



Original Research Paper

A Comparison of Hypnotically-Induced Death Experiences and Near-Death Experiences

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(Received on May 25th, 2017; Final Revised and Accepted on August 25th, 2017)

Abstract: Past-life regression therapy has become a common practice and many people have reported that they recalled their past lives in the course of the therapy. Whether the past-life memories recalled in this way are authentic ones or not is controversial, there being both positive and negative evidence. However, irrespective of the authenticity argument, it is undeniable that the therapy can give people an opportunity to experience “death” in a safe setting. In this exploratory study, we examine whether “death” experiences occurring under past-life regression therapy is comparable to near-death experiences by using the two established instruments for assessing the phenomenological aspects and aftereffects of the latter: The Near-Death Experience scale developed by Greyson (1983) and the Life Change Inventory-Revised developed by Greyson and Ring (2004). It is shown that the scores of the two scales in “death” experiences occurring under past-life regression therapy is consistently higher than those in spontaneously occurring near-death experiences reported in one study (Goza, et al. 2014), although the scores of the NDE Scale in the former are lower in three of the four subscales than those in spontaneously occurring near-death experiences reported in another study (Greyson, 1983). The results appear to warrant further investigation of hypnotically-induced “death” experiences by using the scales designed for near-death experiences.

Keywords: *past-life regression therapy, death-experiences, mystical experiences, NDE Scale, Life Change Inventory-Revised*

1. Introduction

Past-life regression therapy, in which a client under hypnosis is brought to experience scenes that appear to have taken place in his or her past lives, has become a common practice. Whether the scenes recalled in this way are actual memories or products of the imagination is controversial. Although there are cases in which a client recalled detailed information apparently unknown to him or her, as reported by Bernstein (1956), Brownell (1949), Goldberg (1997), Snow (1999), Steiger & Williams (1976), Wilson (1987) and cases that include “unlearned language” (xenoglossy), as reported by Ohkado & Okamoto (2014) and Stevenson (1974, 1984), there are a number of studies, including experimental ones, that call into question the authenticity of such memories recalled under hypnotic past-life regression (Dwyane and Bowers, 1983; Lynn, Lock, Myers & Payne, 1997; Spanos et al., 1991; Venn, 1986).

Irrespective of the status of recalled past lives, however, it is undeniable that many people report

experiencing “death” in past-life regression under hypnosis, and that experience is often a positive one. For instance, Wambach (1978), who collected more than a thousand hypnosis-induced past-life recall accounts, wrote: “There is no doubt from the report of my subjects after they awoke from the hypnosis that death was the best part of the trip. Again and again they reported how pleasant it was to die, and what a sense of release they had after they left their bodies” (Wambach, 1978, p. 140).

In this article, we examine whether death experiences under hypnotic past-life regression (henceforth, hypnotic death experience or HDE) are comparable to near-death experiences (NDEs) and their aftereffects, as measured by standard scales.

2. Method

We developed an internet-based questionnaire using QuestionPro, an online survey software tool. The questionnaire, which was labeled “a study to learn more about near-death and related experiences,” asked first about the type of experiences participants had: near-death experience; “death” experience under past-life hypnotic regression therapy; or other mystical experience (ME);

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and asked them to describe the experience. The main part of the questionnaire consisted of two established instruments: the NDE Scale, and the Life Changes Inventory-Revised (LCI-R), which assesses aftereffects of NDEs and related experiences. We also collected basic demographic information: the participants' gender, nationality, and the age at which he or she had the experience.

