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Hypno-Death-Experiences: death experiences during hypnotic regressions

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Abstract

Aim: In this work we analyze 44 death experiences between incarnations, as reported by 36 participants during hypnotic regression sessions with the same hypnotist.

Method: The descriptions of the experiences were evaluated using the Italian version of the Near-Death Experience Scale.

Results: A large part of the reported experiences can be categorized as “Affective”, with a majority reported as: “*Feeling a sense of joy*” and “*Seeing and being enveloped by a bright light*”, as well as in the ‘Transcendental’ category, with all experiences showing a similar frequency. Regarding the ‘Paranormal’ category, the most often reported experience is that of: “*The feeling of being separated from one’s physical body*”.

With respect to the total score, 18% fall inside the range commonly used to identify true NDEs.

Conclusions: The death experiences undergone during the hypnotic regressions contain very similar characteristics to those reported in classic NDEs. Whether these experiences were actually lived or were, instead, accounts of events previously learned through conventional means remains unknown.

Keywords: hypnosis, hypnotic age regressions, death, near-death-experiences

Introduction

The use of hypnosis to relive past lives is a still controversial technique usually used to help resolve distress or psychopathological issues. Furthermore there is still debate about whether past life experiences are real or purely a result of the beliefs and expectations of those under hypnosis, or even of the hypnotist (Pyun & Kim, 2009; Spanos, Menary, Gabora, DuBreuil, & et al, 1991). The greatest difficulty is in being able to verify the reliability of the information given by the experiencer, even though this was possible in the case described by Tarazi (1990).

If however it is possible to induce experiences of past lives, it should also be possible to relive the birth and death events of those lives. To our knowledge, only Schenk (1999) has documented some of these death experiences within a series of clinical cases to which the technique of lucid dreaming was applied in order to relive previous lives.

The chance to analyze a complete database of death experiences of previous lives induced via hypnotic regression for research (rather than therapeutic) purposes is a rare opportunity to do a detailed analysis using the Greyson (1983) Scale. This is usually used to evaluate pre-death experiences (NDE), meaning experiences reported by people whose vital functions have been seriously compromised, such as during cardiac arrest or a serious brain infection, resulting in loss of consciousness (Charland-Verville et al., 2014; Facco & Agrillo, 2012).

This scale, recently authenticated according to the model by Rasch da Lange, Greyson, & Houran (2004), consists of 16 questions related to four categories of experiences, respectively called: 'Cognitive', 'Affective', 'Paranormal', and 'Transcendental'. For each question – for example: *“Did you seem to have entered a supernatural world?”* – the answer is given a score as follows: 0 = negative; 1 = *“Yes, relative to my personal future”*; 2 = *“Yes, relative to the world’s future”*, and so on to a maximum of 32 points.

Methods

Participants

The participants were 14 males and 22 females ranging in age from 25 to 64 years old with an average of 49.6 years. Their recruitment was on a voluntary basis through word-of-mouth from people known to the hypnotist.

The criteria for their selection were: spontaneous memories of past life episodes; déjà vu in places never seen before; recurring dreams relative to events and people (usually of the past) not linked to the current life but recognized as part of one’s heritage. The hypnotist was an adult male aged 72 years with more than two decades of experimental hypnosis experience.

Procedure

Audio recordings were made of all hypnotic regression sessions and each participant, via informed consent, authorized the anonymous handling of these data. Only one session was obtained from 36 participants, while 8 participants contributed two sessions each for a total of 44 experiences.

We emphasize that this database was not created to analyze the relived death experiences of participants, but as a generic reference to document what was reported during these sessions. This

has limited investigations into possible changes and long-term effects of these experiences, as will be better explained in the discussion.

Segments containing death experiences between incarnations were extracted from each audio recording and these contents were then transcribed and grouped according to events, to enable separate evaluations. If a particular participant reported multiple death experiences in one or subsequent sessions, these were identified as a 'new death'.

Each event from these experiences was then independently assessed by two judges using an adaptation of the items section of the Italian version of the Near-Death Experience Scale (NDES; Pistoia et al., 2018), after having agreed on the criteria by analyzing together the first two death experiences. The adaptation simply consisted of using each of the scale's 16 questions as simple descriptions of the experience. For example, the question '*Did you feel joy?*' was changed to '*The sensation of joy was felt*', and the phrase '*Did you see future events?*' instead became '*Events from the future appeared*'.

