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The Value of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences

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**THE VALUE OF THE AWARENESS OF
NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES**



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To my Colleagues and Professors of Saybrook Institute

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Introduction

Sark (1997) writes, “Stories are our way to illuminate the path and find common ground Our illusions of separation disappear when we hear stories of another’s struggles or discoveries” (p. 3). NDE stories have provided nonexperiencers with knowledge of the “discoveries” made by near-death experiencers. A principal value of Near-death experiences may be in the telling of the stories and the effect these stories have for others to reduce their fears of and concerns about death. This E-book explores the impact and value knowing about, not having a near-death experience has on those who have heard, watch, or read reports of this phenomenon.

The following is an edited excerpt from the conclusions of the dissertation of the author titled, “The Value of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences for Reducing Fears of Death for Elderly Persons“ The findings of the research and offers concluding comments by the researcher. The first part of this book explores the hypotheses and research questions of this study in the light of the findings. The information provided by quantitative and qualitative methods has been integrated to respond to the hypotheses and questions of this research.

Main Hypotheses and Research Questions

The hypotheses and research questions and their findings are summarized in this section.

Hypothesis 1. Participants who are aware of Near-death experiences, but have not themselves had a NDE, will report a fear of death less often than individuals who are not

aware of near-death experiences.

Nineteen participants of 40 quantitative participants recorded some level of fear of death on the Threat Index. The awareness of near-death experiences, as recorded on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey, of these participants was divided, 55% Aware and 45% Non-Aware. Of these two groups, 50% of the Aware participants and 44% of the Non-Aware participants reported a fear of death. Both groups' mean score on the Threat Index was almost identical. The Aware participants' mean score was 4.00 with a standard deviation of 4.09. The Non-Aware participants' mean score was 3.33 with a standard deviation of 3.69. This minimal deviation between the Aware and the Non-Aware group reflects no significant numerical difference in the Fear and No Fear groups as associated with their awareness of near-death experiences. Hypothesis 1 was therefore not statistically supported and the null hypothesis was not rejected. The quantitative research failed to establish that the awareness of near-death experiences directly influences a person's fear of death.

The inability to establish a significant difference in the levels of fear between Aware and Non-Aware participants may be a result of the choice of participant pools. All of the participants were of advanced age, had been exposed to death over their lives through the deaths of friends and relatives, and were now living in a retirement facility. For most residents, this facility is their final residence in life. Ninety-five percent of the participants also reported knowing someone who had died in the past 12 months. As the qualitative data reflects, the low reported fear of death appears to be associated with the fact that many of the elderly participants have come to terms with most of their fears of death. They have already accepted and planned for its inevitability. The choice to live in a retirement facility for the remainder of their lives also reflects the participants' settling many of their future needs. Coming to terms with the end of

their life is a normal and expected outcome of aging but it does not rule out that some people will still have some fears regarding death. Further, the participants' lower fear of death is consistent with Butler and Lewis's (1977) observation that "older people tend to fear it [death] less than younger do and often are more concerned about the death of those they love than about their own" (p. 40). Although the quantitative data did not demonstrate that awareness of near-death experiences reduced the fear of death, the qualitative data did provide information that reflects that most participants believed that awareness of near-death experiences helped them with their fears or concerns about death and dying. These findings will be integrated with the quantitative data later in this book, in response to the research questions.

Hypothesis 2. Participants who report little or no fear of death or dying will claim that this, in part, is due to their awareness of Near-death experiences.

With the rejection of Hypothesis 1, no direct relationship could be established between awareness of near-death experiences and the fear of death. However, some data were collected from the quantitative participants who knew about near-death experiences that reflected their opinions regarding the value of awareness of near-death experiences. Although these participants reflected little or no fear of death on the Threat Index, when specifically asked on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey if they thought awareness of Near-death experiences had an effect of reducing some of their fears of death, most of the participants responded that their awareness had some influence on their fears and concerns. See Appendix A for a complete description of the quantitative data.

The majority of the participants who were aware of near-death experiences reported that

they thought that this awareness provided insight regarding death, what happens after death, and helped with their fears or concerns regarding the process of dying. Less than 50% of the participants thought that awareness of Near-death experiences helped with their fears of being dead. Though these responses reflect that the participants thought that their awareness of Near-death experiences are helpful with some of their fears of death, the research data did not statistically support that this awareness directly resulted in their reduced fear of death. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 has not been statistically supported by the quantitative data. However, the qualitative data provided more depth to the quantitative findings, by providing insight into the values the qualitative participants placed on the awareness of Near-death experiences. The qualitative data generally supported the notion that awareness did help most of the participants with their fears or concerns about death.

