THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE (NDE):
AFTEREFFECTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

by

David Jon Longo

A Master's Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

May 1997
THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE (NDE):
AFTEREFFECTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

by

David Jon Longo

has been approved

April 1997

APPROVED:

[Signatures]

ACCEPTED:

[Signature]

Associate Dean for Graduate Studies
ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to describe the process that people go through after having a near-death experience (NDE) so that counselors can work more effectively with their clients who have had such an experience. Research literature was reviewed concerning the aftereffects of a NDE. A questionnaire was used to describe the process that people go through after having a NDE and to assess whether or not there was a relationship between the type of NDE and the process that people go through after having a NDE.

This questionnaire was administered to 33 people who had experienced a NDE. The findings indicated that people who experienced a NDE go through a process and this process can be defined by specific stages. However, this process was different for each person and there appeared to be no relationship between the type of NDE and the process that people go through after a NDE.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Chapter**

1. **THE PROBLEM**.................................................................1

   Introduction..........................................................................1

   Development of the Problem...........................................1

   Need for the Study..........................................................4

   Purpose of the Study........................................................5

   Research Question..........................................................5

   Definition of Terms..........................................................5

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW**..................................................8

   Introduction..........................................................................8

   Near-Death Experience (NDE)...........................................8

      Definition of a NDE.........................................................8

      Elements of a NDE........................................................9

      Study of a NDE............................................................10

      Prevalence of a NDE........................................................18

   Types of NDEs.....................................................................18

      Initial or Non-Experience.................................................18

      Pleasant or Heaven-like Experience..............................19

      Unpleasant or Hell-like Experience.................................20

      Transcendent or Revealing Experience............................21
3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction.
Research Design.
Instrumentation.
Population and Sample.
Assumptions and Limitations.
Procedure.
Method of Analysis.

4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA.

Findings.

Part I.
Part II.
Part III ...................................................................................................................................... 35
Part IV ...................................................................................................................................... 36

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .............................................. 46

Summary .................................................................................................................................. 46
Conclusions ............................................................................................................................... 46
Recommendations ....................................................................................................................... 48

REFERENCE LIST ..................................................................................................................... 51

APPENDIX A PARTICIPANT NOTICE, LETTER, AND QUESTIONNAIRE ....... 53
CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

A near-death experience (NDE) is the phenomenon during which people suffer an apparent death and are then restored to life. With the advent of such modern medical techniques as cardiopulmonary resuscitation measures, NDEs have become more widespread recently than in the past (Lewis, 1995).

This study attempted to describe the process that people go through after having a NDE. The logical rationale for this study was to determine what the process is so that counselors are not frustrated if they are not as helpful as they would like to be, clients are not frustrated if they are not as clear as they would like to be, and both are in a position to work together more effectively.

The results expected were that people who have experienced a NDE go through a positive or a negative process and this process may be defined by specific stages. Further, there may be a relationship between the initial or non-experience, the pleasant or heaven-like experience, the unpleasant or hell-like experience, and the transcendent or revealing experience (Atwater, 1994) and the process that people go through after having a NDE.

Development of the Problem

The study of NDEs started with the work of Kubler-Ross in the mid-sixties. While
working with terminally ill patients, she began to study life after death and in particular, reports of some patients having out-of-body experiences (Kubler-Ross, 1974). She continued her work with near-death survivors who gave detailed accounts of leaving their body, going through a light, and visiting other realms (Kubler-Ross, 1975).

In the early seventies, Moody (1975) studied one hundred and fifty case histories and anecdotal reports and outlined the different elements that were reported to occur during a NDE. Two years later, Moody (1977) outlined unusual elements that were reported to occur during a NDE of extreme duration. Over the next ten years, Moody (1988) compiled more than a thousand new case histories of people who had NDEs. He focused on what happened to them after they died, how their lives had changed, and how powerful the aftereffects of a NDE had been.

In the late seventies, Ring (1980) was the first to conduct a scientific study of NDEs using scientific methods and statistical analyses. He interviewed about one hundred near-death survivors and was able to verify the work of Moody. In the early eighties, Ring (1984) interviewed forty-two people, had one hundred and seventy-four people complete questionnaires, and selected sixty-two letters from near-death survivors that were detailed enough to be coded for a study on such personal transformations as changed values and attitudes toward life after having a NDE.

During the same time period, Grey (1985) interviewed forty-one people and was able to validate Ring's work on the various types of transformational experiences. In the summer of 1984, Ring visited Grey in England and brought an advance copy of his book for her to review. She, in turn, asked him to read a copy of the manuscript that she was
preparing for publication. They were both amazed to learn that not only were their NDE findings similar but that their conclusions were identical (Ring, 1992).

Around the same time, Greyson (1985) differentiated distinct types of NDEs on the basis of a cluster analysis of eighty-nine near-death survivors. Greyson and Evans-Bush (1992) surveyed fifty reports of distressing NDEs that were collected over a nine-year period and identified different types of distressing experiences.

A few years later, Atwater (1988) interviewed over two hundred near-death survivors and over a thousand of their relatives and friends and was able to isolate a pattern to the major aftereffects of having a NDE. She was the first to say that having a NDE alters the brain's structure and also one of the first to say that having a NDE significantly changes the electromagnetic fields that surround a person.

She believed that what happens after a NDE is even more important than the actual NDE itself (Atwater, 1988). She defined four types of NDEs, described the physiological and psychological aftereffects of a NDE, defined common positive and negative reactions to a NDE, defined common positive and negative adjustments after a NDE, and offered some suggestions for counseling those who have had a NDE (Atwater, 1994).

Of all of the near-death survivors whom Atwater interviewed, only one person said that she thought that she went through specific stages. First, she experienced a frustrating stage. Then, she experienced an interesting or a learning stage. Next, she experienced an adventurous or an experimental stage. Finally, she experienced an exciting stage. This process took place over a thirty-year period (Atwater, 1988).
Thus, the nature of the problem investigated in this study was that of focusing on the process that people go through after having a NDE and that of determining if the experience was positive or negative and if possible, that of describing the process in specific stages. It may be possible that there are others who have experienced similar stages to those experienced by the one person described above who was interviewed by Atwater; it may be that each person's experience is unique; or it may be that there are different stages that people go through after having a NDE.

Need for the Study

Although there appears to be a pattern to the NDE and a pattern to the major aftereffects of NDEs, some of the NDEs and the aftereffects tend to be more positive while others tend to be more negative. While it is important to understand the common reactions and the common adjustments that have to be made, it is also necessary to understand the process that people go through after having a NDE. If this process could be described, then counselors would be in a position to work more effectively with clients who have experienced a NDE and who seek help for issues related to their experience. Although it is still unclear how often or to what extent counselors work with near-death survivors, it is clear that NDEs are becoming more prevalent (Gallup, 1982). Thus, it is likely that counselors will find themselves working with increasing numbers of near-death survivors in the future.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to describe the process that people go through after having a NDE so that counselors can work more effectively with their clients who have had such an experience. While most counselors are not trained to deal with the physiological aftereffects of a NDE, they are in a position to refer their clients to other professionals and to focus on the psychological aftereffects for which they are trained.

Research Question

The research question to be answered in this study was "What is the process that people go through after having a NDE?"

Definition of Terms

A buzzing or ringing noise - occurs "while having a sense of being dead. At this initial stage of the NDE, the dying are confused and try, unsuccessfully, to communicate with other people at the scene" (Lewis, 1995, p. 258).

Peace and painlessness - is the next stage of the NDE. "While people are dying, they may be in intense pain, but as soon as they leave their body the pain vanishes and they experience peace" (Lewis, 1995, p. 258).

Out-of-body experience - is the next stage of the NDE. "The dying often have the sensation of rising up and floating above their own body while surrounded by a medical team and watching it down below, feeling very detached and comfortable. They
experience the feeling of being in a spiritual body that looks like a sort of living energy field" (Lewis, 1995, p. 258).