Every event in each death experience was assigned by a judge a number corresponding to the NDES question, followed by a score of 0, 1 or 2 depending on the quality of the experience. For example, if the statement "*I leave my body*" was marked as 12_2, it corresponded to item 12 of the NDES (i.e., "*Did you feel separated from your physical body?*") and a score of 2 corresponded to: "*Yes, I obviously left my body and was aware of existing outside of it*". If the phrase "*I'm rising; I'm a hologram; I am in a bright, green space*" was marked as 13_1, it corresponded to item 13 of the NDES (i.e., "*Did it seem like you had entered a supernatural world?*") and the score of 1 corresponded to "*Yes, an unfamiliar, alien place*".

After the judges' independent evaluation of all the experiences, they were subsequently compared by one of the authors (PT) to identify any inconsistencies and/or omissions so as to obtain a final version agreed on by both judges. The final version is available at <https://figshare.com/s/c1dc60a5fe2e37d70ade>.

Results

The percentage of events classified as identical irrespective of their score was 85.9% (116/135). The percentage of events classified as identical when scores were included was 67.4% (91/135).

All differences with respect to classification of experiences referred to items 5 and 6, corresponding respectively to the questions: '*Did you feel a sense of peace or fulfilment?*' and '*Did you feel joy?*', and to items 14 and 15, corresponding respectively to: '*Did you seem to be in contact with a being or mystical presence?*' and '*Did you see the spirits of deceased people or religious figures?*'.

Types of experiences

The frequency and corresponding percentage of type of experiences obtained from 44 descriptions of deaths analysed are shown in Table 1 and graphed in Figure 1.

| Experience Type | Counts | % of Total |
|--|--------|------------|
| Cognitive | | |
| 2 - Accelerated thoughts | 1 | 0.7 % |
| 3 - Scenes from the past | 6 | 4.4 % |
| Affective | | |
| 5 - Feeling of peace | 4 | 3.0 % |
| 6 - Feeling of joy | 22 | 16.3 % |
| 7 - Sense of harmony with the universe | 7 | 5.2 % |
| 8 - Bright light | 16 | 11.9 % |
| Paranormal | | |
| 10 - Extra-sensory experiences | 2 | 1.5 % |
| 11 - Scenes from the future | 3 | 2.2 % |
| 12 - Separation from physical body | 24 | 17.8 % |
| Transcendental | | |
| 13 - Supernatural world | 12 | 8.9 % |
| 14 - Contact with a mystical presence | 13 | 9.6 % |
| 15 - Encounters with deceased people | 16 | 11.9 % |
| 16 - Reaching a boundary | 9 | 6.7 % |

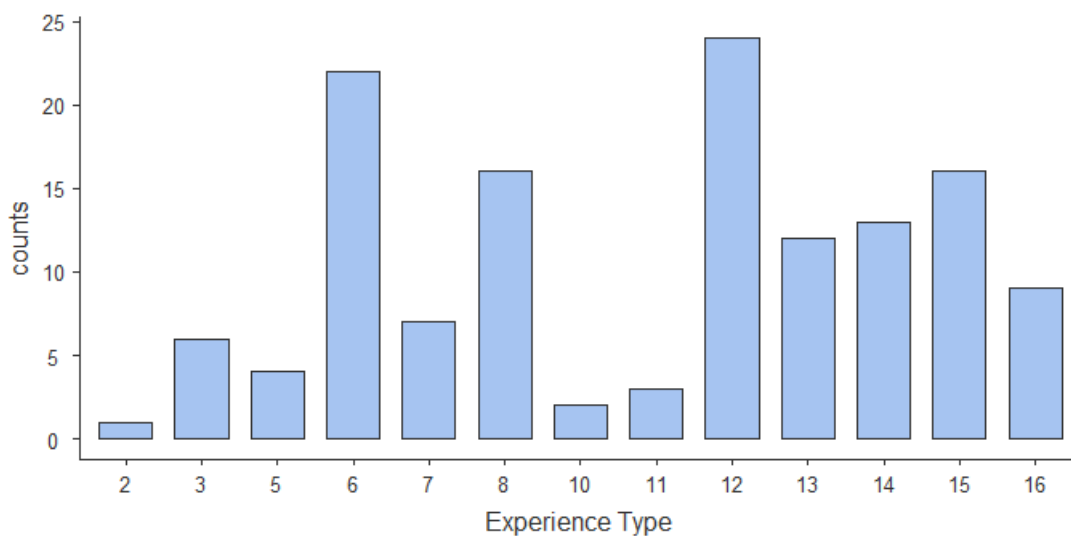


Figure 1: Histogram of type of experience described in the 44 death experiences examined.

