Editor’s Foreword

Beyond most near-death experiencers’ (NDErs’) assertions that their NDEs were subjectively real or hyperreal, what evidence exists for their objective reality? Debate on this topic among scholars represents a theme that runs through this issue of the Journal.

In 2006, Penny Sartori, Ph.D., a Welsh nurse, published in this Journal a case study from her prospective NDE hospital research study in Wales. The case was notable because of seemingly veridical and healing aspects of the adult male patient’s NDE that seemed pertinent to the question of the objective reality of NDEs. This issue of the Journal opens with a critique of that case study by Michael J. Rush, M.A., P.G.Dip. He presents several questions, criticisms, and alternative explanations for various aspects of the case.

In the following two articles, Sartori responds to Rush, and Rush rejoins Sartori’s response. In her response, Sartori answers many of Rush’s questions with additional information heretofore absent from the refereed journal literature, and she responds to his criticisms and offers of alternative explanations. In his rejoinder, Rush accepts many of Sartori’s points but concludes, among other things, that scholars like he and Sartori will remain at an impasse because their respective perspectives lead them to draw different implications from the same data.

On a tangential note, one of Rush’s points in his original critique is that “exceptional claims require exceptional evidence.” For readers who have not already read eminent scholar Etzel Cardeña and colleagues’ recent opinion letter in Frontiers of Neuroscience on this topic, I highly recommend it: (http://www.frontiersin.org/journal/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00017/full).

Next in this issue is a review of Nancy Clark’s 2012 book Divine Moments: Ordinary People Having Spiritually Transformative Experiences, reviewed by Andrew Wood, M.S., a doctoral student in counselor education. Wood highlights, among other things, Clark’s treatment of the issue of how questioning the reality of near-death-like and other spiritually transformative experiences is related to unwarranted pathologizing of the experience and/or the experiencer. Wood applauds Clark for achieving her goal of making these types of experi...
ences better known and understood, thereby enabling experiencers to more readily recognize the nature of their experiences and feel safer to disclose them and process them psychospiritually with others who are well-informed about such experiences.

Next, in the first of two Letters to the Editor, Rudolf H. Smit comments on his and others’ written debates with anesthesiologist Gerald Woerlee regarding evidence from cases involving apparently non-physical veridical perception. In these cases, near-death experiencers perceive phenomena in the material world that, based on the conditions and positions of their physical bodies, they seemingly should not be able to perceive and yet that are subsequently confirmed as accurate. Smit’s conclusion echoes one of Rush’s: that people approaching the same NDE data from different perspectives are prone to reach different conclusions and, ultimately, to be locked in impasse.

I chose very purposely to end this issue with a Letter from Alinaghi Ghasemiannejad, an Iranian master’s student of psychology, and Jeffrey Long, M.D., and Jody Long, J.D., founders and administrators of the online Near-Death Experience Research Foundation. As if in response to an article from the previous issue of this Journal in which the topic of Muslim NDEs was shown to have received little research attention over the four decades since the advent of the field of near-death studies, the authors report preliminary results of a study of Shiite Muslims’ NDEs. They found that such cases are not rare, and they invite other researchers interested in cross-cultural research to contact them. They conclude their letter with the possibility that Ghasemiannejad’s forthcoming study comparing these Muslim NDEs with Western NDEs might contribute additional data to existing evidence indicating the universality of these experiences—and that acknowledgment of this universality might foster global peace. For this issue that contained extensive reference to NDErs seeking to have their experiences recognized as real and researchers’ responses so often ending in ideologically-based impasse, an expressed aspiration of global peace seemed a worthy note on which to end the issue.

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