The tunnel experience - is the next experience of the NDE or "that of being drawn into darkness through a tunnel, at an extremely high speed, or going up a stairway (or some other symbol of crossing a threshold) until reaching a realm of radiant golden-white light" (Lewis, 1995, p. 258).

Rapidly rising into the heavens - is an alternate to the tunnel experience. "Instead of a tunnel, some people report rising suddenly into the heavens and seeing the earth and the celestial sphere as they would be seen by astronauts in space" (Lewis, 1995, p. 258).

People of light - is the next experience of the NDE. "Once they are on the other side of the tunnel, or after they have risen into the heavens, the dying meet people who glow with an inner light. Often they find that friends and relatives who have already died are there to greet them" (Lewis, 1995, pp. 258-259).

The being of light - is the next stage of the NDE. "After meeting the people of light, the dying often meet a powerful spiritual being whom some have called an angel, God, or Jesus. Also, although they sometimes report feeling scared, they do not sense that they were on the way to hell or that they fell into it" (Lewis, 1995, p. 259).

The life review - is the next stage of the NDE. "The being of light presents the dying with a panoramic review of everything they have done. In particular, they relive every act they have ever done to other people and come away feeling that love is the most important thing in life" (Lewis, 1995, p. 259).

Reluctance to return - is the final experience of the NDE. "The being of light
sometimes tells the dying that they must return to life. Other times, they are given a choice of staying or returning. In either case, they are reluctant to return. The people who choose to return do so only because of loved ones they do not wish to leave behind" (Lewis, 1995, p. 259).
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The topics in this chapter and their sequence include the definition and the elements of a NDE, the study and the prevalence of a NDE, the four types of NDEs, the physiological and psychological aftereffects of a NDE, the common reactions and common adjustments after having a NDE, counseling approaches for working with those who have had a NDE, and a summary of the NDE process with counseling implications for working with those who have had a NDE.

Near-Death Experience

Definition of a NDE

A near-death experience (NDE) is the phenomenon that occurs during a life-threatening crisis. Ring (1992) reported that those who experience a NDE separate from their body and are "swept up into a light-filled realm" (p. 94), having an initial experience of peace and security. He pointed out that their perception of reality is hyper-real as they encounter beings of light, spirits of deceased relatives, or spirits of deceased friends. He added that the nature of the encounter is one of "compassionate self-examination (with) insights of profound spiritual import" (p. 94), that their sense of the encounter is one of
feeling totally affirmed, and that their motivation regarding this encounter is to remain in
this other realm and not return to their body.

Ring (1992) noted that the determination to return to their body may be a
"personal choice, (an) externally imposed injunction, or not indicated" (p. 94) but once
they do return, they may experience such emotions as "disappointment, regret, sorrow,
resentment, but also exhilaration" (p. 94). He found that their memory of the encounter is
usually intact and that although their immediate aftermath is filled with variable and strong
emotions, they do not experience post-traumatic stress symptoms. Finally, he added that
most people have only one NDE in their lifetime and this experience usually occurs during
adulthood.

Elements of a NDE

There are many elements of a NDE. Kubler-Ross (1974) reported accounts by
patients of having out-of-body experiences. She continued her work with near-death
survivors who gave detailed accounts of leaving their body, going through a light, and
visiting other realms (Kubler-Ross, 1975).

Moody (1975) outlined a repetitious pattern of fifteen elements of a NDE. These
include having feelings of ineffability, hearing the news of their death, having feelings of
peace and quiet, hearing a buzzing or ringing noise, entering a dark tunnel, having an out-
of-body experience, meeting other spirits, meeting a being of light, having a life review,
approaching a border or limit, coming back, telling others, having aftereffects, having new
views of death, and having their experiences corroborated by others.
Moody (1977) encountered additional elements that were reported to occur during a NDE but were not as common as the original fifteen. These include having a vision of knowledge or a moment of enlightenment, seeing cities of light, seeing a realm of bewildered spirits, and experiencing supernatural rescues from the brink of death. With the exception of supernatural rescues, each of these occurred with those who have had NDEs of excessive length, that is, NDEs that lasted from ten to twenty minutes.

Ring (1980) verified Moody's earlier findings of a repetitious pattern of most of the elements of a NDE but outlined a core experience of five aspects that are more common and their order in frequency. These include having feelings of peace and a sense of well-being, separating from the body, entering the darkness, seeing the light, and entering the light. Grey (1985) verified Ring's findings of a core experience of these five aspects.

Finally, Atwater (1988) outlined a pattern of eight basic elements. These include having a sensation of floating out of their body, passing through a dark tunnel or black hole or some kind or darkness, ascending toward and entering into a light at the end of the darkness, being greeted by friendly voices or people or beings, seeing a panoramic view of the life they have just lived, being reluctant to return to earth, having a different sense of time and space, and being disappointed that they have been revived.

Study of a NDE

Kubler-Ross is a world-renowned leader and authority on the subject of death and dying. She started working with terminally ill patients in 1965 and through her interviews, was able to define five distinct stages of death. These include denial and isolation or being
unable to face the idea of death; anger or rage at, envy for, and resentment toward other people and at God for the end coming so soon, bargaining or finding some sort of way of postponing the inevitable, depression or having a great sense of loss of so many meaningful people and places, and acceptance or having a quiet expectation of the inevitable and a deep feeling of peace (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

As she continued her work, Kubler-Ross (1974) began to investigate life after death, paying particular attention to accounts by patients who reported having out-of-body experiences. Kubler-Ross (1975) was the first to publicly acknowledge the existence of near-death phenomena. She referred to the experiences that people, who had been considered dead and had later been revived, reported. These near-death survivors gave detailed accounts of leaving their body, going through a light, and sometimes visiting other realms. Afterwards, some even hoped that they would hurry up and die so that they could return and stay in the other realm that they had previously visited.

Recently, Kubler-Ross (1991) and her colleagues conducted research on NDEs. They studied twenty thousand cases of people from all over the world who had been declared clinically dead and who later returned to life. They discovered that the dying experience was the same for everyone, regardless of their religion and regardless of whether they were a believer in a Higher Power or not.

In the early seventies, Moody (1975) was asked if there were any historical examples of near-death phenomena and he answered that as far as he knew, there weren't any but added that he would not at all be surprised to find that such reports have been recounted in the past. Two years later, Moody (1977) reported that there were many
accounts of NDEs available in writings from earlier times. Although it has only recently become obvious that the literature of the Middle Ages is filled with accounts of near-death experiences (Zaleski, 1987), Moody (1975) was the first to use the term "near-death" to describe this phenomenon.

Moody (1975) studied approximately one hundred and fifty cases of those who were resuscitated after being pronounced clinically dead, those who came very close to death, and those who told their experiences to other people who were present and then reported them to Moody. Although the experiences of those in the third group complement the experiences of those in the first two groups, they were dropped from the study. This brought the number of the cases in the study to approximately fifty and enabled him to study only firsthand reports using case histories and anecdotal reports.

Moody (1975) outlined a repetitious pattern of several elements of a NDE. These include such experiences as having feelings of ineffability, seeing the resuscitation team working and hearing the news of their death, having feelings of peace and quiet, hearing a buzzing or a ringing noise, entering a dark tunnel, having an out-of-body experience, encountering other spirits, encountering a being of light that helped with evaluating their lives, having a life review, approaching a border or barrier, coming back, telling others, having aftereffects, having new views of death, and having their experience corroborated by others.

During the next two years, Moody (1977) encountered additional elements that were not as common as the original elements of a NDE. These include having a vision of knowledge or a moment of enlightenment, seeing cities of light, seeing a realm of
bewildered spirits, and being rescued from the brink of death by the voice or the light of a spiritual agent or being. With the exception of supernatural rescues, each of these occurred with those who have had NDEs of excessive length. He also discovered that there are many people who remember nothing in connection with a NDE but he doesn't speculate on how many non-recallers or non-experiencers there may be. His work stimulated scientific studies of NDEs by other researchers interested in near-death phenomenon.