Comments

From the data shown in the Table and Figure 1 it is clear that most of the reported experiences fall in the ‘Affective’ category, with a predominance corresponding to items 6 (*‘Felt a sensation of joy’*) and 8 (*‘Saw or felt enveloped by a bright light’*), or in the ‘Transcendental’ category, with the same frequency of experiences corresponding to: *‘It was like entering a supernatural world’* – *‘There seemed to be contact with a mystical being or presence’* – *‘Deceased people or religious figures were present’* – *‘A boundary or point of no return was reached.’*

With respect to the ‘Paranormal’ category, the most often reported experience is that relative to: *‘There was the sensation of separation from the physical body’*, whereas the others (*‘Senses were more alive than usual’*; *‘There was awareness of what was happening elsewhere’*; *‘Scenes from the future appeared’*) either were not referred to at all or were mentioned in less than 3% of cases.

Lastly, in the ‘Cognitive’ category two experiences were never reported: *‘Time seemed to move faster’* and *‘There was a sudden understanding of everything’*, while the other two (*‘Thoughts flowed faster’* and *‘There was a flashback of past events’*) were referred to with frequencies of 0.7% and 4.4% respectively.

It is also interesting that the order of the observed frequencies of these experiences conforms with the observed hierarchy by Lange, Greyson, & Houran, (2004) in their analysis of the original Near-Death Experience Scale via the Rash Model method. In this study, those who described a true NDE reported, in decreasing order, firstly the affective experiences, then the transcendental ones, and finally the paranormal and cognitive ones, the exception being the experience of feeling separated from one’s physical body.

Total Points

The Pearson correlation between the scores given by the two judges equals 0.95; 95% CI: 0.92 – 0.97, therefore demonstrating excellent agreement. The average score was 4 and the range was from 1 to 10. The frequencies and percentages of these scores is presented in Table 2 and in the Figure 2 histogram. The percentages and frequencies of the number of death characteristics obtained is shown in Table S1 and Figure S1 in the Supplementary Material section.

| Total | Counts | % of Total |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 4.5 % |
| 2 | 4 | 9.1 % |
| 3 | 7 | 15.9 % |
| 4 | 10 | 22.7 % |
| 5 | 4 | 9.1 % |
| 6 | 9 | 20.5 % |
| 7 | 4 | 9.1 % |
| 8 | 3 | 6.8 % |
| 10 | 1 | 2.3 % |

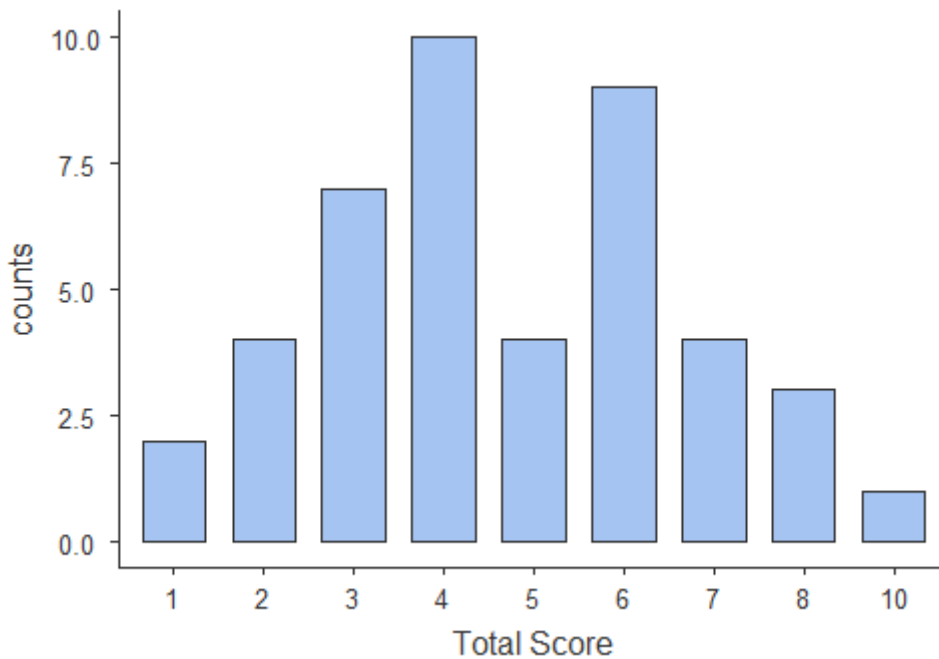


Figure 2: Histogram of distribution of total scores

Using the traditional 7 total point criterion to identify true NDEs, from Table 2 we note that only 8 out of 44 experiences (18%) fall in this category, but it must be stated that if the experiences with a total score equal to 6 were included, this percentage would rise to 38.6%.

