The Role of
Near-Death Experiences,
After-Death Communication,
and
Past Life Memories
in Grief

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Grief

- Common response to loss of someone or something to whom/which one is emotionally attached – as in death of a loved one
- Holistic response:
  - Feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger, relief, guilt
  - Thoughts of disbelief, confusion, preoccupation
  - Physical sensations of listlessness, tension
  - Behaviors of crying, sleep and eating disturbances, social withdrawal or dependency

(Foster & Holden, 2014; Worden, 2009)

Grief

- A process that can involve
  - Reinquishing emotional bonds with the deceased, and/or
  - Retaining changed but continuing emotional bonds with the deceased.

(Feld, Gao, & Paterna, 2009; Foster & Holden, 2014; Stroebe & Schut, 2005)
Grief

- A process with two simultaneous aspects:
  - Loss-orientation
  - Restoration-orientation
- A process involving oscillation:
  - Between orientations, and
  - Within orientations (confrontation vs. avoidance)
... all of which can facilitate functional physical and mental health.

(Foster & Holden, 2014; Stroebe & Schut, 2005)

Grief

- Three primary questions grieving people confront:
  - About the deceased: Where and how is the deceased?
  - About the living: How will I/we continue without the deceased?
  - About the relationship: Will I/we and the deceased be together again?

NDEs, ADCs, and PLMs

- For each phenomenon:
  - Definition
  - Example
  - Evidence of veridicality (not merely hallucination)
  - Effect on grief of
    - Experiencing or witnessing the phenomenon
    - Learning about the phenomenon, as evidenced by
      - Anecdotal reports or case studies, and
      - Research studies
Near-Death Experiences
Definition
• Usually during a close brush with death
• A typically real or hyper-real experience
• Of an alternate reality, with
  • Material and/or
  • Transmaterial aspects
• After which the experiencer is changed in particular ways.
• Reported by 1 in 5 survivors
• 90% pleasurable; 10% distressing

Bush, 2009; Zingrone & Alvarado, 2009

Near-Death Experiences
Example: Tricia
• At interview (2008), mid-30s, community college English teacher, fully physically functional
• Grew up in Evangelical church; “pretended” participation
• At NDE (1994; 14 years before interview)
  • College student in Austin, Texas; ~ 21 years old
  • Unclear career purpose (copy editor?); self-centered
  • Up early to run 10K; sleepy; car accident
  • Broken back, leg bones, etc.
  • Surgery with cardiac arrest; 6 months in body cast

Near-Death Experiences
Evidence of Veridicality
• Anecdotal reports and case studies: Tricia – the rest of the story
• Rivas, Dirven, & Smit (2016)
  • >100 cases of NDE-related paranormal phenomena verified by credible third parties
  • Example: Adjacent operating room
• Research Studies
  • Five so far; none have yielded a veridical case
  • Sam Parnia’s ongoing AwaRe study
Near-Death Experiences
Effects on Grief: Experiencing
• Anecdotal reports and case studies (Ring, 1984, pp. 76-82)
  1981, birth of second child, massive hemorrhaging
  In NDE, met spiritual entity, “the greatest friend I had”
  Told her he would come for her child in four days
  Baby Tari died on day 4 from “unanticipated” brain hemorrhage
  “In the weeks following, I felt no grief of my own loss, but I felt sorry for my
  friends and relatives who didn’t know where Tari was, and couldn’t believe –
  really believe – that my ‘experience’ was anything more than a vivid dream.”
  Husband died 6 years later; some years later, eldest son died in car accident
  “My grief was softened and shortened each time. People said, ‘She’s in
  shock now, she’ll grieve more later.’ Later they said, ‘She must be a very
  strong person to live through what she’s had to live through so calmly.’
  Neither statement was true. It feels good to tell the truth to someone. They
  aren’t dead. They are all alive, busy and waiting for me. Our separation is
  only temporary and very short, compared to all of eternity.”
• Research studies: None to date

Near-Death Experiences
Effects on Grief: Learning about
• Anecdotal reports and case studies: Ryan Foster
• Research studies: Ryan Foster’s exploratory study
  (Foster & Holden, 2014)
  12 experimental, 12 wait-list group participants
  Hogan Grief Reaction Checklist before and after
  3 NDE-education and discussion group sessions
  Results: Change in four of six aspects of grief:
  Experimental group slightly less panic, more personal
  growth; much less blame and anger and detachment
  Distressing NDEs (Bush, 2009)

