Positive Aftereffects of Near-Death Experiences

Russell Noyes, Jr. Peter Fenwick Rosan Christian

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

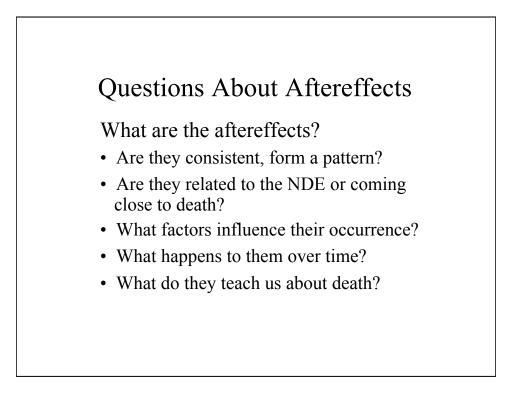
- Changes positive and of great significance
- Such change could serve therapeutic ends
- They might aid in understanding death
- May serve to validate the NDE itself
- May be studied prospectively and verified by others

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



Studies of Aftereffects

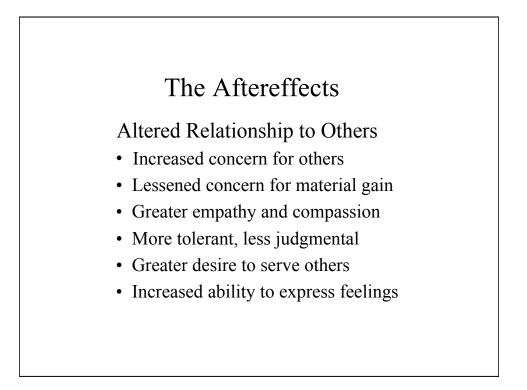
- Noyes (1980) initial study
- Ring (1984) developed measures of depth and life change
- Groth-Marnat and Summers (1998)
- Van Lommel, et al. (2001) prospective cardiac arrest study
- Schwaninger, et al. (2002) prospective cardiac arrest study

Percent Rep	orti	ng C	nange	
	2 Y	ears	8 Ye	ears
	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 -4	.7	-16	-63 -4	1

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

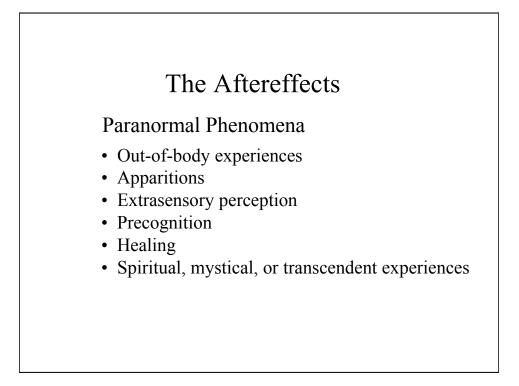


The Aftereffects

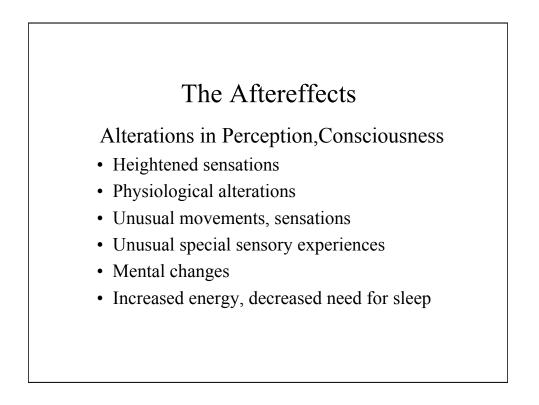
Altered Attitude Towards Life

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

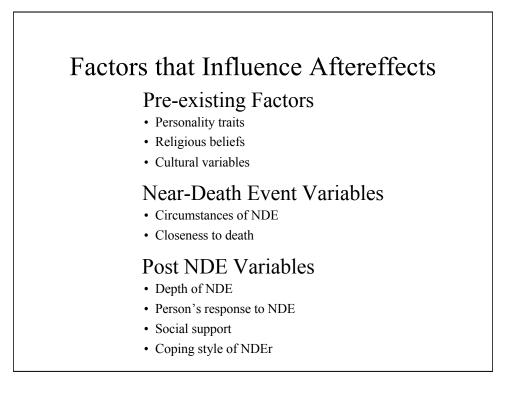
Psychological and Physical Healing



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



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: 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

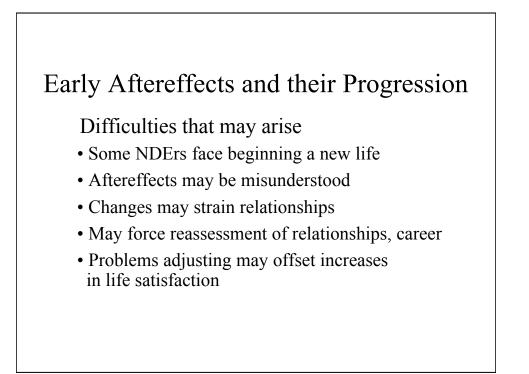
Early reactions

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

Early Aftereffects and their Progression

Development and progression

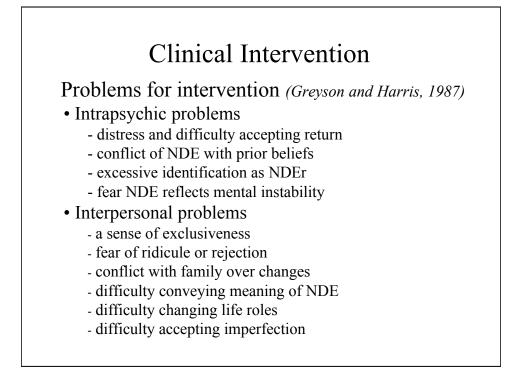
- Integration trajectories (Sutherland, 1992)
 - blocked
 - arrested
 - steady
 - accelerated
- Stages in integration process (Hoffman, 1995)
 - shock/surprise
 - need for validation
 - interpersonal implications
 - active exploration
 - integration



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

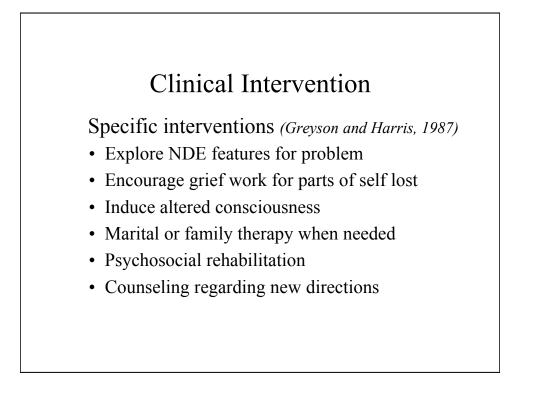


Clinical Intervention

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

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.



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