In the next ten years, Moody (1988) compiled more than a thousand new case histories of people who had NDEs. He focused on what happened to them after they died, how their lives had changed, and how powerful the aftereffects of a NDE had been. He discovered that they no longer fear death; they sense the importance of love; they sense a connection with all things; they develop a respect for knowledge and an appreciation for learning; they develop a feeling of control and assume more responsibility for what happens in their lives; they have a sense of urgency with the shortness and fragility of their lives; they have spiritual curiosity and develop more of their spiritual side; and they reenter and readjust to the real world.

Ring (1980) examined the findings of Moody and focused on the repetitious pattern of NDEs using scientific methods and statistical analyses rather than case histories and anecdotal reports. Although he verified Moody's findings of a repetitious pattern and confirmed most of his elements of a NDE, he further described the five stages of the core experience of the elements that are more common and their order in frequency. These stages include experiencing the affective component of having feelings of peace and a
sense of well-being, separating from the body by leaving the body behind, entering the
darkness, seeing the light, and entering the light.

Ring (1980) found that elements of the core experience were found in illness
victims, accident victims, and suicide-attempt victims but that the incidence and the depth
of the experience as well as an analysis of the core experience by stages tended to be
greatest for illness victims, moderate for accident victims, and weakest for suicide-attempt
victims. Further, he found that the likelihood or the depth of a core experience does not
seem to be significantly related to such demographic measures as religious affiliation,
religiousness, or prior knowledge of near-death phenomenon.

For years, Ring (1984) focused on personal transformations and in particular,
changed values and attitudes toward life after having a NDE. People seem to show
greater appreciation for life and more concern and love for others while their interest in
personal status and material possessions lessens. They also appear to have a heightened
sense of spiritual purpose and seek a deeper understanding of life's meaning. These self-
reports tend to be corroborated by others who observe the behaviors of near-death
survivors.

During the same time period, a near-death survivor conducted her own research on
near-death phenomenon independent of other findings and independent of other
researchers. Grey (1985), a British psychologist, based her master's research project on
near-death phenomenon. During her eighteen-month study, she interviewed forty-one
people and found that thirty-eight of the forty-one had Ring's core experience and five of
the forty-one had a terrifying experience. She found evidence that this type of NDE is
more likely to be reported immediately after the experience.

Although Ring did not find any terrifying experiences, Grey's (1985) work in England validated Ring's (1984) work in the United States on the types of transformational experiences. These experiences include physical sensitivities, physiological and neurological functioning, psychoenergetic functioning, emotional functioning, expanded mental awareness, and paranormal functioning.

Ring (1992) defines these transformational experiences as physical sensitivities to light, sound, humidity, and alcohol; such physiological and neurological functioning as body temperature, blood pressure, and the nervous system; such psychoenergetic functioning as energy level, sleep patterns, and unusual energetic sensations in the body; such emotional functioning as mood fluctuation and emotionality; such expanded mental awareness as increased information-processing capacity, a sense of mind expansion, and an awareness of alternative realities; and such paranormal functioning as telepathy, precognition, and psychokinesis.

Greyson (1985) differentiated three distinct types of NDEs on the basis of a cluster analysis of eighty-nine near-death survivors. These types include a transcendental experience of encounters with an unearthly realm, an affective experience of feelings of peace and joy, and a cognitive experience of thought acceleration and sudden understanding. Further, although the type of NDE was not significantly correlated with the specific cause of the NDE, he found that when NDEs were sudden and unanticipated, they were rarely associated with cognitive experiences but were frequently associated with transcendental and affective experiences.
Greyson and Evans-Bush (1992) surveyed fifty reports of distressing NDEs. Most were experiences similar to the usual NDEs that were interpreted as frightening, some were experiences of a void, and a few were experiences of typical hellish images.

Atwater (1988) is another near-death survivor who conducted research on near-death phenomena. She interviewed over two hundred near-death survivors and over a thousand of their relatives and friends. She herself had experienced three NDEs in 1977 and although she had no intentions of conducting any research, she found that she needed to study near-death phenomena just to be able to survive. It took her five years to isolate a pattern to the aftereffects of a NDE.

The pattern of major aftereffects includes the inability to personalize such emotions or feelings as love and a sense of belonging; the inability to recognize and comprehend boundaries, rules, or limits; a sense of timelessness or difficulty understanding time sense or references to what has occurred in the past or what may occur in the future; such expanded or enhanced sensitivities as becoming more intuitive, psychic, knowing, spatial, or non-linear in perceptions; a shifted or changed view of physical reality such as becoming more detached, objective, seeing through events and problems with a noticeable reduction in worries and fears; a different feeling of a physical self or a certain detachment from the body and any identification with it as the self and knowing instead that we live in or wear our bodies; and difficulty with communications and relationships, finding it hard to say what is meant or to understand the way language is used by others (Atwater, 1988).

Atwater (1988) was the first to say that a NDE actually changes the brain's physiology and alters its structure. She was also one of the first to say that a NDE
significantly changes the electromagnetic fields that surround the average person. She came to believe that what happens after a NDE is even more important than the actual NDE itself. After years of research and thousands of sessions with near-death survivors, she is convinced that it is not the NDE that is so important but the aftereffects and how individuals respond to them that determine true value and meaning, not the other way around.

Atwater (1994) continued her work for the next six years. She defined four types of near-death experiences. These include the initial or non-experience, the pleasant or heaven-like experience, the unpleasant or hell-like experience, and the transcendent or revealing experience. She described the different physiological and psychological aftereffects that people experience after having a NDE. She defined the most common positive and negative reactions that people experience after having a NDE. She defined the most common positive and negative adjustments that people experience after having a NDE. Finally, she described some approaches to counseling that might be useful when working with those who have experienced a NDE.

Although she has been able to isolate a pattern to the aftereffects, it appears that it is still not clear whether there is a specific process that people go through after having a NDE. However, Atwater (1988) did interview one person who said that at first, life was frustrating, then life became interesting, then life became adventurous, and finally, life became exciting. Thus, one person did suggest a specific process of a frustrating phase, an interesting or learning phase, an adventurous or experimental phase, and an exciting phase over a thirty-year period.
A nonprofit organization grew out of the work of Kubler-Ross and Moody in the 1970's and the work of Ring in the 1980's. The International Association for Near-Death Studies was founded in 1981. This association promotes the study of NDEs through conferences, grants, and networking, publishes the Journal of Near-Death Studies, and issues a quarterly newsletter, Vital Signs (Lewis, 1995).

Prevalence of a NDE

In a national Gallup Poll survey of fifteen hundred adults conducted by George Gallup Jr's. organization from early 1980 until September 1981, Gallup (1982) indicated that fifteen percent of Americans eighteen years of age and older believe that they have experienced the near-death phenomenon, that is, that they have either been close to death, nearly died, or have been pronounced dead. He believed that this figure was a conservative number and that many more people may have actually experienced the near-death phenomenon at that time.

Types of NDEs

There are four types of near-death experiences. These include the initial or non-experience, the pleasant or heaven-like experience, the unpleasant or hell-like experience, and the transcendent or revealing experience.

Initial or Non-Experience

The initial experience, sometimes referred to as the non-experience, involves such
elements as loving nothingness or the living dark or a friendly voice. Those who seem to need the least amount of evidence for proof of survival or who need the least amount of turmoil in their lives at that point in time seem to have this type of experience. This may be a beginning experience or a way of introducing people to other ways of perceiving reality. These people have very brief experiences or ones that consist of only one or two elements. However, what may seem like inconsequential events can have as powerful an impact on individuals as NDEs that consist of several elements. These are usually uncomplicated or simple out-of-body episodes. Lengthy or complicated NDEs seem unnecessary for these individuals as a little exposure to otherworldly realities appears to be enough for this stage of their development (Atwater, 1994).

