

THE SHARED DEATH EXPERIENCE: A TRANSFORMATIVE END-OF-LIFE PHENOMENON REPORTED BY CAREGIVERS AND LOVED ONES



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Key Points of Today's Presentation

- Introduce SCRI
- Review findings from our study on shared death experiences (SDEs)
- Discuss how information about SDEs can add to breadth of support for entire care continuum



Shared Crossing
Research Initiative

Mission

To research end-of-life experiences and their therapeutic value for patients, their families and loved ones, and caregivers.

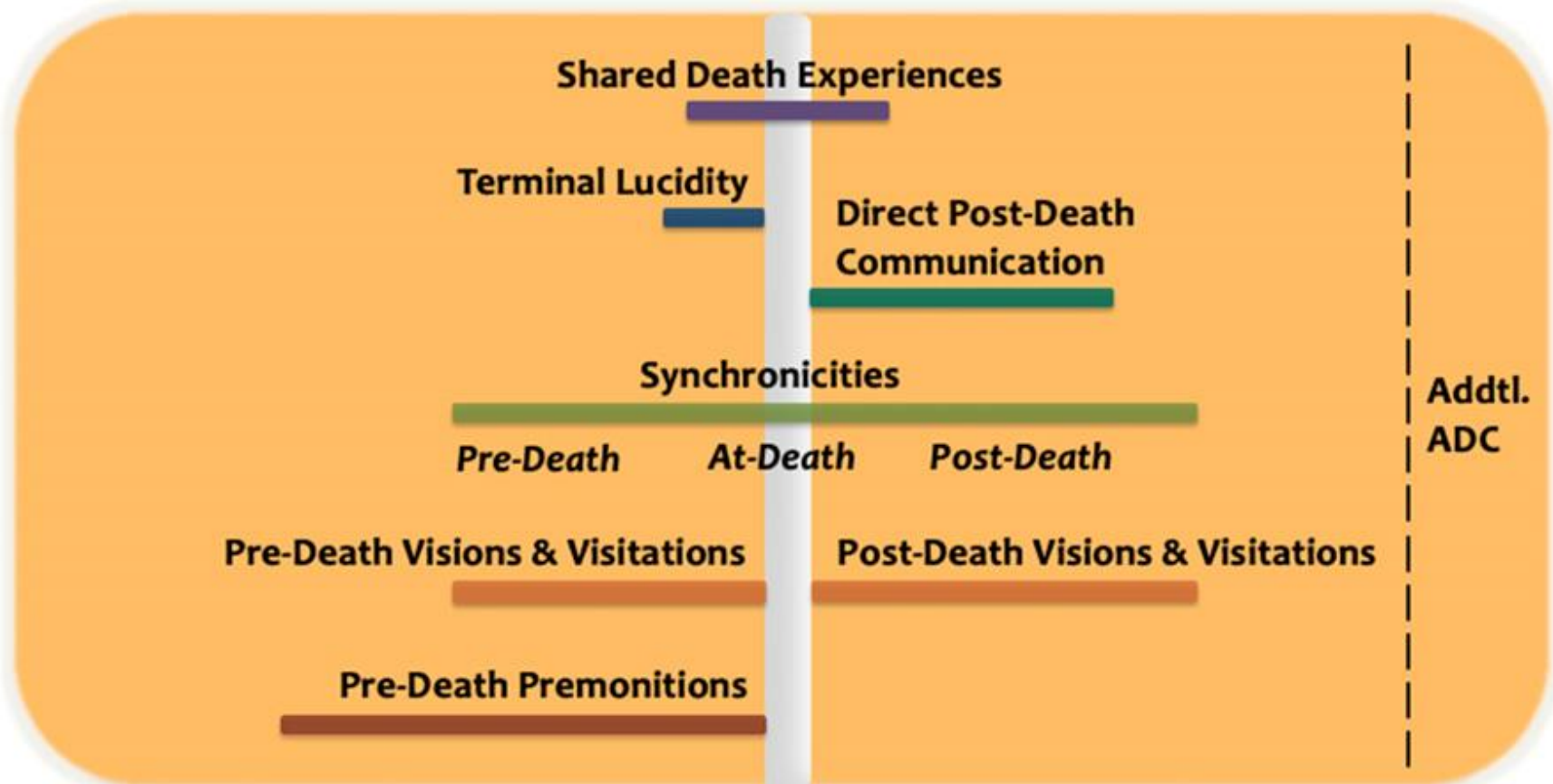
End-of-Life Experiences

- Significant events w/in dying process
 - Meaningful dreams and visions reported by dying patients

Shared End-of-Life Experiences

- Significant events within the dying process
- Meaningful experiences reported by loved ones and caregivers of the dying

The Spectrum of End-of-Life Experiences (SELE)



Approaching Death

Death

After Death

ADC = After-Death Communication

What is a Shared Death Experience?