Randomly chosen participants were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews to address the research questions and to give more depth to the quantitative responses of the participants. All of the qualitative participants thought that awareness of near-death experiences had some effect on their concerns about death and dying. The following discussions regarding the research questions provide more insight into their thoughts concerning the value and influence of the awareness of near-death experiences.

Question 1 - Does a person's awareness of Near-death experiences, independent of having had a NDE, have an effect on reducing her or his fears of death?

This question can be responded to by integrating the descriptive analysis of the Threat Index and Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey with the interpretations of the

qualitative interviews. The qualitative participants' interview responses, like the quantitative responses, support the claim that most participants who are aware of Near-death experiences, but not near-death experiencers themselves, thought that this knowledge was helpful with their fears or concerns about death. The following sections will discuss the overall effect that awareness of near-death experiences has on the attitudes of the participants toward death and dying. The specific issues to be discussed are (a) the level of fear recorded on the Threat Index and qualitative insights about the participants' fears, (b) a quantitative assessment of the value of the awareness of near-death experiences on helping specific fears of death and dying from the responses on Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey, (c) a qualitative response to the relationship between the participants' comments concerning their interpretation of the meanings of near-death experiences and those concerning the value of these meanings, and finally, (d) the influence that these meanings and values have on the participants' fears of death as demonstrated by the quantitative and qualitative findings.

The level of fear recorded on the Threat Index and qualitative insights

The overall levels of fear recorded on the Threat Index by this participant group were lower than the scores recorded by younger participant groups. However, there was enough of a difference in the fear scores to detect those who were recording fear of death and those recording little or no fear. Threat Index scores ranged from 0-12 with a mean value of 3.7 and a standard deviation of 3.88 for the 40 participants. The slight difference in the levels of fear could be directly related to the age of the participant group. Kalish (1981) comments on the effect of aging on the fears of death by stating,

Fear of death diminishes with age Both attitudes towards death and the meaning of death change across the life span. In part, this change represents the differing life experiences and life situations of each age group, and, in part, it represents the specific historical time and the specific cultural context in which we live. (pp. 130-131)

During the qualitative interviews, some participants, who commented that they did not fear death itself, stated that they did have some concerns about some aspects of death and dying. They commented that they had a greater concern for the process of dying, less concern for what happens after death, and not much concern for being dead. Participants commented that their concern about being dead was more of a concern for those left behind at death than for themselves. This finding is consistent with the research of Kalish, Kastenbaum, Neale), and other thanatologists in which they comment that the majority of people fear the process of dying most, followed by the fear of the unknown nature of what happens after death, and finally, a fear of being dead and not being part of the living world, along with the effect their deaths will have on others. The next section will delve into how the participants thought awareness of near-death experiences helped their specific fears related to death and dying.

**An assessment of the value of the awareness of Near-death experiences on helping
specific fears of death and dying**

The Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey data provided a descriptive interpretation of the participants' knowledge of Near-death experiences. The quantitative data also provided some insight about what the participants thought were helpful aspects of near-death experiences for reducing the fears of death. All of the participants' findings discussed are

from the Aware group of participants. Responses on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey instrument demonstrated an interesting finding in that Fear participants, more than the No Fear participants, thought that the awareness of near-death experiences helped with their fear of the dying process. Twice as many No Fear participants reported that they thought awareness of Near-death experiences was helpful with their fear of being dead as did the Fear participants. There was a slightly less than 10% difference in the responses between the two groups regarding their opinions of the helpfulness of the awareness of near-death experiences for reducing the fear of the unknown nature of what happens after death. Several more No Fear participants recorded that they thought the awareness of near-death experiences was helpful for reducing this fear than Fear participants.

The quantitative data, concerning the participants' interpretation of near-death experiences, are consistent with reports of interpretations by near-death experiencers. The majority of near-death experiencers believe that their experiences are primarily transpersonal experiences and have helped with their fears of death and dying. Many near-death researchers believe that the experience is best explained by a combination of the neurobiological, psychological, and transpersonal explanations.