Moody (1977) encountered unusual elements that were reported to occur during a NDE that were not as common as the original fifteen elements. One of these was that of being supernaturally rescued from the brink of death by a voice or the light of a spiritual agent or being. Afterwards, their lives changed, their religious beliefs were strengthened, and they came to believe they were saved from death for a purpose.

**Pleasant or Heaven-like Experience**

The pleasant or heaven-like experience involves such reassuring and self-validating scenarios as loving family reunions with those who have previously died, reassuring religious figures or light beings, validation that life counts, and affirmative and inspiring dialogue. Those who need to be reassured that they are loved, that life is important, and that every effort serves a purpose in the overall scheme of things seem to have this type of
experience (Atwater, 1994).

Moody (1975) reported that he had not found any cases in which a heaven was described. However, he later encountered unusual elements that were reported to occur during a NDE that were not as common as the original fifteen elements. One of these was that of seeing glimpses of other realms of being or cities of light which were referred to as being heavenly (Moody, 1977).

Unpleasant or Hell-like Experience

The unpleasant or hell-like experience involves such inner-cleansing and self-confronting encounters as a threatening void, a stark limbo, a hellish purgatory, scenes of a startling and unexpected indifference, or hauntlings from one's past. Those who have deeply suppressed or repressed guilts, fears, and angers and those who expect some kind of punishment or discomfort after death seem to have this type of experience (Atwater, 1994).

Moody (1977) reported that he had not found any cases in which a hell was described but added that he had never interviewed anyone who was guilty of anything more than a minor transgression. He thought that people who weren't guilty of anything more than a minor transgression would probably be less likely to have an unpleasant experience but he did not preclude the possibility of anyone having a hell-like experience. However, he did encounter unusual elements that were reported to occur during a NDE that were not as common as his original fifteen elements. One of these was that of seeing glimpses of confused beings who seemed trapped in an unfortunate state of existence.
On the other hand, even though Grey (1985) validated Ring's work on the types of transformational experiences after having a NDE, Grey found five people who had such terrifying experiences as panic, fear, isolation, desperation, and a hell-like imagery whereas Ring (1984) did not find any negative experiences. Grey (1985) also found evidence that this type of NDE was more likely to be reported if their interviews occurred immediately after their experience.

Greyson and Evans-Bush (1992) surveyed fifty reports of distressing NDEs that were collected over a nine-year period. They identified three types of distressing experiences. Most were experiences similar to the usual NDE that were interpreted as frightening, some were experiences of a void, and a few were experiences of typical hellish images.

Transcendent or Revealing Experience

The transcendent or revealing experience involves such exposure to supernatural dimensions and scenarios beyond one's frame of reference as revelations of greater truths that are not personal in nature. Those who are ready for a "mind-stretching" challenge and those who are more apt to utilize the truths that are revealed seem to have this type of experience (Atwater, 1994).

Moody (1977) encountered unusual elements that were reported to occur during a NDE that were not as common as his original fifteen elements. One of these was that of encountering glimpses of an entire realm of existence where there was a moment of enlightenment in which they seemed to have complete knowledge. Although this feeling of
complete knowledge did not persist after they returned, their experience encouraged them to learn what they could in this lifetime. Ring (1984) refers to a general family of transcendental experiences and aftereffects, one of which is a feeling of transcendental love and compassion for all things.

Greyson (1985) differentiated NDEs into distinct types on the basis of an analysis of eighty-nine near-death survivors. These include a transcendental experience of encounters with an unearthly realm, an affective experience of feelings of peace and joy, and a cognitive experience of thought acceleration and sudden understanding.

**Aftereffects of NDEs**

Regardless of the type of NDE that people have had, there are many physiological and psychological aftereffects that most people experience after they have had a NDE.

**Physiological Aftereffects**

The typical physiological aftereffects that people experience after they have had a NDE include looking and acting younger and being more playful, having brighter skin and eyes that sparkle, having a substantial change in energy levels, becoming more sensitive to light and sunlight, becoming more sensitive to sound and noise levels, being more open and accepting toward what is new and different, regarding things as new even when they are not and having boredom levels decrease or disappear, handling stress more easily and healing more quickly, and exhibiting changes in brain functioning. Although there are other physiological aftereffects, they are experienced less frequently (Atwater, 1994).
Psychological Aftereffects

The typical psychological aftereffects that people experience after they have had a NDE include having an inability to personalize love and a sense of belonging; having an inability to recognize and comprehend boundaries, rules, or limits; having difficulty understanding time sense or references to either the past or the future; having sensitivities that expand and enhance with the intuitive opening up to the psychic; having a shifted or changed view of physical reality with a noticeable reduction in the time they spend worrying and being fearful; having a different feeling of their physical self and knowing that they live in or wear their bodies; and having difficulty with communications and relationships, finding it hard to say what they mean or to understand the words of others (Atwater, 1994).

Implications for Working with Those Who Have Had a NDE

There are common positive reactions and common negative reactions. Whether these common reactions are positive or negative, there are common positive adjustments and common negative adjustments that have to be made.

Common Positive Reactions

The most common positive reactions from those who have had a NDE include feeling ecstatic at the wonder and beauty of it all, feeling thrilled by the privilege of having experienced such a miracle, feeling grateful that something so incredible happened to
them, feeling in awe and being unable to speak or to find the right words, being evangelistic and desirous of telling others about death and God and the power of love, and feeling humbled by the magnitude of the experience and what it may portend (Atwater, 1994).

**Common Negative Reactions**

The most common negative reactions from those who have had a NDE include feeling angry for having been revived and being forced to leave the other world, feeling guilty for not missing or being concerned about their loved ones, feeling disappointed that they are in their physical bodies and having bodily functions, feeling horrified if their experience was frightening or unpleasant, feeling dumbfounded if they want to talk about their experience but are not able to or are afraid to do so, and feeling depressed at realizing that they must resume their former lives and find a way to go on regardless of what has happened to them (Atwater, 1994).

**Common Positive Adjustments**

The most common positive adjustments that are made after people have a NDE include being unconditionally loving and generous, being unhindered and detached and childlike, having a heightened sense of the present moment, having enhanced sensitivities and a greater awareness of the need of others, having an expanded worldview and fewer worries and fears, being knowledgeable of a spiritual identity, and accepting of a greater reality and the existence of God (Atwater, 1994).
Common Negative Adjustments

The most common negative adjustments that have to be made after people have a NDE include being initially confused and disoriented, being disappointed with the unresponsive or uncaring attitudes of others, being depressed and having the inability to integrate the experience into their daily lives, having behavior that is threatening to others, being arrogant and unloving, and seeming to know-it-all (Atwater, 1994).

Counseling Approaches

Whether there are positive or negative reactions after having a NDE or whether there are positive or negative adjustments that have to be made, there are some counseling approaches that have been suggested that may be helpful when working with those who have had a NDE.

Moody (1988) conducted a conference for medical professionals on coping with people who have experienced a NDE and together, they came up with several guidelines for dealing with spiritual crises. They believed that they should listen sympathetically and let those who have experienced a NDE talk freely about their experience, reassure them that they are not alone and that there experience is common, tell them what their experience was and that it is called a NDE, bring the family together and encourage discussions about changes in near-death survivors so that the family understands and is able to cope with them, have them meet other near-death survivors, and have them read about their experience.
Atwater (1994) had a few suggestions of her own. She believed that counselors should do active listening and that near-death survivors needed to have plenty of time and would benefit from talking to an empathetic listener. She added that there should be an absence of pressure to resume their everyday routines, that they needed to ease back into their lives, that they couldn't be expected to be the same as they once were, and that they might make sudden or unusual changes in their lifestyles (Atwater, 1994).

Atwater (1994) believed that counselors should encourage near-death survivors to take classes and study, to experiment and explore ideas, and to ask questions without shame, ridicule or guilt. She added that supportive therapy of some kind would be useful. This could be a family session that is nonjudgmental or a group session with other near-death survivors.

