

## LIFE REVIEW IN A NON-NEAR-DEATH EPISODE: A COMPARISON WITH NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

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The near-death experience (NOE) sometimes includes a rapid review of some or all of the experiencer's life. This component of the NDE has been alternately referred to as "panoramic memory," "life review," or some combination or variation on these terms (Moody, 1975, p.64; Noyes, 1972; Ring, 1980, pp. 67, 115). Described in this article is a phenomenon apparently unique to the journal literature in general and to near-death and associated literature in particular: a case of life review not associated with a near-death episode. The features of this case are then compared and contrasted with near-death life reviews.

### PROCEDURE

During a business meeting at which the authors met, Holden mentioned her research interest in transpersonal phenomena, particularly the near-death experience. In the ensuing discussion, Guest sketchily disclosed an experience she had had some years before. It seemed to her that her experience resembled that of some NDErs, though she herself had not pursued any systematic comparison. Holden subsequently conducted a computer search through the journal literature of the last 15 years and found no apparent reference to any experience like Guest's. As a result of Holden's recent research (1988a, 1988b, 1989) she was aware of two sources that reported cases of "near-death experiences" that had not occurred during near-

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literature*

death episodes (Gabbard, Twemlow & Jones, 1981; Ring, 1984, p. 220 ff), but neither of these included the life review component. Holden proposed a collaboration in an intensive case study, as follows:

1. that Guest would refrain from any research on NDE's or related phenomena until the data-gathering process was completed,
2. that Guest would submit a written description of her experience and its aftermath, including complete detail and excluding interpretation or speculation,
3. after which Guest would participate in oral interview and written data collection pertaining to her experience and its aftermath in her life,
4. that Holden would prepare a manuscript based on the findings, to which Guest would have the opportunity to make editorial suggestions or co-author.

Guest agreed to this format and chose to co-author, out of a concern that this article accurately reflect her experience and because of her own background in journalism.

#### GUEST'S LIFE REVIEW

*an  
awareness  
of  
emotional  
pain*

The date was July 13, 1983-it was a Thursday. The time was an unspecified few minutes during the noon hour-probably around 12:30. It was hot and sunny. The day was memorable because my husband and I were separating after 16 years of marriage. Earlier, I had gotten our two sons ready for day care and fed them breakfast. I rushed them out of the house so we would not see their dad packing his things in[to] the car. I went to work.

I was aware of [emotional] pain, but I wasn't thinking much about it. I felt numb. . . .

I was a professional writer in a college information office at that time. I had a news release to write that day-a straightforward two or three pages, or normally less than an hour's work. It took me all morning and well into the noon hour to complete. I had a work-related errand to run at that time and left to attend to it.

My office [was] on the third floor ... I was consciously concentrating on business, but also tuned in to my inner emotional state. . . . My surroundings did penetrate my consciousness to a degree.

As I came down the last flight of stairs, I was aware of dimness, pleasantly cool on a July day in Texas. The lights probably weren't on. I [was] vaguely aware that someone was in the hall . . . someone else passed. . . otherwise, it was quiet. I turned to my right and walked about 10-12 steps to the glass door. Sometime during that time, my experience began.

Details of a 20-year relationship flicked through my head-> fast, fast, but full, complete. Did they go from first to last? Yes, they must have. They were restricted to a single relationship, and further confined to the seemingly innocuous incidents and the unequivocally bad incidents, arguments, and omissions of that relationship. In each, I saw and understood the behavior of both of us. In a new way, I understood the behaviors, understood what the consequence would be-and then the consequential scene would come, and the next and next.

I seem to recall understanding that sometimes what we actually said was not what we were arguing about-that many times, we didn't know ourselves well enough at the conscious level to know what was really bothering us. The understanding was newly accessed, but seemed part of the memory, i.e., present-if unnoticed-at the time of the remembrance, not something that came later. The best way I can explain it is that as sound is part of current videotape-sight and sound are integral-the underlying deep understanding was simply part of the memory. To expand-I could remember the emotions going on in the events, but that remembrance was "soft." The "loud" memory was this warm understanding that I apparently had but previously had no access to, The memories themselves were light emotional impact-like, "remember when we went to the mall?" The understanding was heavy impact-like, "remember what you were doing when you heard John Kennedy was shot?"

