

1. Are we at the brink of a new paradigm for viewing death?

Yes, I do believe we are on the brink of a new paradigm for viewing death. There are four aspects of death involved in this paradigm shift – near death, dying, after-death communication, and the afterlife.

Near-death experiences

With the advent of improved resuscitation efforts we have considerable information through research about near-death experiences. We know they occur to millions of people and have transformative aftereffects which may include an increase in spiritualism away from materialism, loss of fear of death, increased psychic abilities, interference with electronic equipment, and a sense of purpose. While there have been attempts to explain this phenomena through biological explanations, such as low oxygen levels, none has been shown to be adequate to the task.

Deathbed communications

For centuries there have been descriptions of deathbed visions. More recent research has shown this communication to not be just visions but also auditory and kinesthetic types of communications. Deathbed communications occur frequently to dying individuals with estimates of 25% to 50%. We also know these communications provide a reduction in anxiety, pain and general suffering at the time of death. There are other phenomena that occur at the time of death which are being incorporated into this new paradigm. There are reports of family members and health professionals seeing a mist or fog leave the body at the time of death. Interestingly, this has not been reported as occurring during near-death experience. Hospice personnel frequently report how the dying seem to have some power of the time of their death. The dying will often wait for family members to arrive before dying. I drove for two days to be at my mother's side who was close to death. She died 45 minutes after I arrived. Sometimes dying individuals wait until friends and relatives leave the room before dying. How this occurs is unknown.

After-death communications

After-death communications are probably the most common of all these phenomena. Bill and Judy Guggenheim, authors of *Hello from Heaven*, estimate 60 million people in the United States have had this experience. These communications with the deceased can also be visual, auditory, kinesthetic or symbolic. Most often there is a strong emotional connection between the deceased and the recipients of these communications but occasionally the connection is made with someone less emotionally connected but possibly more able to receive the communication. Once the after death communication has occurred, grief is often resolved.

The afterlife

Establishing the existence of an afterlife is the most difficult aspect of this paradigm shift. Many individuals who have near-death experiences believe they have seen the afterlife. Some believe deathbed communications and after death experiences establish there is continuation of life by

deceased individuals. From a scientific perspective, experiences provide limited evidence. With near-death experiences, deathbed communication and after death communication researchers can measure impact of these experiences on the individual. There is also knowledge that is frequently obtained during these experiences that, given the nature of the physical condition of the individual or the ability to know certain facts, are not possible to be obtained other than through a manner that indicates translocation or communication with a deceased individual. In an article I wrote with Ken Ring we reported a woman who during her cardiac arrest had seen a red shoe on the roof of the hospital. Sure enough a resident was able to find this red shoe. A hospice nurse reported a deceased patient had appeared to her moments after his death explaining where he had put papers for an insurance policy about which he neglected to tell his wife. The nurse visited the wife and found the papers where the deceased had said they were placed. Such validation of an afterlife, other than experiences and theories are still a work in progress.

2. In your book you offer a framework to guide individuals undergoing a transpersonal experience surrounding death. Could you elaborate on why the framework is so effective in providing support?

There are four components to the framework I suggest in the book to use when providing support to individuals who have these experiences. The four components are use of a client-centered approach along with Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), attribution theory, and acknowledgement of the existence of transpersonal experiences.

A client-centered approach

At the center of the framework is a humanistic, client-centered approach described by Carl Rogers, PhD. A client-centered approach provides a positive view of individuals, called positive regard by Rogers, with an emphasis on self-determination. Health care professionals historically have been taught to use an authoritative approach when working with clients. Just telling individuals what to do has not been successful. A client-centered approach is effective because it is a non-judgmental approach, encouraging the use of open-ended questions by health professionals and family members. The person who has had a transpersonal experience is encouraged to describe the experience and reactions to them including thoughts and emotions. This approach is effective because the person is assisted in developing an understanding and maybe an action plan that works for them instead of being told what to do. The client knows best the environmental, financial or emotional issues they face. So many times 'patients' are given prescriptions and told when to take them without being given the opportunity to say they cannot afford the medication.

Neuro-linguistics Programming (NLP)

Neuro-linguistics Programming (NLP) involves the development of models by studying the approaches of gifted individuals. One of these models lead to the development of types of