Summary

The NDE process occurs during a life-threatening crisis. Those who have had a NDE separate from their body, are swept up into a light filled realm, and experience peace and security. They meet beings of light and spirits of deceased loved ones; they go through a compassionate self-examination and have profound insights; and they experience total affirmation and want to remain in this other realm. When they return, they feel disappointed, regret, sorrow, resentment, but also exhilaration and they usually remember their experience and have strong, variable emotions (Ring, 1992).

Whether the type of NDE is positive or negative, whether there are positive or negative reactions after having a NDE, and whether there are positive or negative
adjustments that need to be made, it is important to determine what the process is that people go through after having a NDE.

Moody (1988) conducted a conference for medical professionals on coping with people who have experienced a NDE and together, they came up with guidelines for dealing with spiritual crises. Atwater (1994), a near-death survivor herself, came up with some counseling approaches that may be helpful with those who have had a NDE.

Atwater (1994) found that it takes near-death survivors about seven years to integrate their experience. She explains that the first three years are the most challenging because near-death survivors are the most disoriented during this time and their significant others are confused and don't know what to do.

Atwater (1994) suggests that the sooner near-death survivors realize that their feelings and concerns are typical and normal, the faster they become stabilized and the easier it is for them to integrate their experience. Thus, if the process that people go through after having a NDE could be described, then counselors and their clients would be in a position to work together more effectively.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the process that people go through after having a NDE so that counselors are in a position to work more effectively with clients who have had such an experience. The research question addressed in this study was "What is the process that people go through after having a NDE?"

Research Design

This study utilized an ex post facto descriptive design that examined relationships that may explain phenomena that have already taken place. This method examines facts about people as well as their opinions and attitudes. The purpose is not to assign value to any relationships between events or phenomena but to draw attention to the degree these events or phenomena are related. The researcher doesn't manipulate variables or control the environment in which the study takes place. The purpose is to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon, population, or area of interest (Merriam and Simpson, 1995).

In this study, the phenomenon studied was a NDE; the population studied were those who had experienced a NDE; and the area of interest was the process that they go through after having had such an experience. Further, this study assessed whether or not
there were relationships between the type of NDE and the process that people go through after having a NDE and also assessed whether or not there were relationships between gender, age, ethnic origin, level of education, occupational status, or a previous NDE and the process that people go through after having a NDE.

**Instrumentation**

The instrument used in this study consisted of a combination of closed-form and open-form items used to assess the facts, attitudes, and opinions about NDEs from the participants.

The questionnaire contained four parts. Part I examined demographic factors that may be related to the process that people go through after having a NDE. These were gender, age, ethnic origin, level of education, occupational status, and a previous NDE experience. A copy of the instrument used in the study can be found in APPENDIX A.

Part II determined whether the participants experienced a NDE as defined by Moody (1975), Ring (1980), and/or Atwater (1988). These were conceptually defined as Moody's repetitious pattern of fifteen elements, Ring's core experience of five aspects, and Atwater's eight basic elements.

Moody's (1975) repetitious pattern of fifteen elements were operationally defined as having feelings of ineffability (inexpressibility), seeing the resuscitation team working and hearing the news of one's death, having feelings of peace and quiet, hearing a buzzing or ringing noise, entering a dark tunnel, having an out-of-body experience, encountering other spirits, encountering a being of light and being helped with evaluating one's life,
having a life review, approaching a border or limit, coming back, telling others, having aftereffects, having new views of death, and having one's experience corroborated by others.

Ring's (1980) core experience of five aspects were operationally defined as having feelings of peace and a sense of well-being, separating from one's body, entering darkness, seeing a light, and entering a light.

Atwater's (1988) eight basic elements were operationally defined as having a sensation of floating out of one's body, passing through a dark tunnel or black hole or some kind of darkness, ascending toward and entering a light at the end of a dark tunnel or black hole or some kind or darkness, being greeted by friendly voices or people or beings, seeing a panoramic view of the life one has just lived, being reluctant to return to earth, having a different sense of time and space, and being disappointed that one has just been revived.

Part III examined the type of NDE experienced. These types were conceptually defined by Atwater (1994) as the initial or non-experience, the pleasant or heaven-like experience, the unpleasant or hell-like experience, and the transcendent or a revealing experience.

The initial or non-experience was operationally defined by Atwater (1994) as loving nothingness, seeing the living dark, hearing a friendly voice, and by Moody (1977) as being rescued from the brink of death by the voice or the light of a spiritual agent or being.

The pleasant or heaven-like experience was operationally defined by Atwater
(1994) as having loving family reunions with those who have previously died, seeing reassuring religious figures or light beings, feeling validated that life counts, hearing an affirming and inspiring dialogue, and by Moody (1977) as seeing glimpses of other realms of being or cities of light.

The unpleasant or hell-like experience was operationally defined by Atwater (1994) as encountering a threatening void, encountering a stark limbo, encountering a hellish purgatory, encountering scenes of a startling and unexpected indifference, encountering hauntings from one's past, by Moody (1977) as seeing glimpses of a realm of bewildered spirits or confused beings trapped in a unfortunate state of existence, by Grey (1985) as having a terrifying experience of panic or fear, having a terrifying experience of isolation, having a terrifying experience of desperation, having a hell-like imagery, and by Greyson and Evans-Bush (1992) as having a distressing experience.

The transcendent or revealing experience was operationally defined by Atwater (1994) as having revelations of greater truths that are not personal in nature, by Moody (1977) as encountering glimpses of an entire realm of existence and having a vision of knowledge or a moment of enlightenment, and by Greyson (1985) as encountering an unearthly realm, having feelings of peace and joy, and having thought acceleration and sudden understanding.

Part IV determined the process that people go through after having a NDE. This was conceptually defined as a frustrating stage, an interesting or learning stage, an adventurous or experimental stage, an exciting stage, and other stages experienced and operationally defined as the order of the stages, the length (days, weeks, months, and/or
years) of each stage, and whether or not the stages were still being experienced.

Population and Sample

The population in this study were those who experienced a NDE. The size of the sample was 33 respondents. The researcher contacted the International Association of Near-Death Studies (IANDS) to place a notice in their quarterly newsletter, Vital Signs, requesting research participants. Further, the researcher contacted each of the active IANDS groups in the United States and Canada to request additional research participants.

IANDS promotes the study of NDEs through conferences, grants, and networking, publishes the Journal of Near-Death Studies, and issues a quarterly newsletter, Vital Signs (Lewis, 1995). Research participants responded to the notice in the quarterly newsletter by contacting the researcher.

Assumptions and Limitations

One assumption was that those who experienced a NDE would remember their experience and another, that those who experienced a NDE would complete a questionnaire about their experience. A third assumption was that the participants would respond honestly to the items on the questionnaire.

One limitation was that the identified sample might not accurately represent the total population of those who experienced a NDE.
Procedure

The researcher contacted the International Association of Near-Death Studies (IANDS) to place a notice in their quarterly newsletter, Vital Signs, requesting presearch participants. Research participants responded to the notice by contacting the researcher, questionnaires were sent to research participants, and upon completion, questionnaires were returned to the researcher. Further, the researcher contacted each of the active IANDS groups in the United States and Canada to request additional research participants. Chapter representatives responded to requests by contacting the researcher, questionnaires were sent to chapter representatives, representatives distributed them at their following meeting, and upon completion, questionnaires were returned to the researcher.

Method of Analysis

The data was analyzed by describing the process that people go through after having a NDE, by assessing whether or not there were relationships between the type of NDE and the process that people go through after having a NDE, and by assessing whether or not there were relationships between gender, age, ethnic origin, level of education, occupational status, or a previous experience and the process that people go through after having a NDE. A frequency count with corresponding percentages were reported for each section of the questionnaire.
Findings

Part I

There were 33 respondents in the sample. Respondents answered questions in Part I of the questionnaire which asked about their gender, age, ethnic origin, level of education, occupational status, number of NDEs, and if they had more than one NDE, whether their previous NDEs were positive or negative.

