, Chicago IANDS
PO Box 732
Wilmette, IL 60091
dianewillis@chicagoiands.org
INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES encourages submission of articles in the following categories: research reports; theoretical or conceptual statements; papers expressing a particular scientific, philosophic, religious, or historical perspective on the study of near-death experiences; cross-cultural studies; individual case histories with instructive unusual features; and personal accounts of near-death experiences or related phenomena.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS: Logical organization is essential. While headings help to structure the content, titles and headings within the manuscript should be as short as possible. Do not use the generic masculine pronoun or other sexist terminology.

MANUSCRIPTS may be submitted in electronic format (preferred) or hard copy. Electronic manuscripts may be submitted by e-mail to the Editor, Bruce Greyson, at cbg4d@virginia.edu, or by mailing a computer diskette or CD-ROM to the Editor at the address below. Please clearly designate the name of the file containing the manuscript and the hardware and software used. IBM-compatible files are preferred in WordPerfect, but other programs for IBM-compatible or Macintosh computers are acceptable. Manuscripts submitted as hard copy should be submitted typed on one side of the page only, double spaced throughout, with a margin of at least one inch on all four sides, and all pages should be numbered. There are no absolute limits on length of articles, but authors should strive for conciseness.

Send manuscripts and/or computer diskettes or CD-ROMs to: Bruce Greyson, M.D., Division of Perceptual Studies, University of Virginia Health System, P. O. Box 800152, Charlottesville, VA 22908-0152, USA.

TITLE PAGE should contain the names of the authors, as well as their academic degrees, institutional affiliations, titles, and telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address for the senior author. Include a name, postal address, and e-mail address for reprint requests.

ABSTRACTS: Abstracts of 100–200 words are required with all articles. Abstracts should include the major premises of the article, intent, hypotheses, research design, results, and conclusions. For research reports, include the purpose, hypotheses, method, major results, and conclusions. For review or discussion articles, identify the main themes and conclusions and reflect them in a balanced fashion; if sources are important (for example, previous research), include these. For other types of articles, including replies to other authors’ articles or case histories, refer briefly to the main themes and conclusions and cross-reference if necessary. Abstracts should be nonevaluative in tone, and should include as much information as possible within the constraints of space.

KEY WORDS: Articles should include two to five key words, listed after the abstract, which will be printed in the Journal and used by abstracting services for indexing the article. This is unnecessary for book reviews and letters to the editor.

FOOTNOTES AND ENDNOTES are strongly discouraged.

REFERENCES should be listed in alphabetical order (and chronologically for each author) at the end of the article, and referred to in the text by author(s) and year of publication. Only items cited in the text should be listed as references. Personal communications and Internet websites may be cited in the text, but should not be included in the list of references. Include all authors in references with multiple authors. Do not abbreviate journal titles. Capitalize principal words in journal titles, but only the first word in a book title or subtitle. Page numbers must be provided for direct quotations.

ILLUSTRATIONS should be self-explanatory and used sparingly. Tables and figures must be in camera-ready condition and include captions. Electronic artwork submitted on disk should be in TIFF, EPS, or PDF format (1200 dpi for line and 300 dpi for halftones and gray-scale art). Color art should be in the CMYK color space. Artwork should be on a separate disk from the text, and hard copy must accompany the disk.