The qualitative interviews provided insight into the participants' quantitative responses about the value of an awareness of near-death experiences. Most of the participants who commented they did not fear being dead or the unknown of what happens after death, did not give much consideration to their dying but were looking beyond their death to their expectations of life after death. This would account for their lower consideration of the value of the awareness of near-death experiences on the fear of dying. However, those participants who did have some fear of death and dying commented that they thought more about their own death and

thought awareness of near-death experiences helped with this fear and their fear of the unknown of what happens after death. The participants thought that awareness of near-death experiences had value in providing insight about what might be expected after death, provided hope in life after death, and affirmed existing beliefs.

Logotherapy is a school of psychotherapy, developed by Viktor Frankl, teaches that meaning is developed by the interpretation one makes of an experience. This theory is relevant when reviewing how the participants of this research found meaning and value for the awareness of near-death experiences by their interpretations of the experiences from books, television, movies, and other people. These interpretations and meanings were discussed during the qualitative interviews. The participants who interpreted the near-death experiences only as physical or psychological responses to dying considered the experiences to be nice stories that had value in how they appeared to help some people with their fears of death. The participants who responded that they believed near-death experiences are transpersonal experiences commented that they were encouraged by the stories told by near-death experiencers and others. They were encouraged because the near-death experience stories supported their personal constructs regarding death and dying. Near-death experiences appear to be interpreted based upon the social, cultural, and religious background of the experiencer. This finding is consistent with comments made by Viney (1993) when she states, “a story enables people to link together the events they experience, using their customary ways of viewing things, or their personal constructs, to do so” (p. 1).

The findings of the quantitative data, as commented earlier, provided some insight into the perceived values of the awareness of Near-death experiences, and the qualitative data provided more depth about the participants’ responses.

The relationship between the participants' comments concerning their interpretation of the meanings of Near-death experiences and their comments concerning the value of these meanings

Most of the participants believed that the meanings of near-death experiences are that they are glimpses of what dying will be like and what may occur after this life. The participants' sharing of their descriptions of near-death experiences and their interpretations of these experiences as indicating an existence after death were consistent with their stated religious or philosophical beliefs. When most of the participants described Near-death experiences, they used similar descriptions of a bright light, a tunnel, and the meeting of celestial beings. The participants' descriptions were consistent with reports by near-death experiencers and the visions offered as the "afterlife" by many religious traditions. According to Zaleski, there is general acceptance of the near-death experience phenomenon among religious teachings. However, there are some disagreements regarding the disproportionate reports of pleasant, non-hell like experiences by 99% of near-death experiencers,

For some religious critics, the most serious flaw in the near-death experience literature is its portrait of death as a pleasant, gentle transition. Converging streams of Freudian, existentialist, and neo-orthodox thought, along with modern biblical scholarship, have produced a strong sentiment among theologians that it is essential to the Christian message to affirm the reality and sting of death.

(Zaleski, 1996, p. 333)

Atwater (1992) interprets hellish Near-death experiences as,

An encounter with a bardo, limbo, or hellish purgatory, or scenes of a startling and unexpected indifference, or even ‘hauntings’-from one’s past. It is usually experienced by those who seem to have deeply suppressed or repressed guilts, fears, and angers, and/or those who expect some kind of punishment or accountability after death. (p. 4)

Rawlings believes that many of the pleasant Near-death experiences are tricks of Satan to lead people away from the teachings of God. He believes that the reason there are not more reported negative near-death experiences is because the hellish Near-death experiences are quickly forgotten by the conscious experiencer, similar to forgetting some dreams. Although Rawlings’s descriptions and analysis of the near-death experience have some relevance, he leaves out of his discussion the possibility that if God is a loving God, He does not want to scare His people by the fears of a hellish life and death. Instead, God would use near-death experiences to show how His love can be experienced and affect how one leads the remainder of her or his life. Negative near-death experiences provide the experiencer, and those who are aware of these experience stories, as expressed by a qualitative participant, that “it is not too late to make some changes in this life.”