Of the 33 respondents, 9 (27%) were male and 24 (73%) were female. Further, 5 (15%) were 31-40, 18 (55%) were 41-50, 4 (12%) were 51-60, 4 (12%) were 61-70, and 2 (6%) were 71-80 years of age. Regarding ethnic origin, 31 (94%) were White and 2 (6%) were other.

Of the 33 respondents, 13 (39%) completed high school, 16 (48%) completed college with an undergraduate degree, 3 (9%) completed graduate school with a master's degree, and 1 (3%) completed graduate school with a doctoral degree. Regarding occupational status, 10 (30%) checked professional, 2 (6%) checked manager/official, 6 (18%) checked clerical/sales, 1 (3%) checked skilled craftsman/foreman, 1 (3%) checked service, 11 (33%) checked not currently employed, 1 (3%) checked both professional and clerical/sales, and 1 (3%) wrote in self-employed.
Of the 33 respondents, 25 (76%) have had one NDE and 8 (24%) had more than one NDE. Of those who had more than one NDE, 6 (18%) experienced their previous NDEs as positive, 1 (3%) experienced ten of his previous NDEs as positive and one as negative, and 1 (3%) experienced two of her previous NDEs as positive and one as negative.

Part II

Respondents answered questions in Part II of the questionnaire which determined whether or not they experienced a NDE as defined by Moody (1975), Ring (1980), and/or Atwater (1988). All respondents in the study answered each question in Part II and verified that they did, in fact, experience a NDE as defined by Moody, Ring, and Atwater.

Part III

Respondents answered questions in Part III of the questionnaire which determined whether their NDE experience was an initial or non-experience, a pleasant or heaven-like experience, an unpleasant or hell-like experience, and/or a transcendent or revealing experience. Of the 33 respondents, 2 (6%) indicated that they experienced a transcendent or revealing experience, 5 (15%) indicated that they experienced both a pleasant or heaven-like experience and a transcendent or revealing experience, 19 (58%) indicated that they experienced an initial or non-experience, a pleasant or heaven-like experience as well as a transcendent or revealing experience. Thus, 26 (79%) indicated that their experience was positive.
On the other hand, of the 33 respondents, 2 (6%) indicated that they experienced a pleasant or heaven-like experience, an unpleasant or hell-like experience as well as a transcendent or revealing experience and 5 (15%) indicated that they experienced an initial or non-experience, a pleasant or heaven-like experience, an unpleasant or hell-like experience as well as a transcendent or revealing experience. Thus, 7 (21%) indicated that their experience was both positive and negative. Of the 33 respondents, no respondent indicated that his or her experience was negative.

Part IV

Respondents answered questions in Part IV of the questionnaire which determined stages that they may have experienced after their NDE. The results of Part IV are as follows:

No response. Of the 33 respondents, 1 (3%) did not answer any of the questions in Part IV which asked about the specific stages experienced after having a NDE, the order of the stages, the length of the stages, and whether or not the stages are still being experienced.

No order of stages/length of stage indicated. Of the 33 respondents, 2 (6%) did not answer the questions on the order of their experience or the length of each stage.

One respondent (3%) indicated that she has experienced three of the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) - an interesting or learning stage, an adventurous or experimental stage, and an exciting stage - and continues to experience two of these stages - an interesting or learning stage and an adventurous or experimental stage - and added
that she has also experienced a "cleaning-up-my-life stage (i.e. vegetarian diet, stop smoking, and practice yoga)" but did not indicate the order of her experience or how long each stage lasted. The other (3%) indicated that he has experienced and continues to experience the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) - a frustrating stage, an interesting or learning stage, an adventurous or experimental stage, and an exciting stage - but did not indicate the order of his experience or how long each stage lasted.

A frustrating stage indicated as a first stage. Of the 33 respondents, 15 (45%) indicated that they experienced a frustrating stage as the first stage in their process.

Two respondents (6%) indicated that they experienced one of the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) with the second adding additional stages. One (3%) indicated that she only experienced a frustrating stage which lasted years but did not indicate whether or not she continues to experience it. The other (3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating stage which has lasted years and she continues to experience, added an "anxiety/panic attacks" stage which has lasted years and she continues to experience, followed by a "major depression" stage which only lasted months, and finally a "post-traumatic stress" stage which she no longer experiences.

Two respondents (6%) indicated that they experienced three of the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) in the same order but differed in how long each stage lasted and the stages they are still experiencing. One (3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating stage which only lasted seven days, followed by an interesting or learning stage which lasted five years, and finally an adventurous or experimental stage which she experiences as ongoing. The other (3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating
stage which has lasted five to seven years and she continues to experience, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has also lasted five to seven years and she continues to experience, and finally an adventurous or experimental stage which has lasted two to three years and she continues to experience as well.

Four respondents (12%) indicated that they experienced three of the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) in a different order with the third operationalizing one stage and a fourth adding an additional stage. One (3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating stage which lasted years, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has lasted years and she continues to experience, and finally an exciting stage which has lasted years and she also continues to experience. Another (3%) indicated that he first experienced a frustrating stage which lasted twenty-six years, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which has lasted seven years and he continues to experience, and finally an interesting or learning stage which has also lasted seven years and he continues to experience.

The third respondent (3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating stage which only lasted two weeks but she still experiences "at times," followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which lasted two years during which time she "felt compelled to move from one state to another (i.e. Massachusetts to Arizona)," and finally an interesting or learning stage which has lasted more than twenty years and she continues to experience. The fourth respondent (3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating stage which lasted five years, added an "after-effects" stage which has lasted twenty-one years and she continues to experience, followed by an interesting or learning
stage which has also lasted twenty-one years and she continues to experience, and finally an exciting stage which has lasted twenty-one years and she continues to experience as well.

Three respondents (9%) indicated that they experienced the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) in the same order with the third adding an additional stage. One (3%) indicated that he first experienced a frustrating stage which lasted one year, followed by an interesting or learning stage which lasted twelve years, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which lasted three years, and finally an exciting stage which lasted two years, adding that he sometimes still experiences each of these stages. Another (3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating stage which lasted ten years, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has also lasted ten years and she continues to experience, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which has lasted five years and she continues to experience, and finally an exciting stage which has lasted two years and she continues to experience.

The third respondent (3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating stage which lasted only six months, followed by an interesting or learning stage which lasted two years, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which also lasted two years, followed by an exciting stage which lasted two years as well, and added a "heightened psychic, precognitive abilities, and future memories" stage but did not indicate how long she experienced this stage or if she continues to experience it.

Four respondents (12%) indicated that they experienced the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) in a different order with the fourth adding an additional stage. One
(3%) indicated that she first experienced a frustrating stage which only lasted seven months but she still experiences from time to time, followed by an interesting or learning stage which only lasted ten months but she still experiences from time to time, followed by an exciting stage which lasted one year, and finally an adventurous or experimental stage which also only lasted ten months. Another (3%) indicated that he first experienced a frustrating stage which has lasted five years and he continues to experience, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has also lasted five years and he continues to experience, followed by an exciting stage which has lasted two years and he continues to experience, and finally an adventurous or experimental stage which has lasted one year and he continues to experience.

The third respondent (3%) indicated that he first experienced a frustrating stage which only lasted one-half day, followed by an exciting stage which only lasted two to three days but he still experiences from time to time, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has lasted seven years and he continues to experience, and finally an adventurous or experimental stage which has also lasted seven years and he continues to experience. The fourth respondent (3%) indicated that he first experienced a frustrating stage which has lasted twenty-six years and he continues to experience, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which has lasted twenty years and he continues to experience, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has lasted eight years and he continues to experience, followed by an exciting stage which has only lasted three months and he continues to experience, and added a "satisfied stage of knowledge" stage which has only lasted two weeks and is mostly what he is currently experiencing.
An interesting or learning stage indicated as a first stage. Of the 33 respondents, 7 (21%) indicated that they experienced an interesting or learning stage as the first stage in their process.