Discussion

The main goals of this work were firstly to analyze the characteristics of death experiences undergone during hypnotic regressions, and secondly to reflect on their nature, especially with respect to the question: *‘Are they actual lived experiences, or are they just extracted from knowledge previously acquired from reading about others’ pre-death experiences?’*

As far as the characteristics are concerned, a large part of them overlap with those described in classic NDEs. When reading a summary of the descriptions, we see that, for the most part, the characteristics reported by the various participants are just the same as NDEs. Furthermore, their frequency conforms with what is observed from true NDEs, with a preponderance of the Affective ones, followed by Transcendental and the so-called parapsychological and cognitive ones, the predominant one being the experience of being outside the body.

Regarding the scores, only 18% fall within the accepted level of a true NDE, even though another 20% reported a score very close to this threshold.

Finally, with respect to the nature of these experiences, whether real or acquired, there are both favourable and contradictory elements for them being genuinely experienced during the hypnotic regression sessions. They are listed below, bearing in mind that true NDEs are always followed by an immediate return to life, whereas deaths relived during regressions are never followed by an immediate return to life, but potentially only by a consecutive reincarnation.

Favourable elements:

- As described above, the frequency of observed characteristics reported by our participants conforms with what is observed by Lange et al., (2004), in those who underwent true NDEs.
- If participants of our study only reported information described by others, why were they reported with this particular distribution frequency rather than randomly, or simply repeating all those described in the literature?

Contradictory elements:

- Why do only 18% or, if we use a wider criterion, only 38% report a score that is compatible with that of true NDEs?
- Why does a large part of the experiences contain few elements of true NDEs?

Our current position is to defer judgement on this issue until further studies on these experiences are conducted that extend beyond the limitations of this study and provide us with the information we need to make a decision.

Among the limitations there is undoubtedly the lack of assessing the amount of NDE knowledge of participants before the hypnotic regression. Also, it would have been useful to have evaluated the fear of death before and after the relived death experience and its long-term effects, as is done for classic NDEs.

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Supplementary Material

Table S1: Counts and frequencies of Number of Death Characteristics

| Number | Counts | % of Total |
|--------|--------|------------|
| 1 | 4 | 9.1 % |
| 2 | 12 | 27.3 % |
| 3 | 12 | 27.3 % |
| 4 | 11 | 25.0 % |
| 5 | 4 | 9.1 % |
| 7 | 1 | 2.3 % |

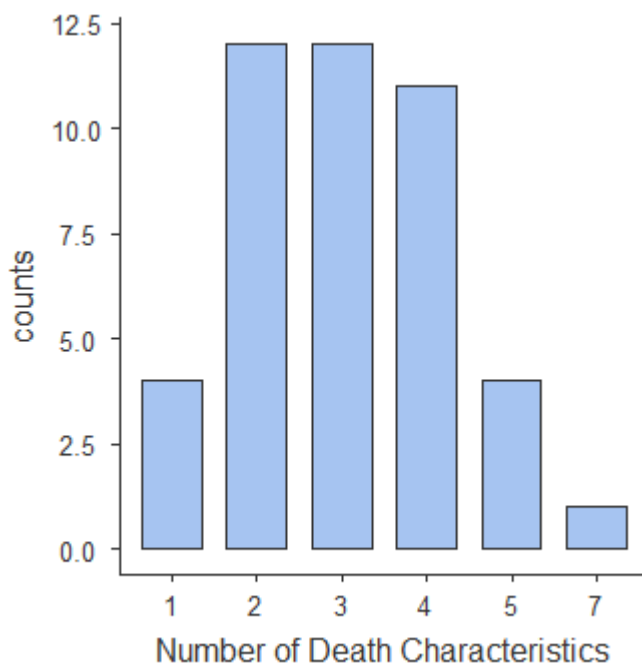


Figure S1: histogram of the number of death characteristics