After-Death Communication
Definition
• Perceived contact with a deceased person
  Spontaneous (Streit-Horn, 2011)
  Systematic review of all surveys (35) 1894-2006
  Over 50,000 respondents in 24 countries
  At least 33% report ADC some time in their lives
  75% report ADC within one year of loss of loved one
  All socioeconomic statuses; more bereaved and women
  Not related to mental illness
  Modalities: awake/asleep; healthy-deathbed; sense of presence,
  visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, symbolic, telephone
  Most frequent messages: deceased OK; comfort and encourage
  the living (Knight, 2011)
  Induced (IADC; Botkin, 2005)
After-Death Communication

Example

- Spontaneous: Dad
- Induced: Uncle Ray
  (Holden, 2011)

After-Death Communication

Evidence of Veridicality

- Anecdotes and case studies
- Scattered throughout literature – including cases in the book in which my story is published
- Research studies
  - None to date

After-Death Communication

Effect on Grief: Experiencing

- Anecdotes and case studies
- Scattered throughout literature
- Research studies: (Streit-Horn, 2011)
  - Benefits: Nearly always described as pleasant, positive, mystical, serene, elating, helpful, comforting, healing, spiritual, etc.
  - Detriments: Rarely described as distressing, usually in relation to fear and/or confusion from lack of information or misinformation
After-Death Communication
Effect on Grief: Witnessing
- Anecdotes and case studies of attendants at deathbed witnessing dying person’s ADC
- Scattered throughout literature
- Research studies: (Streit-Horn, 2011)
  - None to date

After-Death Communication
Effect on Grief: Learning About
- Anecdotes and case studies: Scattered throughout literature
  - Example: Hamza Balol, Sudanese man working in Saudi Arabia
  - "Your communications with your late loved ones deeply touched my heart. I never believed in ADC and never experienced in my life before. When someone dies, it looks like the whole world is depopulated. Due to a sudden hypertension attack, my father died in Sudan 5 months ago. Deep sadness penetrated my heart and I experienced an indescribable pain in my soul for his absence. His death left a huge void in my life that turned upside down and became painful beyond the words. Your story about David and Ray had finally woven a blanket of comfort that warmed my heart and soothed my soul. After reading this story, I have come to realize that my father will no doubt visit me in my dreams someday and sometime. I have come to realize that death is not the last sleep, it is the last and the final awakening. I have come to realize that our loved ones are watching over us from Heaven and they are somehow connected to earth. I have come to realize that our hundredfold grief can be divided by love and strong bond that connected us with them. I have come to realize that death is not extinguishing light, it is putting out the lamp because dawn has already come. Their dawn has come no doubt. While we are still mourning their great loss, others are rejoicing to meet them behind the veil." (July 2, 2012)
- Research studies: None to date

Past-Life Memories
Definition
- “Impressions that individuals report in which they have experienced themselves as a particular person with an identity (other than their current identity) in a previous time or life span” (Milis & Tucker, 2014, p. 305)
  - Spontaneous or induced
  - Solved or unsolved
Past-Life Memories

Definition
- In >2,500 childhood spontaneous PLMs, Stevenson (1987) found
  - Verbal memories
  - Behavioral memories (phobias & philias)
  - Special skills
  - Birthmarks or birth defects (30% of cases)
- Other research findings
  - Reported in all cultures, but more with belief in reincarnation
  - 2/3 males
  - 75% recall previous death; violent disproportionate (~50%)
  - Rebirth usually within 3 years; median 3 months
  - Violent death: more rapid rebirth

Past-Life Memories

Example, with Evidence of Veridicality
- Cemil Hayak / Cemil Fahrici (Stevenson, 1997)
  - Hayak: bandit, suicide
  - Fahrici: born three days later with bleeding birthmark under right chin
  - Named Daham; insisted on Cemil
- Memories and personality features
- Investigation

Past-Life Memories

Effect on Grief: Experiencing
- Anecdotes
  - In some solved cases, complicated
    - For previous family, current family, and experiencer
  - In other solved cases, transformative
    - Brian Weiss (1996): Only Love is Real
- Research studies
  - None to date
Past-Life Memories
Effect on Grief: Learning about

- Anecdotes
  - None to date
- Research studies
  - None to date

Summary

- Experiencing, witnessing, and learning about NDEs, ADCs, and PLMs have the potential to ease grief by answering two of the three basic questions of grief:
  - About the deceased: Where and how is the deceased?
  - About the relationship: Will I/we and the deceased be together again?
  - ...which, in turn, can help answer the third question:
  - About the living: How will I/we continue without the deceased?

References