*deep  
understanding  
was  
part  
of the  
memory*

It was fascinating and breath-taking, Yet as I experienced this, I was aware-as sometimes I am not-of the heat of the noonday, of walking in the bright sun by the swimming pool; I was vaguely aware of where [ was and that I was walking. I do not remember meeting anyone; there were few people out at that time of the day. I have always believed that the experience was fragile, and that any interruption would have destroyed it, stopped it. None occurred, and I've always been thankful,

I've no specific memory of the events I looked at, just patterns of behavior and consequences. . . . I've no idea how many individual memories surfaced-s-I have a vague recollection of the whole thing starting with a memory when I was 19 or 20-something I had completely forgotten, so that my attention

immediately focused intently, rather like a riveting sentence to lead into a good journalism story. I remember that a number of memories involved detailed conversations. (It doesn't surprise me that I should store conversations like that; my memory for conversations at the conscious level is naturally excellent and has been trained as well.)

The memories simply began and ended, as if a tape had started and stopped. Although the memories were completed, the experience was not. I felt incredulous, overwhelmed, awed. The aftermath lasted longer, perhaps, than the experience itself.

. . . The understanding I felt came from within, it seemed to me, and seemed permeated with a totally unconditional love. This love was overwhelming, the kind my [Christian] faith would normally associate with God, but my subjective experience is that this came from me, was/is a part of me. To know that such love could be a part of me was stunning, even thrilling. The complete understanding and complete love were part of each other.

A lot of painful feelings were reviewed in this experience. Come to think of it, it was a sequential strand woven through a relationship, and I spontaneously reviewed the entire length of it, so far as I know. Anyway, the painful feelings "at the top" were augmented by the understanding running concurrently beneath the conscious thoughts and feelings.

*the  
experience  
wiped  
away  
my  
anger,  
my  
hurt*

The experience wiped away my anger, and my hurt. My understanding at the end was that two people were responsible for this relationship, and we had both tried to do the best we could. I realized I still loved my husband-s-that understanding had been buried for some time under an accumulating pile of anger and pain. Somehow, I felt forgiveness for the shortcomings of both of us. I also realized that the accumulated pain we had both experienced was so deep that our chances of reconciliation were extremely slim unless he experienced something similar to [this experience of] mine. I felt great grief, and wondered why this understanding had to come to me now.

I sat in my car and cried hard for perhaps five minutes. At that time, I had not cried so long in years. Instead, I had been very logical, very adult. . . . For a long time, I had ... been leading a life of containment.

Who is it who said, "Counseling is learning what we already know?" This felt like that. Somewhere in my unconscious is a non-judgmental Recorder that notices and understands with

love, even when I (consciously) don't. I believe it must exist in everyone ....

This event has been important to me, from the start. **I**n deciding to set down the details, I looked back in the journal I began about that time, and checked with friends. I asked my ex-husband whether I had talked about it. There is almost nothing. I think, in the course of writing this, that part of the silence may be the difficulty to communicate an experience with no shared [referents]. I've found this difficult, and I am not satisfied with what I have down. I've had to use metaphor a lot, which is inexact and limiting. The vocabulary at our cores may not exist. ...

What *did* it do for me? At the time, it was highly important to me that I not feel hate, Anger was okay, but not hatred. "Behaving well" was important. Both aims were achieved, largely due to the understanding and forgiveness of both of us that came out of this experience, I believe. I also believe I paid a price-i-I[retained] a lot of the understanding afterwards, which made it pretty difficult to maintain a victim or "it's his fault" stance. As a result, I had a lot of guilt and even more grief to work through. **I**t has taken a long time. And yes, sometimes I've thrown accusations out anyway. Only I have to apologize later, because I know they aren't true. That knowing is not always comfortable ....

Slowly, over the years, I think this experience has had increasing effect. Even if I can't access that understanding at will, I know it is there. Now, sometimes, I will behave under stress in a familiar [pattern], suddenly notice what I'm doing-and stop the negative stuff. That strong understanding has simply become part of what I know about myself. A time or two, I've even thought of more productive behavior to utilize. Frequently not, of course. I have found forgiveness of self to be an ongoing process, requiring continuous work.

*this  
experience  
has had  
increasing  
effect*

I hold a master's degree in counseling. . . this experience has influenced both my theory and behavior with clients. I began classes in January, 1984. Sometimes I wonder if I would have begun on the degree without this experience. Certainly, that experience was part of a six-month period in my life when I would say my understanding of myself and others grew faster than at any time since I was two (years old).

I think I have a lot more to learn from that experience. I would like to be able to access that accepting understanding again-ideally at will. I have no idea if that is possible ....