The NDE Scale is a 16-item instrument that assesses the presence, contents, and depth of an NDE. A total score of higher than 6 is regarded as an NDE. The higher the score, the deeper and/or more complex the experience is. The scale has four subscales: cognitive features, such as an altered sense of time; affective features, such as intense feelings of peace; paranormal features, such as a sense of separation from the physical body; and transcendental features, such as encounters with a mystical being or presence. The LCI-R assesses aftereffects of near-death experiences. The 50 items in the LCI-R comprise the 9 value clusters: appreciation for life (4 items), self-acceptance (3 items), concern for others (10 items), concern with worldly achievement (7 items), concern with social/planetary values (5 items), quest for meaning/sense of purpose (4 items), spirituality (5 items), religiousness (4 items), and appreciation of death (3 items). It also contains 5 items that are not included in any of the 9 value clusters but are retained because the authors "felt they represented common effects of NDEs that may be of interest as individual items" (Greyson & Ring, 2004, p. 47). We recruited participants through hypnotherapists, NDE researchers, and through a request published in the quarterly newsletter of the International Association for Near-Death Studies for persons who had had NDEs or HDEs to participate in a web-based survey. The data collection period was from November 2013 to August 2014. This study was approved by the University of Virginia Institutional Review Board for Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 20.

Hypothesis

We hypothesized that HDEs and MEs may be comparable to NDEs in the sense that their phenomenology may be similar to NDEs as measured by the NDE Scale (Greyson, 1983), and that their aftereffects can be similar, as measured by the Life Changes Inventory-Revised (LCI-R) (Greyson & Ring, 2004). In other words, scores of HDEs and MEs measured by these scales are similar to those of NDEs. Since the number of participants experiencing NDEs and MEs were so small, the relevant figures for those experiences are only suggestive and were not subjected to statistical analysis. For supplementary comparisons, we cited comparable

data from other studies concerning NDEs: Greyson (1983) and Goza, et al. (2014) for the NDE Scale, and Goza, et al. (2014) for the LCI-R.

3. Results

Of the 61 participants who began the survey, 32 completed it, and one completed only the NDE Scale. Seven (21%) had NDEs, 23 (72%) had HDEs, and two (6%) had MEs. Two participants described HDEs that they classified as MEs; we reclassified them as HDEs. One participant claimed to have had a couple of MEs, but his description of the experiences suggested that they were telepathic experiences without features of mystical experience, so we excluded those experiences from the analysis. The MEs described by two participants were out-of-body experiences, one taking place while the participant was in bed and the other taking place while the participant was riding a bicycle. Participants' nationality, gender, and age at which the experience took place are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Participant demographics

Variable	NDE	HDE	ME
Gender:			
Male	2	15	1
Female	2	6	0
Not specified	3	2	1
Nationality:			
Brazil	0	1	0
Germany	1	0	0
Greece	0	1	0
Ireland	0	1	0
Japan	4	2	1
Netherlands	0	5	1
Turkey	0	5	0
United Kingdom	1	4	0
United States	1	2	0
Multiple or not specified	0	2	0
Age at experience:			
10 years or younger	3	0	0
11-20 years	2	1	1
21-30 years	0	2	1
31-40 years	1	6	0
41-50 years	1	7	0
51-60	0	4	0
61-70	0	1	0
Not specified	0	2	0

NDE Scale Scores

Of the 32 respondents, only two scored below 7 (one scored 4 and the other 6). Both of those were respondents reporting HDEs. This suggests that HDEs can be comparable to NDEs as measured by the NDE Scale. The scores of the 30 respondents who scored 7 or higher are presented in Table 2 together with those reported by Greyson (1983) and Goza et al. (2014).



Table 2 NDE Scale Scores (mean ± S.D.)