Whether or not the near-death experience is a positive or negative experience, both appear to have an effect on the experiencer. Only 2 of the qualitative participants spoke of negative near-death experiences. The value of the awareness of positive near-death experiences appears to be in their impact on providing some encouragement and comfort when one considers one’s own death or the death of another. This encouragement comes not in replacing or changing one’s religious beliefs, but by providing contemporary stories of first-person visions of

what most of the participants believed exists beyond this life. The true value of this knowledge should not be judged by looking for the sources of near-death experiences, but by the influence near-death experience stories have on the individual's personal constructs of death and dying. As one participant shared, "This is a way to replace some of the lost religion." Another participant voiced the opinion of many of the participants by summing up the value of awareness of near-death experiences by stating, "[NDE stories] reaffirm my beliefs."

The quantitative and qualitative data reflected that participants who believe in life after death thought near-death experiences are examples of what to anticipate at death. No matter what the participants believed was the source of the near-death experience, they thought awareness of near-death experiences had value. In the next discussion, the quantitative and qualitative data will be integrated in terms of the influence the meanings and values of awareness of Near-death experiences have had on the participants' personal fears concerning death.

**The influence that the meanings and values of awareness of near-death experiences
have on the participants' fears of death**

All of the qualitative participants who believed in life after death shared that they thought that awareness of near-death experiences led them to reaffirm their beliefs in an existence after death. Most of the participants commented that they were comforted by knowing, from near-death experience stories, that although the actual act of dying may physically be uncomfortable, the discomfort ends at death. They believe that the dying individual is released from the body to enter an afterlife where she or he is met by someone and accompanied into the unknown nature of life after death. Although the participants related that their fears of death were not high, the

knowledge of near-death experiences helped with their concerns about the process of dying, being dead, and the unknown nature of what exists after death. By combining their awareness of near-death experiences and their religious beliefs, many participants stated that they did not fear death but would welcome it when it was their time to die. In the mean time, however, they believed that life should be lived to its fullest.

The outcome of the quantitative and qualitative responses of the participants supported an affirmative answer to research question one. The qualitative data supports that the awareness of near-death experiences have some effect on the participants' fears of and concerns about death by providing an account of what to expect at, and after, death. Zaleski (1987) supports this finding by stating, at the conclusion of her evaluation of near-death experiences,

All of us need to work at verifying our beliefs, whether they derive from personal experience or from venerated hearsay. A conviction that life surpasses a death, however intensely felt, will eventually lose its vitality and become a mere fossil record, as alien as any borrowed doctrine, unless it is tested and rediscovered in daily life...

Otherworld visions are products of the same imaginative power that is active in our ordinary ways of visualizing death; our tendency to portray ideas in concrete, embodied, and dramatic forms; the capacity of our inner states to transfigure our perception of outer landscapes; our need to internalize the cultural map of the physical universe; and our drive to experience that universe as a moral and spiritual cosmos in which we belong and have a purpose...

Whatever the study of near-death visions might reveal about the experience of death, it teaches us just as much about ourselves as image-making

and image-bound beings...we are able to grant the validity of near-death testimony as one way in which the religious imagination mediates the search for ultimate truth. (p. 205)

The responses of most of the participants of the research clearly reflect that they believe Near-death experiences support their religious beliefs and provide them some solace when they consider their own death or the death of others.

Question 2. How does the awareness of Near-death experiences affect one's attitudes toward death and dying?

This question addresses the aspects of near-death experience stories that the participants thought were helpful with their fears of and concerns about death and might be helpful to others. Knowing which aspects of the near-death experience are beneficial can be useful when attempting to help people to deal with their fears or concerns about death. The responses of the participants of this research were similar to those of near-death experiencers. Near-death experiencers report being comforted by the idea that although dying maybe painful, that there is an end to the pain, that they are not alone when they die, and that there is an existence after this life.

The findings of the quantitative data did not conclusively provide answers to Question 2; however, the data did provide an indication that the participants thought that awareness of near-death experiences helped with some of their fears of death and dying. These findings were reflected by the responses on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey and the qualitative interviews. The interviews provided more insight into the specific aspects of near-

death experience stories that the participants believed were helpful with their fears of death and dying. According to the elderly participants of this research, regardless of their level of concern about death, many considered stories of near-death experience to be encouraging as they faced their own impending deaths or the death of another.

It is not uncommon for people to have some fear of death. The following discussion will specifically focus on the participants' view that awareness of near-death experiences affect fears of and concerns about (a) the process of dying, (b) being dead, and (c) the unknown nature of life after death, and how this awareness might help others to reduce their fears of death and dying.