This was a cognitive *and* feeling experience. But what did it feel like? Were you ever lost as a child, and scared, and desperate? And found your way home at last, to the warmth and shelter of someone's arms? And you knew, you just *knew*, as you never had before, how much, how very much, you were loved, and the tight, desperate feeling inside loosened and relaxed, and warmth tingled through your body, and laughter danced joyously behind the warmth on a tide of rising effervescence, of total, peaceful well-being, You were Home. This felt like that. And the wonder was-t-the wonderful wonder was-s-I had been trying to find my way home, and I suddenly realized I had been there, all along. It was inside myself.

#### COMPARISON OF GUEST'S LIFE REVIEW WITH NDEERS' LIFE REVIEWS

Subsequent to submission of her summary, Guest was interviewed on some points of clarification, and she completed the Life Changes Questionnaire (Ring, 1984, pp. 276-79), the Religious Beliefs Inventory (pp. 282-83), the Psychic Experience Inventory (pp. 285-94), and a questionnaire devised by Holden to clarify some points regarding the review and its aftermath.

*preliminary  
level  
of  
assessment*

Assessment of experiences such as these is still at a very preliminary level. Guest's experience was totally subjective and, unlike at least some near-death experiences, completely lacking in external verification. We acknowledge the limitations of exclusive reliance on self-report. We also acknowledge the limitations of use of assessment instruments for which reliability has not been established. Despite their limitations, these are the best methods of assessment available at this time. The reader is asked to keep these points in mind while pursuing the following comparison.

#### *Characteristics of the Review*

A comparison of self-reported characteristics of Guest's life review with those of NDEers' life reviews is presented in Table I.

By comparison, life reviews within the context of near-death episodes and Guest's life review, which occurred outside that context, appeared, in most ways, to be indistinguishable. Examples from the NDE literature can be found in which the life review occurred during the near-death episode before loss of consciousness and without a sense of being out-of-body (Noyes & Kletti, 1977; Sabom, [1982, p. 50). And one NDEer's review consisted exclusively of a reliving "of the outstanding

events she and her husband had shared" (Noyes & Kletti, 1977, p, 190), very reminiscent of the thematic content of Guest's review. While still within the range of NOEs, these features represent the minority of NDEs, based on the proportion with which they are mentioned in the literature.

Even Guest's new understanding of the causes of the demise of her marriage had its parallel in some ND life reviews. For example, consider the following interview between a near-death researcher and a male subject whose ND life review had occurred after an auto accident:

*Respondent:* ... It was like I got to see some good things I had done and some mistakes I had made, you know, and try to understand them. It was like: "Okay, here's why you had the accident. Here's why this happened. Because so and so and so:" ... It all had meaning. Definitely.

*Interviewer:* Were most of (the things you viewed] positive? Negative?

*Respondent:* The interesting thing about that: They were both. But there was *no feeling* of guilt. It was *all right* . . .

*Interviewer:* ... But somehow you were understanding your life in a way that you've never been able to understand it before.

*Respondent:* Yeh, in a new context. A whole new context (Ring, 1980, p. 73).

Whereas some characteristics of Guest's experience fall in the mainstream of NOE characteristics and some are at the extreme of the range of NOE characteristics, three aspects of Guest's experience fall outside the range that is described in the NOE literature. One is the obvious difference in circumstances: non-near-death vs. near-death; however, the parallel between physical death in the NOE and death of a primary relationship in Guest's experience is noteworthy. A second difference is Guest's relatively greater awareness of physical sensations arising from external stimulation, for example, the warmth of the day and the brightness of sun on water. Perhaps she was free to attend to these sensations because her focus was not drawn to the presumably riveting components of a near-death episode, be it accident, crisis of illness, or suicide attempt. A third is Guest's pre-experience conscious desire to avoid hating her husband, a goal that the review helped her to achieve. No such motivation on the part of NDers, and ND life reviewers in particular, is noted in the literature.