Scale	NDErs (N=7)	HDErs (N=21)	MErs (N=2)	NDErs in Greyson (N=74)	NDErs in Goza, et al. (N=24)
Total NDE Scale	20.43 (± 7.16)	14.67 (± 4.09)	20.50 (± 3.54)	15.01 (± 7.84)	10.71 (± 4.32)
Cognitive Component	4.43 (± 2.88)	3.67 (± 1.39)	5.00 (± 4.24)	2.35 (± 2.51)	4.63 (± 1.01)
Affective Component	6.29 (± 2.22)	4.57 (± 2.01)	6.00 (± 1.41)	5.50 (± 2.67)	2.38 (± 2.39)
Paranormal Component	3.71 (± 2.43)	2.90 (± 1.55)	6.00 (± 1.41)	3.31 (± 2.30)	2.67 (± 1.34)
Transcendental Component	6.00 (± 1.92)	3.52 (± 1.94)	3.50 (± 3.54)	3.85 (± 2.67)	1.04 (± 1.81)

Table 3 LCI-R Scores (mean ± S.D)

Scale	NDErs (N=7)	HDErs (N=21)	MErs (N=2)	NDErs in Goza, et al. (N=20)	nonNDErs in Goza, et al. (N=48)
Total LCI-R*	1.43 (± 0.34)	1.13 (± 0.55)	0.84 (± 0.60)	1.07 (± 0.36)	0.77 (± 0.45)
Appreciation for Life	1.36 (± 0.75)	1.15 (± 0.76)	1.38 (± 0.88)	0.77 (± 1.00)	0.51 (± 0.68)
Self-Acceptance	1.33 (± 0.75)	1.30 (± 0.69)	0.83 (± 1.18)	0.50 (± 0.79)	0.09 (± 0.83)
Concern for Others	1.10 (± 0.61)	1.15 (± 0.70)	0.95 (± 1.20)	0.43 (± 0.86)	0.15 (± 0.80)
Concern with Worldly Matters	-0.63 (± 1.24)	-0.36 (± 0.86)	-0.93 (± 1.31)	-0.25 (± 0.57)	-0.13 (± 0.62)
Concern with Social Values	0.57 (± 0.39)	0.38 (± 0.68)	0.80 (± 0.44)	NA	NA
Quest for Meaning	1.50 (± 0.75)	1.26 (± 0.69)	1.38 (± 0.88)	0.57 (± 0.91)	0.20 (± 0.78)
Spirituality	1.43 (± 0.73)	1.14 (± 0.83)	1.60 (± 0.57)	0.73 (± 0.97)	0.14 (± 0.77)
Religiousness	0.36 (± 1.31)	-0.48 (± 0.98)	0.00 (± 0.00)	0.40 (± 1.20)	-0.06 (± 0.83)
Appreciation of Death	1.06 (± 0.61)	1.12 (± 0.65)	1.07 (± 0.55)	NA	NA

*The total scores for NDErs, HDErs, and MErs do not include the figures concerning "Concern with Social Values" and "Appreciation of Death" for comparison because they are not available for NDErs and nonNDErs in Goza, et al.

Table 2 shows that the NDE Scale scores of HDEs are consistently higher than those of NDEs reported in Goza, et al. (2014), with the exception of Cognitive Component. That was the only component on which scores from the HDEs and from NDEs reported by Goza, et al. (2014) were higher than from NDEs reported by Greyson (1983).

The LCI-R Scores

To our knowledge, the study by Goza, et al. (2014) is the only one that reported detailed LCI-R scores for NDErs although Schneeberger (2010) used the LCI-R for individuals having unitive mystical experiences. Table 3 compares LCI-R scores of the NDErs studied by Goza, et al. (2014) and of participants in the present study. Note that Goza, et al. (2014) did not give figures concerning the Concern with Social/Planetary Values cluster or the Appreciation of Death cluster, because they yielded Cronbach's α values below the acceptable level of 0.6.

The figures in **Table 3** show that in all the seven clusters in which the scores for NDErs and nonNDErs studied by Goza, et al. (2014) are available and in the total of these clusters, the scores of those experiencing HDEs

in the present study are higher. This suggests that HDEs can yield even higher aftereffects than NDEs.

The Cronbach's α reliability scores for the total and 9 clusters in the present study and in that of Goza, et al. (2014) are given in **Table 4**.

Table 4 Cronbach's α reflecting reliability of LCI-R Scores.