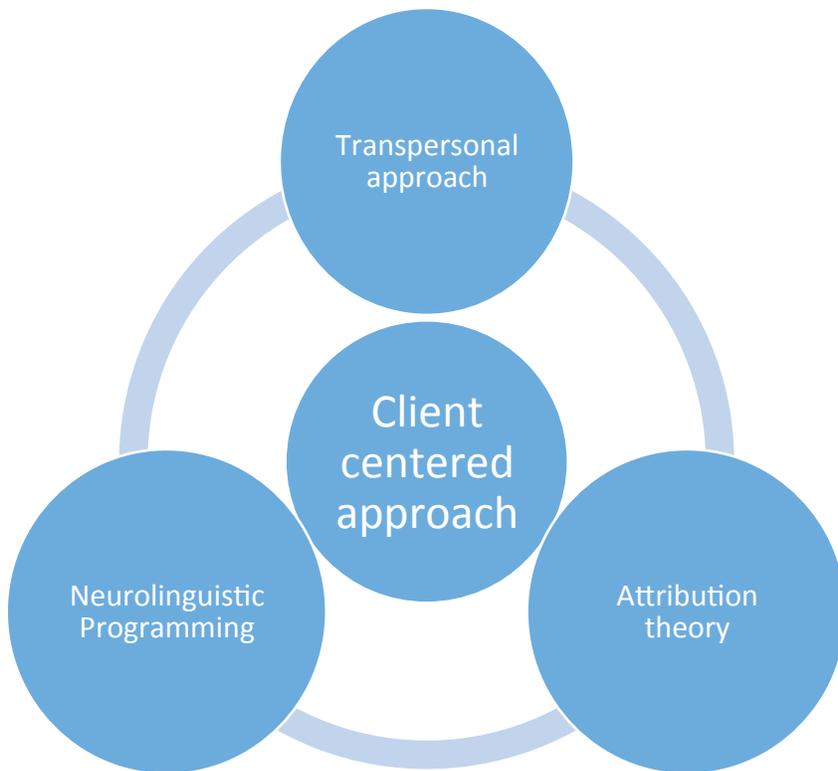
communication patterns based on identifying if a communication is visual, auditory or kinesthetic. Some additional approaches have included olfactory and gustatory communications. In describing some of these transpersonal experiences, it is important to assess all of the communication patterns. For years, for example, we have called deathbed communication, deathbed visions. We now know these communications can also be auditory and/or kinesthetic. One woman I interviewed was feeling 'pokes'. She knew it was her deceased husband who was poking her since that was consistent with his personality. After death communications can be olfactory as well as visual, auditory or kinesthetic. The understanding of these NLP communication types provide for inclusion of experiences that would have been missed previously.

Attribution theory

During the process, the person will be asked what they attribute is the cause or preceding event leading to the transpersonal experience. Attribution theory tells us we all try to make sense of our experiences and the events that occur. Someone may believe this event is spiritual, or an indication of mental illness, or a blessing for good work or a host of other explanations. Distressing near-death experiences can be interpreted as a punishment. When we do not allow a person to express their understanding of an experience, whatever explanation is offered will most likely be ignored. Once a person can say they are worried this event means they are 'going crazy', which is what is frequently said by individuals and family members, it is possible then to achieve a dialogue about the event. It is then possible to normalize this event explaining they happen to millions of people who have no evidence of mental illness.

Transpersonal experiences

Transpersonal experiences are characterized by experiences and perceptions that go beyond biological theories as we currently understand them. They include spiritual experiences, peak experiences, as described by Abraham Maslow, and altered states of consciousness. This is not a new term but rather one used in the 1960s by the founders of the field of Transpersonal Psychology. This field of Transpersonal Psychology opens the door to use understanding events like near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, deathbed communications, after death communications as being within the realm of human experiences. The old paradigm of dying included just what happens physically and physiologically during death. Belief in the legitimacy of transpersonal experiences enables professionals and family members to discuss these events without fear of ridicule or judgment. Support is seen as facilitating growth from these experiences and assisting with any life adjustments that need to be made. That is a different position from ignoring these experiences or approaching them as signs of mental illness implying the person needs anti-psychotic medications.



3. Do you have a vision or strategy on how to effect an integration of transpersonal experiences into mainstream science and education?

Vision

My vision of how integration of transpersonal experiences into mainstream science and education would include the following to name a few:

- All books used to educate those involved with individuals who are near death or dying would have sufficient information on how to support individuals who experience transpersonal events when near death or dying.
- More government and private founding funding would be available for researchers on these topics.
- Mainstream science journals and conferences would include these topics in their publications and presentations.
- Books on human biology, physiology, psychology would describe these experiences and encourage research in this field.

Strategies

We involved in studying, reading, and writing about these experiences are currently operating on parallel tracks to mainstream science. As they say in politics, we need to walk across the aisle.

I believe it would help integrate transpersonal experiences if those involved in research and writing about transpersonal experiences submit articles for publication and applications for presentation to mainstream science and education journals and conferences. We currently are submitting presentations and articles to groups who are already committed and understand the significance of these experiences. Even if articles or applications for presentations to mainstream science and education journals and conferences are initially rejected, the reviewers of these documents have seen them. They are key people who need to be informed about what is being studied, described and experienced. Prestigious journals like the New England Journal of Medicine have on occasion published book reviews and articles on transpersonal experiences. More need to do so. As more and more submissions are presented these topics, their relevance will become noticed to mainstream scientists!

The public needs to be aware these transpersonal experiences are not integrated into mainstream science. Books and websites on these topics are popular with readers but most of the readers are not made aware of the lack of funding for research in these areas and the lack of integration in textbooks. Public support can be a major force for the integration of transpersonal experiences into mainstream science.

I also believe in the theory of six degrees of separation. As each of us contact six people who in turn contact six more people and so on, the information will permeate mainstream science. We must move out of our comfort zone being with other like-minded individuals and meet and talk with mainstream scientists.