*characteristics  
in midstream,  
at extreme  
range,  
and  
outside  
the range*

TABLE I  
COMPARISON OF CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEAR-DEATH AND NON-NEAR-DEATH LIFE REVIEW

	NDers' Reviews"	Guest's Review**
circumstances		
physical	near-death episode	not a near-death episode
psychophysiological	ranging from before loss of consciousness to deep into episode of unconsciousness	fully conscious
psychological		
awareness of death	experiencer may or may not believe physical death to be imminent or present	no conscious thoughts of physical death; awareness of "death of relationship"
prior motivation	no prior conscious motivation to seek NDE	prior conscious motivation to "not hate" and to "behave well"
content		
speed	rapid yet vividly detailed replay of experiences	same
comprehensiveness		
length	complete life span or only selected segments; sometimes future experiences	only past memories of marriage relationship
depth	ranging from complete review of even most "insignificant" memories to "highlights" only	complete review
order	chronological, retrograde, or holistically instantaneous	chronological
sensory	predominantly visual, sometimes with auditory, olfactory, or gustatory recall	predominantly visual with auditory recall only
pleasantness of memories	exclusively pleasant, predominantly unpleasant, or both	both

participation		
control over experience	ranging from complete control to complete lack of control, i.e., review is "happening to" experiencer	complete lack of control
involvement in review	ranging from total spectating to total reexperiencing	simultaneous spectating and reexperiencing
emotional reaction	ranging from ecstatic joy to deep sadness	three levels: 1. (surface) original emotions associated with each memory 2. warmth, acceptance, and harmony associated with deep understanding of causal factors in demise of relationship 3. surprise associated with discovery and revelations of review
involvement of "presence"	may be director, guide, or uninvolved bystander during review; absent during review but present before or after; or totally absent	totally absent
awareness of physical body / sensations	apparently absent	<b>present, though attention predominantly focused on review</b>
attention to physical surroundings	diminished, greatly diminished, or totally absent	greatly diminished
ineffability	great difficulty describing experience in "earthly language"	same

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\*A composite of variations described by Moody (1975), Noyes (1981), Ring (1982), and Sabom (1980).

\*\***Boldface** indicates deviation from near-death life review composite description.

### *Aftermath of the Review*

NDErs have reported changes in themselves that seem to them to have resulted from their NDEs: personality changes, value changes, changes in religious and spiritual orientation, and changes in psychic experiences and belief in psychic phenomena (Ring, 1984). Not all of their NOEs contained life reviews; to the best of our knowledge, no research has been conducted which analyzed aftermath changes by NDE component such as, in this case, the life review. Therefore, the best comparison that can be undertaken at this time is that between the aftermath of Guest's non-near-death life review and the aftermath of NDEs as a whole, only some of which contained life reviews.

*an  
aftermath  
increase  
in  
self  
worth*

Personality change has been noted in the aftermath of the NDE. Based on interview data as well as one item from the Ufe Change Questionnaire (LCQ), Ring (1984) concluded that, apparently as a result of the NDE, experiencers felt a greater sense of self worth (p. 102). Similarly, Guest reported an aftermath increase in self-worth, both in her account, during our interview, and on the LCQ.

Changes in values have also been found as part of the aftermath of the NDE (Ring, 1984). NDErs' concern for others tended to increase strongly, and concern with impressing others tended to decrease; so did Guest's. NDErs' appreciation of life tended to increase strongly; Guest did report some increase in her appreciation of life, but attributed the change to her divorce, not the life review. Materialism tended to decrease among NOEs; Guest's reportedly increased. Similarly, NDErs' quest for meaning tended to increase strongly, whereas Guest's reportedly increased only slightly. In fact, her answers to the six LCQ items on the "quest for meaning" subtest were mixed: three "increase" responses; two responses of "no comment," one of which she followed by writing the question, "What's a higher consciousness?"; and one response indicating that her life review had, in fact, "furnished the pieces to complete that search to my satisfaction for now."

Changes in religious and spiritual orientation have also been noted in the aftermath of the NOE. Based on interview data as well as responses to the Religious Beliefs Inventory (RBI), Ring (1984) concluded that in the aftermath, NDErs are likely to shift away from a "conventional (*italics deleted*) (Christian) religious orientation" toward "universalistically spiritual orientation" (p, 145). Ring described the latter as

- 1, A tendency to characterize oneself as spiritual rather than religious per se,
- 2, A feeling of being inwardly close to God,
3. A deemphasis of the formal aspects of religious life and worship.
4. A conviction that there is life after death, regardless of religious belief.
5. An openness to the doctrine of reincarnation (and a general sympathy toward Eastern religions).
6. A belief in the essential underlying unity of all religions.
7. A desire for a universal religion embracing all humanity (p. 146).

