

Positive Aftereffects of Near-Death Experiences

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A Death blow is a Life blow to Some
Who till the died, did not alive become—
Who had they lived, had died but when
The died, Vitality begun.

Emily Dickinson

Reasons Aftereffects Attracted Interest

- Changes positive and of great significance
- Such change could serve therapeutic ends
- They might aid in understanding death
- May serve to validate the NDE itself
- May be studied prospectively and verified by others

Definition of Near-Death Experience

- “NDE a transcendent or mystical experience occurring at the boundary of death” (*Greyson, 1999*)
- Transcendent: going beyond the limits of
- Mystical: having a spiritual meaning or reality
- Death: physical cessation of life
- NDE may occur with “deaths in life”

Review of Literature Thirty Years

- Studies of unbiased samples
- Adequate sample size and comparison groups
- Statistical methods to test hypotheses
- Near-Death Experiences Index to Periodical Literature (2006)
- Thesis project of Rozan Christian

Questions About Aftereffects

What are the aftereffects?

- Are they consistent, form a pattern?
- Are they related to the NDE or coming close to death?
- What factors influence their occurrence?
- What happens to them over time?
- What do they teach us about death?

Studies of Aftereffects

- Noyes (1980) initial study
- Ring (1984) developed measures of depth and life change
- Groth-Marnat and Summers (1998)
- Van Lommel, et al. (2001) prospective cardiac arrest study
- Schwaninger, et al. (2002) prospective cardiac arrest study

Percent Reporting Change

	2 Years		8 Years	
	yes	no	yes	no
	%		%	
Ability to love others	42	16	78	58
Sense of inner meaning	52	25	57	25
Concern spiritual matters	15	-8	42	-41
Fear of death	-47	-16	-63	-41

The Aftereffects

Altered Perception of Self

- Loss of fear of death
- Strengthened belief in life after death
- Feeling specially favored by God
- New sense of purpose, mission
- Heightened self-esteem
- Altered perception of the body

The Aftereffects

Altered Relationship to Others

- Increased concern for others
- Lessened concern for material gain
- Greater empathy and compassion
- More tolerant, less judgmental
- Greater desire to serve others
- Increased ability to express feelings

The Aftereffects

Altered Attitude Towards Life

- Greater appreciation of, zest for, life
- Increased focus on the present
- Deeper religious faith
- Search for knowledge
- Greater appreciation for nature

Psychological and Physical Healing

The Aftereffects

Paranormal Phenomena

- Out-of-body experiences
- Apparitions
- Extrasensory perception
- Precognition
- Healing
- Spiritual, mystical, or transcendent experiences

Percent Reporting Experiences

	Before	After
	%	%
Extrasensory perception	25	55
Out-of-body experience	12	44
Encounter apparitions	13	45
Mystical experiences	23	59

The Aftereffects

Alterations in Perception, Consciousness

- Heightened sensations
- Physiological alterations
- Unusual movements, sensations
- Unusual special sensory experiences
- Mental changes
- Increased energy, decreased need for sleep

The Aftereffects

Kundalini Phenomena

	%
• Intense positive emotions	76
• Changes in speed of thought	61
• Watching oneself from distance	55
• Intense negative emotions	52
• Internal voices	46
• Internal sounds	42
• Changes in breathing	39
• Ascending sensations	37
• Spontaneous orgasmic sensations	37
• Becoming locked into position	20
• Assuming strange positions	17
• Unexplained hot, cold sensations	10

Factors that Influence Aftereffects

Pre-existing Factors

- Personality traits
- Religious beliefs
- Cultural variables

Near-Death Event Variables

- Circumstances of NDE
- Closeness to death

Post NDE Variables

- Depth of NDE
- Person's response to NDE
- Social support
- Coping style of NDEr

Factors that Influence Aftereffects: Near-Death Event Variables

Depth of NDE strongly related

Coming close to death produces change

- Literature on post-traumatic growth
- Meaning found in adverse events

Suicide attempts produce typical NDEs

- NDEs reduce suicidality
- Suicide a search for transcendence?