The effect of awareness of Near-death experiences on the fear of the process of dying

The majority of the participants' responses concerning fears of death were related to the fear of the process of dying. Participants commented that although they really did not fear death, they were concerned about the process of dying because they did not want to suffer, be dependent on others, endure a lingering death, or be a burden to their families. Several participants also expressed concern and sadness that they might die alone. These concerns are consistent with other thanatological research. In Western society, the most common fears of death are that the process will be a painful and prolonged process, involving dependency on others. Also, many fear that they will die alone.

Although science and technology have prolonged lives and helped many aging people to remain independent longer, they have not helped to reduce the fear of the process of dying or of a lingering death, but in fact, may have contributed to increasing this fear. As demonstrated by

the data of this research, although these aged adults did not have a high fear of death and dying, when specifically asked, they almost unanimously indicated that they feared the process of dying. Several participants related stories of the painful and lingering deaths of some of their friends or relatives and the knowledge that some friends and relatives were currently suffering a prolonged, painful death. The majority of the participants from the quantitative and qualitative research had known someone who had died in the past 12 months. Many of these deaths had been prolonged or lonely deaths that none of the participants relished.

It appears from the quantitative and qualitative data that near-death experience stories have helped some participants to expect that although the process of dying may be painful and prolonged, they were reassured that the pain would eventually stop, that they would be released from their aged and infirmed bodies, death would be peaceful, and they would be met by spiritual beings to guide them to their existence after this life. As discussed earlier most of the participants reported, on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey, that near-death experience stories helped them with their fear of the process of dying. The qualitative data reflect the same findings. Most participants reported that they thought near-death experience stories provided them with a sense of what physically to expect at death and what may exist beyond this life. Several expressed their reassurance that by hearing these stories they were not fearful of death because they knew they were “going to a better place,” “would see loved ones,” “be out of pain,” and would “know what to expect [at death].” Stories of near-death experience provided assurance that death would bring an end to a painful experience, that the dying will be met by others at death, and that there is an existence after death. Near-death experiencers express similar reassurances about dying being a transitory state that leads to a peaceful and comforting existence. Even participants who have had a negative experience share that, because

of their experience, they are more attuned to making changes to their current life to assure a peaceful death. The findings of the quantitative and qualitative data of this research clearly support that there is commonly perceived value in the awareness of near-death experiences and that such awareness reduces the fear or concern about the process of dying.

The effect of awareness of Near-death experiences on the fear of being dead

As mentioned earlier, the fear of being dead was not reported to be a significant concern by the participants. Of the three commonly identified themes concerning fear -- the process of dying, being dead, and the unknown nature of what happens after death, this issue was the least feared. Several participants expressed a fear of being dead. These participants commented whom they had a concern, more than a fear, about being dead. This concern was not over their own physical annihilation and loss of identity, but a concern for those that they would be leaving behind at their death. The fact that this fear is so low may again reflect the differences between the ages of these participants and younger people. By the age of the participants of this research, most adults have come to terms with their mortality and may not fear being dead as much as the process of dying or the unknown of what to expect at death.

When considering the value of near-death experiences for helping with the fear of being dead, some quantitative participants reported that they thought awareness of near-death experiences was helpful. This was supported by the participants' qualitative responses. Many of these participants thought that these experiences supported their beliefs and provided them with hope that being dead was not a complete annihilation of self but part of a process leading toward an existence after this life. These findings are consistent with the aftereffects of near-death

experiencers. As a near-death experiencer commented,

I never think too much about death. When you put it there in front of me and I had to look at it and I said death in itself is cold and no feeling and no nothing. I never thought about death as just a body. I never connected with the way I thought, you know, just being a body there with you know, with feeling, until I thought of it. I never really thought about it just in that sense. I thought of death with what comes after, you know. Or how am I gonna die? I hope it's in bed and I have an easy death. I thought about those things but not really death in itself.

This comment, by a near-death experiencer, is supported by Ring's near-death experience research. His participants expressed that they did not fear being dead because they felt that they are part of a bigger plan and that their death is all part of a grand design.

The similarities regarding the assurance that there is an existence beyond the physical body, between near-death experiencers and individuals who have heard stories of near-death experiences, provide support that sharing near-death experience stories with people could reduce their fears of being dead. Several participants of this research commented that they thought that near-death experience stories should be shared with others who fear being dead to reduce their fears. One participant lamented that she wished she had shared stories of near-death experiences with her dying husband to ease his concerns about death. Several other participants commented that they thought sharing near-death experience stories with people who are enduring a lingering death would be helpful in reducing their fears of death and enable them to feel safe to let go of this life with a hope of an existence beyond the body.

The research supports the view that near-death experience stories can be helpful by reassuring some people not to be so fearful or concerned about dying or being dead. This was illustrated by the stories and comments shared by the elderly participants of this research.

The effect of awareness of near-death experiences on the fear of the unknown
nature of what happens after death

Developing ideas about what might exist after death was the most important aspect of the near-death experience that participants reported in terms of reducing their fears or concerns about death. The findings of the research supported the notion that knowledge of near-death

experiences has some effect on reducing the fear of the unknown nature of what happens after death. The responses on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey and from the qualitative interviews support this finding.

The majority of the quantitative participants reported that they thought that awareness of Near-death experiences was helpful with their fear or apprehension of the unknown nature of existence after death. Most of the qualitative participants commented that they interpreted the occurrence of near-death experiences as providing a glimpse of an existence after death and to assure them that death is not to be feared. They believed that these stories occur to provide hope and reaffirm beliefs in life after death. Even the participants who were aware of near-death experiences but did not believe they are glimpses of what death will be like, did not think that awareness of these experiences were of no value. They believed that if people found comfort in stories of near-death experiences, then their awareness was beneficial.

This research was conducted to determine if awareness of near-death experiences was beneficial to help people deal with their fears of death. The results of the research suggest that awareness of near-death experiences does help to reduce concerns or fears about the unknowns of existence after death. The responses of the participants of this research reflected that they believed that a combination of their religious or philosophical beliefs and their awareness of near-death experiences has provided them with hope about and support for an existence in life after death.

Near-death experience researchers such as Greyson, Grof and Grof, Moody, Morse, Ring, and Sabom all confirm that the most prevalent responses of near-death experiencers are an unalterable belief in life after death and a reduced fear of death. Whereas the participants of this research commented that they thought awareness of Near-death experiences supported their

beliefs and hope in an existence after death, near-death experiencers themselves have expressed an unalterable belief in an existence after death. The veracity of the stories of what near-death experiencers say they saw and experienced have provided the listeners of these stories with hope that death is nothing to fear and that there is life after death. The similarity between the experiencer and the listener of these stories is described by Zaleski (1996),

If near-death literature is to have any prophetic value or evidential weight, it will be because it communicates insights capable of being verified-not in medical charts, but in our own experience. We may find no difficulty in respecting the testimony of those whose lives have been transformed by a near-death vision, but we can verify their discoveries only if, in some sense, we experience them for ourselves. The same can be said of other forms of religious testimony; for, unlike the generalizable truths of science, religious truths are true only insofar as religious people make them their own.

In this respect, there is no great distance between those who have experienced near-death visions and those who have only read of them. The visionary-who must continually struggle to understand and not to betray his or her original vision-is in the same boat with the rest of us. All of us need to work at verifying our beliefs, whether they derive from personal experience or from venerated hearsay (pp. 353-354).

Near-death experience stories thus have value when the listener makes the stories part of her or his personal construct of death and dying. As found in previous research reports of Near-death experiences, these experiences are compatible with most religious beliefs. This is particularly true if the interpretation of the near-death experience is that it is a vision of the

period between physical death and life after death. Many experiencers report that toward the end of their experience they encounter a barrier; they are aware that if they go beyond the barrier they will not be able to return to their life. It is beyond that point that the varied religious interpretations of judgment, encounters with God, heaven or hell may occur. Prior to that point, the near-death experience provide the experiencers with the common characteristics reported and have value for the participants of this research. Though not all the participants thought that near-death experience stories were helpful to them in terms of reducing fears of death, as several participants stated that they had no fears of death, there was a consensus that awareness of near-death experiences did not create or increase one's fear and could be helpful for some people who might fear death and dying.

Conclusions

Although the participants of this research did not demonstrate a significant fear of death on the Threat Index, almost 50% of the participants did report some fear. Responses on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey and the qualitative interviews provided breadth and depth about the participants' fears of and concerns about death. The responses provided insight into what participants thought the meanings and values were of near-death experience stories on reducing fears associated with death and dying. The outcome of this research demonstrates that although the quantitative data cannot support the claim that awareness of Near-death experiences reduces the fear of death and dying, the qualitative data does indicate that the participants thought that near-death experience stories have meaning and value and have been helpful to them by providing insight into what to expect at death. Participants also thought that it would be helpful to share these stories with others.

A clear finding of this research was that participants reported that awareness of near-death experiences does no harm. The participants reported that the awareness of near-death experiences did not cause them to fear death. Therefore, if stories of near-death experiences appear to have been helpful to the participants of this research, this researcher would infer that awareness of near-death experience stories would be helpful to other people when dealing with their own fears of death and the death of others. It appears that the essence of the stories of near-death experiencers, and what the participants of this research remembered most about the stories of near-death experiences, is the claim that there is nothing to fear about death. Therefore, the sharing of near-death experience stories can be helpful in reducing some people's fears of death. As Ram Dass (1992) shares, "We are human beings on the edge of a mystery-let's share our truths together [We will find that] death is entirely safe."

As the participants reported, stories of near-death experiences supported their beliefs, provided them hope in an existence after death, and an idea of what to expect at death. In consideration of these findings, it seems advantageous to share near-death experience stories with individuals who are curious, concerned, or fearful about death and dying. The awareness of these experiences can give people modern stories of possible visions of what happens at death. As shared by the participants of this research, these stories can be comforting when considering one's death or the death of others.

Near-death experience stories can be used, as other stories, to educate the listener or reader about possible perceptions of death. There are various types of stories. Stories are recounted in myths, legends, fairy tales, folklore, fiction, and narratives about events or personalities. These stories are meant to entertain and educate the listener or reader. Stories, through the ages, have been microcosms of the cultures, religions, and lifestyles of a society.

Near-death experience stories provide insight into various cultural and religious perspectives about what happens at death based upon contemporary stories of otherworld journeys.

Storytelling, regardless of the media, still fulfills human needs not satisfied by modernity's impersonal scientific or high technological methods of communication and explanation of human experiences. According to Baker and Greene (1987), "Storytelling brings to the listeners heightened awareness-a sense of wonder, of mystery, of reverence for life," (p. 18). According to Cushman (1993), "an authentically told story can be a rich source of cross-cultural information and wisdom" (p. 57). Estés (1992) states, "Stories are medicine. They have such power; they do not require that we do, be, act anything-we need only listen. The remedies for repair or reclamation of any lost psychic drive are contained in stories" (p. 16). Listening to stories allows the listener to transcend time and connect with other people by extending the commonality of experience, putting a sense of order to events, and by providing sensibility and meaningfulness to confusing, threatening situations. Stories provide a vehicle for the individual to take internalized thought processes and externalize them by identifying with individual(s) or even events within the story. Stories are "therapeutic because the patient finds his [or her] own solution, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about him [or her] and his [or her] inner conflicts at this moment in his [or her] life" (Bettelheim, 1975, p. 25). The findings of the research, imply that the listening and reading of stories of Near-death experiences can provide ideas about what may lie at the end of this life, and with the foundation of religious or philosophical beliefs, prepare many for the inevitability of death. The awareness of near-death experiences appears to be beneficial in terms of reducing fears, for not only the dying person but also those who are left behind after the death of a loved one.

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The Quantitative Participant Group: No Fear - Aware/No Aware Participants

Quantitative No Fear Participants	Participant Group	Aware Participants	Non-Aware Participants	Inc/ Multi Answers
Total Group	40	22	18	
No Fear Participants	21	11	10	
Knows Someone Who Died		11	7	
Belief in Life After Death		9	8	1
NDE Provides Insight		7		
NDE Help w Process		6		1
NDE Help w Being Dead		4		1
NDE Help w Afterlife		6		
NDE-Physical		1		1
NDE-Psychological		2		1
NDE-Transpersonal		6		1

Quantitative No Fear Participants	Participant Group	Aware Participants	Non-Aware Participants	Inc/ Multi Answers
Total Group	100%	55%	45%	
No Fear Participants	52%	50%	56%	
Knows Someone Who Died		100%	70%	
Belief in Life After Death		90%	80%	1
NDE Provides Insight		64%		
NDE Help w Process		60%		1
NDE Help w Being Dead		40%		1
NDE Help w Afterlife		55%		
NDE-Physical		10%		1
NDE-Psychological		20%		1
NDE-Transpersonal		60%		1