An RBI score of zero would indicate no change, a negative score a shift toward conventional religiosity, and a positive score a shift toward universalistic spirituality. The mean score for "mainline Christian" NDBrs was 4.45, non-NDE near-death survivors was 4.92, and other respondents (International Association for Near-Death Studies members who had never knowingly been close to death) was 4.41 (p. 312). Because Guest described herself as a Methodist, comparison to these three groups of "mainline Christians" seemed most appropriate. Her score was 3, indicating a lower-than-average shift toward universal spiritual orientation by comparison with any of the three Christian groups.

*a  
measure  
of  
universalistic  
spirituality*

Two specific points merit further attention. Approximately two thirds of NDErs report an increased "openness to the notion of reincarnation" (p. 158). By contrast, on both the LeQ and RBI, Guest's responses substantiated that her beliefs had not changed from strongly opposing the idea of reincarnation. Similarly, Guest's resistance to the idea of a "universal religion embracing all humanity" (p. 285) stands in strong contrast to the sentiments of NDErs (p, 163).

Changes in the frequency of psychic experiences and in beliefs about psychic phenomena also seem to characterize the NDE aftermath. Based on NDErs' self-reports, interview responses, and responses to the Psychic Experiences Inventory (PEI), Ring (1984) identified a tendency for NDErs to report a significant increase in both psychic experiences and beliefs in psychic phenomena (pp. 172-73; 317-19). Significance on the PEI was established to be a score of 8-14, the range in which 58% of NDErs fell (p, 172). Guest scored 5 on the PEI, and showed absolutely no change regarding psychic and spiritual beliefs, with one exception. To the question regarding belief in life after death, *before* her review Guest indicated "tend to

believe" and wrote in "with fear;" to the same belief *after* her review she indicated "tend to believe" and wrote in "without fear."

#### DISCUSSION

*impact  
of  
"what is  
experienced"*

Our most intriguing hypothesis regarding the mix of Guest's reported changes as compared to those of NDErs is that the similarities and differences in aftereffects might be attributed to similarities and differences in the experiences themselves. Like most NDErs, Guest experienced understanding and love within the context of "another reality" than that with which she had been previously aware. Like many NDErs, Guest experienced a level at which her life was being observed, recorded, and infused with deeper meaning. The content was restricted to one intense, interpersonal relationship: the lifespan of her marriage. It would seem to follow logically that her experience of deep inter- and intrapersonal insight and love would be followed by an increase in self-worth. Indeed, this finding suggests that increased self-worth may not depend upon encounter with "the light" which typifies so many NDEs but, as Ring (1984) has suggested, with "*what is experienced* [italics added] in the presence of the light: total love and unconditional acceptance" (p, 102).

It also seems logical that the deep intra- and interpersonal understanding and love would generalize from the marriage relationship to all of Guest's relationships, as evidenced by her reportedly strong increase in concern for others and a decrease in concern with impressing others. The profound emotional impact of a glimpse into what is experienced as a deeper level of reality might understandably be followed by a loss of fear of death, characteristic of both Guest and NDErs, and shifts toward greater spirituality and psychic sensitivity, characteristic of most NDErs and, to a lesser extent, Guest.

Why then the differences between aftermaths of Guest's experience and NDErs' regarding not only spiritual and psychic changes, but also value changes such as appreciation of life, materialism, and quest for meaning? These might be attributed to the differences between her review and most NDEs. For example, an increased appreciation for life might be dependent on the experience of having been dead or near death. Likewise, Guest's relatively lesser shift toward both universalistic spirituality and psychic experiences and beliefs might be attributed to the absence in her experience of a near-death episode; an DBE; propulsion through a tunnel or void; encounter with

dead loved ones, "the light," or other beings; or even review of her *entire life*.

Such a hypothesis is, however, highly speculative. Because of the nature of the instruments, similar answers between Guest and NDErs may represent very different meanings, and different answers may disguise similar meanings. Both the LCQ and **RBI** measured *change* on the phenomena addressed, but did not assess this in relationship to the respondent's *original position* regarding these phenomena. So, for example, an answer of "no change" in "desire for solitude" could indicate that the respondent had been low to moderate in this regard and that the experience had had no impact; on the other hand, it could indicate that the respondent was *already high* in desire for solitude limiting the potential impact of the experience to increase that desire. In fact, after learning the results of the comparison described herein, Guest asserted that her quest for meaning had increased only slightly because such a search had been part of her life prior to her life review experience. It may be that many NDErs had been relatively low in "quest for meaning" prior to their experiences, and that the only reason Guest appeared not to have increased as much as NDErs was that she had already been relatively high on this factor. There is no way of determining whether this was the case.