Factors that Influence Aftereffects: Pre-Existing Factors

- Demographic factors not important
- No evidence of psychopathology
- Developmental factors: child abuse
- Personality predisposition: dissociation
- Religious and cultural factors

Factors that Influence Aftereffects: Post NDE Variables

- NDErs reaction to his or her experience
- Reaction of professionals, family, etc.
- Capacity for change
- Supportive environment

Early Aftereffects and their Progression

Early reactions

- Immediately afterwards ‘dazed and perplexed’
- Lingering contact with alternate reality
 - alterations in time and space
 - detachment from world, body
 - heightened sensation, sensibility
- Initial reactions and disclosure

Early Aftereffects and their Progression

Development and progression

- Integration trajectories (*Sutherland, 1992*)
 - blocked
 - arrested
 - steady
 - accelerated
- Stages in integration process (*Hoffman, 1995*)
 - shock/surprise
 - need for validation
 - interpersonal implications
 - active exploration
 - integration

Early Aftereffects and their Progression

Difficulties that may arise

- Some NDErs face beginning a new life
- Aftereffects may be misunderstood
- Changes may strain relationships
- May force reassessment of relationships, career
- Problems adjusting may offset increases in life satisfaction

Clinical Intervention

Immediately after event professionals should

- Be alert for NDE
- Be aware and accepting of NDE
- Avoid labeling as pathological or dismissing
- Be supportive and provide information
- Make other resources available
 - literature on NDEs
 - support groups for NDErs
 - organizations devoted to NDEs

Clinical Intervention

Problems for intervention (*Greyson and Harris, 1987*)

- Intrapyschic problems
 - distress and difficulty accepting return
 - conflict of NDE with prior beliefs
 - excessive identification as NDEr
 - fear NDE reflects mental instability
- Interpersonal problems
 - a sense of exclusiveness
 - fear of ridicule or rejection
 - conflict with family over changes
 - difficulty conveying meaning of NDE
 - difficulty changing life roles
 - difficulty accepting imperfection

Clinical Intervention

Working with NDErs therapists should

- Regard problems from NDE as life crises
- Be aware of NDE, strong aftereffects
- Avoid idealizing the experience
- Avoid viewing NDEr as victim
- Help NDEr appreciate active role
- Help NDEr distinguish NDE from aftereffects

(Greyson and Harris, 1987)

Clinical Intervention

Specific interventions *(Greyson and Harris, 1987)*

- Explore NDE features for problem
- Encourage grief work for parts of self lost
- Induce altered consciousness
- Marital or family therapy when needed
- Psychosocial rehabilitation
- Counseling regarding new directions

Clinical Intervention

Therapy for the dying

- Aftereffects of potential value to dying
- Dying persons may have NDEs
- Presently no acceptable method of induction
- Persons with fatal illness may benefit from learning about aftereffects

Meaning of Life Changes

Pattern of positive life change reflects rebirth

- NDE a death-rebirth experience
- Old self dies, a new person is born
- This is not death in the physical sense

Rebirth is manifested in aftereffects

- NDErs refer to themselves as reborn
- They have received precious gift of life
- Have a unique mission
- And a personal relationship with God

Meaning of Life Changes

Loss of death fear yields greater vitality

- Vitality and stasis are qualities of existence
- NDE yields greater vitality
- Characteristics of vitality or “aliveness”
 - sense of invulnerability
 - sense of special importance
 - special favor of God
 - belief in continued existence
- John 6:47 Heaven is now.

Meaning of Life Changes

Loss of fear of death a consistent feature

- Fear of death an ultimate concern
- This fear robs one of life
- This fear is lost through
 - the experience of survival
 - rescue by divine agency
 - receipt of special favor

NDE has two important consequences

- An existential crisis
- A spiritual encounter

Limitations and Future Directions

Some limitations of existing research

- NDE difficult to study
- Small, biased samples
- Retrospective report of change
- Interpretation of differences
 - NDErs vs. non-NDErs

Limitations and Future Directions

Needed are studies

- Defining and measuring NDE
- Examining various dimensions of aftereffects
- Using nonspecific measures
- Comparing groups cross sectionally
- Longitudinal study of trajectories
- Providing corroboration by informants
- Involving community surveys
- Integrating negative and positive effects

CONCLUSION