- Experience in which loved ones, caregivers, or bystanders feel they are sharing in a dying person's transition to a benevolent afterlife
- Theme of a journey is prevalent

Raymond Moody



Our Participants

- Came from:
 - Referrals
 - Conference and Media Presentations
 - SCP Website
- Experiencers offered us description and write-ups
 - We invited them to interview

Semi-Structured Interviews

- Personal background
- Circumstances & features of their experiences
- Aftereffects
- Talking about their experiences with others
- Anything else they wanted to share

Our Study

- Conducted interviews with 107 participants reporting shared death experiencers (SDE)
- These participants reported a total of 164 SDE accounts

Demographics

Characteristics	<i>N</i> = 107	%
Age Range*		
21-30	2	1.9
31-40	3	2.8
41-50	12	11.2
51-60	30	28.0
61-70	42	39.3
71-80	15	14.0
81 +	3	2.8
Gender		
Female	91	85.0
Male	16	15.0

Demographics (contd.)

Characteristics	<i>N</i> = 107	%
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	99	92.5
Asian	4	3.7
Latino/Hispanic	3	2.8
African American	1	0.9
Current Religion/Spirituality		
Spiritual not Religious	56	52.3
Christian	28	26.2
None	12	11.2
Jewish	6	5.6
Buddhist	3	2.8
Hindu	2	1.9

Initial Findings: Majority of SDEs Occur Remotely

- Previous work exists characterized SDEs as bedside phenomena
- ~64% of all reported SDEs occurred remotely

Initial Findings: Mindfulness Practices Correlates with SDEs

- ~67% of participants engaged regularly in a range of meditative activities
 - Meditation, prayer, contemplation, yoga, etc.

Findings:
4 Participatory Modes of an SDE (Nonexclusive)

- 1) Remotely Sensing a Death
- 2) Witnessing Unusual Phenomena
- 3) Accompanying the Dying
- 4) Assisting the Dying in Transitioning

Remotely Sensing a Death (~25%)

- Brief thoughts, feelings, or sense of presence around time of death (~16%)
 - --OR--
- Sudden onset of sympathetic physical symptoms (~8%)

Witnessing Unusual Phenomena (~84%)

- Vision of the Dying (~50%)
- Unearthly light (~25%)
- Sensing energy (~20%)
- Alterations in space / time (~19%)
- Encounters w/ non-human entities (~16%)
- Seeing spirit leave body (~15%)
- Encounters w/ deceased loved ones (~13%)
- Appearance of heavenly realms (~12%)

Accompanying the Dying

(~15%)

- Occur out of body or in visionary realm
 - Gardens, castles, otherworldly regions, or a void
 - Acquiring special knowledge
 - Appearance of border that experiencer is “not permitted to go beyond”

Assisting the Dying

(~5%)

- Like accompaniment, but participants additionally reported feeling that the dying required their help

Findings: Changes in Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors

- Participants reported several personal transformations that they ascribed to their experiences
- The following figures come from reports arising from interviews, and so they represent minimum figures

Findings: Certainty of an Afterlife

- ~90% of participants reported being convinced that life exists beyond death

Findings:

Aftereffects: Knowing The Deceased Are Happy And At Peace

- Out of 107 shared-death experiencers, 72 (~67%) reported knowing their loved ones were well.

Arlene R: I have not dreamed about her, but I don't need to. I know she is in a place filled with love and no pain.

Leslie M: I knew it was my father who had come to tell me that he had died and that he was at peace and well in the afterlife.

Tricia S: I feel quite at peace . . . He's moved on and he's happy.

Findings: Aftereffects—Grief Reconciliation

- ~69% reported their SDE had positively impacted their grief

Stephanie L.: I knew that he was okay, that he had gone back to a safe, wonderful, loving place. The grieving was very different for me, because I understood that. And I missed him physically in this world, but I knew that he was okay.

Findings: Aftereffects—Alleviation of Death Anxiety

- ~52% reported their SDE left them with less or no fear over death and dying

Findings: Aftereffects – Life Purpose

- ~ 43% reported that their SDE left a profound mark on what they perceived to be life's meaning

Valerie S.: Everything I do today, all the intuitive work and all that, is a direct response of my first husband dying . . . I used to sell mainframe software, and my life is completely different because of it.

Findings: Aftereffects – Continuing Bonds

- ~ 24% reported having an ongoing relationship with a deceased loved one.
- This falls within framework of “Continuing Bonds” – model of grief whereby people redefine rather than terminate relationships w/ the deceased

Findings: Therapeutic Value in Sharing Story

- ~38% of participants reported concern over being dismissed or ridiculed
- Every interviewee expressed gratitude for having a safe space to share their stories

Educating Caregivers about SDEs

- Healthcare professionals are increasingly aware that:
 - EOLP may have positive impact on dying process, though may also bring about existential crises
 - There is need for specialized training

Conclusion

- These accounts are deeply meaningful stories
- They often have positive impact and bring therapeutic benefits if openly received
- This requires health professionals to be open and able to discuss these experiences

Share Your Shared Crossing Story

- The *Shared Crossing Research Initiative* continues to document shared crossings.
- If you or someone you know has experienced a shared crossing, we would appreciate your telling us this story. In this way you support our research and continued efforts to raise awareness and educate people about the profound and healing experiences available at the end of life.
- Please visit our website www.sharedcrossing.com to find more information about our work and to contact us to share your story.