

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES: FORTY YEARS OF RESEARCH

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2019

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THE FIELD OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES

- Field formally opened in 1975 with *Life After Life* by Raymond Moody, MD, PhD
- Descriptions of near-death experiences (NDEs) in
 - Ancient Egyptian, Tibetan, Greek, and Christian texts
 - More recent Western literature, including Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*
- By 2005, many books and >700 journal articles, incl:
 - 65 research studies
 - In US, Europe, Asia, and Australia
 - Involving more than 3,500 near-death experiencers (NDErs)
 - Studying both the experience and aftereffects.

PLEASURABLE WESTERN ADULT NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- NDEs occur most often during serious illness or injury
- NDEs include three aspects:
 - **Non-material:** peaceful, floating sensation
 - **Material:** perceive material world from position outside physical body
 - **Trans-material:** perceive and interact with environments and entities not of the material world
 - Tunnel, void, preternatural environments
 - Deceased loved ones and spiritual entities; Being of light
 - Life review

PLEASURABLE WESTERN ADULT NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- Faces analogy
- Incidence: 1/5 survivors of close brush with death

PLEASURABLE WESTERN ADULT NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Tricia

- At interview (2008), mid-30s, community college English teacher, fully physically functional
- Grew up in Evangelical church; “pretended” participation
- At NDE (1994; 14 years before interview)
 - College student in Austin, TX; ~ 21 years old
 - Unclear career purpose (copy editor?); self-centered
 - Up early to run 10K; sleepy; car accident
 - Broken back, leg bones, etc.
 - Surgery w/ cardiac arrest; 6 months in body cast

AFTEREFFECTS OF PLEASURABLE WESTERN ADULT NDES

- PSPS
- Psychological aftereffects include:
 - Loss of fear of death
 - Profound shifts in fundamental values
 - Increased self-worth and meaning and purpose in life
- Spiritual aftereffects include:
 - Deeper religious/spiritual faith
 - Paranormal and mystical experiences
- Physical aftereffects include:
 - Changed bodily functions
 - Malfunction of electrical devices in NDEr's vicinity
- Social aftereffects include:
 - Relationship stress from NDEr's psychospiritual shifts
 - Shift toward service-oriented careers

DISTRESSING WESTERN NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES: FINDING A WAY THROUGH THE ABYSS (Bush, 2017)

- Unlike predominant emotions of pleasurable NDEs, those of distressing NDEs (dNDEs) include terror, horror, despair.
- Four types (from most to least frequently reported):
 - Variation: Same as pNDE but experienced as unpleasant
 - Isolation
 - Torment
 - Condemnation (1 case)
- In 20 studies, dNDE incidence ranged from 0% to 50%.
- Research has revealed no clear differences between pNDErs and dNDErs; it appears anyone can have a dNDE.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES OF WESTERN CHILDREN AND TEENS

- Children and teens of all ages have reported NDEs.
- Children's and teens' NDEs are similar to adults' in:
 - Content
 - Aftereffects
- Children's NDE testimonies can be particularly poignant.
- Whereas many adult NDEers need focused assistance in integrating the NDE into subsequent life, even more children may need such assistance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WESTERN NDEERS

- NDEs have been reported by people of every demographic, with no consistent differences; equal opportunity transpersonal experience
- NDEers reflect the same mental health statuses as the population at large.
- It is unknown whether possibly greater levels of a few psychological features, such as absorption, preceded the NDEs or resulted from them.

NON-WESTERN NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES (Long, 2010)

- An analysis of NDEs reported at the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation website revealed contents and aftereffects of NDEs appear to be
 - Universal
 - With no consistent differences between NDEs of people from various cultures.
- Faces analogy (again)

WORLD RELIGIONS AND NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- NDE features can be found in the afterlife teachings of the scriptures of,
- And NDE aftereffects reflect the values of,
 - Hinduism
 - Buddhism
 - Zoroastrianism
 - Judaism
 - Christianity
 - Islam
 - Bahá'í

VERIDICAL PERCEPTION IN NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- In apparently non-physical veridical perception (AVP), NDErs perceive phenomena during their NDEs in material and/or trans-material domains that they could not have known from sensory or rational processes yet that are later corroborated as accurate.
 - Tricia seeing step-dad vend candy bar
- Six different controlled studies of AVP in hospitals yielded no cases of AVP.
- In *The Self Does Not Die*, over 100 cases of paranormal phenomena during NDEs corroborated by credible 3rd parties (Rivas, Dirven, & Smit, 2016)

EXPLANATORY MODELS OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- Scholars have proposed psychological, physiological, and transcendental theories to explain NDEs.
- Psychological and physiological models fail to account for all features of NDEs and their aftereffects.
- Mainstream scientists, who believe the brain somehow produces the mind, have not embraced transcendental models that include the contentions:
 - that mind sometimes functions, often exceptionally well, when brain is disabled, and
 - that mind is primary and that brain, like a cell phone, receives and transmits mind.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH ON NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- Practical applications have focused on
 - Clinical considerations
 - Education
- Clinically, NDErs have reported both helpful and harmful experiences disclosing their NDEs to others
 - In a study of 88 NDErs reporting on 188 experiences of disclosure (Holden, Kinsey, & Moore, 2014),
 - On average, positive side of neutral
 - In approximately 40% of disclosure experiences, NDEr felt harmed – with no difference between medical, mental, social, or spiritual healthcare providers
 - Disclosure experiences had not improved over 7 decades
 - Worst if NDEr reported relatively sooner and/or had relatively deeper NDE.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH ON NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- Clinicians have generated recommended approaches for healthcare providers to work most effectively with NDErs in the immediate and long-term NDE aftermaths.
- Clinicians probably less likely to harm if they hold certain knowledge and attitudes about NDEs
 - Studies have shown some educational programs effective in improving healthcare professionals' knowledge and attitudes
- Knowing about NDEs can be beneficial for non-NDErs in settings such as education and grief counseling.

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