Two respondents (6%) indicated that they only experienced an interesting or learning stage. One (3%) indicated that he is currently experiencing an interesting or learning stage but did not indicate how long he has been experiencing it. The other (3%) indicated that she experienced an interesting or learning stage which only lasted weeks.

One respondent (3%) indicated that she experienced two of the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) and added four additional stages. She indicated that she first experienced an interesting or learning stage, followed by an exciting stage, added a "reawakening" stage, followed by a "talk-about-it" stage, followed by a "progressive re-learning" stage, and finally a "confrontation" stage during which she confronts her NDE experience, adding that this entire process only lasted approximately five months.

One respondent (3%) indicated that she experienced three of the four stages reported by Atwater (1988). She indicated that she first experienced an interesting or learning stage which has lasted years and she continues to experience and added that she is also currently experiencing an adventurous or experimental stage and an exciting stage.

Three respondents (9%) indicated that they experienced the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) in a different order with the third adding two additional stages. One (3%) indicated that she first experienced an interesting or learning stage which she continues to experience, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which she continues to experience, followed by a frustrating stage, and finally an exciting stage.
which she experiences from time to time but she did not indicate how long she experienced each of these stages. Another (3%) indicated that she first experienced an interesting or learning stage which lasted years, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which also lasted years, followed by a frustrating stage which only lasted months and she continues to experience, and finally an exciting stage which also only lasted months.

The third respondent (3%) indicated that she first experienced an interesting or learning stage which only lasted six months, followed by an exciting stage but did not indicate how long she experienced it or if she continues to experience it, followed by a frustrating stage which lasted thirty-five to forty years, added a "disappointed" stage which also lasted thirty-five to forty years, followed by a "dreaming" stage which lasted fifteen to twenty years, and finally an adventurous or experimental stage which has lasted about five years and she continues to experience.

An adventurous or experimental stage indicated as a first stage. Of the 33 respondents, 1 respondent (3%) indicated that she experienced an adventurous or experimental stage as the first stage in her process.

One respondent (3%) indicated that she first experienced an adventurous or experimental stage which only lasted three months but she still experiences from time to time, followed by an exciting stage which only lasted three weeks but she still experiences from time to time although she adds that her experience now is "not like at first," added a "depression" stage which lasted five years, followed by a frustrating stage which has lasted three years and she continues to experience, added a "closing down" stage which
lasted eighteen years, and finally an interesting or learning stage which has lasted seven years and she continues to experience.

An exciting stage indicated as a first stage. Of the 33 respondents, 3 (9%) indicated that they experienced an exciting stage as the first stage in their process.

Three respondents (9%) indicated that they experienced the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) in a different order. One (3%) indicated that she first experienced an exciting stage which has lasted years and she continues to experience, followed by a frustrating stage which only lasted months, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has also lasted years and she continues to experience, and finally an adventurous or experimental stage which has lasted years and she continues to experience as well.

The other two (6%) indicated that they experienced the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) in the opposite order with the second adding an additional stage. One (3%) indicated that she first experienced an exciting stage, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage, followed by an interesting or learning stage, and finally a frustrating stage, adding that all stages have lasted years and she continues to experience them. The other (3%) indicated that he first experienced an exciting stage which only lasted three days, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which only lasted three weeks, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has lasted six months and he continues to experience, followed by a frustrating stage which has lasted three months and he continues to experience, and added a "felt-like-a-Martian-looking-to-connect-with-another-Martian" stage which lasted twenty-eight years.

Other stages indicated as a first stage. Of the 33 respondents, 4 (12%) indicated
four other stages as the first stage in their process.

One respondent (3%) indicated that she did not experience any of the stages reported by Atwater (1988) but indicated that she experienced a "growing spiritually" stage instead. She did not indicate how long this stage lasted or whether or not she continues to experience it.

Two respondents (6%) indicated that they experienced two of the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) and added additional stages. One (3%) indicated that he first experienced a "peaceful and loving feeling" stage which only lasted a "short time" although it "seemed longer," followed by an exciting stage which he continues to experience, and finally an interesting or learning stage which he is currently experiencing. The other (3%) indicated that she first experienced a "state of confusion" stage along with a "sense of mission" stage, each of which has lasted more than two years and each of which she continues to experience, followed by a frustrating stage which only lasted six months but she continues to experience from time to time, followed by an interesting or learning stage which has lasted more than two years and she continues to experience, added a "praying-to-go-back" stage which has lasted more than two years and she continues to experience, followed by an exciting stage which has lasted more than two years and she continues to experience, added a "why me" stage which has lasted more than two years and she continues to experience, and finally an adventurous or experimental stage which has lasted more than two years and she continues to experience.

One respondent (3%) indicated that she experienced three of the four stages reported by Atwater (1988) and added additional stages. She indicated that she first
experienced a "dark night of the soul, desert" stage which lasted five or six years, followed by an interesting or learning stage which she continues to experience, followed by an adventurous or experimental stage which she continues to experience "off and on," followed by a frustrating stage, and finally an exciting stage which she continues to experience "off and on," adding that these stages were scattered throughout and those that continue do so "at a lower level."
Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the process that people go through after having an NDE so that counselors can work more effectively with their clients who have had such an experience.

Research literature was reviewed concerning the aftereffects of a NDE. A questionnaire was used to collect data on the process that people go through after having a NDE and to assess whether or not there was a relationship between the type of NDE and the process that people go through after having a NDE.

This questionnaire was administered to 33 people who had experienced a NDE. The findings indicate that people who experienced a NDE go through a process and this process can be defined by specific stages. However, this process appeared to be different for each person and there also appeared to be no relationship between the type of NDE and the process that people go through after having a NDE.

Conclusions

The data answers the research question to the extent that there does appear to be a process that people go through after having a NDE and this process can be defined by specific stages. However, the findings also indicate that this process can be different for
each person who has experienced a NDE and there appears to be no relationship between the type of NDE and the process that people go through after having a NDE.

Although Atwater (1988) had been able to isolate a pattern to the aftereffects, it still had not been clear whether there was a specific process that people go through after having a NDE. Of all the near-death survivors whom Atwater interviewed, only one person said that she thought that she went through specific stages. She explained that at first, life was frustrating, then life became interesting, then life became adventurous, and finally, life became exciting. Thus, Atwater reported that one person did suggest a specific process of a frustrating stage, an interesting or learning stage, an adventurous or experimental stage, and an exciting stage over a thirty-year period. Although there are no past studies with which to compare the results of this study, the results of this study do elaborate on these stages reported by Atwater (1988).

The results of this study support the stages reported by Atwater (1988). Most of the respondents in this study indicated that they experienced a frustrating stage, an interesting or learning stage, an adventurous or experimental stage, and/or an exciting stage when they completed the questionnaire for this study. In fact, most of those who responded experienced one, two, three, or all of the stages reported by Atwater. A few respondents even indicated that they experienced them in the same order reported by Atwater (1988).

However, the results of this study do not completely support the stages reported by Atwater (1988). There were many respondents who indicated that they experienced these stages in a different order and there were many respondents who added stages other
than those stages reported by Atwater (1988).

The results of this study are interpreted as a starting point in determining what the specific stages are in the process that people go through after having a NDE. The results of this study are evaluated as positive in that they demonstrate that there is, in fact, a process and that this process does, in fact, have stages. The results of this study have helped answer the research question of what the process is that people go through after having a NDE. Thus, the findings indicate that people who have experienced a NDE go through a process and this process can be defined by specific stages. However, it does not indicate what those specific stages are or the order of these stages.