Scale Cluster	Present Study	Goza, et al. (2014)
Total LCI-R	0.927	0.956
Appreciation for Life	0.923	0.752
Self-Acceptance	0.782	0.776
Concern for Others	0.956	0.910
Concern with Worldly Achievements	0.889	0.724
Concern with Social/Planetary Values	0.676	0.501
Quest for Meaning/Sense of Purpose	0.725	0.805
Spirituality	0.885	0.907
Religiousness	0.871	0.939
Appreciation of Death	0.176	0.019

Just as in the study by Goza, et al. (2014), Cronbach's α for the Appreciation of Death cluster in the present study is notably low. The score for the Concern with Social/Planetary Values cluster in the present study



is lower than the most other scores, but it is above the acceptability criterion of 0.6 or higher, which is different from the result reported in Goza, et al. (2014).

4. Discussion

We hypothesized that HDEs and MEs may be comparable to NDEs in the sense that their phenomenology may be similar to NDEs as measured by the NDE Scale and that their aftereffects can be similar, as measured by the LCI-R. For the above-mentioned reason, the MEs are excluded from consideration. As for HDEs, the scores of the two scales are consistently higher than those of NDEs reported in Goza, et al. (2014) and in that sense “death” experiences occurring under past-life regression therapy can be deeper than near-death experiences. On the other hand, the scores of HDEs in three items in the NDE Scales (affective, paranormal, and transcendental) are lower than those of NDEs reported in Greyson (1983), whereas the score of HDEs in one item (cognitive) is higher than that of NDEs. The total scores of HDEs and NDEs are 14.67(±4.09) and 15.01(±7.84), respectively, and they appear to be sufficiently similar.

NDE Scale scores from HDEs in this study and from NDEs reported by Goza, et al. (2014) were lower than from NDEs reported by Greyson (1983), with the exception of scores on the Cognitive Component. The lower scores from the NDEs reported by Goza, et al. (2014) may be due to their sample being recruited from veterans exposed to life-threatening combat, among whom affective, paranormal, and transcendental features may be attenuated by the traumatic nature of the combat situation, whereas the cognitive features of time slowing down and thoughts speeding up might be life-saving.

The lower scores of the NDE Scale scores in this study, compared to those reported by Greyson (1983), may be related in part to the smaller sample size and consequently larger sampling error in the current study. Whereas Cronbach’s α , the measure of statistical reliability, in Greyson’s (1983) study was a sufficiently high 0.88 for the entire NDE Scale (and 0.75, 0.86, 0.66, and 0.76 for the Cognitive, Affective, Paranormal, and Transcendental Components), α in the current study was only 0.53 for the entire NDE Scale (and -0.14, 0.67, 0.48, and 0.35 for the four components).

Another possible confounding variable in comparing our findings with those of Goza, et al. (2014) is the time that had elapsed between the NDEs or HDEs and participation in the studies. We do not know how many years had elapsed between participants’ combat-related NDEs and their participation in the study of Goza, et al. (2014). If that elapsed time was significantly different from the time elapsed between our participants’ HDEs and their participation in our study, it is

conceivable that that difference may have influenced their aftereffects as measured by the LCI-R.

5. Conclusion

Our findings suggest that “death” experiences that emerge in the course of hypnotic past-life regression may be comparable in phenomenology and aftereffects to spontaneously occurring near-death experiences. Although our sample size was small, the data appear consistent enough to warrant further investigation of hypnotically-induced “death” experiences.

Acknowledgment

The authors are grateful to all the participants of this research. We would also like to thank Frank Bob, Athanasios Komianos, Frank Pasciuti, and Mika Iwasaki, for helping us recruit appropriate participants for this study from among their clients and friends, and to the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) for permitting us to advertise for participants in their quarterly newsletter. Special thanks go to two anonymous reviewers of the journal for their invaluable comments on an earlier version of the paper.

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