*undetermined  
factors*

Similarly, Guest subsequently associated her slight increase in materialism with her increased self-esteem. Prior to her experience she had felt unworthy of material gains. After the experience she felt worthy of material comfort, but did not in any way seek material splendor. Perhaps prior to their experiences, NDErs had been relatively more materialistic; thus their relative decrease and Guest's relative increase represent movement toward a similar position of moderation regarding materialism. The assessment instruments could not have detected this nuance.

Another such issue involves the influence of pre-existing religious beliefs and training. Moody (1975) found that prior religious indoctrination influenced not the content of the NDE, but how the experiencer interpreted that content (p. 140). Ring (1984) found that an aftermath shift toward universalistic spirituality was significantly greater among NDErs who, at the time of questionnaire response, described themselves as not mainline Christians (p. 314). This is a finding with which Guest's mainline Christian affiliation and relatively lesser shift toward universalistic spirituality seemed very much in accord. In addition, her Christian beliefs and belief in the value of conventional religion have, she acknowledged, contributed to

her original and continuing firm disbelief in reincarnation. The impact of previous religious beliefs on other dimensions, such as belief in psychic phenomena, cannot be ascertained by Ring's or these data, but suggests a possibly significant factor that may override or interact with the content of the experience itself in producing aftermath effects.

However, a deeper look into this matter raises questions. A possible mechanism underlying the relationship between religious beliefs and aftermath effects is that mainline Christian experiencers resist shifts in belief that contradict their preexisting beliefs. It may be assumed, for example, that Guest failed to show a comparable shift toward universalistic spirituality because of an ethnocentric belief that Christianity is "the way" to salvation. In fact, Guest's written comments indicated the belief that various religions could be helpful metaphors to people from various cultures who were seeking spiritual development. This response implies a tolerance for the concept of "many paths to enlightenment," as well as an acceptance of the diversity that is-and is likely to continue-in the world. This was the basis upon which she failed to support the concept of a universal religion for all humankind, which rendered her score more conventional on Ring's (1984) conventional-universalistic continuum. But her beliefs are hardly conventional, even by Ring's definition. Again the limitations of the assessment instruments to detect such subtleties precludes our drawing any firm conclusions regarding our hypothesis.

*limitations  
of  
assessment  
instruments*

#### CONCLUSIONS

The nonincar-death life review studied herein seems similar enough to NO life reviews to warrant further comparative research of these phenomena. NOEs exist in large numbers (Gallup, 1982); a tantalizing question is whether ND-like experiencers, such as Guest, exist in numbers great enough to make such research possible. Guest cannot believe that her experience is unique, but neither personal experience nor literature review provides substantiation for that belief. If such numbers did exist, the hypothetical link between aftermaths of, and experiential components of, NDEs and ND-like experiences, could be examined. A thorough study of this type would utilize NDEs; NOE-like experiencers, such as Guest and others reported in the literature; and non-experiencers. Assessment would be made of personal, value, spiritual, and psychic variables as perceived ex post facto by respondents both before and after their experiences or, in the case of non-experiencers, at the beginning and end of some time period. Also assessed would be possible influential variables such as prior religious

training and beliefs, and prior psychic experiences. Of course, assessment would also be made of the components of the experiences. Analysis could lead to greater insight into the roles of these factors in aftermath changes.

Such insights could also serve purposes beyond pure understanding. Guest's experience provided her with deep, new insight, and with a profound sense of love of self and husband, of responsibility that precluded blaming of others, and of forgiveness that precluded blaming of self. These are the ingredients of a successful personal growth experience in the face of extreme loss; thus, they are also the ingredients of a successful counseling experience. Refinement of our insight into the factors that contribute to these outcomes will not only contribute to our understanding of these phenomena, but may also be integrated into counseling and thus directly benefit those seeking such outcomes.

*successful  
personal  
growth  
and  
counseling  
experiences*

A final note regards the question of whether researchers and research organizations would do best to limit their scopes to NDEs exclusively or to ND-like experiences exclusively. Implications arising from the results of the comparison undertaken in this study suggest that differentiation of experiences on the basis of their proximity to a near death episode might be artificial indeed. If we are to deepen our understanding of these phenomena, especially at this preliminary phase of research, we are more likely to benefit from an approach that is inclusive as opposed to exclusive.

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