**Recommendations**

The implications that the findings have for future research are that more work would be beneficial to determine what the specific stages are that people go through after having a NDE and what the order of these stages are. One recommendation would be to involve family members and significant others by interviewing them or having them complete questionnaires as well in a future study. It is possible that people who experience a NDE are not aware of what their process is until after they have experienced it. If this is the case, then the perspectives of others could be helpful. Further, people who experience a NDE are not likely to go through their process in isolation. If they are part of a family system or other support system, then it is possible that others may be going through a process of their own. If this is the case, then it would be useful to compare and contrast the processes of those who experienced the NDE and those who
interact with them.

If counselors encounter clients with therapeutic issues resulting from a NDE, it is recommended that counselors listen empathetically as clients talk freely about their experience and reassure them that their experience is common. Some clients may feel the pressure to resume their everyday routine and counselors may help them slowly ease back into their lives. On the other hand, other clients may want to make sudden changes in their lifestyles and counselors may help them slow down this process.

Counselors may encourage family members and significant others to be part of the therapeutic process as clients are not likely to be going through their process in isolation. It is important that the findings of this study and other studies are discussed with clients and with family members and significant others if they are part of the counseling session, so that counselors and clients and family members and significant others are less frustrated with each other and with the process. This is especially important in light of the fact that frustration as a first stage occurred in almost half of the respondents in this study. The more that clients understand that their feelings and concerns are normal, the faster they become stabilized and the easier it is for them to integrate their experience.

Although it is still unclear how often or to what extent counselors work with near-death survivors, it is clear that NDEs are becoming more prevalent. Thus, it is likely that counselors will find themselves working with increasing numbers of near-death survivors in the future. While most counselors are not trained to deal with the physiological aftereffects, they are in a position to refer clients to other professionals and to focus on the psychological aftereffects for which they are trained. These findings offer a starting point
in determining specific stages and the order of these stages. If a near-death process could be more clearly defined in future studies, then counselors would be in a good position to work with clients more effectively.


APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT NOTICE, LETTER, AND QUESTIONNAIRE
POTENTIAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

RESEARCH ON NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

If you (or someone you know) have experienced a life-threatening crisis during which you (or they) have suffered an apparent death and were then restored to life, please contact me (or have them contact me) if you (or they) would be willing to participate in a research study on near-death experiences by responding to a questionnaire that will require about 20 minutes of your time. Thank you.

DAVID LONGO

GRADUATE STUDENT IN COUNSELING

OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

(602) - 990 - 9060
Dear Research Participant,

Thank you for responding to the notice and for participating in this research study. This questionnaire is self-explanatory and can be completed in about twenty (20) minutes. Please complete this questionnaire and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope that is addressed to David Longo, 6991 East Camelback Road, Suite C-151, Scottsdale, Arizona 85251.

This research study is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Counseling at Ottawa University. If at all possible, please complete this questionnaire and return it within one week. This will allow the time required to organize and analyze the data. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (602) - 990 - 9060. Thank you for your effort.

Sincerely,

David Longo
RESEARCH STUDY ON NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Part I: Please check ONE response to indicate your answer.

1. Gender: Male _____
   Female _____

2. Age: 20 and younger _____
   21-30 _____
   31-40 _____
   41-50 _____
   51-60 _____
   61-70 _____
   71-80 _____
   81 and older _____

3. Ethnic Origin: White _____
   Asian _____
   Native American _____
   Hispanic _____
   African American _____
   Other _____

4. Highest Level of Education Completed: Elementary School (Grades 1-4) _____
   Middle School (Grades 5-8) _____
   High School (Grades 9-12) _____
   College (Undergraduate Degree) _____
   Graduate School (Master's Degree) _____
   Graduate School (Doctoral Degree) _____

5. Occupational Status: Professional _____
   Manager/Official _____
   Farmer/Farm Laborer _____
   Clerical/Sales _____
   Skilled Craftsman/Foreman _____
   Operative _____
   Service _____
   Not Currently Employed _____

6. How many near-death experiences (NDEs) have you had: One _____
   More Than One _____

7. If you had more than one, with the EXCEPTION of your most recent NDE, how many NDEs did you experience as: Positive _____
   Negative _____
Part II: Please check EVERY response that applies to each question.

8. In your most recent NDE, did you experience:
   Having feelings of ineffability (inexpressibleness) ______
   Seeing the resuscitation team working and hearing the news of your death ______
   Having feelings of peace and quiet ______
   Hearing a buzzing or ringing noise ______
   Entering a dark tunnel ______
   Having an out-of-body experience ______
   Encountering other spirits ______
   Encountering a being of light and being helped with evaluating your life ______
   Having a life review ______
   Approaching a border or limit ______
   Coming back ______
   Telling others ______
   Having aftereffects ______
   Having new views of death ______
   Having your experience corroborated by others ______

9. In your most recent NDE, did you experience:
   Having feelings of peace and a sense of well-being ______
   Separating from your body ______
   Entering darkness ______
   Seeing a light ______
   Entering a light ______

10. In your most recent NDE, did you experience:
    Having a sensation of floating out of your body ______
    Passing through a dark tunnel or black hole or some kind of darkness ______
    Ascending toward and entering a light at the end of a dark tunnel, black hole, or some kind of darkness ______
    Being greeted by friendly voices or people or beings ______
    Seeing a panoramic view of the life you have just lived ______
    Being reluctant to return to earth ______
    Having a different sense of time and space ______
    Being disappointed that you have been revived ______
Part III: Please check EVERY response that applies to each question.

11. In your most recent NDE, did you experience:
   Loving nothingness [ ]
   Seeing the living dark [ ]
   Hearing a friendly voice [ ]
   Being rescued from the brink of death by the voice or the light of a spiritual agent or being [ ]

12. In your most recent NDE, did you experience:
   Having loving family reunions with those who have previously died [ ]
   Seeing reassuring religious figures or light beings [ ]
   Feeling validated that life counts [ ]
   Hearing an affirming and inspiring dialogue [ ]
   Seeing glimpses of other realms of being or cities of light [ ]

13. In your most recent NDE, did you experience:
   Encountering a threatening void [ ]
   Encountering a stark limbo [ ]
   Encountering a hellish purgatory [ ]
   Encountering scenes of a startling and unexpected indifference [ ]
   Encountering hauntings from your past [ ]
   Seeing glimpses of a realm of bewildered spirits or confused beings trapped in an unfortunate state of existence [ ]
   Having a terrifying experience of panic or fear [ ]
   Having a terrifying experience of isolation [ ]
   Having a terrifying experience of desperation [ ]
   Having a hell-like imagery [ ]
   Having a distressing experience [ ]

14. In your most recent NDE, did you experience:
   Having revelations of greater truths that are not personal in nature [ ]
   Encountering glimpses of an entire realm of existence and having a vision of knowledge or a moment of enlightenment [ ]
   Encountering an unearthly realm [ ]
   Having feelings of peace and joy [ ]
   Having thought acceleration and sudden understanding [ ]
Part IV: Please check EVERY response that applies to each question.

15. After your most recent NDE, did you experience:
   A frustrating stage _____
   An interesting or learning stage _____
   An adventurous or experimental stage _____
   An exciting stage _____
   Other stages other than those listed above __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

16. If you have experienced more than one of the stages above, list them in the order of your experience (first, second, third, fourth, etc.):

   A frustrating stage
   An interesting or learning stage
   An adventurous or experimental stage
   An exciting stage
   Other stages if indicated in question #15
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

17. If you have experienced any of the stages above, how long did each stage last (number of days, weeks, months, or years):

   A frustrating stage
   An interesting or learning stage
   An adventurous or experimental stage
   An exciting stage
   Other stages if indicated in question #15
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

18. If you have experienced any of the stages above, are you still experiencing:

   A frustrating stage
   An interesting or learning stage
   An adventurous or experimental stage
   An exciting stage
   Other stages if indicated in question #15
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
   Yes _____  No _____
Any Additional Comments: