

**The Value of the Awareness of
Near-Death Experiences for Reducing Fears of Death
for Elderly Persons**

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Abstract

THE VALUE OF THE AWARENESS OF REPORTS OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES FOR
REDUCING FEARS OF DEATH FOR ELDERLY PERSONS

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This research examined the meanings of the awareness of reports of near-death experiences for elderly individuals and whether such awareness may help reduce their fears of death. The participants of this research were 40 dementia-free elderly people between the ages of 67 and 95 (28 women and 12 men) who were living in 2 independent living facilities (half in a privately funded facility, half in a government-assisted facility). The participants were all white and had at least a high school education. None were terminally ill. Participants volunteered to participate in the research project following hearing about the project at residents' meetings at the facilities, and were accepted if they were over 65 years of age, dementia-free, and did not report having had near-death experiences themselves.

This research was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The quantitative data provided basic information concerning the 40 participants, their levels of fear of death, and the extent of their awareness of reports of near-death experiences. Awareness of such reports was defined in terms of having learned of such reports in one or more of a variety of ways, such as through accounts in books and magazines, on television and radio programs, and from those who claimed to have had such experiences themselves. Qualitative interviews with 15 of the participants who were aware of reports of near-death experiences were used to explore the meanings and values for individuals of such awareness and particularly how such awareness affected their fears of death.

Three instruments were used to gather quantitative data about the participants: (a) Demographic information was gathered from the Personal Information Survey. (b) The level of fear of death of the

participants was assessed by the Threat Index (a widely used and validated instrument used to measure fears of death and dying). A low level of fear of death was found in the participants, a finding that is worthy of further research. (c) Information concerning the participants' awareness of reports of near-death experiences was gathered through the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey (a tool developed by the researcher and validated in a pilot study). Twenty-two of the 40 participants reported an awareness of reports of near-death experiences. Thirteen of these 22 participants thought that awareness of near-death experiences reduced their fears about dying. Four thought that their awareness helped mitigate their fears of being dead. Seven reported that they thought awareness of reports of near-death experiences were helpful with regard to their fears about the unknown nature of life after death. However, the comparison of the Threat Index and the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey results did not show a clear correlation between awareness of reports of near-death experiences and the reduction of fears of death.

The qualitative research consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 participants who had reported an awareness of reports of near-death experiences. The qualitative research revealed how the awareness of reports of near-death experiences influenced the participants' fears of death and of the unknown nature of life after death. The majority of the participants thought that stories of near-death experiences had been helpful to them by providing ideas about what might be expected at death, such as that death is not painful and that one is not alone at death. Two participants thought that near-death experiences were in fact hallucinations but nonetheless recognized their possible benefits. All of the participants thought that awareness of reports of near-death experiences did no harm and did not cause them to fear death more. These findings suggest that the sharing of accounts of near-death experiences may help the elderly cope with fears of death, and may provide counselors with an additional resource to use to help those elderly individuals who fear death.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Many elderly people in Western societies fear death (Butler & Lewis, 1977). This researcher has watched elderly people die and has observed their fears as their lives end. The researcher's grandfather, even with his firm religious convictions and intractable pain, hung desperately to life out of his fear of death.

The major fears held by people about death are the fears of the physical process of dying, of being dead, and of the unknown nature of what happens after death (Neale, 1973). Modern science has helped to make the process of dying less physically painful, but it has not allayed other fears of death. Many people continue to fear the unknown nature of death, and are looking for answers as to what happens after death. Accounts of near-death experiences may provide some of these answers and may reduce their fears of death. This research examined the benefits of the awareness of near-death experiences for reducing the fears of dying among the elderly.

For the purpose of this research, a near-death experience is defined as an experience in which an individual has been considered close to being physically dead or has been medically declared dead and then recovers. The experiencer may report being separated from her or his physical body, seeing a bright light, traveling through a tunnel, meeting celestial beings, reviewing her or his life, and eventually returning to her or his body (Moody, 1975).

Research on those who have had near-death experiences has documented the positive effects of these experiences on reducing fears of death (Lorimer, 1990, 1994; Morse, 1990, 1992; Ring, 1980, 1985). However, no studies have looked at what effects a person's awareness of reports of near-death experiences, rather than actually having a near-death experience, has on a person. One is defined as being aware of reports of near-death experiences if one has heard or read about near-death experiences and

some of the speculations as to their origins. This research project looked at whether and how the awareness of near-death experiences affects fears of death for the elderly person.

Background

Death is a universal event that affects every human's life. Yet the subject of death is a topic with which many people are uncomfortable and fearful. People are afraid of the process of dying, of being dead, of the extinction of their personalities, of what will happen to loved ones, and of the unknown nature of life after death (Becker, 1973; Choron, 1964; Kalish, 1981; Neale, 1973; Tomer, 1992). Everyone, at some time in her or his life, will confront the reality of death. How fearful one is facing death depends upon how prepared one is to die (Foos-Graber, 1989; Levine, 1984).

Philosophical, religious, and social teachings and practices provide humans with ways to understand death and prepare for its inevitable occurrence. Although philosophical, religious, and social teachings and practices can influence the elderly person's attitudes and fears toward death, they do not always alleviate the fears.

In premodern times, death was generally accepted as an integral and expected part of life. During these times, people died at home; death was generally neither denied nor hidden. In modern times, however, death is often considered to be an intruder to life and is denied in many Western societies (Becker, 1973). Death is avoided by defining it with scientific terms or euphemisms, and by segregating the dying from the living. Many people die confined in institutions surrounded by depersonalized medical technology, instead of at home in their own surroundings. This modern loss of contact with death has left many people ill equipped to deal with it when it enters their lives.

Modern medical and social approaches to death have not met the emotional and psychological needs of many people who fear death. Although advances in medical science have taken much of the

physical pain out of death by the use of drugs to manage pain, science has not been able to provide answers to the questions of what happens after death. This lack of answers can cause some to fear death. The question of this research is whether and how the awareness of near-death experiences may be helpful in reducing the fears of death.

A near-death experience generally first involves a sense of being detached from the body and separate from the living world. Some people report a sense of passing through a tunnel toward a bright light. During this passage, they may encounter other disembodied entities who are deceased individuals from their past, angels, or unknown spirits. Some experiencers also report having a panoramic review of their life. During this review, they see how their actions in life affected others. The experience ends when they become aware of their return to their physical body (Moody, 1975; Morse, 1990; Ring, 1985).

Not everyone who has a close encounter with their own death report having had a para-normal experience characterized by the common characteristics of near-death experiences. However, of those that have had what is called a near-death experience, most report similar characteristics associated with near-death experiences, as well as that the experience is peaceful and pleasant (Ring, 1980, 1985). However, 1% of experiencers report having had a negative, fearful near-death experience (Greyson, 1992a; Rawlings, 1993). Some negative experiences are described as encounters with frightening beings, being in pitch-blackness, or having a sense of eternally repeating painful, frightening life experiences (Greyson, 1992a; Rawlings, 1993).

Interpretations of near-death experiences, according to Kellehear and Irwin (1990), are related to the individual's philosophical, religious, and social beliefs concerning death. There are several theoretical perspectives that help to interpret near-death experiences. Some, using a neurobiological approach, explain near-death experiences as the concomitant of chemical reactions resulting from the process of dying

(Nuland, 1993). Mainstream psychologists commonly explain the phenomenon as the mind's way of allaying the fear of death by creating a pleasant illusion of death (Noyes & Kletti, 1976a). Some transpersonal thinkers interpret near-death experiences as indicating a separation from physical and psychological realms and possibly a glimpse of an afterlife (Grof & Grof, 1980).¹

Near-death experiencers report that their confrontation with death has given more meaning to their lives and reduced their fears of death (Kalish, 1981; Lorimer, 1994; Ring, 1992). The present researcher has found that people who face their own deaths or the death of others report being comforted by these reports. According to Kübler-Ross (1969, 1991), knowledge of what to expect at death can alleviate some associated fears. Growing older can be a difficult enough life process without fearing the inevitability of death (Kalish, 1981).

This study may provide individuals with additional information that they may use when considering their own deaths and the deaths of others. This study will contribute to the fields of psychology and human science by assessing a possible new counseling resource, namely the use of accounts of near-death experiences, to help the elderly deal with their fears of death. This new resource can be used when working with the elderly and dying, and when teaching thanatology to caregivers of the elderly and the dying.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

A literature review and personal experiences of counseling terminally ill people, people fearful of

¹ Transpersonal theorists study transpersonal experiences. A transpersonal experience is an awareness of a state of consciousness that is beyond the ego or personal self. It usually is accompanied by a sense of transcendence and spirituality (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992, p. 90).

death, and individuals who have had near-death experiences, guided the researcher to the following research questions:

1. Does a person's awareness of near-death experiences, independent of having had a near-death experience, have an effect on reducing the fears of death?
2. How does the awareness of near-death experiences affect one's attitudes toward death and dying? If so, what are the aspects of near-death experience reports that are helpful in reducing the fears of death and dying?

The quantitative and qualitative research addressed Research Question 1. The qualitative research also addressed the second research question by examining the accounts the participants share of their exposures to near-death experience reports and how these exposures affected their attitudes towards death and dying.

The following hypotheses were tested in the quantitative research and are related to Research Question 1:

1. Participants who are aware of near-death experiences, but have not themselves had near-death experiences, will report a lower level of fear of death and dying than individuals who are not aware of near-death experiences as measured by the Threat Index.
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.

Hypothesis 1 addresses the expected differences in the fears of death as reported by participants relative to their knowledge of near-death experiences. The rejection of the null hypothesis supports the expectation that individuals who are aware of near-death experiences will report fear of death less often, as measured by the Threat Index. The Threat Index is a well-validated survey that assesses an individual's fear

of death. Hypothesis 2 addresses the question of whether participants will claim that their awareness of near-death experiences helped reduce their fears of death by providing insight to what might be expected at death. The Awareness of Near-Death Experience Survey is a researcher-developed survey that asks the participant to assess her or his awareness of and interpretations of near-death experiences. The rejection of the null hypothesis depends on the participants' abilities to identify what effect near-death experience awareness has on their fears of death.

Scope

This research project investigated the value and meaning of the use of accounts of near-death experiences for the elderly, particularly in helping to reduce fears of death and dying. The research examined the responses of dementia-free elderly residents of several Central Florida independent living facilities to several research surveys and to semi-structured interviews.

There has been no study of the percentage of people who claim an awareness of near-death experiences. However, the wide publication of some of the available literature and media coverage of the subject suggests a significant level of general public knowledge of near-death experiences. Therefore, the researcher did not anticipate any difficulty finding people with awareness of near-death experience.

Quantitative and qualitative research data were gathered. The quantitative data were collected from the responses to three surveys, the Personal Information Survey, the Threat Index, and the Awareness of Near-Death Experience Survey. The Personal Information Survey is a researcher-developed survey that gathered descriptive data such as age, gender, and religious practices, on the participants. The collected data provided demographic information regarding the participants, the assessments of their levels of fear related to death, and self-assessments of their knowledge of near-death experiences.

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews of participants who reported

an awareness of near-death experiences. The qualitative research delved into the values and meanings the individuals placed on being aware of near-death experiences. Participants were asked to discuss their thoughts and fears about death, their awareness of and attitudes about near-death experiences, and how the awareness of these experiences influenced their fears of death.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review concentrates on some of the historical and theoretical literature on human attitudes toward death, particularly the fears of death of the elderly. This review also includes literature concerning the phenomenon of near-death experiences. The literature review of this study is divided into four sections related to death:

1. Historical perspectives on attitudes concerning death and dying.
2. Perspectives on the fears of death.
3. Death from the elderly's perspectives.
4. The phenomenon of near-death experiences.

Historical Perspectives on Attitudes concerning Death and Dying

Beliefs and practices concerning death have changed throughout human history (Ariès, 1974). In pre-modern times, death at a young age was common due to living conditions and medical practices (Kalish, 1981). As medical science has advanced and helped humans live longer, attitudes and responses to death also have changed. In modern Western societies, death is often ignored or feared. Changes in lifestyles and improved medical science have depersonalized death and made it an encroachment on life instead of part of life (Shneidman, 1973). This has left many people ill-equipped to deal with death when it touches their lives.

Rudimentary medical practices and often inadequate defenses against predators caused death to be a familiar experience in earlier societies. The process of dying was often painful and rapid. According to DeSpelder and Strickland (1983), some primitive societies feared death because they believed that death was not a natural process but an unnatural, accidental occurrence. Other societies had no fear of death. They perceived death not as an end or extinction of life, but as a change in existence in which the soul passed to another realm. The living world prepared the dying for this

transition by various pre-death rituals and funeral practices.

In many preliterate societies, attitudes toward death focused on the dead and their effects on the living. The living either honored or feared the deceased. In some of these societies, memories of the dead were kept alive through memorials and rituals. In other societies, the dead were feared because of harm they might cause to the living. Out of fear, the dead person was not acknowledged by the living. Funeral rituals therefore were often designed to honor the dead or "to offset fears about the potential malevolence of the dead towards the living," (DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983, p. 36).

During early Greek history many people believed that the spirits of the dead continued to live after death and that in this state knowledge was attained. Plato wrote,

It has been proved to us by experience that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body-the soul in herself must behold things in themselves: and then we shall attain the wisdom which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers; not while we live, but after death; for if while in company with the body, the soul cannot have pure knowledge, one of two things follows-either knowledge is not to be attained at all, or, if at all, after death. (Plato, trans. 1976, p. 204)

Many early burial practices reflected a belief in life after death. Archaeological discoveries of ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and primitive American Indian burial sites, for example, have shown the importance of preparing the deceased for the afterlife. Many sites have revealed the dead surrounded by artifacts, which may have been used by them in life and were expected to be used by them in an afterlife.

Philippe Ariès (1974) identified three periods of development concerning understandings of

death in post-antiquity Western culture. The first period is considered to be between the 6th and the early 12th century. The second period is identified as being between the later 12th century and the 17th century. The third period began toward the late 17th century and has run through the 20th century. Attitudes toward death changed significantly during this final period and can be subdivided into two periods: the 17th century through the 19th century, and the 20th century.

In Western culture from the 6th through the early 12th century, death was accepted as the collective destiny of all human beings. Concerns about one's own death were overshadowed by a social awareness of the death of others. Due to limited medical skills and limited knowledge to prevent or treat fatal diseases or recover from many injuries, death continued to be an accepted, common occurrence in life. Some people viewed death either as an escape from life's troubles or as leaving the pleasures of life. The Venerable Bede, around the 7th century, described his view of his society's attitudes regarding life and death in the following manner:

When compared with the stretch of time unknown to us, O king, the present life of men on earth is like the flight of a single sparrow through the hall where, in winter, you sit with your captains and ministers. Entering at one door and leaving by another, while it is inside it is untouched by the wintry storm; but this brief interval of calm is over in a moment, and it returns to the winter whence it came, vanishing from your sight. Man's life is similar; and of what follows it, or went before, we are utterly ignorant. (Enright, 1987, p. 2)

The church and its teachings were the accepted source of knowledge and hope concerning death, dying, and afterlife beliefs during this period (DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983). Religious teachings were also used as a means to control social and personal behavior. Heaven was considered the reward for righteous living, whereas the punishment of hell was a result of an evil life.

Attitudes toward death between the 12th and 17th centuries concerned more the individual's own mortality than the social aspects of death. The individual became more aware of her or his life and impending death, as opposed to the death of others. The act of dying became an important personal experience (Ariès, 1974). A belief in a personal afterlife became more important than what happened to others after death (Davis, 1989).

The accepted source of knowledge also began to change during the 12th through 17th centuries. Within the aristocracy, religious thought and influence began to give way to secular, scientific reasoning. Social changes during the Renaissance period reflected a focus away from religion and toward a secular, scientific basis for knowledge (Van Doren, 1991).

From the end of the 17th century and through the 19th century, attitudes toward death again began to change. The death of others began again to overshadow the individual's perception of her or his own death. Death was romanticized, depicted as a human companion in art and literature (Ariès, 1974, p. 56). Dying and life after death were believed to be beautiful, peaceful experiences. One romantic depiction of death compared it with the emergence of a butterfly from a cocoon. According to DeSpelder and Strickland (1983),

(t)he old notions of Heaven and Hell that had so motivated people in an earlier time were replaced by a hoped-for immortality of the soul and an eventual reunion of loved ones in an afterlife. (p. 60)

By the end of this period death "remained familiar and tamed" (Ariès, 1974, p. 58). Mozart reflected the views of his time in a letter to his father in 1787:

As death, when we come to consider it closely, is the true goal of our existence, I have formed during the last few years such close relations with this best and truest friend of mankind, that his image is not only no longer terrifying to me, but is indeed

very soothing and consoling! And I thank my God for graciously granting me the opportunity . . . of learning that death is the key which unlocks the door to our true happiness. (Anderson, 1966)

The romantic, familiar attitude toward death began to change again during the latter part of the 19th century. During the late 19th century and into the 20th century, modern Western culture began to view death as a fearful, forbidden occurrence (DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983). Dylan Thomas (circa 1950) reflected this fear when he said, "Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage, against the dying of the light" (Jones, 1971, pp. 207-208). The fear of death has been exacerbated by reduced confidence in organized religious doctrines regarding death and an increase in medical science's intervention in the dying process. Scientific advances have also increased the secularization of social and intellectual thought, supplanting religious doctrines (Cogley, 1968). Modern scientific advances have caused many people to lose touch with longstanding religious and cultural beliefs and practices, which has left a void in many people's ability to deal with death (Judy, 1993).

Science and technology have influenced how many people in the United States approach death. The process of dying has been affected by advances in pharmacology, medical practices, and medical treatment facilities. In premodern Western society, dying usually took less time because of primitive medical practices and the absence of the availability of pain reduction drugs. Dying also often took place in the home in the care of family members. In modern Western society, however, many humans have lost touch with death. Advances in medications and medical practices have reduced much of the physical pain associated with dying. Also, the dying are often removed from the familiar surroundings and institutionalized in hospitals and nursing homes. The care of the dying person is often removed from the family and placed in the hands of health care professionals.

Modern medicine also has attempted to tame death by prolonging life. This prolongation of life is, at times, at the expense of the quality of life (Kalish, 1981). The impersonal objectivity of modern medical care has reduced the interpersonal relationships between the medical community and the dying person. This depersonalization has left the dying person more fearful of death because of a sense of loss of control over her or his life (Brim, Freeman, Levine, & Scotch, 1970). According to Kübler-Ross (1969), the fear of death could be reduced by improving interpersonal communication with all patients: "If we could combine the teachings of the new scientific and technical achievements with equal emphasis on interpersonal human relationships we would indeed make progress" (Kübler-Ross, 1969, pp. 11-12).

In the past 35 years there has been an increased interest in death. This has been due, in part, to an increased awareness of death brought to the public through the media, increased life expectancy, and a social movement toward self and group awareness. Kalish (1981) states, "I firmly believe that the recent interest in death and concern for the dying are not merely fads but the consequences of a variety of social changes" (p. 15). This increased awareness of death has resulted in advances in medical sciences and services to the dying and elderly, an awareness of potential natural and political destruction, and an increased introspection of self by many people.

During the 1960s there were many social movements, such as that against the war in Vietnam and for civil rights. As civil rights laws were enacted and the war in Vietnam ended, some people who had been socially active found new causes in the rights for the disabled, the dying, and the elderly. Education and research was focused to meet the needs of these groups. Kübler-Ross pioneered the education of health care professionals and the public to the needs of the dying with her book On Death and Dying (1969). Hospices were formed to provide home health services and special care to the dying and their families. And the elderly, with their increased numbers and

activism, brought attention to their needs, and since they represented a high number of the dying, also brought attention to the needs of the dying. Services to the elderly and dying became part of Western society (Kalish, 1981).

With the attention that had been placed on the Cold War by the media and government, the threat of nuclear destruction, reports of ecological disasters, and the immediacy and graphic reports of death throughout the world, many people have become more sensitive to death and dying. The media continues to bombard the public with reports and pictures of death and mayhem throughout the world. The awareness of the prevalence of death has led to many people to be more aware of death. However, the detached method of presentation of these deaths has led many people to a false confidence that death only happens to others. It is within the private moments that many people may consider their own mortality and confront the fears associated to this awareness (Levine, 1982).

Many modern Westerners fear the extinction of their lives and the unknown nature of life after death (Neale, 1973). These fears have not been lessened by scientific knowledge. Science can define and sometimes retard death and also can make the process of dying less painful. However, scientific reasoning has no explanations regarding what happens after death, except what happens with the deterioration of the physical body. To date, there has been no empirical evidence for the claim that there is life after death (Ring, 1980, 1985). Inversely, there also has been no scientific evidence to disprove the existence of an afterlife. Since the existence of an afterlife cannot be confirmed or discredited, an afterlife may or may not exist. Without scientific confirmation of life after death, many people still fear being dead and the unknown nature of what happens after death (Kalish, 1981).

As science and technology failed to answer many of the questions people have had regarding life and death, many have turned inward in search of their own soul (Moore, 1992). Religious and

spiritual practices have increased (Gallup, 1979). There had been a decline in reports of religious affiliations, after the growth of religion in the 50s. With the aging of the parents of the baby boomers, the maturing of the boomers, and religious movements such as the Jesus Movement and other charismatic and fundamentalist movements of the early 70s, more people were returning to practicing a religion. More attention also has been given to paranormal experiences such as near-death experiences. Books and research concerning these experiences have proliferated since Raymond Moody's publication of Life After Life in 1975. It is estimated that more than 5% of the United States population have had a near-death experience and more and more people are becoming comfortable sharing what happened during their near-death experience. With attention being paid to the value of spiritual or transpersonal experiences,² more people are using the knowledge of and belief in these experiences to overcome obstacles and improve their lives (Fox, 1993). This research project is an example of this effort.

Perspectives on the Fears of Death

In this section of the literature review, the researcher will examine some perspectives on fear, the fears of death, and constructs used to overcome or deal with the fears of death. By examining the literature on fear in general, a framework can be developed to understand how individuals become fearful. In the subsection, "Fears of Death," the researcher will review what people fear about death and why they fear it. Finally, I will discuss some philosophical, religious, and psychological perspectives that help some people to come to terms with and make sense of their fears of death.

The Nature of Fear

Schuster (1986) defines fear as "a way of alerting one that danger is present and that something needs to be done to protect oneself" (p. 225). Fear is a human emotion that can affect

² Spiritual experiences are defined as a sense of intimacy with a Godhead which leads to a sense of oneness with life (Lajoie and Shapiro, 1992, p. 90).

how individuals live their lives and face death. It is difficult to describe in precise, scientific terms due to its subjective nature. Some theorists postulate that fear is a learned emotion, some, that it is an interpretation of a physiological response. Others believe that fear is an innate response for self-preservation (Becker, 1973). A person's past encounters with threatening, fearful, or anxious situations determine what she or he may perceive as a fearful or anxious event. Despite the source of the emotion of fear, in order to reduce or be free of fear, individuals should learn how to deal with their fears (Rachman, 1990).

According to Rachman (1990), there are three main components to fear, which do not always correspond with each other. These components of fear are described as "the subjective experience of apprehension, associated psychophysiological changes, and attempts to avoid or escape from fearful situations" (p. 3). These three components of fear can affect how individuals perceive and respond to fearful situations, how physical and psychological states change when one is frightened, and how people may attempt to avoid or escape from a threatening situation. When discussing fear, one should be aware of which components of fear are being described. This will provide a clearer understanding of the individual's fear.

Psychological research by researchers such as Wolpe and Bandura has shown that fear can be acquired through a conditioning process or by vicarious observations of fearful situations (Bandura, 1977; Rachman, 1990; Wolpe & Rowan, 1988). Conditioning theorists postulate that fear is a learned response. It occurs when there are "signals (conditioned stimuli) that are premonitory of (i.e., have in the past been followed by) situations of injury or pain (unconditional stimuli)" (Mowrer, 1939, p. 554). Fear can also be reduced by using conditioning techniques. Positive conditioning, such as, systematic desensitization techniques, can be used to reduce or extinguish some fears (Wolpe, 1973).

Vicariously acquired fears are believed to be developed by observing fear in others. For example, if a child observes a significant adult being afraid of death, she or he may develop the same fear. Bandura (1977) observed that not only could attitudes and behaviors be developed by observing and copying other's responses, but that by copying other people's appropriate behavior, fearful attitudes and behaviors could be changed. According to Clark (1986) and Rachman (1990), there are some theories that fear can be learned through the absorption of threatening information. For example, the sharing of information that could be interpreted as threatening can create a sense of fear in some individuals. However, information that could be considered nonthreatening can also be used to help individuals deal with fear. For example, information about the pain of some terminal illnesses can lead to a fear of the process of dying. Inversely, providing information about the benefits of palliative medical care can help reduce the fear of dying.

People respond differently to threatening situations. Individuals respond to a threat based on how the threat is perceived and the learned response to the threat. According to Becker (1973), "[One's] fears are fashioned out of the ways in which [one] . . . perceives the world" (p. 18). What one person might consider threatening or fearful may not be considered the same by another person. How one has learned to deal with fear will affect her or his response.

People use various methods to reduce or extinguish their fears. Defense mechanisms such as denial and illusion are cognitive defenses used by many to deal with unacceptable psychological situations (Freud, trans. 1957). According to Freud (trans. 1957), an illusion is the creation of an acceptable concept that avoids the recognition of the unacceptable situation. Illusion and denial are two methods used by many people to deal with death.

The personal construct theory of George Kelly (1955) provides an analysis of how fears can develop and be resolved. According to the personal construct theory, individuals develop certain

belief constructs to anticipate and deal with events that may occur in their lives. These constructs help individuals interpret and respond to life's experiences. When an individual's personal construct does not support the expected interpretation or response, the individual will feel threatened and may become fearful. The resolution of this fear can be accomplished by modifying existing personal constructs to encompass the newly acquired experiences.

Fears of Death

Many people fear death. The most common fear, in Western society, is that the process of dying will be painful, prolonged, and will reduce the quality of life (Kastenbaum, 1986). Many also fear dying alone. Another fear is that of not existing and participating in life (Neale, 1973). Many people cannot conceive life without their involvement. According to Tomer (1992), humans fear death because they view death as an annihilation of their person, a radical personal transformation, a threat to the meaningfulness of life, and a threat to the completion of life projects (p. 496). Third, not knowing what happens after death has been linked both to eternal questions and to fears by many human beings.

Although advances in medical science and pharmacology have helped reduce the pain associated with some illnesses and injuries, they also often compromise the individual's ability to communicate and be involved with others. The prolongation of life and the physical and financial expenses associated with medical care can cause an individual to become dependent on others for support, with an accompanying loss of self-esteem (Neale, 1973). Further, because of the use of modern medical technology, many people are confined to hospital settings for their final days, away from their known surroundings. This confinement often leads to social isolation that can exacerbate someone's fear of dying alone.

Most humans have difficulty conceptualizing their nonphysical existence. The prospect of

nonbeing can be fearful to many people. They cannot conceive of life without their participation. Many humans also fear death due to its destruction of the living person (Kalish, 1981; Neale, 1973).

The finality of death may cause fear if an individual thinks that her or his life has not had meaning, or that she or he has not completed a particular life task. When death is imminent, she or he may feel that she or he has not accomplished enough to reflect a purpose and value for having lived (Neale, 1973). Many people also view death as an obstacle to the completion of life projects, such as parenting young children or completing a career goal. Not being able to complete a life goal could be considered a sign of failure and add to their fear of death (Kalish, 1981).

The transformation from life to death also can be frightening due to the unknown nature of what happens after death. Shneidman (1973) writes,

To contemplate death-that meeting-point of life and nonlife. That absence of a self, that absence of a future, that experience that is not experienceable-is it any wonder that this epistemological never-never land makes death seem forbidding and forbidden. (p. 62)

Religious beliefs and practices can be beneficial to help some individuals deal with their fears of the unknown related to death. Religious beliefs and rituals can sometimes help reduce this fear of the unknown. According to Duff (1995), “group celebrations of religious rituals lift people and give them “a sense of continuity beyond the grave”” (p. D-7).

Fears of death can be affected by how someone perceives how others react to death (Rachman, 1990). Fears of death also can be affected by acquiring new knowledge, such as knowledge concerning the advances in medical science that make dying less painful. For some people, the fear of death causes anxiety and physical discomfort. Others accept the inevitability of death and are comfortable with their mortality. Those who fear death often attempt to avoid, deny,

or create illusions to make the realities of death palatable.

According to Kalish (1981), to accept death one must be prepared. To approach death unprepared can cause fear. Philosophical, religious, and psychological reasoning can prepare one for death (Levine, 1982; Shneidman, 1973). The following sections provide an overview of some philosophical, religious, and psychological perspectives that have helped people prepare for death.

Philosophical Perspectives on Death

Since ancient Greece, philosophical reasoning has been a part of the human dynamic of thought and attempt to understand our existence. According to philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, "the fear of death is the beginning of philosophy, and the final cause of religion" (Durant, 1977, p. 328). From a human science perspective, a review of philosophical reasoning concerning death is important to provide a complete interpretation of the human experience of death. The human science approach of studying human experiences encompasses more than just the natural scientific approach. It also requires the reasoning of philosophy (May, 1983).

Ancient Egyptians focused a great deal of time, energy, and resources in order to prepare for the next life. They perceived life as a dream that was quickly over and thought that death was eternal. Ancient Egyptians believed that in order to enjoy eternity in another life, the body of the deceased had to survive into eternal life. Therefore, careful embalming techniques were used to prepare the corpse. Bodies were wrapped in bandages and buried with food, drink, and personal possessions to be used in the next life. Bodies were either buried in the ground or in elaborate tombs. The Egyptians believed that the dead crossed the river of death to the Kingdom of Orisis, the god of the dead, where they were to spend eternity. To guide the dead on their journey to the Kingdom of Orisis, the Book of the Dead³ was buried with the deceased (Budge, 1989). Entrance

³ There are several versions of the Book of the Dead that are either read to the deceased or are buried with the body.

into eternity was dependent on judgment of Orisis of the individual's life.

Ancient Greeks viewed religion more as a matter of ritual than morality. Buildings and statues were built to honor the Greek gods. Greeks perceived death as a release of the soul from the body. The soul, which was considered to be part of the mind, was believed to be immortal. It was considered that the soul lived before the body and would live again in another life. Socrates' death provides an example of how Greeks wanted to view death as the end of this existence and not to be afraid of when it happened. When Socrates was condemned to die for supposedly corrupting the young by asking too many questions, he accepted death gracefully. In the dialogue Phaedo Plato recorded Socrates' final evening with his friends. After ingesting the poison hemlock, Socrates commented to his friends, "And therefore I go on my way rejoicing, and not only, but every other man who believes that his mind has been made ready and he is in a manner purified. And what is purification but the separation of the soul from the body . . . I have been told a man should die in peace" (Plato, 1976, p. 277). Socrates then laid down and covered himself with a sheet. Just before he died, thinking of the life he was leaving, he sat up and addressed a friend, "Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?" and then he lay back down and died (Plato, trans. 1976, p. 278). This readiness and matter-of-fact approach to death by Socrates illustrates how ancient Greeks considered death to be a passage to greater existence than this life, and that one should prepare for death just as one would prepare for any journey. Socrates' remembrance that he owed Asclepius a debt is similar to how one may remember an unfinished task before one embarks on any journey.

Ancient Greeks believed that the transition from life to death was considered to be a journey across the River Styx. When a Greek died, coins were placed over the corpse's mouth to pay the boatman, Charon, to take her or his body across the river to the underworld of the next life, a place

called Hades. Bodies were sometimes buried but most often were cremated and the ashes were then buried with the person's possessions, to be used in the next life (Davison, 1992).

Early Roman beliefs were similar to Greek beliefs. The dead were either buried or cremated. Poor citizens were often buried in a common grave, without a ceremony, and at night. However, the more prominent citizens were mourned with style and pomp. Their bodies were laid out for people to come by and pay their last respects. The Greeks and Romans shared the belief in the dead souls being ferried across the River Styx. The Romans also placed coins on the dead person's mouth to pay the boatman. In formal Roman funeral ceremonies, along with the mourning family and friends, professional mourners were hired to promote the solemnity of the occasion. However, clowns were also hired to make jokes about the dead person in order to remind the mourners that no matter who the person was, she or he was still human and ultimately died.

The philosopher Schopenhauer believed that phenomena exist only insofar as the mind can perceive them as concepts. In his speculation concerning the fear of death, he stated that due to our inability to conceptualize our own death and afterlife, we formulate philosophies and theologies:

The average man [woman] cannot reconcile himself [herself] to death; therefore he [she] makes innumerable philosophies and theologies; the prevalence of a belief in immortality is a token of the awful fear of death. (Durant, 1977, p. 328)

According to Martin Heidegger (1927/1962), death demonstrates that there is no hope in becoming what we are essentially because we eventually cease to exist in physical form. He thought that we should not place hope for our eternal existence in our accomplishments of life. Accomplishments in life, according to Heidegger, have no effect on one's assurance of an existence after death. This awareness can cause an individual to become fearful and anxious since many people judge the value of their lives, and their expectations of life after death, by what they have

accomplished and how we are remembered. Heidegger's perspective supports two of the common themes of the fear of death, that is, that death is a threat to the meaningfulness of life and to the realization of one's goals in life. Tomer (1992) states,

Heidegger's position implies that death is on one hand a threat—the threat of nonexistence. On the other hand, according to Heidegger, a realization of our future nonexistence is a precondition of a fuller understanding of our life and, eventually, a precondition for freeing ourselves from anxiety. (p. 478)

The fear of death can therefore be reduced by the acknowledgment of our eventual nonexistence and the acceptance of death's inevitability (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

Krishnamurti's (1969) thoughts parallel some of Heidegger's opinions. He comments that the fear of death is a result of our preconceived notions of death. Krishnamurti suggests that we shun our preconceived ideas of death and be open to the entire experience of death without expectations:

In order to meet it [death] in such a way all belief, all hope, all fear about it must come to an end, otherwise you are meeting this extraordinary thing with a conclusion, an image, with a premeditated anxiety, and therefore you are meeting it with time To discover that nothing is permanent is of tremendous importance for only then is the mind free, then you can look, and in that there is great joy. (p. 75)

Krishnamurti believes the human fears associated with death are caused by our separation of life and death into two distinct states. He believes that to overcome the fear of death, we should view life and death as together forming the complete cycle of human existence: "We have separated living from dying, and the interval between the living and dying is fear" (Krishnamurti, 1969, p. 76).

By considering life and death as integrated aspects of our entire human experience, we can overcome the fears of death.

Religious Perspectives on Death

Perspectives from religious traditions provide a wealth of human wisdom concerning death. According to Smith (1991), “When religions are sifted for [their] truths, a different cleaner side appears. They become the world’s traditions. They begin to look like data banks that house the winnowed wisdom of the human race” (p. 5). A review of religious beliefs concerning death complements the philosophical and psychological interpretations of being human.

Although death is a common experience, interpretations of death and life after death vary among different religious traditions. According to Hick (1989), a belief in the immortality of the spirit has been present in most religions for centuries. The belief that there is a life after death is one of the oldest concepts of human history (DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983).

Many beliefs in life after death have concerned a nonphysical transition into a serene spiritual world with encounters with other deceased people and possible religious figures, although afterlife existence might also be painful. There may be a judgment or accounting of one's life with a final disposition of the individual spirit following the period of judgment or personal assessment. This final disposition may be heavenly or hellish depending on the final judgment. In the following review, the researcher will provide a brief overview of prehistoric human-African, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian-religious beliefs concerning death and afterlife.

Cro-Magnon humans had a concept of death and an anticipation of life after death. They buried their dead in or near their caves or huts along with the dead person’s tools, weapons, jewelry, and other favorite possessions. The dead were also attired in the favorite formal clothing. The burial of the person, along with her or his belongings, are considered to be prehistoric humankind’s

anticipation of needing these things in life after death (Davison, 1992). Ancient cultures incorporated beliefs in life after death as civilization advanced. The cultural belief of what type of judgment might follow death was based upon the standards of right and wrong that were established according to cultural customs.

Traditional African religions have been influenced by the advent of Christianity and other religious beliefs (Horsey, 1997). However, some beliefs have survived. Most African religions believe in a supreme God who is unique and transcendent. A belief in life after death is incorporated into the myths and funeral practices of Africa. Religion, to many Africans, is part of one's life and "there is no dichotomy between life and religion," (Horsey, 1997, p. 1). Death is accepted as a normal end of life. The sacredness of religion and funeral practices are preserved in ritual dress and practices. The invisible world of spirits and ancestors is always present and part of everyday life. Many Africans perceive death as a departure of the person and not the annihilation of the individual. The dead person is believed to move to another state of existence in the company of other departed spirits (Mbiti, 1970). Many Africans do not visualize any geographical separation between the living world and the afterlife. It is believed by many African religions that "as soon as a person is physically dead he arrives 'there' in his [or her] spirit form" (p. 209).

In African societies corpses are usually buried. Depending on the society, different burial locations are chosen. Some bury their dead in the home of the dead person, or in the compound where the person lived, or in a place behind the compound. People are buried in graves of different shapes and sizes. Some graves are circular, others rectangle, and some "cave-like" at the bottom. In some societies the dead are buried in a big pot. Many societies bury the dead with food, weapons, stools, tobacco, and clothing. In some former African societies the dead person's wife or wives were also buried with him. All of these items were intended to be used by the dead person in the next life

and his wives were to accompany him into the next life. In other societies the dead are thrown into a bush or river and left to be eaten by wild animals or birds. Some societies also have a special hut in which the corpse remains for months and years, at which time the remains are removed and buried. Some families keep the skull or jaw of the dead member in order to remind the family that the deceased lives on in the hereafter (Mbiti, 1970).

Buddhists and Hindus believe that upon death, there is generally a rebirth to another life. Buddhists and Hindus believe that life and death are experiences that lead to spiritual growth. For the sages of these traditions, death is inevitable and need not be feared unless one has not lived a good life. The believer's actions in this life will determine his or her rebirth. Karma is the force created by the actions of the individual-the effects of actions. Good karma, which is achieved by compassionate actions in this life, leads to a higher existence in the next life. For Buddhists, nirvana is reached by achieving an understanding of the nature of reality. This must be discovered through the experiences of other dimensions of human consciousness (Klein, 1991, p. 103).

The Tibetan conception of death is a little different from early Buddhist teachings in its relationship to life and the value of karma. According to Tucci (1958), "Death is not merely a question, as in earlier Buddhism, of the consequence of the process of maturation of karma which has effect at a particular time and in a particular manner, it is also a separation of the life-principle, from the body, which can be traced back to factors which are fortuitous rather than karmic in a strict sense" (pp. 193-194). Tibetans do not believe that the separation of body and spirit at death are permanent. They believe that the spirit can be called back to the body, or in case of permanent death lead the spirit on its journey to a better form of existence, through recitations from the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Tibetan Buddhists also believe that nirvana can be reached in one lifetime (Evans-Wentz, 1960). They believe that this can be accomplished by using all the latent energy of the

human being in service of the spiritual goal. The teachings of the Buddha support the focusing of energy on spiritual development. Upon death, the Buddha states, “All compounded things decay. Work out your own salvation with diligence” (Smith, 1991, p. 88).

Early Taoists attempted to avoid death by using meditative breathing techniques, special diets, magic, and drugs. During the time of Confucius the Taoists began to change their concept of death as being exclusively physical, and began to look for life after the death of the body. They believed that a good afterlife was a reward for good behavior in life. When Buddhism infiltrated Taoist China, people learned that they could reduce the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth by selfless behavior (Davison, 1992).

In Hinduism, death is considered “a series of changes through which an individual passes” (Adiswarananda, 1991, p. 169). Hindu teachings describe ultimate reality as Brahman. According to Adiswarananda (1991), “Brahman is non-dual pure consciousness, indivisible, incorporeal, infinite, and all-pervading like the sky” (p. 159). Death is not feared but an event that one prepares for during life. According to the scriptures of the Hindu Sikhs’ holy book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib (trans. 1985), “Death is not bad if one knows how to die” (p. 579). The Hindus, when confronted with death, have a ceremony that is designed to help celebrate its inevitability and prepare for its coming. When considering what happens after death, the Sikhs believe that it is not what happens between dying and being reborn that is important. It is one’s actions and thoughts in this life that will determine the nature of the next life. The issue of the next life is believed to be determined at the moment the present life ends. To Hindu believers, dying is the fulfillment of life (Singh, 1995).

Death, in the Islamic faith, is the cessation of biological life and the resting of the spirit, in the grave, until the Judgment Day. According to Islamic belief, God gives and takes away life. Parents do not give life and the events of life do not cause death. All actions on behalf of the parents

or events are acts of being intermediaries of God's will. Funeral practices by Islamics reflect the belief that angels of God will come and ask the dead to comment on her or his life. Therefore the dead are usually buried in trenches with a slab of stone to cover the grave. Earth is not to press against the body in order for it not to restrict the body from sitting up and meeting the angels of God (Turner, 1994). Some Muslims believe that at death the "good souls" see visions of God and heaven, and that the wicked see the hell that awaits them. From the time of death to the time of judgment, Muslims believe, the spirit remains in a state of "dreamless sleep," with the exception of possible visions of eternity (Galloway, 1991; Johnson and McGee, 1991).

The Jewish religion generally emphasizes the present life, and not life after death. Jews believe they live and die only once (Ponn, 1991). Although Judaism recognizes that the life of the spirit does not end at the point of bodily death, it is the Jew's responsibility to focus on a meaningful life and not speculate on life after death. According to Elbé (1906), the Old Testament states that the actions in the present life will reward the righteous and chastise the wicked. It does not specifically address the concept of an afterlife. Although the Old Testament does not directly address immortality, traditional Jews believe that death will bring the resurrection of the body and soul, followed by the judgment of the worth of their lives by God. Reform Jews believe that resurrection involves only the soul. The Old Testament, in the writings of Solomon, states that God made man [woman] imperishable. Job comments, "For I know my Redeemer lives, and the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again in my skin, and in my flesh shall I see my God: whom I myself shall see and my eyes shall behold, and not another: this my hope is laid up in my bosom" (Job 19: 25-27, Revised Standard Version; RSV). A judgment and separation of the dead, at death, are commented on in the book of Daniel, "And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always" (Daniel

7: 2, RSV).

Most modern Christians share the beliefs of Judaism, but further believe that Jesus of Nazareth lived, was crucified, arose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and lives forever as God. Christians believe that Jesus is the son of God. Christians believe that, through the force and example of Jesus' life, His death, and His resurrection, there is life after death for all believers. Christians believe that, upon death, they come before God and are judged. According to Smith (1991), "Following death, human life is fully translated into the supernatural domain" (p. 355). Fundamentalists and conservatives interpret the Holy Bible literally and believe that there is a specific heaven and hell and that only Christians are admitted to heaven. All others are condemned to Hell. Other Christians interpret biblical scripture more symbolically, taking into consideration the language and culture of the time when the Bible was written. Heaven and hell are viewed as a "condition," such as happiness or peace, rather than a specific place. Regardless of whether the afterlife beliefs are interpreted conservatively or liberally, many Christians believe that a person dies only once and that after death, the spirit is judged, and then exists in an afterlife for eternity (Galloway, 1991; Johnson & McGee, 1991). According to the Holy Bible, "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9: 27, RSV).

Psychological Perspectives on Death and the Fears of Death

Psychological perspectives on death provide insight into why humans fear death and how they deal with its inevitability. This section reviews some of the psychoanalytic, humanistic, and existential perspectives of death and the fear of death. These perspectives provide an understanding of the fear of death and of how to accept death's finality.

Psychoanalytic Perspectives

According to Freud's (trans. 1946) psychoanalytic theories, defense mechanisms are

employed by the ego to guard against internal and external stimuli that might invoke fear and anxiety. Denial and illusion are cognitive defense mechanisms used by many to deal with the fear of death. Denial allows individuals to avoid thinking about death until its reality renders denial no longer possible. The creation of illusions allows the individual to avoid considering an unpleasant situation such as death, by creating an acceptable illusion such as life after death. Creating illusions allows for the individual not only to deny an unpleasant situation but also create an acceptable alternative. Although people are aware of death and that they will eventually die, many continue to deny its existence. Human beings cannot conceive of their own deaths: "Whenever we make an attempt to imagine it we can perceive that we really survive as spectators Our unconscious does not believe in its own death; it behaves as if it were immortal" (Freud, trans. 1959, pp. 305, 313). Some people can discuss and theorize about death. They can also accept the deaths of others. However, they cannot conceive or accept their own mortality. Breznitz (1983) states,

Denial itself can be particularly effective in view of the fact that death is a single-trial experience, and as long as we are alive we have been through false alarms only. The many threats that did not materialize encourage the illusion of invulnerability so necessary to one's psychological security and well being. (p. 233)

Another effective method of denying death is to repress awareness of its reality (Weisman, 1972). By repressing the consciousness of their mortality, individuals can subjugate their fears of death. Pushing the thought of a fearful or unpleasant experience, such as death, into the future is another form of denial. The reaction of Scarlett O'Hara to the unpleasantness of the Civil War, in Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind (Selznick, 1939/1989), provides an example of pushing unpleasantness into the future. Instead of dealing with her current unpleasantness, Scarlett chose to wait until "tomorrow." When considering death, many people also try not to think about it until

"another time" (Kalish, 1981).

The creation of illusions is an additional psychological method to avoid the fear of death. Tomer (1992) believes that "most people develop and maintain positive illusions regarding themselves, the world, and their ability to control the environment and the future" (p. 488). People may create an illusion of immortality and a belief in an afterlife of "streets of gold" or "a mansion with many rooms" to provide a tangible illusion of what to expect after death. These illusions are reflected in their philosophical and religious beliefs of death and afterlife. The acceptance of these beliefs appears to help reduce many people's fear of death (Kastenbaum, 1992; Levine, 1984).

Carl Jung, in his autobiography Memories, Dreams, Reflections (1961/1989), views death from the perspective of the ego and the psyche. Jungian psychology describes the ego as the bridge between the outside world and the rest of the individual's personality. From the ego's perspective, "it [death] appeared as a catastrophe; that is how it strikes us, as if wicked and pitiless powers had put an end to a human life" (p. 314). The psyche is considered the part of human awareness that provides insight and knowledge. From the perspective of the psyche, "death appears as a joyful event. In the light of eternity, it is a wedding, a mysterium coniunctionis. The soul attains, as it were, its missing half, it achieves wholeness" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 314).

Jung advocates that individuals continuously strive to increase their awareness of death to overcome the fear of death. He proposes that we can be more conscious of life by not denying the reality of death. By this increased consciousness of death, individuals can come to know and accept death as a part of human life: "The sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 326).

According to Becker (1973), the so-called "healthy-minded" argument and the "morbidly-minded" argument propose diverse psychological perspectives concerning the origin of the human

fear of death. The healthy-minded argument is that the fear of death is not innate but learned. It supports the theoretical perspective that fear is a learned response, learned through the exposure to other deaths throughout life (Clark, 1986; Rachman, 1990). The morbidly-minded argument is that the fear of death is not learned but is natural and present in all humans. It supports the belief that fear is innate and based upon the survival instinct of living beings. Becker believes there is no real answer to the argument, yet “nevertheless something very important emerges: there are different images of man [or woman] that he [or she] can draw and chose from” (1973, p. 24). The arguments provide for different perspectives for people to consider when dealing with their fears of death, such as, that the fears of death are either learned or innate in humans. Becker believes that regardless of either argument, overcoming fears of death requires the individual to examine her or his fears and find methods to overcome these fears.

George Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory provides a model of how people form a belief construct and incorporate these constructs into their lives. In Kelly's theory, constructs are cognitive patterns or paradigms that an individual creates to understand and apply to current and future events. These constructs are created on the basis of the individual's personal experiences and cultural influences. According to the personal construct theory, to deal with the fear of death, an individual may need to modify her or his existing construct regarding death (Rigdon, Epting, Neimeyer & Krieger, 1979). Individuals who have not come to accept the inevitability of death will consider death to be incompatible with their current core constructs, leading to fearfulness. Krieger, Epting, and Leitner (1974) explain the nature of a threat, which also can be associated with the threat of death:

If a person's identity and understanding of the model [of death] is challenged, he [or she] is said to experience threat. In construct theory terms, threat is said to be the

awareness of an inability to accurately predict events in the world along with the awareness of a need to undertake some degree of systematic change in order to do so.

Threat arises with a person's realization that he [or she] has lost anticipatory security within the environment. (p. 300)

For some individuals the finality of death, the dying process, and the unknown nature of what happens after death have no place in their existing personal constructs. This lack of constructs can cause fear:

The nature and implication of death are unclear to the person so that death remains an unknown, undefined mystery; the person's expectations and suppositions about the world are not adequate to explain this event. Death simply does not fit anywhere in the person's construct system. (Rigdon, et al., 1979, p. 246-247)

Humanistic Perspectives

Abraham Maslow (1954/1970) and Carl Rogers (1980) have developed humanistic theories that human beings are motivated by a desire to achieve their highest level of innate potential. This achievement is called "self-actualization," the finding of purpose for one's life (Maslow, 1954/1970). Many people fear death because they think that their lives have not been fulfilled or purposeful. Hence, the actualization of one's life can reduce the fear of death (Maslow, 1954/1970; Rogers, 1980). Maslow theorizes that the more an individual accepts her or his life, the less she or he will fear death. He believes that each human "has an essential nature of his [or her] own" (p. 340). He considers normal human development to consist of the "actualizing" of the "essential nature" of the individual. According to Maslow (1954/1970), the actualized individual develops "into maturity along the lines that [the] hidden, covert, dimly seen essential nature dictates, growing from within rather than being shaped from without" (pp. 340-341). The person matures from internal value

motivations and is minimally influenced by outside forces.

Carl Rogers (1980), in his humanistic approach to death, believes that individuals cannot really know whether they fear death until they are actually faced with their own deaths. He relates the fear of the dying process more to the circumstances surrounding the individual's dying than to the process itself:

I think that no one can know whether he or she fears death until it arrives. Certainly, death is the ultimate leap in the dark, and I think it is highly probable that the apprehension I feel when going under an anesthetic will be duplicated or increased when I face death. Yet I don't experience a really deep fear of the process. So far as I am aware, my fear concerning death relate to its circumstances. (Rogers, 1980, pp. 87-88)

Rogers never came to a clear affirmation of a belief in life after death: "I consider death with, I believe, an openness to the experience. It will be what it will be, and I trust I can accept it as either an end to, or a continuation of life" (Rogers, 1980, p. 88).

Rogers (1980) believes that humans develop "toward constructive fulfillment of [their] inherent possibilities" (Rogers, 1980, pp. 117-118). Although this development may be affected by situations in life, most people continue to strive toward their highest potentials. Rogers (1980) believes that the person will continue to grow and enhance her or his self-esteem unless life situations overpower the individual (p. 123). By helping people to find "constructive and growthful changes in [their] personality and behavior," they can be guided toward actualized lives (Rogers, 1980, pp. 133-134).

The idea of self-actualization is a response to the theme that death is a threat to the realization of life goals. Maslow and Rogers believe that their interviews and empirical work support that self-

actualized individuals are satisfied with their lives and do not fear the end of their lives. According to Maslow (1954/1972) and Rogers (1980), the awareness of death for individuals who have not self-actualized can be threatening. To protect themselves from this threat, illusion and denial may be used. However, by being open to the experience, the fully functioning individual might even find the prospect of death an interesting experience (Rogers, 1980, p. 88).

Rollo May (1988) believes that fear strikes the core of an individual's self-esteem and sense of value. According to May (1988),

The critical question is how he [or she] relates to the fact of death: whether he [or she] spends his [or her] existence running away from death or making a cult of repressing the recognition of death under the rationalizations of beliefs in automatic progress or providence, as is the habit of our Western society, or obscuring it by saying 'one dies' and turning it into a matter of public statistics which serve to cover over the one ultimately important fact, that he [or she] himself [or herself] at some unknown future moment will die. (pp. 106-107)

May (1988) considers death an inseparable part of living. He postulates that by confronting the reality of one's eventual nonbeing, and finding meaning in her or his life, the individual can be more attuned to the immediacy of her or his life. This heightened sense of consciousness and meaning can provide a vitality to life and a reduction in the fear of death (p. 110).

Existential Perspectives

An important life task for many individuals is to find value and meaning for their lives. As previously noted, one recurrent theme is the threat death poses to life's meaningfulness. By finding meaning in life, individuals develop values, goals, and priorities. To accomplish these tasks, according to Schuster (1986), requires a recognition and acceptance of death. According to

Kastenbaum (1986), death can provide meaning to life by guiding us to clarify our values. Finding meaning in life can help to reduce the fear of death: "Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual" (Frankl, 1968, p. 122). Search-for-meaning theories relate to the human process of reformulating "perceptions, life schemes and attitudes" to make sense of life (Tomer, 1992, p. 482). Thompson and Janigian (1988) comment that meaning can be found in life schemes that consist "of both order (of the world and one's place in it) and purpose (of one's life)" (Tomer, 1992, p. 483). Viktor Frankl (1968) theorizes that all reality has meaning, dependent on an individual's perceptions and attitudes, and that life never ceases to have meaning (Fabry, 1968).

Search-for-meaning theorists postulate that by finding meaning and purpose in life one can accept the inevitability of death. According to Taylor (1983), meaning may be found "by such cognitive processes as finding a causal explanation for the experience and restructuring the meaning of one's life around the setback [death]" (p. 1170). To overcome the fear of death, one should accept life's suffering and attempt to find the purpose of the fear of death. The finding of purpose of and meaning of the fear of death can lead to an acceptance of the inevitability of death.

To help an individual to reduce her or his fear and anxiety about death, a reconstruction of personal constructs that deny death is required. The development of new personal constructs that accept death and one's mortality is needed. Philosophical, religious, and psychological teachings may help to restructure new personal constructs. The question of this research is whether the use of stories of near-death experiences may help restructure some people's fearful constructs of death with a more positive perspective about death.

Death from the Elderly's Perspective

According to Tolstoykh (1987), "Old age is man's [or woman's] most paradoxical and

contradictory stage of life. It is a time when life's last questions arise with full intensity, allowing no illusions and demanding solutions to what is unresolved" (p. 208). Many elderly people fear growing old. They fear the loss of their health, their personal independence, and dying. However, many elderly fear death less than younger individuals (Butler & Lewis, 1977). Kalish (1981) comments, "While the ultimate meaning of death remains the same, perception of the meaning of death changes as the individual grows older" (p. 132). To understand how the elderly physically and psychologically deal with aging and the increased proximity to death, I will review some demographics of aging, perspectives on aging, and the fears some elderly persons may have about death.

There is no precise age at which an individual is considered elderly. However, gerontologists such as Butler & Lewis (1977) recognize 65 to 70 years old as the age for an individual to be considered elderly in contemporary Western society. This elderly segment of Western society is growing. The number of individuals who are 65 years or older has increased sevenfold since 1900. By the mid-1980s, the over 65-year-old population represented one in six adults. In 1990, 31 million Americans were 65 years old or older. This represents 12% of the United States population (Pegels, 1988). According to Pegels (1988), "Over the next 50 years, Americans who are 65 years or older will increase to 20% of the population" (p. 26). This growing population presents its own special set of life adaption problems and solutions.

Becoming old presents aging adults with unique physical and psychological challenges. A poll of people aged 65 or older reveal that the aged have concerns about becoming old and the pains associated with an aging body, infirmity, loss of independence, not having enough money to live on, a lack of medical resources, and a loss of value and respect (Butler & Lewis, 1977; Gallup, 1988). Many elderly people maintain a sense of independence and feel that their lives have value by their

continuing to be socially engaged, through work or involvement in social activities. Others, however, become despondent and bitter and live the remainder of their lives unhappily (Birren & Schaie, 1990; Butler & Lewis, 1977)

The voluntary or involuntary loss of physical and social activities can be frightening (Butler & Lewis, 1977; Kalish, 1981). As one's physical and sometimes mental health begins to decline, the fears of pain, loss of control, social isolation, and death can become exacerbated for many elderly (Rachman, 1990). Under these conditions, death could be considered a release from the imprisonment of a failing body or mind, or conversely, for others, the intrusion of death on their lives can be frightening (Kalish, 1981). Experiencing the deaths of their peers often forces the elderly to confront the realities of their own impending deaths, if they have not already done so earlier in life. Viney (1993) reports that the physical, psychological, and social changes associated with aging often result in the need for the aging person to modify some of her or his personal constructs to be able to anticipate future events and reduce her or his fears of aging and death. The following sections present physical and psychological perspectives on how many people are affected by, and deal with, growing old.

Attitudes toward aging are diverse depending upon the individual's life experiences, health, social independence, and cultural attitudes towards aging and the aged (Birren & Schaie, 1990; Butler & Lewis, 1977). A belief that aging is a natural and respected process, not to be feared, may help the elderly person accept the aging process and find value and purpose in her or his later years (Tolstikh, 1987). An individual's physical and psychological perspectives on life and aging can affect her or his personal constructs and responses to growing old (Kelly, 1955; Schooler, 1990).

Physical Aging

The physical aspects of aging relate to the effects of aging on the human body. Physical

aging refers to the progressive development and deterioration of the body. From the time a person is born her or his body ages and it matures. As a person ages her or his physical capabilities reach a peak of development and then usually begin to decline (Butler & Lewis, 1977). Busse (1969) categorized physical aging into two processes, primary aging and secondary aging. Primary aging is caused by the physical processes of aging that are irreversible, such as declining eyesight or arteriosclerosis. Secondary aging is the physical effect that reversible illnesses and diseases, such as some cancers or gastrointestinal disorders, have on the body (Elias, Elias, & Elias, 1990). The physical effects of aging cause some elderly people to discontinue some of their social and leisure activities because these activities have become too physically demanding.

Some elderly adults live active, robust lives until their deaths. Others, due to the effects of aging, illness, and disease, progressively deteriorate and may become dependent on others to care for them. The loss of independence and control over one's life can be fearful for many people (Rachman, 1990).

Many elderly believe that “you are only as old as you feel.” This implies the importance aging humans place on feeling physically and psychologically fit (Butler & Lewis, 1977). For an elderly person, physical and mental activities are important. The fact that a person may be physically challenged to perform certain activities without assistance should not limit her or his activities. The elderly individual needs to adjust to the need to be dependent on an assistive device, such as a cane, walker, or wheelchair, or the assistance of someone to help perform some physical activities. The use of assisted devices or reliance on another person should not be approached as a loss of independence, but as a method to continue to remain independent and involved in life (Butler & Lewis, 1977; Spirduso & MacRae, 1990). However, for some elderly, the prospect of death is a willing end to not having control over their body, the pain associated with some illnesses and

diseases, and the loss of independence.

Psychological Perspectives on Aging

To take a psychological perspective on aging is to focus on the mental, emotional, and social aspects of becoming old and how the elderly respond to their loss of physical, mental, and social capabilities (Birren & Birren, 1990). As the aging individual realizes that she or he can no longer do some things, the need for psychological adjustment increases. This increase in psychological adjustments can be caused by neurobiological changes related to the elderly's physical and mental condition, and changes in the level of their social interactions. An individual's mental health also can be affected by the level of her or his mental stimulation. Without adequate mental stimulation, a person's mental competency might be compromised (Birren & Birren, 1990; Viney, 1993). The mental condition of an elderly adult can be affected by the decline of brain function due to disease, such as Alzheimer's disease, or other cognitive dysfunctions associated with aging (Salthouse, 1990).

Some people accept aging as a natural developmental process that all living beings experience. Others attempt to deny or delay it by refusing to accept that they are growing old (Butler & Lewis, 1977; Kimsey, Roberts, and Logan, 1972). Some people will deny their aging by undergoing cosmetic surgery, grooming themselves and wearing clothes normally worn by younger people, and acting chronologically younger than their age. Others will accept aging gracefully and maintain an active psychological, physical, and social interactions with the world around them. They use their "wisdom of the ages" to interpret and respond to life (Butler & Lewis, 1977). Erikson (1975) and Kelly (1955) suggest that individuals who have difficulty accepting their aging might be considered having problems with their psychosocial development and personal constructs.

Erikson's (1975) psychosocial development theory provides a panoramic interpretation of human development from birth to old age. He divides human development into eight stages that are

passed through from birth until old age. During each stage an ego quality associated with the individual's relationship to others is defined and internalized. The outcome of each developmental stage influences how she or he responds to the world around her or him (Butler & Lewis, 1977). The first four stages occur from birth through childhood. Adolescence is considered the fifth stage. The remaining three stages occur from early adulthood through old age (Hall & Lindzey, 1978).

According to Erikson's theory, by the time an individual is considered elderly, she or he may have resolved, or is resolving, her or his final issues of ego development. This psychosocial stage is focused on reviewing one's life, accepting life's accomplishments and failures, and preparing to die. It involves a psychological tension between ego integrity and despair (Erikson, 1975, 1982; Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986), and can be characterized "as a state one reaches after having taken care of things and people, products and ideas, and having adapted to the successes and failures of existence" (Hall & Lindzey, 1978, p. 99). Individuals who feel that their lives have been meaningful will not despair over possible lost opportunities but will feel integrated by having lived a full life. Those who have not resolved this final ego conflict may feel despondent over being old.

The methods that people use to deal with aging are variable, dependent upon the individual, but are usually associated with the value they have placed on their lives and their roles in society. When individuals cannot live up to the role expectations of society, they may begin to be considered "socially dead" (Kastenbaum, 1986, p. 35).

The activity theory (Burbank, 1986; Steinkamp & Kelly, 1987), disengagement theory (Achenbaum & Bengtson, 1994; Marshall, 1980), and role theory (Caspi, 1987; Scharlach, 1989) represent three additional psychosocial theoretical approaches to how people deal with the realities of aging. The activity theory postulates that the more active an older individual is in society, the more successfully she or he will age and remain independent (Howe, 1987). Inversely, according to

disengagement theorists, as roles, interests, and abilities change, the elderly individual may begin to detach from society. With some elderly, the separation from social functions may be due to a lack of interest or ability to perform an activity or due to reduced social interaction with other people. This disengagement from social interactions may lead to psychological problems such as depression, and cognitive dysfunctions due to a lack of mental stimulation (Birren & Birren, 1990). However, for some elderly, disengagement may be a response to the individual preparing to die (Kübler-Ross, 1969).

According to role theory, age brings on fewer new roles to play and more ending of roles played throughout life. Older individuals' roles in the work place or family may change as they age. In the work place, the older person may be replaced by a younger person. Family roles change as children become independent and as a spouse and friends die. These changes can result in a reduced sense of purpose and a reduction in socialization. Caspi (1987) suggests that a decline in the older persons' personal and social attitudes is directly related to the extent that the individual has given up roles as she or he ages. Many gerontologists believe that as roles change, the more active and engaged an elderly person remains, the better psychologically, and often physically, she or her will remain (Birren & Schaie, 1990; Butler & Lewis, 1977; Caspi, 1987; Marshall, 1980; Maynard, 1974).

There are similarities between the role and disengagement theories. Both posit that as the individual chooses to disengage from or changes her or his role(s) in life, she or he can be psychologically impacted. The primary difference between the two theories relates to the control the individual has over either choosing to disengage from life roles or being involuntarily forced to give up her or his life roles due to retirement, infirmity, or widowhood (Marshall, 1980).

As we have seen, changes in social interaction and roles usually move the individual into her

or his final psychosocial stage of development (Erikson, 1982). As with all changes, this transition usually results in the need for the individual to modify existing personal constructs that may have worked during her or his younger years and form new ones that will support the realities of being elderly and coming closer to the end of life (Kelly, 1955; Viney, 1993). According to Viney (1993),

The personal construct approach to the elderly views them as having built up complex sets of personal meanings to deal with the many events in their long lives Our continuing psychological development is ensured by a neverending cycle of validation-invalidations, by others and by events, of the constructs we use in order to make sense of ourselves and our worlds. (pp. 9-10)

As the individual ages and gathers experiences, these new experiences cause a reinterpretation of previously known interpretations and expectations. These changes in personal constructs may help some elderly to deal with the fears of growing old and dying.

The Elderly's Fears of Death

A fallacy concerning the elderly is that they often think of and fear death. In reality, the elderly may be more aware of death because they are seeing many of their friends dying, but they do not fear death more than younger adults. According to Kalish (1981) and Kermis (1984), many older people fear death less than younger people. Kimsey, Roberts, and Logan (1972) comment that it is the physical and mental state of the older person that helps to determine her or his attitude toward death: "Healthy, self-sufficient aged may view death one way, and the sick, helpless aged may well view it differently" (p. 164). Viney (1993) states, "Those who have seen their lives as a series of natural cycles, each with their own meaning, will see death in the same way" (p. 164). They will not fear its inevitability. Kalish (1981, p. 131) cites four reasons for the elderly being less fearful:

1. Many elderly recognize and accept that they have a limited future and have worked through some of their fears of death.
2. Many older individuals suffer from physical and mental chronic impairments and find that death can be a willing disengagement from life to end the suffering.
3. The older the individual gets the more she or he feels that she or he has gotten her or his "just measure" of life and can accept the end of life.
4. Some older people are tired of dealing with life's burdens and look forward to death.

Though many elderly people do not fear death, there are others who do fear death. According to Erikson (1982), the resolution of the conflicts of the final psychosocial stage will help the elder not be threatened by death. Individuals who have not resolved the ego conflict of the last psychosocial stage could be despondent and fear death. They may feel that their life has been purposeless and that they have not accomplished anything of value. It is expected that a successful resolution of Erikson's integrity versus despair stage would help reduce or eliminate an individual's fear of death by the acceptance of her or his life.

Elderly individuals who are either dying or experiencing a major loss concerning health, the deaths of others, or personal independence, may fear death more than other elderly people (Cohan, 1990). The elderly's fears of physical pain, risks of dying, and the threat death could pose to their integrity can be addressed much the same as with other dying people. Much of the physical pain associated with dying can be controlled by the administration of appropriate dosages of pain medication (Nuland, 1993). Overcoming the fear of the risks of dying can be accomplished by encouraging the older person to talk about her or his fears and by sharing with her or him what to expect as death approaches (Kübler-Ross, 1969). The fear of a loss of integrity can be reduced by treating the person with dignity and assuring the elder that her or his dignity will be protected always

(Butler & Lewis, 1977).

Dying alone is a common fear of the elderly (Kermis, 1984; Kübler-Ross, 1969). Eventually, many elderly have to rely on someone for their continued care. As the aged need continued care, many are institutionalized in hospitals or nursing homes. This isolation from family members and familiar environments can exacerbate a fear of being alone at death. According to Kermis (1984), "A person's fear of death as unnatural and alien is accentuated if that person is in an unfamiliar place such as a hospital or nursing home" (p. 326). The fear of dying alone at death can be reduced by maintaining social interaction between the elder and her or his family and others (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Programs such as home health care and hospice have helped to keep elderly and dying people close to their family, friends, and familiar surroundings. These programs also have helped the dying person feel more in control of her or his life and death, and allowed her or him to die in relative physical comfort and dignity (Naisbitt, 1984).

Near-Death Experiences

Those undergoing a near-death experience typically have a sense of peace about death and a lack of fear of what comes after life (Moody, 1977). The experience usually begins with an awareness of being separated from one's body during the process of dying. Individuals may experience a sense of peace, entering darkness, seeing a bright light, meeting spiritual entities, having a panoramic life review, and a sense of judging their lives. At the completion of the experience, the individual returns to life (Moody, 1975). This part of the literature review will examine the phenomenology and theories of near-death experiences (NDEs).

NDEs have been recounted throughout history and around the world, and may date back to the Ice Age (Greyson, 1992a; Mauro, 1992). Prehistoric cave paintings in France and Spain depict scenes that are similar to reported visions related to NDEs (Zaleski, 1987). Book 10 of Plato's

Republic (trans. 1976) presents the story of a near-death experience of a Greek soldier named Er. Er is killed in battle and his body is placed on a funeral pyre. Just before he is to be cremated, he awakens and tells a story of leaving his body and traveling with others to a place where they were all to be judged.

Contemporary figures such as Carl Jung, Thomas Edison, and Ernest Hemingway also have reported their own NDEs (Jung, 1961/1989; Moody, 1977; Zaleski, 1987). Modern researchers, such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1991), Raymond Moody (1975, 1977, 1988), Kenneth Ring (1980, 1985), and Melvin Morse (1990, 1992) have provided modern accounts of NDEs during close encounters with physical death. Quantitative research has shown that the similarities between the different reports of NDEs are not a result of chance or accident (Ring, 1980, 1985).

Since Raymond Moody's 1975 book, Life after Life the subject of NDEs have permeated the general U.S. public. Prior to the sensationalization of Life after Life the subject of NDEs was discussed mostly in the homes of those who had the experience, hospitals and settings for the treatment of physical trauma, and in some counseling environments. Moody's initial book was followed by books by many other physicians, near-death experiencers, and researchers. Some of these books are the following: Raymond Moody's, Reflections On Life After Life (1977), and The Light Beyond (1988); Melvin Morse's, Closer To The Light (1990), and Transformed By The Light (1992); Bailey and Yates', The Near-Death Experience (1996); Betty Eadie's, Transformed By The Light (1992); Kenneth Ring's, Life At Death: A Scientific Investigation Of The Near-Death Experience (1980), and Heading For Omega – In Search Of The Meaning Of The Near-Death Experience (1985); and Michael Sabom's, Recollections Of Death - A Medical Investigation (1982).

The authors of these books and those who had had a near-death experience began to

make many public appearances, including appearing on radio and television news programs such as 20/20 and 60 Minutes, as well as many talk shows. NDEs were also the subject of the 1989 film Flatliners. This proliferation of information about NDEs informed the public and helped those who had had the experience to feel more comfortable about sharing their experiences. A look at the New York Times' best sellers lists from 1992 through 1995 reveals that books pertaining to NDEs were continuously represented on the best seller's list. Books such as Raymond Moody's, Reflections On Life After Life (1977), and Betty Eadie's Transformed By The Light (1992) were each on the best sellers' list for more than 10 weeks.

The scientific community began to produce studies of the experience such as Ring (1980), Sabom (1982), Grof (1988), Morse (1990), and Zaleski (1987). Researchers and experiencers formed a professional association to study the near-death phenomenon, the International Association of Near-Death Studies (IANDS). The association produces an educational journal, the Journal of Near Death Studies, which reports new information regarding NDEs. IANDS also sponsors regular seminars on the subject of NDEs. These seminars are intended for the scientific and education community. As a public service, IANDS also sponsors local support groups for near-death experiencers and their families.

According to a 1991 Gallup Poll estimate, 13 million Americans, 5% of the population, have reported that they have had a near-death experience (Greyson, 1992a). Research has shown that NDEs are no more likely to affect the devoutly religious than the agnostic or atheist. A near-death experience can be experienced by anyone (Moody, 1975, 1977, 1980; Morse, 1990; Ring, 1980, 1985). Talbot (1991) reports that NDEs appear to have no relationship to "a person's age, sex, marital status, race, religion and/or spiritual beliefs, social class, educational level, income, frequency of church attendance, size of home community, or area of residence" (p. 240).

Many who have had NDEs report that it is difficult to describe the experiences because there are not appropriate words to accurately describe their experiences (Moody, 1988, Ring, 1985). They therefore commonly interpret the experience using words, phrases, and metaphors that reflect their religious-cultural backgrounds (San Filippo, 1993).

The Phenomenology of the Near-Death Experience

Those who have claimed to have had NDEs give consistently similar reports. According to Talbot (1991), "One of the most interesting aspects of the ND phenomenon is the consistency one finds from experience to experience" (p. 240). Although most experiencers may not experience all of the traits associated with NDEs, or in the same order, their experience is similar. The following is a reconstructed description of the content of a reported complete near-death experience. Although many experiencers do not report all of the following characteristics, this reconstruction represents most of the major qualities of NDEs drawn from modern accounts:

At the onset of the near-death experience, the individual may experience a sense of being dead, and surprise at being dead, yet no remorse at being dead. Following the peaceful awareness of being dead, the experiencer may have an out-of-body experience, a perception of separating from the physical body and moving away from it. The individual may experience a sense of moving up through a tunnel during a stage of entering into the darkness. As she or he passes through the tunnel, there may be an awareness of a bright light toward the end of the tunnel. While experiencing the consciousness of the light, ethereal forms may also be seen in the light.

In the later part of the near-death experience, the individual may sense that she or he is rising rapidly toward the light into what may be considered heaven or another plane of consciousness. During this ascension, the experiencer may encounter a Being of Light reported to be either God, another spiritual deity, or an energy form (for nontheists). The encounter with the Being of Light

floods the experiencer with a sense of unconditional love that radiates from the Being. During this encounter, the person may become conscious of having a panoramic review of her or his life and may experience a sense of self-judgment. The judgment is not by the Being of Light but is a personal judgment by the experiencer.

Throughout each stage, and particularly in the latter stages of the near-death experience, the individual may be reluctant to return to her or his former life. However, at a point during the experience, the individual becomes aware that she or he must either return to her or his body or never return to life. Individuals who have returned report that they either chose to return, or were directed by the Being of Light to return to their lives (Moody, 1975; Ring, 1985).

The description above is considered a naïve description of the near-death experience. A naïve description and interpretation of NDEs are usually what is provided by the media. Programs such as 20/20, 48 Hours, and 60 Minutes provide some depth to the subject. However the talk show format of many public discussions of the topic of NDEs offers limited understanding of the phenomenon, providing little interpretation of the apparent givens of this experience. The near-death experience (NDE) is usually understood just in the way it is reported, as indicating the separation of the consciousness from the physical realm. The discussions of NDEs usually include some or all of the phenomenology that is reported in the literature review section, Phenomenology of Near-Death Experiences, but without addressing the value and meaning to the experiencer or others of these phenomena. The researcher found that the majority of the participants of his research who were aware of NDEs, had this limited interpretation of the experience and had not given much thought to the value or other interpretation of the experience until interviewed by the researcher.

The subject of how the NDEs affect those who have heard about these experiences has not been researched or discussed until this dissertation, and also in a new book by Kenneth Ring (1998),

Lessons From The Light: What We Can Learn From Near-Death Experiences. This work discusses not only the effects that NDEs have on the experiencer, but also how hearing about NDEs impacts the listener.

Although most near-death reports are positive and represent a pleasurable experiences, there are some reports of negative or "hellish" type experiences. These reports are rare. Of all the reported NDEs, a 1982 Gallup poll estimated that less than 1% are considered negative. The negative NDEs are reported to contain similar traits as positive experiences, but are also associated with extreme fear, panic or anger, helplessness, possible visions of demonic creatures, or a sense of eternal repetition of a painful experience (Greyson, 1992a; Horacek, 1992; Moody, 1988; Rawlings, 1993; Staff, 1992).

According to Rawlings (1993), however, negative NDEs may occur more often than reported. He believes that experiencers may relegate the negative experiences to "painless portions of the memory" or be too embarrassed by the experiences to report their occurrences (p. 33). Rawlings also attributes the low reports of negative experiences to poor data collection techniques:

Perhaps the greatest reason for the paucity of negative reports is the defective method of data collection. Methods are used that disregard the simple bell curve distribution for population studies and scientific information. There are invariably two extremes to any curve, and bias results when investigation is limited to only one end of the curve while the other end is disregarded or purposely omitted. (Rawlings, 1993, p. 34)

Children have also reported having NDEs that are similar to adult experiences (Moody, 1988; Morse, 1990). Although some of the children who have reported having had a near-death experience may be too young to clearly articulate their experience, they have been able to share these

experiences with researchers through drawings and paintings. In some cases, children report information to which they had not been exposed before their NDEs. As an example, some children report meeting spiritual entities who are later identified as deceased relatives whom the child could not have known before her or his near-death experience (Moody, 1988, Morse, 1990).

Many individuals who have experienced the phenomenon described as a NDE appear to have had a lasting aftereffects from the experience (Lorimer, 1990; Ring, 1980). Experiencers often claim to have a fuller understanding of their religious or spiritual insights and feel closer to God (Ring, 1980). They also claim an absence of the fear of death (Morse 1990, 1992; Ring, 1980, 1985).

Children have similar aftereffects to adults. As these children grow and mature, they generally have a sense of purpose and direction for their lives and often do not develop a fear of death (Morse, 1990).

According to Morse (1990), not only do NDEs have an effect on the experiencers, by reducing their fear of death, but they also can have implications for dying patients and surviving family and friends.

The knowledge that the process of dying is not painful or scary, but spiritual and wondrous, can be comforting Research on NDEs validates a variety of death-related visions. The knowledge that NDEs are “real” events can bring new meaning to a peaceful smile before death, a faraway look in the eyes, or simple and brief statements such as “the light, the light” that might otherwise be dismissed. (Morse, 1996, pp. 232-233)

Ring (1980) reported, from his in-depth research of individuals who had come close to death and either reported experiencing the near-death phenomenon or reported not experiencing the phenomenon, that experiencers had a greater decreased fear of death and a greater increase in a belief in life after death than non-experiencers.

Our findings, despite some methodological ambiguities, strongly suggested a marked decrease for

experiencers, where nonexperiencers tended to show no systematic change ($p < .001$) . . . [further], our finding was that experiencers showed a dramatic postincident increase in [after life] belief, where nonexperiencers showed virtually none. (p. 204)

A report of a near-death experience that one of Ring's (1980) subjects had reflects how she learned not to fear death as a result of her experience.

I was afraid of death. I remember as a young woman when I had my two children, sometimes I'd wake up crying in the middle of the night and my husband would hold me, because I would hit me in the middle of the night and . . . [my husband] would just hold me and talk to me and I would get over it. But, I was always afraid of death. Which they say is quite common. Well, I faced death those three weeks I was in the hospital. They never knew whether my heart stopped or not. And they told me this [that her heart could stop at any moment] and I knew this and was aware of it, and yet I had no fear at all. First time in my life that I was actually face to face with death, that knew that I would close my eyes and not wake up again and I wasn't afraid. Because I remember the feeling. I just remember this absolute beautiful feeling . . . And ever since then I've never been afraid of death. (p. 178)

It is the premise of this research that through the telling stories of NDEs and their after effects on the experiencers, similar to that of the woman quoted above, that others might also reduce their fear of death.

From the study of the NDE, we have learned to see death in a new way, not as something to be dreaded but, on the contrary, as an encounter with the Beloved. Those who can come to understand death in this way, as NDErs are compelled to, need never fear death again. And liberated from this primary fear, they too, like NDErs, become free to experience life as the gift it is and to live naturally, as a child does, with delight. Not everyone can learn to assimilate these lessons of the NDE into [her] his own life if [she] he chooses to. (Ring, 1985, p. 268)

Theories of Near-Death Experiences

There are many theories concerning NDEs. Some theologians, medical practitioners, and psychologists believe that NDEs are neurobiological or psychological responses of the body and mind to impending death (Moody, 1988; Nuland, 1993). Others believe that NDEs are transpersonal events that are separate from everyday human life. Most transpersonal theorists believe NDEs begin as a physical or psychological response to dying and then convert to transpersonal experience. Although scientific studies have replicated some aspects of NDEs, there are, however, components of the experiences that defy neurobiological or psychological explanations and may provide support for the transpersonal theory of NDEs (Morse, 1990, 1992; Ring, 1980, 1985). The following is a brief account of neurobiological, psychological, and transpersonal perspectives on NDEs.

Neurobiological theories. Neurobiological theories that maintain NDEs are purely physical or mental phenomena caused by neurological-biological dysfunction associated with the dying process are supported by the research of Penfield (Penfield & Roberts, 1959), whose stimulation of the temporal parts of the brain replicated some of the elements of NDEs. Some subjects sensed being out of their bodies, traveling in a tunnel, seeing a bright light, and having vivid memories. Researchers such as Sagan (1979) and Siegel (1981) believe that NDEs are caused by chemical reactions within the body and brain during the dying process. They postulate that during the dying process, as the eyes deteriorate, they produce the bright light reported to be seen during NDEs. The tunnel effect and the sensation of being out-of-body are believed to be caused by the chemical reactions in the body during the dying process (Moody, 1988, p.178). According to researcher Ronald Siegel (1981), "The descriptions given by dying persons are virtually identical to descriptions given by persons experiencing hallucinations, drug-induced or otherwise" (p. 65). Carl Sagan (1979) states that some NDEs can be associated with "a wiring defect in the human

neuroanatomy that under certain conditions always leads to the same illusion of astral projection/out-of-body experience" (p. 47).

Sherwin Nuland (1993), a physician, states that NDEs may be a result of biological or psychological evolution that is intended to preserve life or a return to the natural process of preparing the body to die. He believes that the experiences may be caused by either releases of endorphins or other biochemical reactions to the dying process.

Towards the end of your life, your body is giving you signals, sometimes very recognizable signals, that the time has come to recognize that nature has won and you must go with nature. Recognizing this gives you the most emotional comfort. It allows you to die the way people used to die 75 and 80 years ago, surrounded by those they loved. (Nuland, 1997, p. 66)

Regarding NDEs, he believes there is a psychological origin for these experiences. He comments,

I would not be surprised if some other elements that have been thought to be possible causes do prove to play a role, such as the psychological defense mechanism called depersonalization, the hallucinatory effect of terror, seizures originating in the temporal lobes of the brain, and insufficient cerebral oxygenation. (Nuland, 1993, p. 138)

Susan Blackmore (1996), a psychologist, proposes a hypothesis for NDEs. She believes that NDEs are hallucinations caused by biological reactions to the dying brain. Blackmore explains the tunnel experience as originating from the part of the brain that process visual data. The tunnel is "seen" as a result of confusion in the processing of information from the visual cortex of the brain. The out-of-body experiences, reported by near-death experiencers are explained as memories projected as a "bird's-eye view" of the event being seen. According to Blackmore, "As perceiving

creatures all we know is what our senses tell us. And our senses tell us what is 'out there' by constructing models of the world with ourselves in it." Humans therefore "see" experiences that they are involved in from a detached, "bird's-eye view" (Blackmore, 1996, p. 292-293). She supports her theories by her own research with ketamine, in which she claims she has been able to replicate some out-of-body experiences. As Blackmore explains, when a person has an out-of-body experience, the person believes she or he is seeing the event or scene from a memory versus direct sensory data.

As with Penfield's research with temporal lobe stimulation, Blackmore explains the origin of the near-death experience life review as a response to temporal lobe stimulation or seizure produced by the stress associated with dying. She argues that the release of neuropeptides and neurotransmitters, such as endogenous endorphins, are responsible for the sense of the experiencer having a life review. According to Blackmore, the significant after-effects of many near-death experiencers are simply that the experiencers are "jolted" out of their previous views of their lives and see themselves and their lives differently:

The near-death experience can out of the blue strike anyone and show them what they never knew before, that their body is only that-a lump of flesh-that they are not so very important after all. And that is a very freeing and enlightening experience.

(p. 296)

Karl Jansen (1996), a neurologist, believes that endorphins are the source of NDEs. He believes that the body produces the endorphins that create the often pleasant near-death experience in order to minimize the pains and fears of dying. According to Jansen, near-death experiences are an altered state of consciousness with characteristic features caused by neuro-toxicity. He, like Blackmore, has replicated some of the features of NDEs with the use of ketamine. He therefore

believes that the naturally produced endorphins, which can be replicated with ketamine, are the source of NDEs:

The near-death experience is an important phenomenon that can be safely reproduced by ketamine, and the “glutamate theory of the near-death experience” can thus be investigated by experiment. Recent advances in neuroscience strongly suggests a common origin for ketamine experiences and the near-death experience in events occurring at glutamatergic synapses, mediated by the NMDA (PCP) receptor. This theory represents an extension of previous hypotheses, and incorporates most of the neurobiological and psychological theories which have been put forward. It links many of these ideas (hypoxia, peptide release, temporal lobe epilepsy, regression in the service of ego, reactivation of birth memories, sensory deprivation, etc.) Rather than being an alternative to them. (Jansen, 1996, p. 276)

Psychological theories. From a psychological perspective, some researchers explain NDEs as the mind's defense against the fear of dying. Freud (trans. 1957) suggested that a defense mechanism to overcome the fear of extinction is to observe death as a “spectator” and not as an event happening to oneself. The vivid, positive autoscopic NDEs could support Freud’s interpretation by its out-of-body, spectator’s, view of one’s death (Sabom, 1982). As demonstrated by Nuland’s comment in the previous section, some researchers believe that NDEs may be the result of the experiencer’s psychological defense mechanism to control the fear of death. Noyes and Kletti (1976a) believe that NDEs are caused by the psychological defense mechanism of depersonalization.⁴ They postulate that during the mental disorganization of the dying process, the near-death experience provides an altered state of consciousness that reduces some of the fear of dying. Some psychologists also

⁴ This is defined as the psychological separation of the individual’s awareness of a given situation as a result of psychological trauma such as fear or pain.

believe that the mind creates positive images of death to control the fear of dying (Moody, 1988; Morse, 1990). These images could be the created features of the near-death experience that demonstrate a freedom from pain after death, the survival of the individual, and consciousness of life after death.

Jungian psychologists portray the NDE as an experience of a set of archetypes associated with death that psychologically reduce the fear of dying. These archetypes, such as the higher Self or God image, the light, guide or wise person, and treasure or reward, are often reported by near-death experiencers. According to Grosso (1983), these archetypes may be brought to consciousness during the dying process because a typical modern person is often a “solitary, anxious, driven being, spiritually uprooted and traditionless-[and having] lost touch with the healing symbols and energies of the deep psyche that help us to cope with death and dying” (p. 4). Grosso (1983) states, “According to the theory of archetypes, dominants of the collective unconscious are activated to compensate for the one-sidedness of the conscious mind” (p. 8). Many persons’ conscious minds perceive death as a one-sided experience with no future after death. According to Jungian psychology, in order to compensate for this image of death, they may create the archetypal images of NDEs to reduce their fears.

The existential perspective of Victor Frankl’s theory of logotherapy suggests that finding meaning to ones’ life through personal life experiences can help the individual overcome difficult situations (Frankl, 1968). Meaning can be found by an individual reviewing her/his life from the perspective of her/his values. Explaining the NDEs from the perspective of logotherapy, Crumbaugh (1997) reasons that “NDEs have to be experiences gained from the individual’s past sensory data. This makes them hallucinations or dreamlike phenomena, which arise under extreme conditions of body insult, such as heart attack, stroke, or car accident” (p. 156). According to the

theory of logotherapy, meaning for the near-death experience can be developed individually through the examination of one's experiences before, during, and after the near-death experience. Logotherapy allows the person to accept the near-death experience at "face-value" and appreciate its effect on one's life. According to Crumbaugh (1997):

The answer is found in Frankl's First Law⁵ and his admonition to avoid reductionism. He did not deny the material, physical, mechanistic side of human life, but he warned against the fallacious trap of reducing all human experience to that side. (p. 159)

Psychologist and researcher Bruce Greyson (1992c) provides three psychological explanations for NDEs. First, he supports the theory of depersonalization as a source of NDEs. Second, he considers the near-death experience may be a recalled memory from the individual birth experience. Psychiatrist Stanslov Grof originally developed this explanation for NDEs but further explained his theory by stating his belief that the near-death experience is a symbolic, archetypal image of the birth process and not a recall of the individual's actual birth (Grof & Halifax, 1977). Greyson's third explanation is that NDEs are the result of the individual regressing in order to protect the ego from the fear of extinction.

Contemporary transpersonal theories. The psychological perspectives considered so far differ from contemporary transpersonal psychological perspectives by their focus on the psychological processes

5 Frankl's First Law is that, "while no cause-and-effect relationship can be proven by analogy, it is often the most convincing form of reasoning, because by definition it has "face validity"; that is, it appears reasonable on the face of the issue at hand [An] analogy is especially powerful where data from the scientific or experimental method do not exist or are inadequate" (Crumbaugh, 1997, pp. 157-158).

of the mind; the transpersonal psychological perspective additionally focuses on other dimensions of experience. The transpersonal approaches often accept mainstream psychology but also include “the sense of identity or self [that] extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993, p. 203).

Transpersonal theorists provide an alternative or additional explanation for near-death phenomena. The transpersonal perspective questions theories of reductionism, and the sense that the experience is only physical. However, the transpersonal model does not discount the effects the body and mind have in NDEs. Rather, the transpersonal perspective offers spiritual explanations to the phenomenon. Transpersonal theorists, such as Grof (Grof & Grof, 1980) and Sabom (1982), consider NDEs to be an expression of an altered state of consciousness of a realm that is separate from the ordinary physical and mental realms of human existence. These experiences have a profound impact on the experiencer's life.

Grof (Grof & Grof, 1980) believes that biological death is not the end of consciousness. He considers NDEs to be a confrontation with death that can lead to personal transformation. Grof comments that the consciousness studies of NDEs may provide a guide for death,

In the light of recent observations from consciousness-research, modern science has had to correct its view of heaven and hell.⁶ It is now understood that these are experiential states available under certain circumstances to all human beings We have learned that experiences of heaven and hell are of quite regular occurrence when one is facing biological death. [This] suggests that we should re-evaluate our attitude toward eschatological mythology. Instead of representing bizarre and ultimately useless pieces of knowledge, the data about hells and heavens can prove to be invaluable cartographies of strange experiential

⁶ A concept often reported by near-death experiencers.

worlds which each of us will have to enter at some point in the future. (p. 15)

Grof (1988) considers death to be the “ultimate teacher” and NDEs are phenomena that may provide a glimpse of the experiential world of death. He believes that NDEs are more than a biological or psychological experience but also a transpersonal experience that can positively influence the experiencer’s life,

There now exists extensive clinical evidence to support the claims of religion and mythology that biological death is the beginning of an adventure of consciousness. The “maps” of the initial stages of this adventure contained in eschatological mythology have proved to be remarkably accurate...This perennial wisdom concerning death has another immediate and verifiable dimension - its relevance for life.

Confrontation with death in a ritual context, or precipitated by emotional or spiritual crises, can both eliminate the fear of death and lead to transformation - that is, to a more enlightened and personally satisfying way of living. (Grof & Grof, 1980, p. 31)

Transpersonal theorists also offer critiques of neuroscientific and psychological accounts of NDEs. Michael Sabom (1982) has interviewed hundreds of people who have reported a near-death experience. Although a physician trained in biological and psychological medicine, he does not believe these are the ultimate causes of NDEs but part of the process that leads to the transpersonal experience. He does not believe that biological or psychological explanations provide enough evidence to explain all of the characteristics of the near-death experience. Perceptions, emotions, senses, memories, and thought processes differ between what would be expected from a biological or psychological explanation for the NDEs and what many near-death experiencers report of their experience. Sabom (1982) explains the near-death experience as “a natural phenomenological process which can be entered into and modified in certain individual ways, but which maintains a

basic structure independent of the whims and fantasies present in the subconscious minds of various individuals” (p. 178).

William Serdahely (1996) questions the reductionist explanations for NDEs and specifically questions the dying brain and memory hypothesis of Blackmore (1993). According to Serdahely, if the out-of-body experience views are memories, as Blackmore suggests, then it would be expected that there would be some reports of seeing scenes from perspectives other than a bird’s eye view. It would be expected that some descriptions of events from a supine positioned memory would be reported by NDEs (Serdahely, 1996). Further, Serdahely does not believe that the dying brain hypothesis adequately explains the emotional change of unconditional love expressed by many experiencers. There has not been adequate research to delineate a source of these emotions in the brain. He comments, “The dying brain hypothesis needs to address from where in the brain these feelings of unconditional love arise: which neurotransmitters and/or cortical structures are responsible for this love?” (p. 48). Serdahely additionally questions how the reductionist brain model explains the differences in the reports of NDEs. He states that Blackmore used the apparent consistency of NDEs to support the dying brain hypothesis, but never explained the cultural and religious variances in the specific NDEs that have been reported by experiencers. Serdahely (1996) proposes that the “neural disinhibition” of the dying person, as described by the neurobiological and psychological perspectives, may be more than a physical or psychological experience. He theorizes that neural disinhibition may be “a causative factor in the separation of the true self, spirit, or soul, from the physical body” (p. 50).

Some elements of the near-death experience, such as the knowledge obtained during the experience, the experiences of children, and the long-term aftereffects on many experiencers, also place some doubt on mainstream psychological and physical explanations of NDEs (Moody, 1988;

Moore, 1992; Ring, 1985; Sabom, 1982). The reports that experiencers give regarding knowledge they have obtained during the experience cannot be supported either by the physical or psychological explanations of NDEs. Some experiencers report meeting individuals they could not have known in life, or knowing events, hearing comments, or observing things, that occurred during their “deaths,” about which there is no plausible reductionist explanation. Further, according to Morse (1990), the experiences of children, who have not reached an age when they begin to fear death, yet have similar NDEs to those of adults, places doubt on the psychological explanation of NDEs being the mind’s reaction to the fear of death (Morse, 1990). Finally, research on the long-term effects of NDEs appear to support that the positive impact of these experiences remains with the persons for the rest of their lives (Ring, 1985, p. 27). Many experiencers report a heightened sense of the importance of altruistic pursuits and sensitivity to ecological issues, and a renewed spiritual perspective to their lives. These long-term effects have not been effectively duplicated by neuro-biological or psychological methods (Kalish, 1981; Moody, 1977, 1988; Peay, 1991; Ring, 1980).

Ring (1985) postulates that a more important meaning of NDEs, may be “that NDErs - and others who have had similar awakenings-collectively represent an evolutionary thrust toward higher consciousness for humanity at large” (p. 255). According to Zaleski (1993), 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 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. A conviction that life surpasses 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. (p. 205)

Regardless of the source of NDEs, whether it is from a physical, psychological, spiritual, or a combination of all the sources, the research of Greyson (1992), Grof (Grof & Grof, 1980), Lorimer (1990, 1994), Moody (1975, 1977, 1988), Morse (1990, 1992), Ring (1980, 1985, 1992), Sabom (1982), Serdahely (1996), and others unequivocally report positive changes in the thinking and lives of many near-death experiencers. This positive effect on human beings provides a value for the near-death experience, regardless of its origin.

Chapter 3. Methods

Design

Human science research often uses multiple systems of data collection and analysis. Polkinghorne (1983) states, "The combination of information from different systems produces a new dimension of understanding, the dimension of depth" (p. 254). In this human science research, the researcher chose to use both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to examine the meaning and value of awareness of NDEs, particularly related to the fears of death in an elderly population. These methods of gathering and interpreting data allow for the gathering of both descriptive quantitative data and qualitative data which provides the participants' interpretations of the subject matter through their own stories. The quantitative and qualitative methodologies used in this research project provided data regarding the participants' fears of death, their awareness of NDEs, and their sense of the value and meaning of this awareness for reducing their fears of death.

The quantitative data were collected using three instruments and provided the basis for descriptive and inferential data. A semi-structured interview, to gather the qualitative data, strengthened the research, providing information concerning the participants' attitudes toward death and examples, through stories, of how NDE reports have influenced the participants' fears of death and what values and meanings they placed on NDEs. The data from the quantitative and qualitative research were then integrated to assess the meanings and values the participants placed on awareness of NDEs using the quantitative data to provide descriptive data of the participants' opinions, and the qualitative data to provide the participants' assessment of the meanings and values of the awareness of NDEs.

Participants

An initial participant pool of 54 participants was developed, following the completion of

three surveys by elderly residents of two central Florida independent living facilities who attended lectures on issues related to aging. Both facilities used in this research are not segregated by race or creed. Fourteen of these 54 participants were disqualified. Of the 14 disqualified participants, 12 participants had incomplete Threat Indexes and 2 were individuals who reported NDEs. Therefore, the final quantitative research group consisted of 40 participants.

The qualitative group consisted of 15 participants. This group was randomly chosen from those in the quantitative group of participants who reported an awareness of NDEs and had a willingness to be interviewed. The 15 participants represented 68% of the participants reporting an awareness of NDEs. Tesch (1990) suggests that to keep the data manageable, the qualitative participant group should be limited to 15 or fewer people.

As previously noted, the final quantitative group consisted of 40 people. This participant group size was determined to be appropriate to identify participants' fears of death by using a power of 95%, which would approximate the true mean within three construct splits on the Threat Index survey test.⁷ This power analysis is based on the standard deviation of 9.62 from Rigdon, et al.'s 1979 study, a study which was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the Threat Index (p. 53). The pool size for this research provided an adequate number of responses to detect a difference in the Threat Index scores if the standard deviation remained close to 9.62.

All the participants of this research project were protected according to the Saybrook

⁷ A split is defined as recording a different bi-polar response to the same construct on the Death Element and Self Element of the Threat Index. As an example, on the construct of "Predictable-Random," if the subject responded that she or he considered her or his Self Element to be "Random" and her or his Death Element to be APredictable,≡ this would be considered a split.

Institutional Review Board (SIRB) criteria. Each participant was required to read and sign an SIRB Informed Consent Form. A copy of this form is located in Appendix A. The consent form served dually to cover both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this research project.

Instruments

The assessment of fear of death has been quantified by various assessment tools. Tools such as the Death Anxiety Scale (Templer, 1973), the Death Attitude Profile (Gesser, Wong, & Reker, 1987), the Fear of Death Scale (Collett & Lester, 1969), and the Death Concern Assessment (Dickstein, 1972) have provided valuable data for human science studies. There also are numerous measurement tools available to assess the experiences of individuals who have had NDEs. Near-death researchers-such as Ring (1980, 1985); Moore (1990, 1992); and Sabom & Kreutziger (1977)-have developed assessment tools to gather subjective data from near-death experiencers. These tools help the participants to describe their experiences and the effects of such experiences on their lives.

The researcher found no tools that have been used to explore and assess the value of being aware of NDEs for individuals who have not had NDEs themselves. So, first, an individual's level of awareness of NDEs and the value of this awareness was assessed by a researcher-developed tool, the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey. To gather the quantitative data for this research project, the researcher also used two other surveys, the Personal Interview Survey and the Threat Index. The following are brief descriptive comments about the assessment survey tools used in collecting the quantitative data.

Personal Information Survey

The Personal Interview Survey provides demographic data on the participants. Participants were asked to provide information concerning their gender, ethnic group, religious preference, religious attendance, education, whether they have known someone who has died within the past 12

months, and whether they believe in life after death. The Personal Interview Survey collected data that was used for descriptive and comparative analyses with the other research surveys.

Threat Index

The Threat Index is a well-documented research instrument, which is based upon George Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory and used to measure the level of threat attributed to death. This theory has been discussed in the Perspectives on the Fear of Death section of the literature review. The personal construct theory provides an explanation about how people may anticipate and view their reality. The theory postulates that people organize their reality using a bipolar construct, with which both similarities and differences are perceived between events, such as how similarly and differently one might see one's life and death. Bipolar constructs provide "a choice between two opposing predictions and courses of action" (Viney, 1993, p. 188).

Krieger, et al. (1974) designed the Threat Index by defining death threat as,

The reluctance of a person to subsume his [or her] present view of himself [or herself], the way he [or she] prefers to see himself [or herself], and the concept of death together as elements under the same poles of a sample of his [or her] constructs. It is assumed that the person who describes both himself [or herself] and death with the same pole of a single construct dimension is organizing his [or her] world in such a way as to be able to see death as a personal reality. The person who places himself [or herself] and death on opposite poles of a construct, however, would have to reorganize his [or her] system to construe self and death together. (p. 301)

The Threat Index consists of two identical surveys of 40 bipolar constructs. The first survey directs the participant to consider a bipolar construct, such as Predictable-Random, when considering how

she or he views her or his current life. The second survey requests the participants to make the same considerations but to consider her or his answers based upon how she or he considers her or his own death. The differences between the responses of how one views one's life and death provides an assessment as to how the individual views death as a personal threat (Krieger, et al., 1974). It usually takes participants 10 to 15 minutes to complete the Threat Index.

The researcher chose to use the Threat Index instead of other tools to measure the fear of death, because he believed that its method of evaluating the fear of personal death was better, for this research, than other tools such as the Death Anxiety Scale (Templer, 1973), the Death Attitude Profile (Gesser, Wong, & Reker, 1987), Fear of Death Scale (Collett & Lester, 1969), or the Death Concern (Dickstein, 1972). The Threat Index assesses how one anticipates one's own death and how it relates to one's current reality, while these other tools provide an assessment of an individual's feelings and thoughts about death.

Advantages of using the Threat Index as a fear assessment tool are that it is easily administered, standardized, and allows for a participant-to-participant comparison. However, a disadvantage of this instrument may be that it is too lengthy for the population of this research. According to Borg and Gall (1989), this is an acceptable completion rate when asking participants to voluntarily complete a survey. However, a higher completion rate may have been achieved if this instrument had not been so lengthy.

An additional disadvantage may be that some elderly participants may also have difficulty completing the survey, as no conversational clarifications are allowed for questions concerning survey items. The researcher attempted to mitigate this restriction by addressing possible questions in his introductory remarks and on the Instructions for Completion of Surveys sheet. The researcher accepted a limited number of questions concerning the surveys after the survey packets had been

distributed. The researcher was cautious to avoid the possibility of researcher-influenced responses caused by his comments.

The validity and reliability of the Threat Index have been well documented. According to Neimeyer, Dingemans, and Epting (1977), "The high reliability of the Threat Index suggests its functioning as an index of stable conceptual orientation toward death" (p. 251). The test reliability of the Threat Index, when tested at 4 and 9 week intervals, reflect a .90 and a .87 reliability, respectively (Rigdon, et al., 1979, p. 251).

The construct validity of the Threat Index has been tested by comparing the results of the Threat Index with other scales, such as the Death Anxiety Scale and the Fear of Death Scale. There is a high correlation between the Threat Index, the Fear of Death Scale, and the Death Anxiety Scale (Rigdon, et al., 1979). This correlation is with how respondents report their fears of their own deaths. The Threat Index's correlation with the Fear of Death Scale and the Death Anxiety are .10 and .23 respectively (Rigdon, et al, 1979, p. 251). According to Rigdon, et al. (1979), the Threat Index and the Fear of Death Scale better reflect an understanding of the way death relates to other aspects of an individual's life. Although the Death Anxiety Scale is a useful tool, its focus is on assessing the level of anxiety and affective arousal caused by thoughts of death and not on the constructs people use when they think about death (pp. 308-309). Krieger, et al. (1974) and Neimeyer, et al. (1977) have reported a high reliability for the Threat Index as an index of an individual's conceptual orientation toward death.

The use of the Threat Index provided a measure of the participants' levels of fear of death. This data were correlated with reported levels of awareness of NDEs in order to test the hypotheses of this research.

Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey

This tool is a researcher-developed survey intended to provide an assessment of the reported awareness participants have of NDEs. The questions on the survey were chosen by determining what information was being sought by the researcher on this particular project. Then the questions were tested on 5 pilot participants and refined, based on their responses. The reliability of the questions were then assessed by these same participants by utilizing the test retest model. Participants were first asked to report if they know of NDEs and how they learned of them. They were then asked to assess their awareness of NDEs as being either significant, some, little, or no knowledge. The definitions for each level of awareness are part of the instructions provided on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey. Participants were further asked whether they believe that NDEs are caused by a neurobiological,⁸ psychological,⁹ or non-physical-chemical-psychological¹⁰ reaction to dying. Participants also were asked to indicate if they think that being aware of NDEs has helped them with their personal views of death and with any fears associated with death. This survey was used as a pilot study with 5 independent participants from this research project. The pilot participants provided information regarding the simplification of the instrument. These suggestions were utilized on the survey that was used in this research. The validity and reliability of this information-gathering tool was not assessed before the delivery of the survey. It was expected that the validity and reliability of the instrument could be assessed by the participants' responses to the interview questions related to NDEs, during the qualitative data collection.

⁸ Neurobiological explanations of near-death experiences are defined as experiences caused by the neurological and biological responses to the body dying.

⁹ Psychological explanations of near-death experiences are explained as experiences caused by the mind's creation of a positive response to dying and being dead.

¹⁰ Non-physical-chemical-psychological explanations of near-death experiences are defined as experiences caused by experiences beyond a human explanation, possibly spiritual/transpersonal experiences.

Quantitative Method

This method generates variables that can be analyzed to provide descriptive and inferential information regarding the research participants and inquiries. The quantitative data collection method provides a tool that makes possible scientific testing of research results. Responses from the survey tools, the Personal Interview Survey, the Threat Index, and the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey were examined in order to provide descriptive statistics such as averages, percentages, and frequency distributions and correlations between the different responses.

The nature of the quantitative method provides for more objective collection and analysis of data than most qualitative methods (Borg & Gall, 1989). Because a common liability of most research methodologies is the effect that the researcher might have on the research participants and their responses, employing the quantitative method allows the researcher to remain more independent from the research participants. This separation reduces the potential of researcher bias toward the data collection (Howell, 1987). Caution was used to avoid researcher bias in the creation of the surveys used in this research, the research methods chosen, and the participant pool used to gather the data.

Quantitative Research Procedures

The quantitative data collection was accomplished in one session each at two facilities. During a scheduled residents' meeting, a verbal overview of the research project was given by the researcher. NDEs were not discussed. The researcher kept the subject of NDEs unknown to the participants until the administration of the surveys. During the introductory presentation, the researcher shared that this research examined fears of death and the methods elderly people use to cope with these fears. The researcher did not know any of the participants prior to the research. The researcher then solicited the involvement of interested participants for this project. The inclusionary

criteria for the initial research participants was that they must be considered dementia-free, literate in English, and 65 years old or older. The assessment of whether a possible participant was dementia-free was made by the living facilities' administrators, who were to identify individuals who may have a type of dementia that might affect their ability to answer the research questions clearly. No one was identified by the administrators.

After noninterested residents left the meeting room, the researcher began the quantitative aspect of the research. As stated earlier, the researcher initially surveyed 54 people. The researcher presented the SIRB Consent Form to the participants for their reading and signature (Appendix A) as part of the survey packets. Along with the SIRB Consent Form, the packets contained the Personal Information Survey, the Threat Index, and the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey (Appendixes C, D, E). Each set of surveys had a preprinted control number that matched the number on the individual SIRB Consent Form, to keep each participant's responses together and confidential.

Instructions to complete the surveys were provided on the Instructions for the Completion of Surveys (Appendix B).

Quantitative Data Analysis

The data gathered using the Personal Information Survey, Threat Index, and Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey provided the basis for descriptive and inferential data concerning the participant groups and the research hypotheses. The responses from the Personal Information Survey and the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey were used as variables to describe the make up of the "Aware" and "Non-Aware" groups (See Appendix H). This data also was related to the data gathered from the Threat Index to assess the participants' level of fear toward death (see Appendix I). A descriptive analysis of the data collected is presented for interpretation in the next chapter.

An analysis of the responses to the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey provided statistical data on whether the participants were aware of NDEs and the extent of their awareness about the phenomenon is presented in the next chapter and Appendix J. The Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey also provided data about how the participants who have heard of NDEs explain these experiences. Based on the responses to the first question of the Awareness of Near-Death Survey, the researcher separated the participants into two subgroups based upon their awareness of or lack of awareness of NDEs. Participants who responded that they had “No” or “Little” knowledge were considered to be in the “Non-Aware” group. The levels of fear of death and awareness of or lack of awareness of NDEs in the two groups were then compared to support or reject Hypothesis 1. A comparison of these responses and to question eight of the Awareness of Near-Death Survey, which asked the participants to identify which specific fears of death are affected by the awareness of NDEs were expected to complement each other in support or reject Hypothesis 2. The following chapter and Appendix K provide a descriptive analysis of the results of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey and Threat Index. These descriptions provide information that can be used to study the relationship between an individual's awareness of NDEs and her or his level of fearing death. This information was also used by the researcher during the qualitative interviews as background information on the participants.

Qualitative Method

Qualitative methods provide insight and depth into individual perceptions of the qualities of human existence. In this research, the researcher attempted to gather data on the participants' thoughts and feelings concerning death and NDEs through semi-structured interviews. The goal of qualitative inquiry, according to Borg and Gall (1989), "is to develop a body of knowledge that is unique to the individual being studied, and that can be used to develop working hypotheses about the

individual" (p. 384). The qualitative method is more subjective than the quantitative method. Borg & Gall (1989) state, "qualitative research methods are largely subjective in that they rely heavily upon the investigator's skills of observation and interpretation to provide valid information" (p. 379).

The proper development of interview questions is important to assure the extraction of the data from the participants' responses. According to Kvale (1996),

The researcher interview proceeds rather like a normal conversation but has a specific purpose and structure. It is characterized by a systematic form of questioning. The interviewers' questions should be brief and simple. An opening question may ask about a concrete situation. The different dimensions introduced in the answer can then be pursued. The decisive issue is the interviewers' ability to sense the immediate meaning of an answer and the horizon of possible meanings that it opens up. (pp. 131-132)

In the development of the interview questions, the researcher used the following types of questions to facilitate a free exchange of the participants' thoughts concerning death, dying, and NDEs:

1. Introductory questions
2. Follow-up questions
3. Probing questions
4. Specific questions
5. Direct questions
6. Indirect questions
7. Structuring questions
8. Silence

9. Interpreting questions

10. Rephrasing the responses to other questions for more clarification.

To insure reliability and validity of the interviews controls were placed on the transcription of the data. As Kvale (1996) recommends, "The quality of transcriptions can be improved by clear instructions about the procedures and purposes of the transcription, preferably accompanied by a reliability check" (p. 163). The reliability of the transcription of this research was enhanced by clear instructions to the transcriber to only transcribe what she clearly heard on the tapes and leave blank any questionable words or passages that were not clear. To further check the reliability of the transcription, three interviews were randomly chosen and transcribed by another transcriptionist. Both transcriptions were evaluated for completed words, sentence length, and common words count. The difference between the work of the two transcriptionists were insignificant.

The validity of transcription is more difficult than assuring reliability. According to Kvale (1996), to effect a valid transcription, "Verbatim descriptions are necessary for a linguistic analysis, the inclusion that pauses, repetitions, and tone of voice are relevant for the psychological interpretations of, for example, level of anxiety or the meaning of denials" (p. 165). The transcriptionist of this research was instructed to transcribe this detail when she heard it. As an added assurance of the recording of the participants' affected responses, the researcher kept notes of the participant's nonverbal behavior throughout the interview.

In this research, the researcher was particularly looking for the participants' interpretations of the meanings and values of NDEs. The interview provided interpretative data of the participants' assessment of the meanings and values of accounts of NDEs and how the awareness of NDEs may have influenced the participants' attitudes towards death.

According to Kvale (1996), interpretations of qualitative data should be made in the contexts

of self-understanding, critical common sense understanding, and theoretical understanding. In the context of self-understanding, “The interpreter here attempts to formulate in a condensed form what the participants themselves understand to be the meanings of their statements. The interpretation is more or less confined to the participants' self-understanding: a rephrased condensation of the meaning of the statements from the interviewees' own viewpoint as those are understood by the researcher” (p. 214). When considering the critical common sense understanding context, “The interpretation may include a wider frame of understanding in light of the participants themselves, be critical of what is said, and may focus on either the context of the statement or on the person making it” (p. 215). The context of theoretical understanding involves interpreting the meaning of a statement by incorporating theoretical concepts. In this research theoretical perceptions related to the philosophical, psychological, physiological, and spiritual dimensions of death and dying, near-death experiences, and gerontology were explored.

The different communities of validation of qualitative research correspond to the interpretational contexts of self-understanding, critical commonsense understanding, and theoretical understanding. The three communities that provide validation to qualitative research are the interviewee, the general public, and the theoretical community (Kvale, 1996). When interpreting the data, the researcher attempted to keep his interpretation within the interviewees' context of understanding. Verbatim transcription of the interviewees' responses, and the notes taken during the interviews, were the sources of the data from the interviews. When considering the validation of the research by the general public, Kvale (1996) comments, “[When] the interpretation is made within the understanding of a general public, the validation of interpretation does not depend on the acceptance of the subject interpreted, but upon the fact of whether the documentation and the argumentation are convincing to members of the general public” (pp. 217-218). The documentation

and the argumentation of this research will not be shared with the general public until it has been determined that the theoretical community has validated the research. This will be accomplished by the acceptance of this research as a doctoral dissertation. The theoretical community validates qualitative research dependent on whether the theory being studied is a valid area of study and the research methods have been rigorous and complete (Kvale, 1996). As discussed in chapter 1 and chapter 6, this research is a valid area of study for human science and adds to the knowledge of human science.

The subject of death is a sensitive topic for many people. The researcher was attentive to each participant's personal feelings about her or his mortality. He also was cautious not to infuse his personal beliefs into the manner the interview questions were formed or asked. A lack of sensitivity could have caused the participants not to be open about their beliefs and fears. The participants in this research generally reported feeling comfortable with the researcher. Several expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to share their beliefs and fears.

Researcher influence could also affect how participants might answer questions. When using the semi-structured interview format, the researcher actively interacts with the participant by asking questions and guiding, to some extent, the direction of the interview. To moderate the researcher's influence on the interview responses, he followed a list of open-ended interview questions concerning death, dying, and NDEs (See Appendix G). This format allowed the participants to discuss freely their perspectives concerning death, their knowledge of NDEs, and the value of the awareness of these experiences, while not straying too far from the research subject. When necessary, the researcher asked probing or clarification questions to solicit additional comments from the participants.

Qualitative Research Procedures

Fifteen participants were chosen from the quantitative participant group of 40 people for personal semi-structured interviews which averaged 45-60 minutes in length. The period of interview time was based upon the participants' interest and attention span for the research topic. The participants were chosen based on their responses to the Near-Death Experiences Awareness Survey. They met the following criteria: that they were aware of NDEs, had not had a NDE themselves, and were available to meet with the researcher to be interviewed.

A level of standardization for all the interviews was insured by the use of an introductory script that was recited by the researcher before the beginning of each interview (See Appendix F). Each interview participant was asked the questions listed in Appendix G, along with additional clarifying questions as necessary. All the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The researcher also recorded visual bodily responses to questions, such as tears, laughter, or wringing of hands. All interviews were completed in private with only the participant and the researcher present.

The semi-structured interviews focused on the participants' feelings and attitudes concerning NDEs and death. The interviews especially delved into the participants' awareness of NDEs and how, for the Aware participants, this awareness has affected attitudes toward death. It also explored their fears of the process of dying, of being dead, and of the unknown nature of what happens after death. The interviews were conducted in a manner to allow for an open discussion about the participants' interpretation of the impact of NDE accounts on their lives. The Aware participants were specifically asked to discuss if and how they believed that the reports of NDEs have affected their fears of death. The researcher found that some participants wanted to talk a great deal regarding the research participant, and the specific interview question, and others wanted to provide brief responses to the questions and conclude the interview as quickly as possible. The differences

in the times of the interviews do not appear to have detracted from the gathering of pertinent data to respond to the research questions. As noted earlier, the interviews lasted an average of 45-60 minutes. The time variance was due to the participants' interest in the topic and information that they had to share.

To insure content validity for each interview, as previously mentioned, all the questions listed in Appendix G were asked during each interview. Since it was a semi-structured interview, some questions asked could not be anticipated. The researcher was sensitive to ask appropriate questions to facilitate the participants to speak freely, yet remain focused on the issues of the interview. The researcher kept the elderly participants focused on the topics of their attitudes towards death, awareness of NDEs, and their assessment of the meanings and values associated with an awareness of NDEs.

Qualitative Data Analysis

When analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher considered methodologies described by Giorgi (1985), Tesch (1990), and Vidich (1970). Giorgi (1985) suggests that when analyzing qualitative data the researcher should get a sense of the whole description of the research event given by the subject, discriminate "meaning units" from the description, delineate the psychological insights within the meaning units, and finally "synthesize all of the transformed meaning units into a consistent statement regarding the participant's experience," in this case, particularly the effect of the awareness of NDEs on the fears of death (p. 10). The researcher did not use the phenomenological method to review the data but did consider the meanings and values participants expressed regarding NDE reports.

Tesch (1990) presents ten steps to good qualitative data analysis:

1. The analysis is concurrent with the data collection and continues after the data has

been collected.

2. The analysis process is systematic and comprehensive, but not rigid.
3. Analyzing the data includes a reflective activity by the researcher, and the keeping of the notes to guide the analytical process.
4. Data is segmented into relevant and meaningful units.
5. The data segments are categorized according to an organizing system that is predominately derived from the data themselves.
6. The main intellectual analysis tool is the comparison of the data.
7. Categories for sorting segments of data are tentative and preliminary at first and remain flexible.
8. The manipulation of the qualitative data during the analysis is an eclectic activity in which there is no one right way.
9. The analysis procedures are neither strictly scientific nor mechanistic. It is an intellectual craft that requires a great knowledge of methodology as well as intellectual competence.
10. The results of the analysis produce a high level of synthesis of the meaning units into a composite summary of the qualitative data and a description of patterns and themes. (pp. 95-97)

Vidich (1970) directs the researcher to be aware of the “social dimensions of the situation in which data were collected,” and the social positions of the researcher and the participant (p. 172). Ignoring the effect on the social dimension and social positions, during the qualitative data collection, could result in distorted data.

In this research analysis, the researcher looked for similar comments and themes relating to

the participants' fears of death and their assessment of the value of being aware of NDEs for reducing their fears. In the analysis of the qualitative data the researcher used a combination of the techniques of Giorgi, Tesch, and Vidich. The researcher looked for the meanings participants placed on NDEs and the value of the awareness of these experiences for reducing the fears of death. The researcher used Tesch's method of looking at the data to produce a high level of synthesis of the meaning units into a composite summary of the qualitative data and a description of patterns and themes. Throughout all of the data collection and analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, the researcher kept in mind Vidich's direction to be aware of the social dimension and position of the participants and the researcher, particularly in this research, since the participants were elderly people living in independent living facilities and the researcher is an independent, middle aged man.

The analysis of the data provided individual stories from each participant about how she or he assessed how the awareness of NDEs affects her or his attitude toward death. The data also provided a personal impression of each participant's thoughts and feelings about her or his mortality and fears. The researcher kept in mind, while analyzing the data, the participants' responses concerning their fears of death and took this into consideration when analyzing the participants' interpretation of the values and meanings of NDEs and the influence these accounts have on their fears of death.

All interviews were transcribed and analyzed for content and themes associated with the awareness of NDEs and fears of death. The transcribed interviews were read three times by the researcher to glean the qualitative data. The researcher identified significant themes by the number of times a similar theme or subject was expressed by the participants. These themes and subjects were then categorized by the participants comments concerning the their fears of death, awareness of NDEs, and the meanings and the values they placed on NDEs. The researcher also looked for what the participants thought the influence of the awareness of these experiences have had on the

participants' lives. Specifically, the researcher was looking to see how accounts of NDEs have influenced participants' attitudes concerning death and dying, and particularly their fears of death. The researcher used the software analysis tool Textbase Alpha to help review the interview transcripts of the participants. This tool helped the researcher by performing many of the laborious tasks of organizing the raw data from the transcripts of the interviews. This allowed the researcher to focus on the analysis of the data. The software was setup to codify the interviews for responses to the interview questions, specific words, phrases, and stories related to death, fear, and NDEs. These code words and their frequency of use in the interviews are listed in Appendix O.

The data was categorized into three primary themes:

1. Awareness of Death
2. Awareness of Near-Death Experiences
3. Influences and Values of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences

These primary categories were then separated into 12 secondary categories that reflected the specific questions asked of the participants. The Awareness of Death category had five secondary categories with three additional sub-categories under the heading of "Exposure to Death." The Awareness of Near-Death Experiences category has five secondary categories. The Influences and Values of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences primary category were sub-divided into two secondary categories. All the secondary categories were then sub-divided additionally to reflect specific responses to the interview questions. When examining the responses to the interview questions, the researcher applied a code to each response. If similar responses were given by participants then their responses were coded the same. Each time a new response was given, a new code was applied

The use of Textbase Alpha reduced two concerns that Borg and Gall (1989) give in their

comments regarding qualitative research. They express concern for the objectivity of the researcher's observations and the interpretation of the participants' responses. This software takes away the dependency on only the researcher's observation of the participants. It also diminishes the effect of preconceived ideas and expectations on influencing the observations of the researcher (Tesch, 1990).

Integration of the Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative analyses provided a multi-variant understanding of the research questions, “Does a person’s awareness of near-death experiences, independent of having had a near-death experience, have an effect on reducing the fears of death?” and “How does the awareness of near-death experiences affect one’s attitudes toward death and dying?” Death and our understanding of its effect on our lives requires a multi-perspective look at our feelings and beliefs about the subject (Kalish, 1981). The integration of the quantitative and qualitative analyses was accomplished by comparing the quantitative data with the results of the qualitative data and noting the differences and similarities of the outcomes of each research methodology. The integration of the data from the quantitative and qualitative research provided a multi-perspectival view of the participants' impressions of death, how they deal with its inevitability in their lives, and the effects the awareness of NDEs has on reducing the participants’ fear of death.

The integration of the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis provide multi-perspectival responses to the participants’ thoughts concerning the questions of this research project.

As discussed in the literature review, fear is a subjective experience which can be observed by verbal and nonverbal behavior, discussion with the participant, and psychological testing. An advantage of using the Threat Index is that it is a well documented and validated instrument to assess the participant group's level of fear of death. This tool provided an accepted method to provide a

baseline of the level of fear of most of the research participants. Another advantage of this integrated approach of inquiry is that the focus of the semi-structured interview on the participants' interpretations of the meaning of NDEs provided more depth to the responses made on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey. Interview responses allowed the participants to further describe and clarify, in their own terms, their opinions regarding death and NDEs.

The integration of the responses from administering the Personal Information Survey, Threat Index, Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey, and the semi-structured interviews provided an in-depth look at the elderly participants' fears of death and their evaluation of the importance of knowing about NDEs. The quantitative analysis was expected to provide support or rejection of the hypotheses of this research and the qualitative data was expected to explore the meanings and values of NDE awareness on fears of death and answer the research questions. This integrated approach to the research questions provided an in-depth perspective to this research.

Limitations & Delimitations

Limitations

All of the participants were Caucasian with more than 89% of the participants reporting to be Christians. This homogeneous group did not provide for the perspectives of other races, cultures, or creeds. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with two of the four non-Christian participants.

As previously mentioned, the researcher used three surveys and semi-structured interviews to gather his research data. There were some limitations to using individual reports to interpret personal experiences due to the subjective nature of individual interpretations and responses to experiences. For example, participants may have responded without properly interpreting the question as it was asked or did not give the question enough thought. Some participants also may

have responded in an attempt to please or displease the researcher. Another limitation of subjective reports is the influence, on the participants' responses, of other life experiences and aware nesses that might consciously or unconsciously affect the participants' fears of death. Early experiences with death, either positive or negative, might effect how an individual responds to the death of others or the expectations of her or his own death.

The length of the Threat Index may have been too long for the population of this research. Twelve of the 54 initial participants did not complete the survey. Some participants complained, as the researcher collected the surveys, of the length of the Threat Index and that the instructions provided on the instrument were not clear. An additional limitation of the Threat Index is that it may not adequately assess idiosyncratic constructs of death such as the impact of personal history or religious beliefs (Neimeyer, Epting, & Rigdon, 1984).

The age of the participants also may have affected the outcomes of the study. This study revealed that the levels of fear recorded by this elderly population were overall low and that the differences between the participants' fears of death were not statistically significant, although the results did provide an indication that some of the participants feared death more than others. Perhaps if the participants were younger they would have recorded a higher level of fear and may have provided more statistically relevant data. Numerous studies of fears of death, as discussed in the literature review, report that younger individuals fear death more than many elderly (Kalish, 1981).

Although the participants were given a clear definition of what was being considered a NDE in this research, several participants were still not clear about the definition. Clarification was provided when the researcher was questioned during the data collection and also by follow-up contacts made by the researcher on surveys with questionable responses, such as indicating awareness of NDEs, but no indication about how the participant became aware of the phenomena.

Several participants who initially reported themselves to be near-death experiencers, when contacted by the researcher, indicated that their experience was actually only being close to death, not having an NDE. These participants were then included in the quantitative research group.

An additional limitation of gathering responses concerning subjective experiences is related to the semi-structured interview format to assemble qualitative data. The qualitative analysis of the participants' interview responses could be biased by the researcher's interpretation. The researcher did not know any of the participants. This limitation was minimized by the cooperative review of the research data by the dissertation committee and the outside dissertation reader.

A possible shortcoming of this research may have been the researcher's familiarity with the subject of NDEs and fears of death. Because of this familiarity, he occasionally may not have delved deeper into a response from a participant because he recognized what the participant was reporting without asking them to go into further depth concerning their responses. When reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, the researcher occasionally noted that more details of the participants' impressions would have been helpful. Another limitation of the qualitative methodology could be the inability to control the unknown variables that come out during the interviews that might influence the data collection and analysis such as narrow religious beliefs, or something unexplainable as being a "mystery of God" or satanic (Rawlings, 1993). One of these variables could have been the possible underlying impact of religious beliefs on reducing the fears of death versus the effects of the awareness of NDEs.

Delimitations

This research did not assess the value of the awareness of NDEs for the reduction of the fear of death in the general public. The research was limited to the responses of participants who live in independent living facilities for elderly people and have volunteered to participate in this study.

Therefore, generalization of the findings of this research should be done with similar consideration as is given to findings from other gerontological studies.

The researcher considered the effects of religion on a person's construct of death. Religious beliefs were considered in their relationship to the participants' awareness of NDEs and in relation to the participants' fears of death, through analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. Although the researcher was sensitive to the impact of religious beliefs on the participants' fear of death, these beliefs were not a major focus of the research but a variable that might affect an individual's fears of death and her or his assessment of the meaning and value of NDEs.

Although the quantitative data did not statistically support hypothesis 1, the data did provide information regarding the participants' levels of fear of death and was useful in describing the participant group. The researcher believes that the limitations or delimitations of this study were addressed by using both the quantitative and qualitative methods of research. The qualitative data provided sufficient data regarding the participants' fears of death and dying. Therefore, the limitations and delimitations of this research did not adversely affect the validity of this research.

CHAPTER 4. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

This chapter will review and interpret the quantitative findings of this research. The first part of the chapter will examine the results of the research. The second part of the chapter will present an interpretation of these results.

Quantitative Findings

Description of Participant Group

Table 1 provides an overview of the quantitative participant group's demographic information concerning age, education, religious practice, and belief in life after death.

Table 1

Participant Group Demographics

Quantitative Participants	<u>N</u>	Percent
Male	12	30%
Female	28	70%
Average Age	80	
High School Graduate	38	95%
College Graduate	14	35%
Catholic	1	2.6%
Protestant	35	88%
Jewish	1	2.6%
Mormon	1	2.6%
Agnostic	1	2.6%
Other	1	2.6%
Attend Church Once/Month	26	65%
Knows Someone Who Died	34	85%

Believe in Life After Death	29	73%
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Note. N = 40.

The quantitative surveys were collected from 54 Caucasian participants. Fourteen participants, 26%, were rejected due to either an incomplete Threat Index or they were NDErs. The final quantitative participant group consisted of 40 Caucasian participants, 28 females and 12 males.¹¹ The average age of members of the group was 80 years old. Ninety-five percent of the respondents completed high school; 35% completed college. The group was 88% Protestant with 65% of the participants reporting that they attended religious services at least once a month. Eighty-five percent of the participants knew someone who had died within the past 12 months. Seventy-three percent reported a belief in life after death.

Fear of Death based on the Threat Index

Forty-eight percent of the participants, 19 participants, reported a general fear of death according to the Threat Index. Fear, as defined by the authors of the survey, is identified by participants' giving different answers to their responses on the two parts of the Threat Index, creating "splits" in the response to the two parts of the index.¹² Twenty-one participants, 52%, reported no fear of death. The median Threat Index score for the group was 3.7, with a standard deviation of 3.88. Overall, this population did not score at a high level of fear when compared to other studies such as that of Neimeyer, et al. (1977), which had a reported mean score of 12.11, and that of Rigdon, et al. (1979), with a reported a mean score of 13.39. The low scores of these participants may be associated with the selection of the participant pool. As

¹¹ According to the facility administrators the gender distribution of the quantitative participants is a representative sample of each facility's population.

¹² The Threat Index has two parts. On Part One the subjects are asked to look at 40 sets of bi-nominal phrases and choose, in each set, which phrase reflects their current attitude concerning their life. On the second part of the survey they are again asked to reflect on the same list of phrases but this time to choose between each of the 40 sets of phrases which phrase reflects their feelings concerning death. Fear is then determined by identifying splits, differences, in the responses on the two parts of the surveys. Splits of 4 or more represent a fear of death (Rigdon, et al., 1979). Subjects scored splits from 0 to 12.

discussed in the literature review, elderly people do tend to not fear death as much as the rest of society (Butler & Lewis, 1977). These low scores made it impossible to determine any relationship between fear of death and awareness of NDEs, since there were minimal differences in the splits of each participants' responses. This issue will be discussed later in this chapter.

Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey

The Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey responses showed that 55% of the 40 quantitative participants reported a “some to significant” awareness of NDEs.¹³ These participants are reported as the “Aware” group. Sixteen of the “Aware” participants reported “some” awareness of NDEs and 6 participants reported “significant” awareness. Forty-five percent of the respondents rated their awareness of NDEs as little to none. These participants are classified as the “Non-Aware” participant group. The Non-Aware participants did not complete the remainder of the survey as the remaining questions related to specific knowledge of NDEs.

Books and television were the media through which most Aware participants reported hearing of NDEs. Sixty-four percent of these participants reported that they had learned about NDEs from books and 59% had heard of the phenomenon from television. Fifty percent of the participants learned of NDEs from other people. Fifty-two percent of the Aware group also reported that they knew someone who had had a NDE. Learning of NDEs from magazines was reported by 27% of participants. The least reported method of hearing about NDEs, with only 9%, was through movies. Some participants gave more than one answer

¹³ Some to significant awareness of NDEs is defined on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey, as having read or heard stories of NDEs, and having knowledge of some of the explanations for NDEs.

about the sources of their knowledge of NDEs. The participants were also able to choose more than one explanation for NDEs, as some did, on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey (Appendix F). Table 2 presents the descriptive data of participants who reported an awareness of NDEs. The table presents information on how the Aware participants have learned of NDEs and how they have interpreted these experiences.

Table 2

How Participants Learned of Near-Death Experiences

	<u>N</u>	Percent
Know an Near-Death Experiencer	11	50%
Learned of Near-Death Experiences from Books	14	64%
Learned of Near-Death Experiences from Television	13	59%
Learned of Near-Death Experiences from Magazines	6	27%
Learned of Near-Death Experiences from Movies	2	9 %
Learned of Near-Death Experiences from People	12	55%

Note. N = 22.

The Aware participants were asked how they explain NDEs. Their choices on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey were that NDEs are a physical-biochemical, psychological, or transpersonal response to dying. Table 3 presents what the participants believed were the source of NDEs.

Table 3

How Participants Explained Near-Death Experiences

	<u>N</u>	Percent
Explain Near-Death Experiences as Physical	5	23%
Explain Near-Death Experiences as Psychological	5	23%

Explain Near-Death Experiences as Transpersonal	12	55%
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Note. N = 22.

The majority of the participant group, 55%, believed that NDEs are transpersonal experiences. Twenty-three percent thought that NDEs are psychological responses to dying. Twenty-three percent of the participants believed that NDEs are caused by a physical or chemical reaction of the body and brain as the person dies. Two participants did not give their opinion, but several participants reported they believed that NDEs are caused by more than one source. This would account for the number of responses equaling 22 but the percentages not equaling 100%.¹⁴

Fear of Death in the Aware and Non-Aware Groups

Of the 19 participants who reported a fear of death on the Threat Index, 55% were aware of NDEs and 45% were not aware of NDEs, as recorded on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey. Fifty percent of the Aware participants and 44% of the Non-Aware participants reported a fear of death. The mean score on the Threat Index for both groups were almost identical. The mean score for the Aware participants was 4.00 with a standard deviation of 4.09. The mean score for the Non-Aware participants was 3.33 with a standard deviation of 3.69. As discussed earlier, the low fear scores may be associated with the selection of the participant pool. This research reflected a minimal numerical difference in fear groups as associated with awareness of NDEs. The minimum deviation of the levels of fear between the Aware and the Non-Aware participants has a p value of .59 and a t value of .54. See Appendix L for the

¹⁴ The percentages were based upon the number of subjects, not the number of responses, since there were 2 subjects who did not respond and other subjects who gave more than 1 answer.

complete t-test values.

Effects of Awareness of Near-Death Experiences on the Fear of Death

In their responses on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey, some participants provided data concerning their beliefs that awareness of NDE can have an effect on reducing fears or concerns about death and dying. When questioned about whether awareness of NDEs provide insight as to what to expect at death, all of the No Fear/Aware participants provided a response, and all but 2 Fear/Aware participants responded. When specifically asked about whether they thought awareness of NDEs helped to reduce the fear of the process, being dead, or the unknown of what happens after death, all but 1 No Fear/Aware participant and 2 Fear/Aware participants responded to these questions. Although some participants did not answer these questions, the majority of the participants who did provide answers indicated that they thought that awareness of NDEs provided insight as to what to expect at death and helped with fears of the process of dying and the unknown nature of what happens after death. Table 4 provides an overview of these responses and the participants’ opinions about whether awareness of NDEs helped to provide insight of what to expect at death and their belief in life after death.

Table 4

Participants’ Assessment of the Value of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences

	<u>N</u>	Percent
Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Provides Insight	13	62%
Helps Reduce Fears of the Process of Dying	11	65%
Helps Reduce Fears of Being Dead	5	38%
Helps Reduce Fears of the Unknown Nature of After Death	9	60%

Note. N = 22.

All of the Aware participants, regardless of their fear score, were surveyed about whether they thought the awareness of NDEs provided insight regarding death, what happens after death, and if they believed that this awareness has had an effect on their fears of death, dying, and the unknown nature of what happens after death. Sixty-two percent reported that they thought that NDEs provided insight into death and what happens after death. Sixty-five percent also thought awareness of NDEs reduced the fear of the process of dying. The fear of being dead was reported to be reduced by 38% of the group. The fear of the unknown nature of what happens after death was reported to be helped by 60% of the participants. Finally, a belief in life after death was reported by 76% of the Aware participants. This is slightly higher than the 73% of the total quantitative participant group who reported a belief in life after death, but is not statistically significant.

The No Fear/Aware group comprised of 11 participants, 52% of the total quantitative pool. The Fear/Aware group also consisted 11 participants, 48% of the total quantitative pool. Table 5 provide a description of the findings of the No Fear/Aware group’s assessed value of the awareness of NDE.

Table 5

"No Fear" and "Aware" Group's Assessment of Near-Death Experiences

	<u>N</u>	Percent
Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Provides Insight	7	64%
Helps Reduce Fears of the Process of Dying	6	60%
Helps Reduce Fears of Being Dead	4	40%
Helps Reduce Fears of the Unknown Nature of After Death	6	55%

Note. N = 11.

As a comparison, Table 6 presents a description of the Fear/Aware group’s assessed value of

the awareness of NDE for reducing fears of death.

Table 6

“Fear” and “Aware” Group’s Assessment of Near-Death Experiences

	<u>N</u>	Percent
Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Provides Insight	5	56%
Helps Reduce Fears of the Process of Dying	6	75%
Helps Reduce Fears of Being Dead	10	20%
Helps Reduce Fears of the Unknown Nature of After Death	3	50%

Note. N = 11

When completing the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey, participants were asked to respond “Yes” or “No” as to whether they believed that awareness of NDEs provided them with insight regarding death and what happens after death. Sixty-four percent of the No Fear/Aware participants reported that they thought that awareness of NDEs provided insight regarding death and what happens after death and helped with any fear they might have regarding the process of dying. Fifty-five percent of these participants also thought that awareness of NDEs helped with their fear of the unknown nature of what happens after death. Forty percent of the No Fear/Aware participants thought that the fear of being dead was reduced by awareness of NDEs. The discussion in chapter 5 of the qualitative data will provide more insight into the participants’ assessed meanings, values, and influences of NDEs, particularly on reducing the fears of death and dying.

Interpretations of the Quantitative Results

The quantitative data and findings do not statistically support Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 states that participants who are aware of NDEs but have not themselves had NDEs, will report a fear of death less often than individuals who are not aware of NDEs. In this research the null hypothesis was not rejected: p

value = .775. The chi-square test reported a chi-square value of .082. The mean difference between the Threat Index scores of the participants was not statistically significant to determine a difference in fear between the Aware and No Aware participants: the p value = .5. Therefore, the research failed to establish that the awareness of NDEs directly impacts a person's fear of death, as measured by the Threat Index and the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey. Forty-seven percent of the Non-Aware group indicated some fear of death compared to 45% of the Aware group. Based upon a sample size of 40 participants, the size of this quantitative study, a difference of 15% would have been statistically significant.

As indicated in the findings, the highest bipolar split on the 40 valid Threat Indexes used in this research was 12. The relatively low splits recorded by this elderly participant group could depict an overall lower fear of death than recorded by younger participants in other studies such as those conducted by Rigdon, et al. (1979), and other researchers as commented upon in chapter 3. The elderly participant group used in this research also have been exposed to death more often than many of the younger participants in the Rigdon et al. studies. This is due to the different study groups' age and living arrangements. All the participants of this research came from independent living facilities that cater to elderly people. This is, for most of the participants, their final living arrangement of this life. Due to their living arrangements, the participants of this study were exposed to death more often and closer than younger persons not living in an independent living community. Eight-five percent of the groups knew at least one person who had died in the past 12 months and all of the participants are considered of advanced age. Advanced age, for the purpose of this research, was considered being 65 years old or older. Therefore, being of advanced age, many have in some manner begun to consider their own death. This was substantiated by the qualitative interviews. The participants' familiarity with death may provide an explanation as to why these participants scored lower levels of fear using this instrument than other studies

using younger participants. There have been no other studies using the Threat Index and an elderly participant pool. However, even with the low threat scores, the Threat Index was successful in identifying some fear in this participant group. Further, the Threat Index responses were supported by the additional questions added to the Threat Index by the researcher and data gathered in the qualitative interviews.

The lower fear of death could be associated with the fact that most people in these independent living facilities probably have made many of their final arrangements and have begun to accept the changes in their lives as they have grown old. Many also have probably discussed their final requests and their death with family members and friends and are now attempting to enjoy the remainder of their lives and not focus on the inevitability of death. According to Weisman (1972) many elderly people have begun to accept their inevitable annihilation from this life and therefore may have reduced this fear. This issue is additionally explored in the qualitative research and discussed in chapter 5.

A belief in life after death was reported by 76% of the Aware participants and 72% of the Non-Aware participants. Although not statistically significant, these results are higher than those for the participants of most national polls. The national average for a belief in life after death is between 65% and 68% (Gallup, 1979; Survey.net, 1997). This participant is examined more in depth in the qualitative research results in chapter 5.

Religious practices might also have influenced the participants' beliefs in life after death and lower fear of death. This is supported by the results of the participants from the Gallup (1979) and Survey.net (1997) polls which reported similar religious practices to those of the participants of this research, and by the fact that the levels of Gallup and Survey.net participants' beliefs in life after death were similar to the belief levels reported by the participants of this research. This subject is examined more in the qualitative research. The relationship between participants' fears of death, beliefs in life after death, and awareness of

NDEs will be explored in the following chapter.

The qualitative participants, who have reported being aware of NDEs, report that their beliefs in life after death have been heightened or reaffirmed by these reports. The high level of belief in life after death by both groups may be associated with the high profession of religious belief, 96%, and the high frequency of religious service attendance. Sixty-four percent of the Aware and 66% of the Non-Aware groups reported attending religious services more than once a month. Many previous studies have demonstrated that regular participation in religious activities has a positive effect on the elderly and can reduce some of their fears of death (Kalish, 1981; McFadden, 1995).

As a result of the failure to establish Hypothesis 1, support for Hypothesis 2 cannot be conclusive. Hypothesis 2 states, "Participants who report little or no fear of death or dying will claim that this, in part, is due to their awareness of NDEs." Hypothesis 2 was not statistically supported due to the participants not specifying that awareness of NDEs helped to reduce their fears of death. However, the responses of the Aware participants do provide some indication of the participants' thoughts concerning their sense of the value of NDE stories reducing fears of death. Hypothesis 2 is that a reduced fear of death would, in part, be a result of awareness of NDEs. The quantitative data demonstrates that the majority of the No Fear/Aware participants thought that awareness of NDEs helped reduce their fears of death. The quantitative results support that some people believe that NDE stories have helped with their own fears of death. However, the survey did not help to assess the strength of the relationship between awareness of NDEs, the reduction of the fears of death, and the fear that was reduced specifically by thinking that one knows what to expect at death.

In the next chapter the researcher will review and interpret the results of qualitative interviews and the assessed meanings and values the participants placed on the awareness of NDEs. The interpretation of

the qualitative data provides a fuller perspective on the influence and value of the awareness of NDEs on reducing the fear of death with this participant group. In the final chapter, chapter 6, the questions promulgated by the quantitative research will be integrated with the qualitative results to respond further to the hypotheses and research questions of this study.

CHAPTER 5. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This chapter will review and interpret the qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews. The first part of the chapter will describe the participant group followed by the coding methodology for the qualitative analysis. The second part of the chapter will present an interpretation of these results. The background data of the qualitative participants is presented using the data collected from the quantitative surveys.

Qualitative Findings

Description of Participant Group

The qualitative participant group was chosen from the quantitative group of individuals who reported an awareness of NDEs, completed the Threat Index, and were willing to be interviewed. This group consisted of 15 participants, 47% who reported a fear of death and 53% who reported no fear. The average age of the participants was 81. These participants were interviewed about their thoughts concerning NDEs, death, dying, and their fears of death and dying.

The Personal Information Survey provided demographic data on the qualitative participant group. The group consisted of 11 females and 4 males. All the participants had completed high school and 6 graduated from college. The participants' religious affiliations were distributed as 12 Protestants, 1 Roman Catholic, 1 Jew, and 1 Humanist. Eleven of the 15 participants reported attending religious services more than once a month. Fourteen of the 15 participants knew someone who had died within the past 12 months. A belief in life after death was reported by 11 members of the participant group. Tables 7 provides a demographic representation of the qualitative group.

Table 7

Qualitative Participant Group Demographics

Participants	All		Fear		No Fear	
Male	4	27%	1	14%	3	38%
Female	11	73%	6	86%	5	63%
High School Graduate	15	100%	7	100%	8	100%
College Graduate	6	40%	2	29%	4	50%
Knows Someone Who Died	14	93%	6	86%	8	100%
Attend Church Once/Month	11	73%	5	71%	6	75%
Catholic	1	7%	0	0	1	13%
Protestant	12	80%	7	100%	5	63%
Jewish	1	7%	0	0	1	13%
Other	1	7%	0	0	1	13%
Belief in Life After Death	11	73%	5	71%	6	75%

Note. N = 15, Fear = 7, No Fear = 8.

As noted in chapter 3, the participants were asked to give their opinion of the source of NDEs. They could give more than one answer. Three No Fear participants believed that the source of the NDE is from a physical or chemical reaction to the body dying or a psychological response to dying. Seventy-one percent of the Fear participants and 50% of the No Fear participants thought that NDEs are a transpersonal response to dying.

Table 8

Qualitative Participant's Explanation for Near-Death Experiences

Participants	All		Fear		No Fear	
Explain Near-Death Experiences as Physical	5	33%	2	29%	3	38%
Explain Near-Death Experiences as Psychological	3	20%	0	0	3	38%
Explain Near-Death Experiences as Transpersonal	9	60%	5	71%	4	50%

Note. N = 15, Fear = 7, No Fear = 8. The percentages represent the number of responses per total participants.

Sixty-three percent of the No Fear participants reported a belief that awareness of NDEs had helped with their fears of the process of dying. Thirty-eight percent of this group felt that the awareness of NDEs reduced their fear of being dead. More than one-third of the No Fear participants felt that awareness of NDEs helped with their fear of what happens after death. Fifty percent of the No Fear group reported that they felt that the awareness of NDEs provided ideas regarding death and what happens after death, when specifically asked that question on the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey.

Fifty-seven percent of the Fear group thought the awareness of NDEs helped reduce their fears of the process of dying. None of the Fear participants reported that awareness of NDEs helped with their fear of being dead. Two Fear participants believed that knowledge of NDEs reduced their fear of the unknown nature of what happened after death. Two Fear participants did not respond to these questions. Table 9 provides a representation of the qualitative participants' views about the values of the awareness of NDEs.

Table 9

Qualitative Participant's Assessment of the Values of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences

Participants	All		Fear		No Fear	
Helps Reduce Fears of the Process of Dying	9	60%	4	57%	5	63%
Helps Reduce Fears of Being Dead	3	20%	0	0	3	38%
Helps Reduce Fears of the Unknown of Afterlife	5	33%	2	29%	3	38%
Awareness Provides Insight	8	53%	4	57%	4	50%
Belief in Life After Death	11	73%	5	71%	6	75%

Note. N = 15, Fear = 7, No Fear = 8. The percentages represent the number of responses per total

participants.

Interestingly, 73% of the total qualitative group reported a belief in life after death. Although this qualitative group was small, this finding exceeds the national average of the reported belief in life after death. As discussed in chapter 4, the national average of believing in life after death is between 65% and 68% (Gallup, 1979; Survey.net, 1997). However, given the ages of the participants, the high religious attendance of the participants, and the gerontological literature, this is not an unexpected finding for these participants. According to Gallup (1979), 71% of the people he surveyed over the age of 50 believe in life after death compared to 64% of people under the age of 30.

The next three sections will present the coding methodology, coding frequencies, and group differences.

Coding Methodology

The qualitative data were analyzed using the steps outlined in chapter 3 of this work. The researcher used the Textbase Alpha software to help in organizing the raw data (Tesch, 1990). To codify the data, the researcher initially organized the responses based upon the answers to the interview questions. When the data was being categorized, the researcher was unaware of the identity of the participant or her or his level of fear of death.

The process of the data analysis included codifying, the participant's transcript was codified for primary, secondary, and subcategories. Each interview transcript was first read for content. A second reading was done to codify responses to each interview question. The primary and secondary categories were determined before the data were analyzed based upon the primary themes of the research and the interview questions. A new subcategory code was assigned for each different response to the interview questions and assigned to the secondary category for the specific interview

question. A third reading of each transcript was then done to insure that the data had been thoroughly been analyzed.

The three primary themes for the data analysis were the following,

1. Awareness of Death
2. Awareness of Near-Death Experiences
3. Influences and Values of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences

These primary categories were then separated into 12 secondary categories that reflected the specific questions asked of the participants. The Awareness of Death category has five secondary categories with three additional subcategories under the heading of “Exposure to Death.” The Awareness of Near-Death Experiences category had five secondary categories. The Influences and Values of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences primary category were subdivided into two secondary categories. As discussed earlier, all the secondary categories were then subdivided additionally to reflect specific responses to the interview questions. When examining the responses to the interview questions, the researcher applied a code to each response. If similar responses were given by participants then their responses were coded the same. Each time a new response was given, a new code was applied. This final categorization of the secondary categories resulted in 108 different responses. The Awareness of Death category had 296 total responses. The Awareness of Near-Death Experiences and the Influences and Values of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences categories had a combined 308 total responses. A complete table of the coding is found in Appendix O.

Coding Frequencies

The qualitative data has been coded identifying the three primary themes of the data, Awareness of Death, Awareness of Near-Death Experiences, and the Influences and Values of the

Awareness of Near-Death Experiences. The frequencies of the coded responses within the subcategories reflect the number of responses by the participants within these themes. These codes are presented in Appendix O, with the frequency that participants commented on aspects of these themes within the categories of the responses. The frequency of the codes reflects the number of times the code was applied to a segment of interview text, rather than the number of participants who reported a response. As an example, a participant may have reported more than one response to a question, therefore providing more information concerning her or his thoughts on the question. During the discussion of this data, the researcher will comment either on the number of times the 15 participants of the qualitative research commented on the themes, meanings, and values associated with this research, or the number of participants who responded to an issue.

Group Differences

The qualitative group was formed from the members of the quantitative participant group. The group differences are for background information only. The group differences, of whether the participant was a Fear or a No Fear participant in the quantitative research, were not considered in evaluating the responses of the qualitative participants. This data analysis, however, was useful when integrating the quantitative and qualitative data in chapter 6.

The differences in the frequency of code occurrences were associated with whether the participant was considered in the Fear or the No Fear quantitative group. The group differentiation was determined by the participants' responses on the Threat Index. The Fear group provided 284 responses. The No Fear group provided 320 responses, for a total of 604 responses. An analysis of the code frequencies between these two groups will provide insight into the similarities and differences in their perspectives of death and the awareness of NDEs. It appears, from the rate of responses by the two groups, that the No Fear group may have been either more at ease with the

subjects of death and NDEs or they had more knowledge of the subjects than the Fear participants.

As commented above, the qualitative research did not consider which group the participants had been associated within the quantitative research. Overall the qualitative responses from the two groups were similar; therefore, the distinction between the two groups was small. In the analysis of the qualitative data, the researcher focused on the narratives of the participants regardless of whether they were a Fear or No Fear quantitative participant. In the following sections the narratives of the qualitative participants will be explored and interpreted.

Interpretation of Qualitative Results

Awareness of Death

This section will explore the thoughts and beliefs of the participants related to their fears of death, personal beliefs about death and the existence of life after death, and how these beliefs were developed and have changed over their lives.

Fears of death.¹⁵ The responses to the interview question concerning the participants' fear of death revealed that the majority of the qualitative group verbally expressed either no or a low fear of death. Many participants, when asked if they feared death, quickly responded that they had some *concerns* about death as opposed to a fear of death. One participant commented that he was glad that he would not know when he was to die, "I feel fortunate no one is going to tell me when it's going to happen," but expressed that he was not afraid to die. He asserted, "I have no fear of death." Some participants actually expressed that they were looking forward to death. Although some other participants reported that they were looking forward to their death, they also did not want to know when they were going to die. Most preferred to die in their sleep. As 1 participant commented, "I

¹⁵ As noted earlier in this research, when commenting on the "fears of death," the researcher is including the fears of the process of dying, being dead, and the unknown nature of what happens after death, when using this term.

hope I just go to sleep in bed.” Another participant echoed that commented by stating, “When my time comes, when God calls me, I hope I go out in my sleep.”

Some participants were insistent about their lack of fear of death and repeated often that they were not fearful of death. A possible explanation for some participants commenting more often about their lack of fear of death may come from a need to reassure themselves that they are not afraid of death. As Shakespeare (1980) observed in Hamlet, some people, “doth protest too much, me thinks,” (p. 77). Often people who are fearful of something will continuously reassure themselves of their lack of fear to mask their true fears (Rachman, 1990).

Most of the participants expressed concerns over the physical aspects of dying. They expressed a fear of the process of dying, suffering while dying, being a burden to others, or a lingering death. This fear was, by far, the greatest fear of most of the participants. As 1 participant commented, “It’s the people that are suffering, hurt, and sick to death that I pity.” Another participant expressed that after watching her husband die with some difficulty, she thought she also may have some difficulties but would ultimately welcome death as long as she was not aware of its coming,

I don't know what I'm going to think when it comes to facing it the way my husband had too. I just don't know what I will do. I have a feeling I will panic too, at least for a while. But in thinking about it now, I have arthritis [with] terrible flare ups. I wish I would go to sleep and never wake up.

Some participants commented that along with concerns over the physical process of dying they also were concerned over the social effect of the process of dying. As explained by 1 participant, “[I fear] being a burden and running out of money.” Another participant expressed that she feared “Having to suffer a lengthy time and letting all the money I’ve collected go so that my

poor children would have nothing.” A fear of extending the process of being kept alive by modern medicine and machines was expressed by most of participants. One participant, who did not want her life extended, and feared that her wishes might not be heeded stated,

That modern medicine, I'll put it that way, they have all sorts of things to keep you alive and lots of times you don't want to be kept alive.

I think that's the way I am. It's just one of those things. There wouldn't be any reason to be out of character for that. I think what would terrify me was the thought that I might be kept alive on machines. I would hate that. So, I have a “no resuscitate” thing and a living will and everything I can think of to prevent that. But probably no one will read any of it at the time.

Some participants also expressed concerns, as opposed to fears, about being dead. They commented on their concerns of the effects their death might have on other people. Concerns ranged from how a surviving spouse would be taken care of, to how a son or daughter would react to a parent's death. One participant shared, “I think that's one of the things a lot of people my age worry about. What about the children? What are they going to do when I'm gone?” There were no expressions of fear of being extinct or not being part of ongoing life. Several participants expressed that they looked forward to death. These persons considered death to be an end to a long life and a release from the physical limitations of their aging and failing bodies. This attitude is similar to the findings of Butler and Lewis (1977) in their work with the elderly.¹⁶ Although some participants looked forward to death, 1 participant expressed a fear of being dead. She expressed a concern over what would happen to her body after death,

¹⁶ Butler and Lewis (1977) found that most elderly people, although not anxious to die, looked forward to being free from the restraints of their aged and often infirmed and disabled bodies. See chapter 2 for more discussion on this subject.

I used to worry about, this is probably not something you are interested in but I just happened to think about it. Many years ago, in my 20s or 30s, I always felt like I wanted to be cremated. I abhor the idea of being closed up in any place like a grave.

I just think that's a horrible feeling.

She continues to have this concern and has requested to be cremated. Most of the other participants did not express any concern over the disposition of their body upon death.

Interestingly, none of the participants commented on being fearful of the unknown nature of what happens after death. In fact, many participants staunchly defended their lack of fear of the unknown of what happens after death with their personal and religious beliefs of life after death. One participant commented that he thought that life after death would be an improvement over his current life, "I [know] there is a better place to go to than what we're experiencing here." Another participant, who stated that she did not fear death, interpreted this life as the beginning of a continued existence and that death would not be the end of her existence. She commented, "I've always believed that there was an afterlife. This isn't it you know. This is just kindergarten compared to what we're going into and I believe that it's just going to happen very quickly." Another participant emphatically stated, "I believe that the Bible is true and I'm a Christian and I believe what it teaches." Even some participants, who expressed no belief in life after death, commented that they were comfortable with their acceptance of their beliefs and had no fear of death.

The most predominant fear expressed by the participants was the fear of the process of dying. However, the overall lack of fear of death reported by all the participants may be associated with their age, how they have been exposed to death, and how their beliefs in death were developed. These issues will be explored in the next sections of this chapter.

Exposures and responses to death. How a person has been exposed to death and how significant other people respond to death can affect an individual's development of personal constructs related to death (Kalish, 1981; Kelly, 1955). This section reports what the participants shared about their early recollections of their exposure and reaction to death.

Interestingly, the participants who expressed a lack of fear of death commented twice as often about their exposure and responses to death as the participants who commented that they had some fear of or concern about death. This difference between some participants may be associated with the different levels of comfort the participants have about the subject of death. This was observed with some participants. When the subject of death was raised, some participants would respond to the question quickly and then move onto another topic or ask for another question. This accounted for some of the shorter interviews during the gathering of the qualitative data. Often, people who unconsciously fear something, such as death, may profess not to be afraid of it but also will avoid the subject when it comes up (Rachman, 1990).

As discussed in chapter 2, personal constructs are usually developed or modified as a result of experiences in one's life. The development of personal constructs regarding death is illustrated by the comments of the qualitative participants. Most of the participants reported that they were exposed to death "normally" throughout their lives. Over their years they have been exposed to death by the deaths of family, friends, and social figures. However, several participants reported that they had also been exposed to death more often because of war and their occupations in health care.

Early awareness of death generally came from the death of pets and relatives. Most of the participants stated that they were initially exposed to death after the age of 10. Descriptions of the participants' early exposure to death ranged from accounts of death being a normal experience to accounts of death being a distressing and horrifying experience.

Some participants commented that as children they learned that death was a natural occurrence and therefore not to be feared. However, this knowledge did not remove the sorrow of the death of a loved one. One participant expressed the thoughts of many of the participants when she considered the death of others,

It bothers a person because we are selfish. We still want them on earth. As long as I'm in human body, I'm going to be selfish to a certain extent. That's the human part of me. But I understand it.

Another participant shared how the death of her son, more than 50 years ago, still affects her,

The only really shocking experience I've had with death was my 31-year-old son who died, they thought, from an acute allergy. He was perfectly well and perfectly strong and had been to choral society practice the night before. The next morning he didn't wake up. Well, it was a tremendous shock and I thought, "31, just ready to get his Ph.D. at John Hopkins," and he had never married, fortunately. So he did not leave a young wife and small child, but after he died the number of his compatriots that wrote us, people I didn't know at all, they were John's friends, the people who wrote and said if it had not been for your son John, I would not have done so and so. And it made me feel that his work was done.

It's amazing to me how absolutely you never get over it. And the silliest things-he played in the high school band, played the cymbals, he was a tall, skinny, boy; he could whack those things. To this day I can not hear the Star Spangled Banner without crying. "The land of the free"-Wham!

However sorrowful both mothers felt about the loss of their sons, they accepted their deaths and felt that their work in this life had been completed. A sense of completeness, their personal beliefs in

life after death, and a belief that they would meet their sons again at death helped them to accept their deaths.

A participant reported, that as a child she was angered by death, because of how a family member's death resulted in her having to "give up my time" during the wake and funeral to focus on "someone I know was not there." Another participant shared several vivid memories of her early encounters with death and its influence on her life. She described death as a "horror,"

The first horror I remember about death is, I must have been very small, and my grandfather took one of these real long green worms off a tomato plant and put it down on the sidewalk. And he said, "What do you think of that?" And I don't know what he expected, but my first thought was, "Step on it," so I stepped on it. I was horrified at what I'd done because it was irreversible and that made me very upset.

Another memory this participant described was the death of a pet chick, "I went [running] through the screen door and the chick came after me and the door slammed on it [and it was killed]. That was it."

A participant, who stated she had no fear of death, commented that she remembers her first encounter with death to be a step in her "loss of innocence." Based on Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory, the "loss of innocence" of the qualitative participants may have contributed to their development of constructs associated with their attitudes toward death. Another participant, who stated that she had some fear of death, recalled that her first experience of a meaningful death was the suicide of her father during her early adulthood. This death left her wondering about death and the reasons her father would have taken his life. A participant who remembers as a child not being affected by the deaths of her pets was awakened to the reality of death by the suicide of her uncle.

She commented,

I don't remember losing sleep over lost pets. I can remember the pets all right and I liked them but I don't remember what happened to them most of the time. But when I was a young woman, just out of college, I had an uncle who committed suicide. Shot himself. And, I loved my uncles at that point. I was just a young woman and that really upset me.

Similar to the previous participant's perplexity with the death of her father, this participant also was affected by her uncle's death, "I wonder sometimes, why did he do that? He had tried a couple of times before. I didn't know that until after he was gone, but that was a heartbreaker." As human development and thanatological research has shown, early experiences of death and how the individual has interpreted these experiences will affect the development of personal constructs regarding death (Kalish, 1981; Kelly, 1955; Viney, 1993).

The frequent exposures to death that the participants have experienced, over their many years, and more so now that they are in a retirement facility, may have contributed to the low fear of death reported by the participants in their interviews. They have been exposed to death often and therefore do not fear what they know (Rachman, 1990). How one is exposed to death can also contribute to one's attitude toward death. The participants who commented that they had some fear of death had often been exposed to death by the death of children, suicide, or as part of their occupation. The presence of often unexplained reasons for death may be a contributing reason to why these types of deaths did not reduce their fear of death. Thanatological studies report that traumatic, unexplained deaths and the deaths of children can affect a person's fear of death by increasing her or his fear of the unknown nature of death (Kalish, 1981; Kastenbaum, 1986). In contrast, a participant whose career had been as a nurse, and who shared the stories of the death of

the worm and her pet chick, viewed human death as a relief from pain and an experience not to be feared. However, she also believed that there is no dignity in death because all deaths are painful, “Dying is a nasty business. I’ve seen enough of it [to know] this dying with dignity is a sham. There is no such thing. One does not die with dignity. It can’t be done.” Her negative assessment of the process of dying did not cause her to fear death. Her personal construct of death was that death is a release from the pain of dying. According to her, her beliefs had been formed from the influence of her favorite grandfather and her exposure to death.

Exposures to death and the memories of these deaths have influenced the participants’ current personal constructs associated with death. Some indicated they were influenced by how death was handled by others. This is consistent with the literature discussed in chapter 2 concerning the ways fears can be developed or reduced. Fear responses can be learned by observing how others deal with fearful situations (Bandura, 1977; Wolpe & Rowan, 1988). As an example, the matter-of-fact approach to death of the participant who stepped on the worm and killed her pet chick appears to have been founded on the teachings of her favorite grandfather and her exposure to death through her occupation. Other participants reported that their beliefs and attitudes about death were influenced by life experiences such as war, the deaths of parents, grandparents, children, and friends. A participant, who exhibited nervous behavior during discussions about death, and has been treated for mental health problems, shared a wartime experience she had while working in the ambulance service during the bombings in England during World War II,¹⁷

I was in the ambulance service, not out on the road but I was in like an underground shelter where we used to bring people in. We weren't allowed to work in the area that we lived in.

¹⁷ The participant would wring her hands when talking about her war experiences and the death of others. She became tearful at time during the interview, commenting that she did not think anyone really cared for her. She expected to only be missed, upon her death, by her son and grandson.

All the bombings [and death], it got to be so casual that I remember one day somebody came by and asked me what I wanted for my dinner or something. I have never forgotten it, at the time I was just writing down that they had found a head on top of a roof, you know. So I said, "I'll have a head." You know, 'cause you got so cold and immune to everything that you were so busy you didn't have time to worry about yourself or anybody else. When the end of the war came, was when I went into a deep depression.

Although she stated that she became cold and immune to death, her expressed fears and observed behavior during the interview did not seem to be the response of someone who was comfortable with death. Another participant commented that an early death had made an impression on her, "I was 12 and my favorite grandfather died. I think that really made a big impression on me. [I realized], he was gone, and I wouldn't see him again." The participant whose father committed suicide, after she was married and had a child, stated that she felt that death became a reality with her father's death.

This section discussed how the participants were exposed to death and how they responded. The discussion in the next section will focus on how the participants developed their beliefs about death and the unknown nature of what happens after death.

How beliefs about death and existence after death were developed. This section, along with the previous section, provides an overview of how the participants assessed how their death and after life beliefs were developed. Following this section is a discussion of the participants' personal beliefs about death and existence after death. How an individual's beliefs about death and afterlife are developed is influenced by childhood and lifetime experiences. This was reflected in the comments of the participants of this research. According to Kelly (1955), the influences of these experiences help to develop personal constructs about death.

All of the participants commented that they had developed their beliefs in death and an

afterlife from religious teachings. However, some participants commented that they did not continue to follow the teachings of their early religious teachings, but developed their own philosophies concerning death. Many participants expressed similar comments when asked how they developed their beliefs. As 1 participant shared, “As a Christian we believe that there is another life. That is the only way I can think of it.” Most of the participants also stated that they learned about death from their families. Another participant commented, “My family was very religious and talked a lot about going to heaven.”

Interestingly, many the participants who expressed a lack of fear of death commented more often that they had learned about death from life experiences, such as war, occupations, and the loss of family members and friends, and observing others dying. Many used euphemisms when discussing death. As a participant commented about death, which he experienced as a young man in a war, "When you've seen the elephant, you are somebody different than you were before." This phrase reflects a familiar euphemisms used by many soldiers when discussing death among themselves. This avoided the use of the word death. As discussed in chapter 2, many people use similar euphemisms to either avoid the use of the word death or to personify death to maintain a sense of familiarity and acceptance of death. Another participant’s lack of fear of death was developed after watching a family member die. Discussing her family member’s death, she said,

She said she had peace and was just ready to go. She was ready. Maybe that’s the peace you get just before you die. This relaxed feeling like even if it’s over, it’s not over. She went with a peaceful look on her face and she was ready to go. It just blows your mind that she was that peaceful when she knew she was leaving her family behind. But she was, she was ready to go.

A participant who did not believe in life after death and professed to be a Humanist believed

she developed her personal beliefs about death after she began to question her religious training. She began to believe that some beliefs grow out of imagination and that everything that one is told is not necessarily true. When discussing the development of her religious beliefs, she shared,

[My beliefs] grew out of the difference between imagination and reality as most children's do, but I think it was rather early that I made a definite distinction between what was pretend and what was real. And I always found reality fascinating. Pretending was part of it but I knew I was pretending. I knew there weren't fairies in the garden and that there weren't pixies, but I loved to read about them.

Many participants expressed that their early religious training was the foundation for their beliefs about death and what happens after death but, as they aged, and were exposed to death more often, their beliefs changed. These beliefs will be discussed in the next section. As mentioned in chapter 2, elderly people are more apt to be exposed more often to death than younger members of the population. The qualitative participants were also often exposed to death. Almost all of the participants had known someone who had died within the past 12 months. Increased exposure to death by the elderly is often a result of honoring the deaths of relatives, friends, and for many, living close to other aging and dying adults. This firsthand experience with death may contribute to their expressed lack of fear of death. As expressed by many participants, the high exposure to death of people of their own age helped to confirm, modify, or further develop their constructs to deal with death.

In the previous sections, the qualitative participants have provided their perspectives on their fears of death, how they have been exposed to death, and how their beliefs in death and the existence of an afterlife have been developed. The next section will be a discussion on how the participants' attitudes about death have changed over the years.

How attitudes about death have changed over the years. According to Butler and Lewis (1977) and Kalish (1981), being prepared socially, legally, physically, psychologically, and spiritually for death can significantly help an elderly person's fear of death. Most of the qualitative group believed that their personal beliefs and attitudes had not changed much over the years, with some exceptions. Many of the participants commented that the primary attitude that had changed for them over the years was the importance of being prepared for death. The majority of the participants reported that they were prepared to die. The fact that participants who shared they did not fear death, believe that they are prepared for death, may contribute to their not fearing death. This is supported by the findings of many researchers such as Erikson (1982), Kübler-Ross (1969, 1991), Marshall (1980), Tolstykh (1987), and Viney (1993).

Overall, the participants commented that the changes over the years were toward (a) being prepared for death, (b) not putting off doing things, (c) having a better understanding and preparing for the social, legal, psychological, and spiritual issues related to death, (d) understanding the importance of doing what is right in life, (e) affirming their personal beliefs of death and the existence of life after death, and (f) an acceptance of the inevitability of death.

The studies of Kalish, Kastenbaum, Levine, and many other thanatologists regarding how attitudes about death change over the years are clearly supported by one of the participants, as she was expressing her beliefs in death and the unknown nature of what happens after death. She shared, "This all gets very mixed up in your mind until you reach an age where you no longer have to hang onto your family beliefs. You develop some of your own [beliefs]." Other participants commented that they had become more "spiritual" and were more involved with their churches.

Many participants commented that the fact that they were in the latter part of their physical lives had resulted in their beginning to look seriously at their mortality, their lives, and their beliefs.

As 1 participant commented, “I didn’t think of death to any appreciable degree until I got to be in my 80s, which was when I got older than my mother was when she died. I began to think I’m not going to get out of this alive.” Another participant, when reflecting on how her fear of death had changed, stated, “Death itself, at this stage, I don’t fear. I could have led a better life than I did, but I led a good life.” This reflection on her life appeared to provide her with satisfaction with her life and she was now prepared to die. Many participants, either in their words or the manner that they approached their remaining lives, believed that being prepared to die was important. None of them were anxious for their death to come soon, but they felt they were prepared. When considering his own death, a participant shared,

Well, I feel when my time is up, the Lord will decide what way I'm going to go. And regardless what my position is, or status in life, I'm going to go. When the Lord decides I'm going to have to go, I'm going to go. I don't think there's anything I can do, medically, mentally, to do anything about it.

This is an opinion shared by many participants when they consider the time and manner of their own death. Another participant’s comment clearly sums up the sentiment of most of the participants, “I welcome death when it comes.” According to many thanatologists, this is an attitude that is usually developed as individuals accept and become comfortable with the knowledge and reality of their mortality (Kastenbaum, 1986; Kübler-Ross, 1969, 1991). The next section provides insight into the personal beliefs that the participants expressed concerning death and an existence after death.

Personal beliefs about death and existence after death. Most of the qualitative participants responded similarly about their personal beliefs about death and what they believed exists after death. They expressed that their beliefs about death centered around a belief that death is inevitable, irreversible, often painful, but ultimately an end to the suffering of infirmity and old age. Several participants

commented that being released from this life would mean going to something better and be a release from the burdens of this life. No one referred to a hellish existence after death. A number of participants expressed a philosophy that life should be lived to its fullest. They expressed a philosophy of “come what may” concerning death. Many participants commented that they had their religious beliefs, which assured them that there is an existence after death, and they would be ready when death came. They believed they had lived fruitful lives and were now living each day as it came.

Most of the participants expressed a belief that a spirit leaves the physical body at death and that there is an existence after death. Several participants described their beliefs about leaving their physical body and returning to a spiritual existence. One participant described her belief of what happens at death as “My final belief is that when this spirit leaves this body, this body dies. The spirit is going back to its father. And the body is going back to its mother, which is the earth.” Another participant described her belief in life after death as “I just know that we get rid of our bodies and our spirit takes over. We are in the spirit world and I don't know what that's like. But I will find out.” None of the participants detailed their beliefs in what type of afterlife they anticipated, other than that some expressed that they were Christians and “believe what the Bible says” about the subject of life after death. One participant commented, “I don't worry about what it's going to be like. I don't remember when I ever thought about it. I don't believe in harps and gold streets and things like that. I cannot imagine forever.” Traditional Christian teachings support the belief that there is a physical existence after this life consisting of either a heaven or hell, as discussed in the literature review.

The majority of the participants expressed a trust in God and a belief in life after death. God was referred to often during the interviews as the “person” in charge of the lives and deaths of the

participants. The acceptance of a Supreme Being provided comfort to most of the participants that there is a “higher power” that is responsible for the lives and deaths of all living beings. One participant expressed her complete faith in God by stating,

When you have been reared up to believe in God and then you've been led to where you have no place to turn and nobody to help you, and God comes in such a force to help you, you know then that God is real. He is our leader. He is right here.

Another participant said that she dealt with her fears of death by facing the reality of death and a trust in God. She commented, “I think facing reality and being absolutely sure that there is a higher power that is taking care of us [helps].” This faith and belief in a Supreme Being are congruent with the findings of Gallup (1979) and the results of the Survey.net survey (1997). These surveys reported that the majority of people in the United States believe in a Supreme Being.

A Christian participant recognized her current life to be “just kindergarten compared to what we’re going into.” She also expressed her beliefs about a life after death by using the analogy that,

Your body is, when you die, nothing more than a letter ready to be delivered. Your soul is in an envelope and once your soul gets delivered, you no longer need the envelope. You take the soul out and destroy the envelope.

A Jewish participant expressed no belief or concern for life after death. She noted that her religious teachings focused on this life and what one accomplished in this life. This belief is similar to the discussion of Jewish beliefs of death and life after death in chapter 2. There was a consensus among most participants that this life is a preparation for the next life and that the “real us” does not die.

Several participants expressed that they believed that they would be met, at death, by the spirits of persons that had died before them and would be guided by them into existence after death. As 1 participant commented, “I expect to be surrounded by all the people who have gone [before

me] that I loved.” This belief is reinforced by the reports of many near-death experiencers who comment that they were met by loved ones who had died before them when they had their encounter with death.

Unexpectedly, almost a quarter of the participants, although most professed to be practicing Christians, expressed personal beliefs that are not common Christian beliefs. Two participants, a Humanist and a professed Christian, expressed a belief that at death a spirit leaves the body and rejoins a collective energy field of other spirits. The Humanist participant explained her belief in an afterlife by stating,

When people ask me where do you think you'll be, my answer is I'll be exactly where I was before I was born and I have no memory of that whatsoever. So I don't worry about it. When you're dead, you're dead, and that's it.

This same participant believed that when one dies the soul of the person is “atomized” into a collective energy field and the person ceases to exist except in the minds of the living. The Christian participant shared her belief in a return to an energy field by commenting,

I don't believe in the hereafter, you know, in that there is a heaven that we all go to. I believe that our energy from our bodies goes back into the energy field that is around us. And what is left then just goes back into the Earth.

She further questioned the teachings of her religion,

I wonder why you need to go into a religious place. Whether it's a guru in India to go and sit with him or whether it's a big cathedral in Rome. You need to go into that.

What's wrong with just finding a tree and sitting under it and finding peace there?

A belief in reincarnation was expressed by 1 participant. She expressed her belief in reincarnation and hoped to come back in a different form. As she commented, “I hope I come back as a dog [or] I

hope I come back as a man.” The belief of reincarnation was an unexpected belief to be found within this participant group since it is not a belief taught in traditional modern Christianity.

The nontraditional Christian beliefs of the previously discussed participants still do express a belief in a continuation of some form of existence after this life. However, 1 professed Christian participant commented that, since the research was anonymous, he felt he could express his true beliefs. This participant indicated that he was a practicing Christian who lived in a predominantly Christian environment. He did not want others to know of his disbelief in traditional Christian teachings. He believed that death is the end of all existence and that there is no life after death. He shared that he practiced a religion to help him feel good,

If this is very anonymous, I would say that you die, period. When death occurs, it's going to occur, and there's nothing that I'm going to be able to do about it. [At death], there's nothing. [It's] lights out and you're just like a dog. This idea of having a soul who goes off into the bright blue yonder-I don't go for it personally. I'm quite religious as far as it goes, but not to that extent. I think religion is wonderful. It's an opiate of the people, and I think I need the opiate on occasion.

Another nontraditional Christian belief was shared by a participant who commented,

I don't think this is the only life we live. I don't believe strictly in the kinds of reincarnation I have read about. But I do think there is more after death and if there is an eternity, or an immortality, I'll put it that way for you. I think you have to earn it in the life you are given. Well, that's quite a lot like the Buddhists isn't it? Or the Hindus I guess. But I don't know where I got that. I figured that out for myself a long time ago.

When asked how she fit her nontraditional beliefs with her traditional Christian beliefs, she

commented,

Well, I think there are more things in life and religion than we think about in our philosophies. I simply don't have that much intelligence or experience. I would never in God's world pretend to understand the mind of God.

Several participants shared their beliefs in what happens right after death. One participant stated, "Well, that there is a certain length of time that your spirit does stay on earth. This gives you an opportunity to see that your family, while they are grieving, are going to be OK." Another participant commented,

Well, I define me as the spirit I can't see and it is not going to disappear when the casing is burned. And I will, I imagine, just from what I have experienced, that I will hang around for awhile. In spirit, to be sure that the people that I love are either taken care of, or are facing it. Maybe just saying good bye to them. I don't know. But I know that's a very strong feeling that I have had a number of times and with the loss of a relative. And even [though the person is dead] I will turn my head and I am sure that person is going to be there. And I know already what I am going to say. It goes on, let's see, when I first began to notice it was with the death of an aunt. She was a long, long way off. I didn't go to the funeral or anything. But when they called me and told me that she had died, for about 2 weeks, I kept seeing her. Now this, of course, is just your mind working backwards and forwards and so forth. I know she wasn't there. Nevertheless, it gets one to think doesn't it?

Overall, the responses of the participants to their beliefs in death and existence after death are similar to the findings of other studies of this subject (Kalish, 1981; Kastenbaum, 1986; Levine, 1984). As these researchers have expressed, beliefs in life after death are usually developed in

individuals' early lives and then may be modified or changed over their years, from experiences of life.

Awareness of Near-Death Experiences

This research evaluated the value and influence of the awareness of NDEs. In this section, the elderly participants' beliefs and attitudes concerning NDEs will be reported and interpreted. The discussion will cover the participants' familiarity with NDEs, their knowledge of the characteristics of NDEs, and the meanings and interpretations participants have placed on the phenomenon.

Familiarity with near-death experiences. The 15 participants included in the qualitative part of this research all reported an awareness of NDEs during their interview. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, to be included in the qualitative study participants must have reported an awareness of NDEs. In the following two sections, accounts of when and how participants became aware of NDEs will be discussed.

When participants became aware of near-death experiences. When the participants became aware of NDEs does not appear to have affected their level of knowledge or their interpretation of the phenomenon. Several participants commented that they had heard of NDEs over the years. However, as they aged, some participants reported being more aware of reports of NDEs. Some commented that when they get together with friends, and the subject of death comes up, the subject of NDEs is often discussed. Most of the participants reported knowing about NDEs for more than 5 years. It did not appear, from the interviews, that the timing of when someone became aware of NDEs had any real impact on the value or influence placed on the phenomenon by the participants.

How participants became aware of near-death experiences. Participants reported learning about NDEs most often from accounts in readings, television programs, and conversations with others. Participants commented on television programs and books that they had read on the subject of

NDEs. Books by Raymond Moody (1975, 1977, 1988) and Betty Eadie (1992) were mentioned most often by the participants. Several participants also commented on various discussions they had recently had with other seniors about NDEs. No participants reported that they were greatly impacted by these discussions. They commented that after hearing about NDEs they were more attuned to learning more about the phenomenon whenever they heard someone speak about it. Some commented that their curiosity about the phenomenon did motivate them to speak to others about the subject, read about it, or watch programs related to NDEs.

A participant reported that she was introduced to books on NDEs when her husband was dying. Several friends had recommended Betty Eadie's (1992) book to help her deal with her fears of her husband's death. She lamented that she wished she had shared information about NDEs with her husband so that he would not have feared death and would have known what to expect at death, "I feel guilty because I didn't prepare him. I'm very sorry for it that I had not urged my husband to read [Eadie's, 1992] Embraced by the Light." Although this participant believed that awareness of NDEs is valuable, she cautioned that care should be taken on how and when these stories are presented to infirm and dying people. She believed that for some people, telling them stories of NDEs when they are ill might create a fear in the individual that they might be dying prematurely. She commented, "When it's somebody you love so much and you know they are going to die and they are going to die pretty soon, you don't like to do anything to make them fearful." She thought that the timing of any discussion regarding death should be selective so as not to increase a person's fear of death when she or he may be ill.

Several participants noted that they had become aware of NDEs after some of their elderly friends, who had been very ill, gave accounts of seeing bright lights, deceased relatives, and peacefulness at and after death. The qualitative data suggests that participants who heard firsthand

reports of NDEs, from actual experiencers, were more impressed with the NDE phenomenon than participants who learned of NDEs from other sources. In the next section, several participants will describe the NDE using descriptions given to them by their friends.

Most of the qualitative participants reported similar methods of becoming aware of NDEs. Participants who suggested that they had some fear of death reported more often that they had learned of NDEs from secondhand sources such as reading or seeing reports on television about the phenomenon. Interesting, participants who commented that they had no fear of death reported more often that they had learned about NDEs from firsthand sources, such as another person or directly from someone who had a NDE. This may suggest that learning of NDEs directly from someone may contribute to a lower fear of death. Some studies have shown that information presented personally can affect an individual's acceptance of new information (Reilly & Lewis, 1983). This effect may be present in the learning of NDEs from someone knowledgeable of NDEs or an actual near-death experiencer. Several of the participants' comments provided support for this theory. One participant, whose husband had had a NDE, commented, "I'm interested in them. My husband died and was resuscitated. It was his experience during that period of time [that interests me]." Another participant, who firmly believed that NDEs are more than a physical or psychological experience, said that her beliefs were reinforced by her father, who often spoke of his NDE. She stated,

I know that my dad went through it. When they came and told us that he had passed away they worked on him and they brought him back. He was very upset with my mother.

The participant whose husband had died before she discussed NDEs with him commented that she had learned of NDEs from a friend who suggested a book written by a near-death experiencer, "I read [about them] when I knew that my husband's death was imminent. It was

suggested that I read Betty Eadie's book, Embraced by the Light [1992], which I did. And I found it very, very enlightening and very comforting."

Description of near-death experiences. When describing NDEs, participants provided similar accounts. These descriptions came from what the participants had heard or read about the experiences. Often, how a person describes an experience can have an influence on the meanings and values placed on the experience by the individual (Giorgi, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1983). The descriptions of NDE phenomena, by the participants of this study, were consistent with established reports of NDE research. As an example, a participant shared a story of hearing a NDE story from her father, which describes the experience from a near-death experiencer's perspective,

I had never even heard of that [NDE] terminology until my Dad [spoke of it], I think, 20 years ago. My Dad was not a religious person, never was, a good person however. We were at the hospital and the nurse came out and told us that my Dad had passed away and meanwhile the doctor calls [the nurse] and he says, "You never tell the family that," and they brought him [her father] back. Consequently, he lived 6 years after that. But in the meantime, he was very upset with my mother. He said, "Why did you let them do that? I was in a beautiful place. There was light and it was just peaceful. It was beautiful." At that time I didn't even know what he was talking about. But as the years go on and you hear this more and then I started understanding what he was trying to explain to us.

Another participant described the experience the way it had been described to her by a good friend,

This one person that I knew very well, when they came down, they saw a tunnel, they were starting through the tunnel. They said they could see a light at the end of the tunnel. And a voice told them, "Not yet." That's when they come back through

the tunnel. When they came to, they were on the operating room table. They lived.

The majority of the participants described NDEs as seeing a light, being in a tunnel, and being beautiful and peaceful. Several participants described the NDE as a glimpse of an afterlife existence. No one described a negative NDE, as described in chapter 2. One participant reported, however, that her friend who had had a NDE, had come back from the experience confused about the experience and the existence of God. He had expected to see God and when he did not, he became despondent over the possible nonexistence of God. She describes her friend's NDE in the following words,

He apparently had a cardiac arrest. As far as I know that was the cause of it. But the nurse had been called and she came quickly and bumped his heart and got it going again. He told me, I'm sure a half a dozen times, because he was very fond of the story. He said, "I died. I know I did. It was so white and so pleasant, and such a clear white, white light." He said, "I wasn't a particle afraid. I was just kind of moving gently into this wonderful white illuminated place." Then he came back and said, "I don't believe in God. I used to. I've been a very good Congregationalist all my life but I don't know. You expect if you die to see God, but I didn't. All I saw was just white, just white and silence, and white." He kept emphasizing the white so many times.

Other stories of NDEs, where experiencers reported believing they had sensed encountering the love of God, did not help with his despondency.

The confusion experienced by the near-death experiencer, discussed above, is not uncommon for near-death experiencers. Many near-death experiencers report some confusion with their personal and religious beliefs, and sometimes in their relationships with others. This confusion is

often a result of having revelations during the experience that affect how the experiencer thinks, feels, and acts after the experience. The experience often alters previous beliefs and attitudes and may require counseling (Moody, 1975, 1977; Ring, 1980, 1985). Perhaps had this despondent experiencer received some counseling by a counselor familiar with NDEs, he may have come to understand his experience and not been depressed until the end of his life.

Some participants gave more detailed descriptions of NDEs than other participants. Overall, the participants' diverse descriptions of NDEs consisted of describing the NDEs in terms of (a) being a comfortable experience, (b) a sense of an existence after death, (c) the spirit leaving the body, (d) not fearful, (e) an out-of-body experience, (f) beautiful, and (g) disappointment about returning to life. The primary difference between the participants who expressed some fear of death, and those who said they did not fear death, was that the participants who expressed no fear of death knew more about the similarity in the stories of NDEs and the value near-death experiencers placed on their experience. As one participant commented,

Well, so many people have said, and I know that everybody, I'm sure, that ever watches TV, or anything like that, has heard that one of the first things you notice is the bright light. And [then feel] as if you are in a tunnel and being drawn towards that light. I've heard that so many times that I think that's a pretty accurate description of what does happen.

A participant reported that she felt that the validity of the idea that NDE reports are a glimpse of a reality after life was justified by the similarity of the reports. As she commented, "They [the experiencers and the reporters of NDEs] say the same things." Another participant commented that since she had become aware of NDEs she was more conscious of the stories, and always paid attention when the subject of NDEs was discussed. She commented,

I'm trying to see if there's any difference in their story. Like if, well, just any changes, but 99% of the time it's the same thing, they say the same thing. A peacefulness, a bright light, so not everybody can make up these stories.

Another participant also found comfort in reports that many near-death experiencers say they were met by someone at the time of their death,

Now, what happens after you get to the other side, and so many of them speak of relatives waiting for them, or someone in a long white robe that they would judge to probably be Jesus, or one of the Saints or something. But that you aren't going to be alone when you get there. I think that's one of the big things. People can die and never had any other members of their family who have been good people and have died, might be a little frightened that it would be very lonesome.

The seeing of spiritual beings or images of people who have died is common experience of near-death experiencers, as described in chapter 2.

Curiously, a participant who stated that she had some fear of death argued for NDEs by describing the experiences as events that people “actually saw and felt.” Even though she still had some fear, this participant thought that NDEs helped her with her fears of death. A closer look at this participant’s interview revealed that she had dealt with two significant deaths in her life, the death of her husband when her son was young, and of more consequence, the death of her son in the past 2 years. NDE reports gave her the comfort of believing that her son was in a better place and that she could look forward to joining him some day. She commented that she did not want to suffer as she died, and alluded, by her comments, that since she would be the last of her family to be alive, she feared the process of dying and being alone at death. She wished to die in her sleep, unaware of the process. She was unaware of NDE reports that describe the dying person not being alone at

death but met by loved ones or other spiritual beings.¹⁸

Interpretations and meanings of near-death experiences. The interpretations and meanings that an individual places on an event or experience can affect the value and influence that the event or experience might have on the person (Giorgi, 1985). Therefore, the interpretations and meanings that the participants had of NDE reports are important in the formulation of their assessments of the values and influences of these reports on affecting the fears of death for this elderly participant group. According to Frankl (1968), meanings of events can be found by how one interprets the experiences of these events. Although all of the participants gave their opinions regarding their interpretations and meaning of NDEs, some participants were more responsive than others. Most of the participants interpreted the experiences as “real.” They also believed that specific meanings associated with NDEs are personally interpreted, based upon a person’s religious and cultural background and beliefs.

The participants were asked to describe how they interpreted the NDE. Most of the participants interpreted NDEs as a combination of physical and spiritual experiences that occurred when someone was close to death. The majority of participants also interpreted the experience as a phenomenon that gives people a glimpse of what happens at and after death. One participant interpreted the NDE as a “window to eternity.” She considered it’s meaning to be “to know it’s there [life after death], even if you don’t see much [during the NDE].”

The participant who had reported herself to be Humanist and did not believe in life after

¹⁸ The participant could probably benefit from some counseling that would educate her about descriptions of NDEs, particularly that aspect of the NDE that reports that many dying people are met by other, already dead, as they transition from this life into an existence after death.

death, interpreted that NDEs are physical experiences whose meaning is to create hallucinations that help some people deal with their fears of dying. She stated,

They are psychological perceptions of the brain derived from the anatomy of that particular [part of the] brain, and the cultural [norms] and the religious beliefs and rituals and whatever [the experiencers] have in their culture that combine for hope. And everybody needs hope.

I think anything, any experience that we have is interrupted through what we understand life is and the things that we've been told and we believe. And, I certainly believe they had those experiences [and] that the brain is set up in such a way that many things effect the brain [such as] oxygen deprivation and perhaps chemicals.

I am equating it with what the brain will do. In a waking state. If you can remember your dreams, which many people can't, but the first moments after you wake up you can often remember and you will see relatives, friends and people that you knew, that's not unusual. Because somewhere those memories, especially sight, since sight takes up so much of the brain, the visual images are in there. In a state where you don't have quite as much oxygen and some of these synapses aren't working very well, I think it's not at all unusual.

I think that I would not argue anyone out of it. I don't argue about it. Because any experience that is personal, including a drug hallucination, is knowledge the person has from personal experience. And that is very powerful.

Another participant also commented that he found no meaning in NDEs. He interpreted them as fantasies. He commented, "They don't seem very plausible to me." He went on further to say, "The

way that the people describe them it sounds like just a fantasy rather than something that really happened to them. I'm sure that one could have a dream of that nature."

The participants who commented on finding meaning in NDEs thought the meanings were in how these experiences provided people with hope for a peaceful death and life after death. Most of the participants commented that they thought NDEs provided examples of what happens to a person at death. One participant described NDEs in the same manner as she described death, "The individual's energy leaving the body," and that at death the person is "no longer encumbered by the body," and pain. Another participant commented,

You do know where you are going. You are shown where you are going when you are leaving out of this world, out of this body. The so-called death, and it's really the death to the body, not the death to the spirit at all.

Two participants, who found little meaning in NDEs, commented that they found it difficult to believe that the NDE was an afterlife vision. They described the experiences as "interesting stories, but not real."

The meaning of NDEs can be found in the effect that it has on the experiencer and those made aware of the experience. None of the participants thought that their awareness of NDEs caused them to fear death. Some participants felt that the awareness of NDEs helped them not to fear death. Most participants thought that their awareness of NDEs gave them an idea of what to expect at death. When asked what meaning they associated with awareness of NDEs, most of the participants stated that the awareness of what to expect at death provided a purpose for the NDE and that its meaning was found in the hope that it provided people who believed in these experiences. Many of the participants reported that this hope provided them a sense of "knowing" of what occurs at death and beyond death. This conclusion is related to the research of Kenneth Ring, when he

studied the after-effects of NDEs on the experiencer. Experiencers reported a reduction in their fear of death and a strong sense of knowing that there was an existence beyond this life (Ring, 1980, 1985).

The interpretations of NDEs, by the participants of this research, are similar to the interpretations provided by many near-death experiencers. The participants interpreted NDEs as providing insight as to what might happen at death. This insight has helped some of the participants with their own fears of death. According to many experiencers, NDEs provide them with a glimpse of what is to come at death and they report that their fears of death are reduced (Lorimer, 1990, 1994; Moody, 1975, 1977; Morse, 1990, 1992; Ring, 1980, 1985).

Values and Influences of the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences

The previous sections have provided a focus to how the participants viewed death and NDEs. This section will explore the values participants placed on the awareness of NDEs and the influences these values had on their constructs of death. It is closely related to the focus of this research which has been conducted to evaluate the value of being aware of NDEs.

The value of the awareness of near-death experiences. Not surprising, the participants attributed value to the awareness of NDEs for many of the same reasons that the awareness of NDEs influenced their beliefs about death and the existence after death. Most of the participants believed that the value of being aware of NDEs is in the effect the knowledge of these experiences has on reaffirming existing beliefs of death, the existence of life after death, and knowing, from reports of experiencers, that they would not be alone but are met by spiritual beings at death. They also believed that knowledge of these experiences could provide a sense of what is to come at death. A Christian participant summed up the value of awareness of NDEs by saying,

[NDEs] give you a little insight as to what might be out there. Give a little warning

to pay attention to things now. [NDEs] would validate some of the beliefs we have.

For the nonbeliever, if they think they have nowhere to go, this might change their mind.

The knowledge of what to expect at death can help to reduce the fear of dying, as demonstrated in the earlier discussion, Fears of Death. According to Rachman (1990), to expect and be knowledgeable about a fearful situation, like death, can help to reduce some fear that may exist.

The values attributed to awareness of NDEs were discussed by the participants. One participant, who had lamented not telling her husband of NDEs before his death, reported that she felt there is a value to being aware of NDEs. The value she found in reports of NDEs was that they confirmed what she believed about death. She also considered of value that such awareness helps people to prepare for death and reduces their fears of the unknown nature of what happens after death. Another participant supported this opinion by stating, “I think for anyone who has been told that [her or his] illness is terminal, it would actually be a duty for any friend, or sympathetic person to tell [the person] about this [NDEs].”

The most important value of the awareness of NDEs, expressed by many of the participants, was the effect awareness had on reducing their fears or concerns associated with death; knowing of NDEs supported their hope in an existence after death. One participant expressed what she believes is a value of the awareness of NDEs by stating, “It [a NDE] carries us along the way. It carries me along the way, in anticipation [of my own death].” Some participants also expressed their belief that information about NDEs should be shared with other people to help them not to fear death. A participant expressed her opinion by stating, “I think that some kind of education for people who are dying slowly, like so many of them are over there in the health center, would be wonderful if they could know about and have this hope of what death was going to be like.” Another participant

further supported the value of teaching people about NDEs by stating, “There are a lot of people that have no religion and no beliefs at all and maybe if they hear something like this, it may give them a little hope.” Another participant thought the awareness of NDEs helped people to die peacefully. She commented, “It helps them [to] cross over.” Many participants felt that a significant value of NDE reports is that they give people hope in something after death and affirm of their beliefs in life after death. One participant stated, “[NDEs are] helpful I think. If you believe in [NDEs] you will have an easy transition and go to something better.”

Another value of NDE, as shared by many of the participants of this research, is in knowing that the dying are not alone at death but are usually met by “someone” to guide them on their way into an afterlife existence. A participant commented, while discussing being an old woman and her awareness of NDEs,

One of the things I don't really like about my life right now [is that] so many people that I love that I'm parted from and it would be nice to feel that I will see them again. [Many] greatly edified Bible students will tell you that there's no male or female. I'm sure I'm going to see my husband but he's going to be like my best friend. That's the way I feel about it. And I have so much to tell him. I miss him so much. That's something I'm looking forward to. And my precious mom and daddy I'm looking forward to seeing. And my other friends also. I have a feeling there's going to be a warm, warm welcome for me when I cross the pond.

As discussed earlier, 2 participants reported that they did not consider that awareness of the awareness of NDEs had any value in their lives. Although they did not see a value in NDE reports, beyond describing what dying might be like, 1 participant shared that she did think that they might be beneficial to other people. She commented, “I don't doubt the interpretations that anyone says,

and that's one's belief system, and that's fine. I'm sure it helps people. [However], it depends on the person, I think."

The values of NDEs as expressed by the participants of this research are the same values expressed by near-death experiencers following their experience (Moody 1975, 1977, 1988; Ring, 1980, 1985, 1992; Sabom, 1982). However, there is one exception. Many near-death experiencers state that after their experiences they know that they not only have hope that there is an existence after death, they emphatically state that they "know" there is an existence after this life (Ring, 1980; Sabom, 1982). Many studies of the aftereffects of a NDE on the experiencers reflect a positive influence on their lives by reducing some of their fears of death. This is reported, by near-death experiencers, to be a result of experiencing what is to happen at death and what they believe to be a glimpse of life after death (Moody 1975, 1977, 1988; Ring, 1980, 1985, 1992; Sabom, 1982). This similar positive influence may also be attributed to some of the participants of this study. As 1 participant commented about NDEs,

We interpret it as going to heaven, or being a peaceful way of dying. And of hope, I think hope is very, very important to people. And the Christian religion has, especially since we have tried to conquer death as successfully as we have. The thought of heaven is a very hopeful thing, perhaps more so because we have a very affluent society and we have a society that denies death. We don't want to see it, we don't want You can't do that in an underdeveloped country because it is all around you. Here we aren't used to it and we make a great big thing of this uncertainty. We need hope.

According to Hall and Lindzey (1978), Frankl (1968), and Kelly (1955), the interpretations, meanings, and values one places on an experience or information can influence how one's life is

affected by the experience. The next section will examine how the participants thought they have been influenced by their awareness of NDEs.

How the awareness of near-death experiences influences one's beliefs about death and existence after death. In the previous section, the researcher reported how the participants assessed the values associated with the awareness of NDEs. In this section, the influence of these values will be explored. All of the participants shared their thoughts about how the values that they placed on the awareness of NDEs had influenced their lives. All but 2 of the participants unequivocally expressed that they thought that NDE reports reaffirmed their beliefs in life after death. The 2 participants whose beliefs were not reaffirmed, expressed that they did not believe in life after death.

A participant who believed in life after death, thought that the influence of the awareness of NDEs “reconfirm what I had always felt was true anyway, but it was even just more beautiful. It almost makes you think, gee, I can hardly wait!” As has been discussed, this is an influence of awareness of NDEs that many participants reported. Another participant thought that the awareness of NDEs helped her religious beliefs in life after death because they “reinforced it.” Another participant also thought her awareness of NDEs had reinforced her beliefs even if NDE stories were questioned by others,

They [NDE stories] don't contradict them [religious beliefs]. I read some of those, like Life after Life, is that the one Moody wrote? I read that some years ago. In fact they had it as required reading at the University of Miami in psychology. I wasn't taking it, but a friend of mine was. And she loaned me the book, she was so amazed. I read it. It didn't startle me at all, maybe that reinforced the feeling I already had. Then when I read the Betty Eadie book, I certainly accepted that [NDEs]. I thought it was just wonderful until Father Don said he thought she went a little too far and

overdid it. Yes, we are believers and are going to go to heaven, and yes it is going to be a whole lot better than what it's like living here on earth. But she dolled it up a little too much. Like putting on too much jewelry.

Another participant stated that NDEs proved to her that “There is another life.” Another participant thought her awareness of NDEs were helpful to her belief in life after death by stating, “It has strengthened my belief.” A participant commented that awareness of NDEs had influenced her fears of death and thought making other people aware of the phenomenon would help them. She stated, “I can't understand why people would be afraid of this so-call death. It is only the death of the body. NDEs demonstrate that.”

These comments are similar to the comments made by many near-death experiencers after their experience. As reported by Kellehear and Irwin (1990); Moody, (1975; 1977; 1988); Morse (1990; 1992); Ring (1980; 1985; 1992); Sabom (1982), and many other researchers, near-death experiencers often report a strengthening of their spiritual beliefs and no significant fear of death. As has been reported by near-death experiencers and discussed in chapter 2, a near-death experiencer may continue to report some fear of death, but this fear is generally associated with the process of dying, not being dead, or the unknown nature of what happens after death. Many experiencers would echo that because of the NDE they are reaffirmed about a belief in life after death because “now we know that.”

The participants often commented on how the awareness of NDEs affected their beliefs about what to expect at death and that the awareness of NDEs gave them hope. Participants who shared that they did not fear death commented, twice as often as other members of the group, that they thought that NDEs gave them hope in a fearless death. As a participant stated,

I believe it. Completely and absolutely. I think the human mind is the most

remarkable institution that was ever invented. And I do feel particularly, people who have a religious faith welcome that kind of an end. And a feeling of, "Isn't this marvelous? This is the best there could possibly be." I do think that, well, you've heard of all kinds of miracles of people reviving and coming back and I believe them. Absolutely and completely. And I believe it ought to be a joyous experience. I certainly do not fear death at all.

Two participants, who do not believe in life after death, commented that their awareness of NDEs had no influence on them and that they, as previously noted, considered the phenomenon to be an interesting story but not a real experience.

One participant made an interesting comment regarding perception about the differences between women and men and their willingness to discuss their own NDE or the NDEs of others. Her conclusion was that men, from her experience, did not trust what NDEs revealed,

It's a funny thing, men don't like to talk about this all that much. Or the ones I've known. If they've had them, and I say my husband did and a couple of friends, all of us at our age have something like that at one time or another. They don't like to talk about it. They don't trust them. Where as we had a headmistress once, who died a rather lingering death of cancer and wrote about it before she did go. And she enjoyed a NDE. It comforted her. She felt that, good, I haven't lived in vain. But I never heard a man say that.

This conclusion, although interesting, is not supported by the literature. There have been no studies of whether women or males are more at ease at discussing NDEs. However, studies have shown that there is no gender difference in who might have a NDE (Moody, 1975, 1977; Ring, 1980, 1985; Sabom, 1982). A study of gender differences concerning ease of sharing NDE stories might be a

valuable subject for future research.

Although there were many responses concerning the influence of the awareness of NDEs, most of the participants commented that NDE reports helped reduce their fears or concerns about death by giving them a sense of what to expect at death, and a hope in life after death. The word hope was used specifically by more than a third of the participants and appeared as a common theme for most of the other participants, based on their comments regarding the meanings, values, and influence of the awareness of NDEs. One participant expressed her reaffirmed hope in a peaceful death by describing the NDE as “A door opening to you, welcoming you to come in.” An assumption, from these findings, suggests that the reaffirming of religious and personal beliefs in life after death as a result of the awareness of NDEs provided the participants with a sense of hope. As a participant commented, “Yeah, we were taught to believe this, and this is called, what is it, ‘blind faith.’ But now there's a little confirmation to it.” Another participant, when asked if awareness of NDEs influenced her concerns about death, shared,

Well, I think it definitely does have an effect. It does make it easier and if the person is someone who has been taught through the Bible this isn't all there is. This is like kindergarten and we're on to something better. Even though they have heard that and been taught that in Sunday School, or something like that, to hear an actual bona fide story that people have written they did go through this death experience, but they came back. That's very assuring.

The influence of this reaffirmation of beliefs may have, in part, helped to lower the fear or concern about death for the participants.

More than half of the participants reported that they believed that the awareness of NDEs helped them not to fear dying. They reflected that the influence of this awareness was on reducing

their fears of the process of dying, the highest reported fear by participants, and what happens after death. This influence was reflected by some of their comments. One participant was assured of her belief in a continued existence after death as reflected by reports of NDEs, “It [NDE] is to let people know to not be afraid of passing over. We just drop this whole body. The real us don't die.” Another participant supported the affirmation that NDEs influenced concerns about death by commenting, “Well, it's probably not going to be as bad as we thought it was going to be.” Another participant was confident that death would not be painful by stating, “It's not this painful way to go, but a nice easy way to go.” Finally, another participant commented she was influenced by her awareness of NDEs by knowing “You don't have to fight, just let go and it's going to be okay,” to go gently into the night, contrary to Dylan Thomas' opinion that humans should “rage, rage” against death (Jones, 1971).

The testaments of the influence that awareness of NDEs has had on the participants shows how providing people with an awareness of NDEs can help reduce their fears of death and reconfirm some of their religious and philosophical beliefs. No participants reported being negatively influenced by their knowledge of NDEs. Further, the individuals who did not believe their awareness of NDEs influenced their lives did not discount the possible value of this awareness in other peoples' lives, but in fact they commented that the awareness of NDEs might help some people, particularly those who are suffering or are afraid to die.

Conclusion

The qualitative data did reveal that awareness of NDEs affected some participants' fears or concerns of death. The data also revealed the meanings and values the participants placed on the awareness of NDEs. Most of the participants thought that NDEs affirmed their personal beliefs, did not conflict with their religious beliefs, and provided them an idea of what to expect at death. They

considered a significant value of awareness of NDEs to be in the hope these experiences provide to some people of a peaceful passage from this life and an existence after death.

Qualitative research cannot prove or disprove a hypothesis. However, the data provided an interpretation of the participants' thoughts concerning the meanings, values, and influences of the awareness of NDEs. The perceptions presented in the qualitative research do support that the awareness of NDEs may in part influence the participants' fears of death and dying. The qualitative data also responds to the research question "How does the hearing and reading about NDE reports affect a person's attitudes toward death and dying?" Most participants reported that hearing contemporary reports that death was a peaceful experience, at which time one is not alone, and that there is nothing to be afraid of, helps to reduce their fears of death. The participants clearly expressed their beliefs that awareness of NDEs reaffirmed their beliefs concerning death and the existence of life after death. They also felt that the awareness of NDEs provided them hope in a peaceful death and life after death. Interestingly, no participants reported that they felt awareness of NDEs was harmful or contrary to their religious beliefs. This is supported by other NDE research. Research has shown that NDEs are reported by people with many different religious or philosophical beliefs (Lorimer, 1990, 1994; Moody, 1975, 1977; Ring, 1980, 1985). Further, interpretations of the experiences are not in conflict with most religious teachings (San Filippo, 1993). Near-death experiencers usually interpret their experiences based upon their religious teachings (Lorimer, 1990, 1994; Moody, 1975, 1977; Ring, 1980, 1985).

The next chapter will present an interpretation of the research results by integrating the quantitative and qualitative data, findings, and interpretations. These interpretations will provide responses to the research questions and hypotheses by discussing the similarities and differences in the quantitative and qualitative data.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This research examined the value of the awareness of NDEs on reducing the fears of and concerns about death for the elderly person. The project employed quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to examine the research hypotheses and questions. The findings demonstrated that although a direct correlation could not be determined between the awareness of NDEs and reduction of fears of death, most of the participants believed there was value to being aware of NDEs. All of the qualitative participants thought that NDE stories should be shared with people who may be fearful or concerned about death. These qualitative findings reflect the value of stories; as 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 NDEs 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 chapter integrates the findings of the research and offers concluding comments by the researcher. The first part of this chapter 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. Following the discussion of the integrated results, the concluding sections present (a) personal impressions resulting from this study, (b) practical implications of this study, and (c) considerations for future research.

Main Hypotheses and Research Questions

Hypothesis 1. Participants who are aware of NDEs, but have not themselves had a NDE, will report a fear of death less often than individuals who are not aware of NDEs. As discussed in chapter 4, 19

participants of the 40 quantitative participants recorded some level of fear of death on the Threat Index. The awareness of NDEs, 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 NDEs. Hypothesis 1 was therefore not statistically supported and the null hypothesis was not rejected. The quantitative research failed to establish that the awareness of NDEs 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 (Birren & Schaie, 1990; Kalish, 1981). 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 NDEs reduced the fear of death, the qualitative data did provide information that reflects that most participants believed that awareness of NDEs helped them with their fears or concerns about death and dying. These findings were discussed in chapter 5 and will be integrated with the quantitative data later in this chapter, in response to the research questions. However, these findings are specific to this research and are not capable of being generalized.

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 NDEs. With the rejection of Hypothesis 1, no direct relationship could be established between awareness of NDEs and the fear of death. However, some data were collected from the quantitative participants who knew about NDEs that reflected their opinions regarding the value of awareness of NDEs. 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 NDEs 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 K for a complete description of the quantitative data.

As discussed in chapter 4, the majority of the participants who were aware of NDEs 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 NDEs helped with their fears of being dead. Though these responses reflect that the participants thought that their awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs. The qualitative data generally supported the notion that awareness did help most of the participants with their fears or concerns about death.

As discussed in chapters 3 and 5, 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 NDEs 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 NDEs.

Question 1 - Does a person's awareness of NDEs, 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 NDEs, but not near-death experiencers themselves, thought that this knowledge was helpful with their fears or concerns about death. Chapter 4 presented the findings of the Threat Index and the Awareness of Near-Death Experiences Survey and chapter 5 presented the results of the qualitative interviews; therefore, the researcher will not repeat all of the specific points developed in these chapters. Instead, the researcher will discuss the overall effect that awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs 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 NDEs 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. As discussed in chapter 4, 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 (1981), Kastenbaum (1986), Neale

(1973), 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 NDEs helped their specific fears related to death and dying.

An assessment of the value of the awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs. The quantitative data also provided some insight about what the participants thought were helpful aspects of NDEs for reducing the fears of death.¹⁹ 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 NDE helped with their fear of the dying process. Twice as many No Fear participants reported that they thought awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs 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 NDEs was helpful for reducing this fear than Fear participants.

The quantitative data, concerning the participants' interpretation of NDEs, 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 (Greyson, 1992d; Lorimer, 1990, 1994). Many near-death researchers believe that the experience is best explained by a combination of all three explanations (Greyson,

¹⁹ All of the participants discussed in this chapter are Aware participants. This is in keeping with the objective of this research, to evaluate the value of NDEs for participants who have been aware of this phenomenon but not had a NDE themselves. Whether a participant was consider a Fear or No Fear participant was determined by the level of fear she or he recorded on the Threat Index, as discussed in chapter 4.

1992d; Lorimer, 1990, 1994; Moody, 1975, 1977; Ring, 1980, 1985).

The qualitative interviews provided insight into the participants' quantitative responses about the value of an awareness of NDEs. 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.²⁰ This would account for their lower consideration of the value of the awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs helped with this fear and their fear of the unknown of what happens after death. The participants thought that awareness of NDEs 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 that teaches that meaning is developed by the interpretation one makes of an experience (Frankl, 1968). This theory is relevant when reviewing how the participants of this research found meaning and value for the awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs 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 NDEs are transpersonal experiences commented that they were encouraged by the stories told by near-death experiencers and others. They were encouraged because the NDE stories supported their personal constructs

²⁰ These expectations were associated with the participants' personal and religious beliefs.

regarding death and dying. As discussed in chapter 2, NDEs 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 NDEs, and the qualitative data provided more depth about the participants’ responses.

The relationship between the participants’ comments concerning their interpretation of the meanings of NDEs and their comments concerning the value of these meanings. As discussed in chapter 5, most of the participants believed that the meanings of NDEs 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 NDEs 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 NDEs, 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 (Greyson, 1992c; Grof & Grof, 1980, Zaleski, 1996). According to Zaleski (1996), there is general acceptance of the NDE 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,²¹

For some religious critics, the most serious flaw in the NDE 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. (p. 333)

Atwater (1992) interprets hellish NDEs 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)

²¹ See chapter 2 for discussion of hellish experiences. Also see Moody 1975, 1977, 1988; Morse, 1990, 1992; Rawlings, 1993; Ring, 1980, 1985, 1992.

Rawlings (1993) believes that many of the pleasant NDEs are tricks of Satan to lead people away from the teachings of God. He believes that the reason there are not more reported negative NDEs is because the hellish NDEs are quickly forgotten by the conscious experiencer, similar to forgetting some dreams. Although Rawlings's descriptions and analysis of the NDE 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 NDEs to show how His love can be experienced and affect how one leads the remainder of her or his life.²² According to Atwater (1992), Ring (1980, 1985), and Sabom (1982), negative NDEs 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 NDE is a positive or negative experience, both appear to have an effect on the experiencer (Atwater, 1992; Ring, 1980). As reported in chapter 5, only 2 of the qualitative participants spoke of negative NDEs.²³ The value of the awareness of positive NDEs 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 NDEs, but by the influence NDE stories have on the individual's personal

²² The researcher believes in God and believes that God is genderless. However, the researcher uses the masculine pronoun to refer to God to provide a human pronoun to describe God.

²³ Several of the participants asked the researcher about negative NDEs. He provided them with some descriptions about negative experiences without interpreting the descriptions. This additional information did not appear to affect the participants' beliefs in the value of being aware of NDEs.

constructs of death and dying. As 1 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 NDEs by stating, “[NDE stories] reaffirm my beliefs.”

The quantitative and qualitative data reflected that participants who believe in life after death thought NDEs are examples of what to anticipate at death. No matter what the participants believed was the source of the NDE, they thought awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs have had on the participants’ personal fears concerning death.

The influence that the meanings and values of awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs led them to reaffirm their beliefs in an existence after death. Most of the participants commented that they were comforted by knowing, from NDE 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 NDEs 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 NDEs 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 NDEs 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 NDEs,

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 this research clearly reflect that they believe NDEs 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 NDEs affect one's attitudes toward death and dying?

This final question addresses the aspects of NDE 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 NDE 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 (Atwater, 1992; Eadie, 1992; Greyson, 1992; Moody, 1975, 1977, 1988; Morse, 1990, 1992; Ring, 1980, 1985, 1992; Sabom & Kreutziger, 1977).

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 NDEs 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 NDE stories that the participants believed were helpful with their fears of death and dying. The researcher will not repeat the details of the information presented in chapter 5, but will respond to this question by particularly focusing on the qualitative participants' comments about how stories of NDEs have affected their fears and could affect others' fears of death. According to the elderly participants of this research, regardless of their level of concern about death, many considered stories of NDE to be encouraging as they faced their own impending deaths or the death of another.

According to Kastenbaum and Aisenberg (1972), it is not uncommon for people to have some fear of death. Therefore the outcome of this research may prove helpful for some people who have fears or concerns about death. The following discussion will specifically focus on the participants' view that awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs on the fear of the process of dying. As discussed in chapter 5, 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, discussed in chapter 2. 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 (Kastenbaum, 1986; Neale, 1973).

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 (Neale, 1973; Nuland, 1993; Weisman, 1972). 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 NDE 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 NDE stories helped them with their fear of the process of dying. The qualitative data reflect the same findings. Most participants reported that they thought NDE 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 NDE 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 (Greyson, 1992c; Ring, 1980, 1985). The findings of the quantitative and qualitative data of this research clearly support that there is commonly perceived value in the awareness of NDEs and that such awareness reduces the fear or concern about the process of dying.

The effect of awareness of NDEs 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 (Birren & Schaie, 1990).

When considering the value of NDEs for helping with the fear of being dead, some quantitative participants reported that they thought awareness of NDEs 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.²⁴

This comment, by a near-death experiencer, is supported by Ring's (1980, 1985) NDE 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.

²⁴ This participant was interviewed during this research but was disqualified to be a part of this project due to her being a near-death experiencer. Her quantitative and qualitative data were not considered in this research.

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 NDEs, provide support that sharing NDE stories with people could reduce their fears of being dead. Several participants of this research commented that they thought that NDE stories should be shared with others who fear being dead to reduce their fears. As commented in chapter 5, 1 participant lamented that she wished she had shared stories of NDEs with her dying husband to ease his concerns about death. Several other participants commented that they thought sharing NDE 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 NDE 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 NDEs 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 NDE that participants reported in terms of reducing their fears or concerns about death. The findings of the research supported the notion that knowledge of NDEs 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.

As discussed in chapter 4, the majority of the quantitative participants reported that they thought that awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs 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 NDEs 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 NDEs, then their awareness was beneficial.

This research was conducted to determine if awareness of NDEs was beneficial to help people deal with their fears of death. The results of the research suggest that awareness of NDEs 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 NDEs has provided them with hope about and support for an existence in life after death.

NDE researchers such as Greyson (1992a), Grof and Grof (1980), Moody (1975, 1977, 1988), Morse (1990, 1992), Ring (1980, 1985, 1992), and Sabom (1982), 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 NDEs 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)

NDE 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 NDEs, these experiences are compatible with most religious beliefs (Ring, 1980, 1985; San Filippo, 1993; Zaleski, 1987, 1996). This is particularly true if the interpretation of the NDE is that it is a vision of the period between physical death and life after death.²⁵ 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 (Grof & Grof, 1980; Moody, 1975, 1977; Morse, 1990). 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 NDE provide the experiencers with the common characteristics reported and have value for the participants of this research. Though not all the participants thought that NDE 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 NDEs did not create or increase one's fear and could be helpful for some people who might fear death and dying.

²⁵ Most religious teaching do not address this period after death and therefore do not need to be in conflict with a belief that NDEs take place between physical death and an existence after death.

Conclusions of This Research

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 NDE 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 NDEs reduces the fear of death and dying, the qualitative data does indicate that the participants thought that NDE 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 NDEs does no harm. The participants reported that the awareness of NDEs did not cause them to fear death. Therefore, if stories of NDEs appear to have been helpful to the participants of this research, this researcher would infer that awareness of NDE 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 NDEs, is the claim that there is nothing to fear about death. Therefore, the sharing of NDE 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."

Personal Impressions

While conducting this research I had the opportunity to spend time with many elderly people

who had the time and willingness to participate in this project. These participants expressed their appreciation for being included in the research project and hoped that their participation would be helpful. The time I spent with these participants was valuable in its confirmation of the gerontological research, discussed in chapter 2, that indicates that the more involved in life an elderly person is, the more satisfied she or he appears to be with her or his life. I found all of the participants involved in their residential community willing to help a “young man” complete his research, and willing to share their thoughts about NDEs, death, and dying.

I believe this research supports the assertion of Ken Ring (1980, 1985, 1992) that the meaning and value of NDEs are to transform people to a higher level of consciousness of their human experience. Ring (1985) has written,

I believe that humanity as a whole is collectively struggling to awaken to a newer and higher mode of consciousness, and that the NDE can be viewed as an evolutionary device to bring about this transformation, over a period of years, in millions of persons. (p. 7)

This higher level of consciousness, whether for an experiencer or a hearer or reader of NDE stories, appears to provide some consolation for the fears or concerns some people have about death and dying.

As a researcher, I was impressed with the similarity in the knowledge of NDEs among the participants and the participants’ unified belief in the value of NDE stories regardless of whether the participants believed the NDE was a glimpse of an existence after death. I was also moved by some of the participants’ sharing their appreciation for being able to talk about their fears and beliefs without feeling they were being judged. Their sharing of the stories of their lives, being elderly, and thoughts about death and dying provided me with valuable insight about living a satisfactory life,

graceful aging, and preparing for a good death.

Practical Implications of this Study

This research has confirmed that there is value to sharing NDE stories with elderly people regardless of their fears or concerns about death and dying. As the participants reported, stories of NDEs 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 NDE 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.

NDE 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 (Campbell & Moyer, 1988). NDE stories provide insight into various cultural and religious perspectives about what happens at death based upon contemporary stories of "otherworld journeys" (San Filippo, 1993; Zaleski, 1996).

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 (Cushman, 1993; Polley, 1978). 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 (Livo & Rietz, 1986). According to Bettelheim (1975), 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" (p. 25). The strongest implication of this study, from the findings of the research, is that the listening and reading of stories of NDEs 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 NDEs 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.

Suggestions for Further Research

This researcher recommends that additional research be compiled on the use of the Threat Index to assess the fear of death in the elderly population. The research on this assessment tool did not reveal other studies of the fear of elderly adults using the Threat Index. This would benefit the validity and reliability of this tool by providing additional data from an older population. Gerontological studies have demonstrated that older adults have different perspectives on many of life's occurrences than younger adults (Butler & Lewis, 1977). This different perspective could affect the standards of the Threat Index.

The age of the participants may have influenced the findings of this research. The fear of

death is characteristically less for older adults than for younger individuals. Therefore, it would be interesting to perform the research with younger participants to determine their levels of fear and their opinions regarding the value of the awareness of NDEs and to compare these results with the results for the elderly participants of this research.

The participants of this research were almost homogeneous in their religious faith. A more diverse participant pool might provide different interpretations and values of NDEs. However, other studies of the effects of NDEs of those who have had the experience, and are from different religious traditions, do not appear to create different interpretations of values and benefits from the experience (Lorimer, 1994; Ring, 1980, 1985).

Any additional research that will help people with their fears of death would be very worthy. The fear of death has been a part of the human experience since humankind became aware of their mortality. It is the hope of this researcher that this study, along with the research of other transpersonal thanatologists into the meanings, values, and influences of stories of NDE stories, will help reduce the fears of death and dying in this age of science and technology.

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Chief Researcher:

The chief researcher for this project is DAVID SAN FILIPPO. He is a doctoral student at Saybrook Institute, 450 Pacific Avenue, 3rd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94133.

Purpose and Benefits:

The purpose of this research is to study the value of the awareness of near-death experiences for reducing fears of death for the elderly. By participating in this study you will be able to add to the body of knowledge regarding dying, death, and the value near-death experiences.

Procedures:

This study will consist of two parts for some participants. The first part will be the completion of a survey. The completion of this survey should take 15-20 minutes.

Some respondents may be asked to participate in the second part of the research. This second part consists of a personal interview with the Researcher. The interview will delve deeper into the subject of human fears of death and the impact accounts of near-death experiences can have on an individual's fear of death. This interview will be audio taped and transcribed. The interview should last 45-60 minutes.

Safeguards:

Your participation in this study is purely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and to discontinue your involvement in this study at any given time, for any or no reason, without being subjected to any prejudice on the part of the Researcher.

The information obtained about you, as well as other participants in this study, will be examined in terms of group findings. The reporting of any such findings shall make no mention of individual's names. Individual cases will not be reported with any identifying information, nor will any of the information obtained about you be released to any third parties. Records and audio tapes will be kept for 3 years at which time they will be destroyed.

Possible Risks:

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to participants. If, at any time, you have any concerns, questions, or upsets, I will be available to discuss them and inform you of options for ameliorating them. You may call me at 407-678-4947, or Donald Rothberg, Ph.D. at 800-825-4480, or the Chairperson of the Saybrook Institutional Review Board, Sabrina Zirkel, Ph.D. at 800-825-4480.

Summary Report:

At the conclusion of this research project, a summary report containing the results and outcomes of this study will be made available for review by the instructor and school administration. If you would like to receive a copy of this report, please write your address below.

Disclaimer:

Participation in this study does not put participants at risk for emotional or physical injury. However, Saybrook Institute will not provide compensation nor medical care in the unlikely event injuries are incurred as a result of participation in this research project.

Signatures:

I have provided an explanation of the above components and conditions to this study, as necessary. I have provide an opportunity to ask questions and have provided satisfactory answers to any questions that have been asked in the course of this explanation.

_____ Date: _____

David San Filippo
Chief Researcher

I have read the above information, have had the opportunity to ask questions about this information, and hereby acknowledge my voluntary participation in this study.

_____ Date: _____

Research Participant

Please Print Your Name: _____

ID Code:

DAVID SAN FILIPPO
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INSTRUCTIONS TO COMPLETE THE RESEARCH SURVEYS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. The purpose of this research is to study the value of the awareness of near-death experiences for reducing fears of death for the elderly. By participating in this study you can add to the body of knowledge regarding death and the value of near-death experiences.

The title of this research project is:

A Study of the Value of the Awareness of
Near-Death Experiences for Reducing Fears of Death
for the Elderly Person

This study will consist of two parts for some participants. The first part will be the completion of three (3) surveys. The completion of these surveys should take 15-20 minutes. Some respondents may be asked to participate in the second part of the research. The second part of the research project consists of a personal interview with the Researcher. The interview will delve deeper into the subject of human fears of death and the impact that near-death experience reports can have on an individual's fears of death.

The following instructions are designed to help in the completion of the surveys:

- 1.) Open the survey folder.
- 2.) Complete each survey by answering each question asked. To properly complete the surveys, follow the directions on each survey. Please answer all of the questions, unless

otherwise directed by the survey.

- 3.) Complete the PERSONAL INFORMATION SURVEY first. This will provide the researcher with basic information about you.
- 4.) Place the completed survey back in the folder and then complete the THREAT INDEX. This will provide information about your level of fear of death. There are two (2) columns of associated items to complete. Go down each column and circle the word(s) that you more closely associate with your own experience. On side one (1) of the survey respond in terms of how you see yourself in your present life. On side two (2), with each item, respond in terms of how you view each of the items in terms of your own death.
- 5.) Place the completed survey back in the folder and then complete the AWARENESS OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES SURVEY. This will provide information about your knowledge of near-death experiences.
- 6.) Place the completed survey back in the folder and return the folder to the researcher.

Your participation in this part of the research project has been completed. Those who will be asked to participate in the second part of this project will be contacted within two (2) weeks. Thank you again for your time and participation.

PERSONAL INFORMATION SURVEY

1. ID CODE _____ 2. _____ FEMALE _____ MALE
3. AGE _____ 4. DATE _____
5. RACE OR ETHNIC GROUP 6. CURRENT MARITAL STATUS
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| _____ White | _____ Single |
| _____ Black | _____ Married |
| _____ Hispanic | _____ Separated |
| _____ Asian | _____ Divorced |
| _____ Native American Indian | _____ Widowed |
| _____ Other (Specify) | |
7. RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE/AFFILIATION 8. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL
- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| _____ Catholic | _____ Grade school |
| _____ Protestant | _____ Some high school |
| _____ Jewish | _____ High school graduate |
| _____ Moslem | _____ Some college |
| _____ Buddhist | _____ College graduate |
| _____ Hindu | _____ Some post-graduate work |
| _____ Mormon | _____ Earned advanced degree |
| _____ Agnostic/Atheist | (Specify) |
| _____ Other (Specify) | |
9. RELIGIOUS SERVICE ATTENDANCE 10. WHERE HAVE YOU LIVED MOST OF YOUR LIFE?
- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| _____ More than Once a Week | |
| _____ Once A Week | |
| _____ More than Once a Month | |
| _____ Once a Month | |
| _____ Several Times a Year | |
| _____ Once a Year | |
| _____ Never | |
11. DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO HAS DIED WITHIN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?
- _____ Yes _____ No
12. IF THE ANSWER TO QUESTION 11 IS YES, WHAT WAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE DECEASED?
- | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| _____ Spouse | _____ Family Member | _____ Friend |
| _____ Acquaintance | _____ Other (Specify) | |
13. DO YOU BELIEVE IN LIFE AFTER DEATH?
- _____ Yes _____ No

ID Code: _____

Date: _____

THE THREAT INDEX

Self Element

Below is a list of dimensions, each of which is made up of a pair of opposites. For each dimension, please CIRCLE the side with which you see yourself or your present life more closely associated. In some cases, you may feel as if both sides describe you to some degree, but please circle only on side of each dimension: the one that describes you better. For example, do you see yourself as more Predictable or Random?

Predictable	-	Random	Responsible	-	Not Responsible
Empty	-	Meaningful	Bad	-	Good
Lack of Control	-	Control	Not Caring	-	Caring
Satisfied	-	Dissatisfied	Crazy	-	Healthy
Relating to Others	-	Not Relating to Others	Conforming	-	Not Conforming
Pleasure	-	Pain	Animate	-	Inanimate
Feels Bad	-	Feels Good	Weak	-	Strong
Objective	-	Subjective	Useful	-	Useless
Alive	-	Dead	Closed	-	Open
Helping Others -	-	Being Selfish	Peaceful	-	Violent
Specific	-	General	Freedom	-	Restriction
Kind	-	Cruel	Nonexistence	-	Existence
Incompetent	-	Competent	Understanding	-	Not Understanding
Insecure	-	Secure	Calm	-	Anxious
Static	-	Changing	Easy	-	Hard
Unnatural	-	Natural	Productive	-	Unproductive
Sad	-	Happy	Learning	-	Not Learning
Personal	-	Impersonal	Sick	-	Healthy
Purposeful	-	Not Purposeful	Stagnation	-	Growth

Abstract - Concrete

Hope - No Hope

Death Element

For each dimensions below, please CIRCLE the side with which you more closely associate your own death, thinking of your own death as if it were to occur at this time in your life.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Predictable | - | Random |
| Empty | - | Meaningful |
| Lack of Control | - | Control |
| Satisfied | - | Dissatisfied |
| Relating to
Others | - | Not Relating
to Others |
| Pleasure | - | Pain |
| Feels Bad | - | Feels Good |
| Objective | - | Subjective |
| Alive | - | Dead |
| Helping Others - | - | Being Selfish |
| Specific | - | General |
| Kind | - | Cruel |
| Incompetent | - | Competent |
| Insecure | - | Secure |
| Static | - | Changing |
| Unnatural | - | Natural |
| Sad | - | Happy |
| Personal | - | Impersonal |
| Purposeful | - | Not Purposeful |
| Responsible | - | Not Responsible |

Bad	-	Good	Nonexistence	-	Existence
Not Caring	-	Caring	Understanding	-	Not Understanding
Crazy	-	Healthy	Calm	-	Anxious
Conforming	-	Not Conforming	Easy	-	Hard
Animate	-	Inanimate	Productive	-	Unproductive
Weak	-	Strong	Learning	-	Not Learning
Useful	-	Useless	Sick	-	Healthy
Closed	-	Open	Stagnation	-	Growth
Peaceful	-	Violent	Abstract	-	Concrete
Freedom	-	Restriction	Hope	-	No Hope

ID Code: _____

Date: _____

AWARENESS OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to assess the level of your awareness of near-death experiences and what they may mean to you.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES are experiences in which an individual has been considered clinically dead but comes back to life. Following the experience, the person reports an awareness different from her/his current life.

1. HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES:
(Choose only 1 answer)

- _____ Significant Knowledge (Knowledge of scientific, psychological, & transpersonal explanations for near-death experiences or have had a near-death experience)
- _____ Some Knowledge (Have read, heard, or seen reports of near-death experiences)
- _____ Little Knowledge (Have heard about near-death experiences but have no further knowledge)
- _____ No Knowledge (If No Knowledge, you do not need to complete this survey)

2. HAVE YOU EVER HAD A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE?

_____ Yes _____ No

3. DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS HAD A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE?

_____ Yes _____ No

4. BY WHAT OTHER METHODS DID YOU BECOME AWARE OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES?(Check as many as appropriate)

- _____ Books _____ Magazines _____ Other People
- _____ Television _____ Movies _____ Other (Specify on back page)

5. HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES?

Physical and/or Chemical response to dying.

Psychological response to dying.

A non-physical-chemical-psychological response to dying. Possibly a spiritual experience.

6. DO YOU FIND THE KNOWLEDGE OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES PROVIDES INSIGHT REGARDING DEATH AND WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

Yes No

7. WHEN YOU THINK OF YOUR OWN DEATH, DO YOU FIND THAT THE AWARENESS OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES HAS HAD AN AFFECT OF REDUCING SOME OF YOUR FEARS ASSOCIATED WITH:

The process of dying Yes No

Being dead Yes No

The unknown nature of what happens after death Yes No

8. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO BE PERSONALLY INTERVIEWED ABOUT YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS CONCERNING DEATH?

Yes No

Comments:

Thank you for your participation in this research project. Your contribution will be used to help other people as they deal with life and death.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

This standard introduction will be given to each participant in order to set the parameters and tone of the interview.

Personal introductions and "chit-chat" will take place before the "official" interview and audio taping takes place. This will allow an opportunity for the participants and researcher to become more comfortable with each other. It will also provide the appropriate anonymity for the participants during the recorded interview.

"This is an interview with Participant # _____. Today's date is _____.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this doctoral research project. As you know, from my introductory statements prior to your completion of the three (3) surveys you completed the other day, this research is looking at your attitudes and beliefs concerning death, dying, and the unknown nature of what happens after death, and your awareness of near-death experiences. In particular, I am interested in whether the awareness of near-death experiences has helped you to deal with fears you may have associated with death or what happens after death. This study will contribute to human science knowledge concerning how people deal with death and whether knowing of accounts of near-death experiences are helpful in reducing the individual's fears of death.

Your responses to the surveys you completed have been helpful in my developing my questions for you during this interview. During the interview I will ask you some questions concerning your beliefs and attitudes about death and dying. These questions are meant to guide the interview and keep us focused on the research questions. However, I would like you to feel free to speak freely about your thoughts and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions.

If at any time during this interview you would like to end the interview, please feel free to do so. I will be audio recording this interview to assure accuracy in understanding your comments. Your interview will be transcribed for analysis. Your identity will remain anonymous. I will be identifying your answers only by a code number and you and I will be the only people who know your name and code number. Your name and any other possible identifying information will not be released for publication or for any other research.

If you still wish to participate in this research, please give me your verbal consent.

Thank you for your participation in this research. Now we can start.

SEMI-STRUCTURED
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Are you familiar with reports of near-death experiences?
2. Tell me about your experience of first becoming aware of near-death experiences.
3. What other ways have you learned about near-death experiences?
4. What do you know about near-death experiences? Please describe your interpretation of near-death experiences.
5. How have you been influenced over time by hearing or reading accounts of near-death experiences?
6. What are your earliest recollections of being exposed to death?
7. How have you been exposed to death throughout your life?
8. What are your personal beliefs about death and life after death?
9. How were these beliefs developed?
10. Tell me of your fears of death, insofar as you are aware of them.
11. How have your fears of death changed over the years? Were there any pivotal events?
12. Does your awareness of near-death experiences have any effect on your personal beliefs about death and an afterlife?
13. How, if any, have your views of life, death, and afterlife been affected by your knowledge of near-death experiences?

The Quantitative Participant Group: Fear/No Fear Participants

Quantitative Participants	Participant Group	Fear Participants	No Fear Participants	Inc/ Multi Answers
Total Participants	40	19	21	
Male	12	5	7	
Female	28	14	14	
Age	80	80	80	
High School	38	18	20	0/1=1
College	14	7	8	
Knows Someone Who Died	34	16	18	
Attend Church Once/Month	26	13	13	
Catholic	1		1	
Protestant	35	18	17	
Jewish	1		1	
Morman	1		1	
Agnostic	1	1		
Other	1		1	
Know an Near-Death Experiencer	14	4	10	
NDE Aware-Books	13	8	5	>1 Answer
NDE Aware-Television	12	8	4	>1 Answer
NDE Aware-Magazines	6	4	2	
NDE Aware-Movies	2	2		
NDE Aware-People	12	4	8	>1 Answer
NDE-Physical	4	4		3 & >1 Answer
NDE-Psychological	5	1	4	3 & >1 Answer
NDE-Transpersonal	12	6	6	3 & >1 Answer
NDE Provides Insight	12	5	7	1
NDE Help w Process	12	6	6	4
NDE Help w Being Dead	5	1	4	8
NDE Help w Afterlife	9	3	6	6

Belief in Life After Death	29	12	17	1/0=1
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The Value of the Awareness of NDEs

Quantitative Participants	Participant Group	Fear Participants	No Fear Participants	Inc/ Multi Answers
Total Participants	100%	48%	52%	
Male	30%	28%	33%	
Female	70%	74%	67%	
Age				
High School	95%	95%	95%	0/1=1
College	35%	37%	40%	
Knows Someone Who Died	85%	83%	86%	
Attend Church Once/Month	65%	68%	62%	
Catholic	2.6%		5%	
Protestant	88%	95%	81%	
Jewish	2.6%		5%	
Morman	2.6%		5%	
Agnostic	2.6%	6%		
Other	2.6%		5%	
Know an Near-Death Experiencer	35%	21%	48%	
NDE Aware-Books	33%	44%	24%	>1 Answer
NDE Aware-Television	30%	44%	19%	>1 Answer
NDE Aware-Magazines	15%	22%	10%	
NDE Aware-Movies	5%	11%		
NDE Aware-People	30%	21%	38%	>1 Answer
NDE-Physical	10%	21%		3 & >1 Answer
NDE-Psychological	14%	6%	19%	3 & >1 Answer
NDE-Transpersonal	33%	33%	29%	3 & >1 Answer
NDE Provides Insight	32%	28%	33%	1
NDE Help w Process	30%	32%	35%	4
NDE Help w Being Dead	16%	9 %	31%	8
NDE Help w Afterlife	27%	23%	40%	6
Belief in Life After Death	73%	63%	85%	1/0=1

The Quantitative Participant Group: Aware/No Aware Participants

Quantitative Participants	Participant Group	Aware Participants	Non-Aware Participants	Inc/ Multi Answers
Total Participants	40	22	18	
Male	12	5	7	
Female	28	17	11	
Age	80	80	80	
High School	38	21	17	0/1=1
College	15	8	7	
Knows Someone Who Died	34	21	13	
Attend Church Once/Month	26	14	12	
Catholic	1	1		
Protestant	35	19	16	
Jewish	1	1		
Morman	1		1	
Agnostic	1		1	
Other	1	1		
Know an Near-Death Experiencer		11		
NDE Aware-Books		14		>1 Answer
NDE Aware-Television		13		>1 Answer
NDE Aware-Magazines		6		
NDE Aware-Movies		2		
NDE Aware-People		12		>1 Answer
NDE-Physical		5		3 & >1 Answer
NDE-Psychological		5		3 & >1 Answer
NDE-Transpersonal		12		3 & >1 Answer
NDE Provides Insight		13		0/1=1
NDE Help w Process		11		3/1=4
NDE Help w Being Dead		5		7/1=8
NDE Help w Afterlife		9		5/1=6
Threat Index-Have Fear	19	11	8	

Belief in Life After Death	29	16	13	1/0=1
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Quantitative Participants	Participant Group	Aware Participants	Non-Aware Participants	Inc/ Multi Answers
Total Participants	100%	55%	45%	
Male	30%	25%	39%	
Female	70%	77%	61%	
Age				
High School	95%	95%	94%	0/1=1
College	38%	36%	39%	
Knows Someone Who Died	85%	95%	72%	
Attend Church Once/Month	65%	64%	66%	
Catholic	2.5%	5%		
Protestant	88%	86%	89%	
Jewish	2.5%	5%		
Morman	2.5%		5%	
Agnostic	2.5%		5%	
Other	2.5%	5%		
Know an Near-Death Experiencer		50%		
NDE Aware-Books		64%		>1 Answer
NDE Aware-Television		59%		>1 Answer
NDE Aware-Magazines		27%		
NDE Aware-Movies		9%		
NDE Aware-People		55%		>1 Answer
NDE-Physical		23%		3 & >1 Answer
NDE-Psychological		23%		3 & >1 Answer
NDE-Transpersonal		55%		3 & >1 Answer
NDE Provides Insight		62%		1
NDE Help w Process		65%		4
NDE Help w Being Dead		38%		8
NDE Help w Afterlife		60%		6
Threat Index - Have Fear	48%	50%	44%	
Belief in Life After Death	74%	76%	72%	1/0=1

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

Quantitative Fear Participants	Participant Group	Aware Participants	Non-Aware Participants	Inc/ Multi Answers
Total Group	40	22	18	
Threat Index - Fear Participants	19	11	8	
Knows Someone Who Died		10	6	
Belief in Life After Death		8	4	
NDE Provides Insight		5		2
NDE Help w Process		6		3
NDE Help w Being Dead		1		6
NDE Help w Afterlife		3		5
NDE-Physical		2		2
NDE-Psychological		1		2
NDE-Transpersonal		6		2

Quantitative Fear Participants	Participant Group	Aware Participants	Non-Aware Participants	Inc/ Multi Answers
Total Group	100%	55%	45%	
Threat Index - Fear Participants	48%	50%	44%	
Knows Someone Who Died		91%	33%	
Belief in Life After Death		73%	22%	
NDE Provides Insight		56%		2
NDE Help w Process		75%		3
NDE Help w Being Dead		20%		6
NDE Help w Afterlife		50%		5
NDE-Physical		22%		2
NDE-Psychological		11%		2
NDE-Transpersonal		67%		2

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

CHI-SQUARE TEST OF AWARE AND FEAR/NO FEAR

	AWARE	FEAR	
Frequency			
Percent			
Row Pct			
Col Pct			Total
	0	1	
	9	9	18
	22.50	22.50	45.00
	50.00	50.00	
	42.86	47.37	
	1	10	22
	30.00	25.00	55.00
	54.55	45.45	
	57.14	52.63	
Total	21	19	40
	52.50	47.50	100.00

STATISTICS FOR TABLE OF AWARE BY FEAR

Statistic	DF	Value	Prob
Chi-Square	1	0.082	0.775
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	1	0.082	0.775
Continuity Adj. Chi-Square	1	0.000	1.000
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	0.080	0.777
Fisher's Exact Test (Left)			0.512
(Right)			0.727
(2-Tail)			1.000
Phi Coefficient		-0.045	
Contingency Coefficient		0.045	
Cramer's V		-0.045	

Sample Size = 40

T-TEST RESULTS

Variable: TI

GROUP	N	Mean	Std Dev	Std Error	Minimum	Maximum
0	18	3.333333333	3.69419258	0.87072954	0	12.00000000
1	22	4.000000000	4.09413053	0.87287156	0	12.00000000

Variances	T	DF	Prob> T
Unequal	-0.5407	37.6	0.5919
Equal	-0.5351	38.0	0.5957

For H0: Variances are equal, F' = 1.23 DF = (21,17) Prob>F' = 0.6734

—

The Qualitative Participant Group

Qualitative Participants	Participant Group	Fear Participants	No Fear Participants
Total Participants	15	7	8
Male	4	1	3
Female	11	6	5
Average Age	81	79	84
High School Graduate	15	7	8
College Graduate	6	2	4
Knows Someone Who Died	14	6	8
Attend Church Once/Month	11	5	6
Catholic	1	0	1
Protestant	12	7	5
Jewish	1	0	1
Other	1	0	1
Know an Near-Death Experiencer	6	0	6
Learned of NDEs from Books	8	5	3
Learned of NDEs from Television	8	5	3
Learned of NDEs from Magazines	1	1	0
Learned of NDEs from Movies	0	0	0
Learned of NDEs from People	9	2	7
Explain NDEs as Physical	5	2	3
Explain NDEs as Psychological	3	0	3
Explain NDEs as Transpersonal	9	5	4
Awareness Provides Insight	8	4	4
Helps with Fears of the Process of Dying	9	4	5
Helps with Fears of Being Dead	3	0	3
Helps with Fears of the Unknown of Afterlife	5	2	3
Belief in Life After Death	11	5	6

The Value of the Awareness of NDEs

Qualitative Participants	Participant Group	Fear Participants	No Fear Participants
Total Participants	100%	47%	53%
Male	27%	14%	38%
Female	73%	86%	63%
Average Age			
High School Graduate	100%	100%	100%
College Graduate	40%	29%	50%
Knows Someone Who Died	93%	86%	100%
Attend Church Once/Month	73%	71%	75%
Catholic	7%	0	13%
Protestant	80%	100%	63%
Jewish	7%	0	13%
Other	7%	0	13%
Know an Near-Death Experiencer	40%	0	75%
Learned of NDEs from Books	53%	71%	38%
Learned of NDEs from Television	53%	71%	38%
Learned of NDEs from Magazines	7%	14%	0
Learned of NDEs from Movies	0	0	0
Learned of NDEs from People	60%	29%	88%
Explain NDEs as Physical	33%	29%	38%
Explain NDEs as Psychological	20%	0	38%
Explain NDEs as Transpersonal	60%	71%	50%
Awareness Provides Insight	53%	57%	50%
Helps with Fears of the Process of Dying	60%	57%	63%
Helps with Fears of Being Dead	20%	0	38%
Helps with Fears of the Unknown of Afterlife	33%	29%	38%
Belief in Life After Death	73%	71%	75%

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Code	I. DEATH AWARENESS				Fear	No Fear	Total
1	Fears of death:				23	34	57
A	No fear:				9	5	14
B	Not suffering:				2	9	11
C	The process:				3	6	9
D	Lingering death:				2	9	11
E	The effect of death on others:				3	4	7
F	Knowing when death is going to happen:				4	1	5
2	Exposures to death:				31	42	73
A	Age at Initial Exposure to Death:				5	6	11
1	Over 10 and under 18 years old:				3	2	5
2	After age 18:				2	2	4
3	Under 10 years old:				0	2	2
B	How Exposed:				19	28	47
1	Grandparent:				3	6	9
2	Mother/Father:				3	4	7
3	Siblings:				0	5	5
4	Other family:				2	5	7
5	Spouse:				3	3	6
6	Friend:				3	1	4
7	Pet/Insect:				0	2	2
8	Occupation:				2	1	3
9	Child:				1	0	1
10	Suicide:				1	1	2
11	Funerals in home:				1	0	1
C	Initial response to death:				7	8	15
1	Distressed:				3	3	6
2	Accept as normal:				0	2	2
3	Angered:				1	0	1
4	Loss of innocence:				1	1	2
5	Grief:				2	0	2
6	Loss of dignity:				0	1	1
7	Relief from pain:				0	1	1
3	How beliefs of death and existence after death were developed:				17	19	36
A	Religion:				6	6	12
B	Family:				3	4	7
C	Life experiences:				3	4	7
D	Observing others:				3	4	7
E	Education:				2	1	3

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Death Awareness - continued				Fear	No Fear	Total
4	Personal beliefs about death and existence after death:			48	40	88
A	Spirit leaves the body:			8	4	12
B	Death is inevitable:			7	5	12
C	There is an existence after death:			6	6	12
D	Going to better place:			4	3	7
E	Death is irreversible:			2	2	4
F	This life is a preparation for the next life:			2	3	5
G	The real "us" does not die:			5	1	6
H	Painful to leave body:			2	1	3
I	Do not believe in a physical hereafter:			2	2	4
J	Belief in a Supreme and Celestial beings:			4	4	8
K	Death is the end of suffering:			1	2	3
L	There is no existence after death:			1	2	3
M	Spirit rejoins an energy field:			1	3	4
N	Reincarnation:			0	2	2
O	Being dead is peaceful:			1	0	1
P	Death is not a reality:			1	0	1
Q	Be joined by others:			1	0	1
5	How attitudes about death have changed over the years:			20	22	42
A	Prepared for death:			2	9	11
B	Began preparing for death:			1	3	4
C	Not put off doing things:			1	1	2
D	No change:			2	2	4
E	Confusion over death cleared up:			1	0	1
F	Do what is right:			1	1	2
G	Spiritual growth:			4	1	5
H	Be positive/Be happy about life:			3	4	7
I	Disillusioned/Satisfied with life:			5	1	6
Total Awareness of Death Responses:				139	157	296

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

II. NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE AWARENESS					Fear	No Fear	Total
6	Familiarity with reports of near-death experiences:				7	8	15
7	When participants became aware of near-death experiences:				8	6	14
A	More than 5 years ago:				4	4	8
B	More than 20 years ago:				2	1	3
C	Five years or less:				1	1	2
D	During the death of spouse read books:				1	0	1
8	How participants became aware of near-death experiences:				17	21	38
A	Read about them:				6	5	11
B	Television:				6	3	9
C	From others:				5	8	13
D	Knew an Experienter:				0	5	5
9	Description of near-death experiences:				34	24	58
A	Light:				7	8	15
B	Going through tunnel/passageway:				6	3	9
C	Peaceful:				3	4	7
D	Seeing existence after death:				1	2	3
E	Beautiful:				2	2	4
F	Spirit leaves body:				1	0	1
G	No fear:				1	0	1
H	Out-of-body experience:				2	1	3
I	Felt existence after death:				1	0	1
J	Disappointed on returning to life:				2	0	2
K	Comfortable:				2	0	2
L	Similarity in reports:				3	2	5
M	Seeing others:				2	1	3
N	Hear sounds:				1	1	2
10	Meanings/Interpretations of near-death experiences:				19	27	46
A	Glimpse of existence after death:				5	4	9
B	NDEs are real experiences:				4	7	11
C	Spiritual experience:				0	3	3
D	Personally interpreted experience:				2	6	8
E	Difficult to believe as afterlife visions:				1	1	2
F	Interesting phenomenon/story:				2	1	3
G	A physical/psychological experience:				0	4	4
H	Energy leaving the body at death:				1	0	1
I	No longer encumbered by the body:				1	0	1
J	Hallucinations/Dreams:				1	1	2
K	Gift of God:				2	0	2
Total Near-death Awareness Responses:				209	85	86	171

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

III. INFLUENCES & VALUES OF AWARENESS OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES									
							Fear	No Fear	Total
12	Values of near-death experiences:						27	31	58
A	Sense of what is to come at death:						6	6	12
B	Reaffirm beliefs:						8	8	16
C	Help to reduce fear of death:						5	8	13
D	Provides hope:						4	7	11
E	We are not alone at death:						2	1	3
F	Replaces lost religion:						2	1	3
13	How does awareness of near-death experiences effect beliefs about death and existence after death:						33	46	79
A	Reaffirmed belief in life after death:						12	12	24
B	No fear of death:						3	6	9
C	Existence beyond the body:						4	8	12
D	What to expect at death:						6	4	10
E	Death is peaceful:						1	3	4
F	Gives hope:						1	5	6
G	No effect/Effect:						3	3	6
H	Gives a sense of peace:						2	3	5
I	Not alone at death:						1	2	3
J	The real "us" does not die:						1	0	1
K	Relieves grief:						1	0	1
Total Influences & Values Responses:							60	77	137

Total Awareness of Death Responses:							139	157	296
Total Near-death Awareness Responses:							85	86	171
Total Influences & Values Responses:							60	77	137
Total Responses:							284	320	604
Fear participants: 2/3/7/8/42/71/87									
No Fear participants: 23/40/49/54/62/65/78/88									

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