

**Do near-death experiences impact the cosmology of those who
experience them, and if so how?**

A research project from Colombia

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of a Master of Arts in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Academic research in mystical/spiritual/religious experiences such as near-death experiences (NDEs) is very scarce in Latin America and especially Colombia. Besides, there is also little research in the cosmology of those who live an NDE. Therefore, this research project contributes by aiming to evaluate in a group of Colombian people if their NDEs impacted their cosmologies, and if so, how.

To find a cosmological impact thirty questionnaires were done and a sample of ten experiencers was taken to deepen their cosmological notions through in-depth interviews. The testimonies reported similar NDE phenomenology, features and aftereffects to those found in the literature and worldwide, suggesting that NDEs also occur in Colombia regardless of gender, education level, religion, and age. It was also found that all interviewees share a similar worldview where there are common behavioural and psychological attitudes, where they perceive a sense of interconnection and a belief that we are part of something bigger, and where a Beyond (seen as higher levels of consciousness and or realms of reality) is part of their reality.

It was found that four out of eight adult interviewees were cosmologically impacted by their NDEs to a high degree that means that existential and meaningful aspects were involved in their change, and they experienced impact towards their view of reality and their place in the cosmos. Two participants had a low-degree cosmological change because not all these elements were present and the other two interviewees did not exhibit any changes at all. The present study proposes that an NDE acts like a cosmological compass, a tool that shows a certain orientation (the shared cosmology that has been previously described) so experiencers can assess if they are or not on the “correct” path and decide their next steps.

1. INTRODUCTION

The principal aim of this dissertation is to investigate whether near-death experiences (NDEs) impact the cosmology of those who experienced them. If so, the research project done with a group of Colombian near-death experiencers (NDErs) will consider how this event cosmologically influenced them. Hence, the terms “near-death experiences” and “cosmology” are to be first introduced.

Near-death experiences are ‘profound psychological events with transcendental and mystical elements, typically occurring to individuals close to death or in situations of intense physical or emotional danger’ as defined by Bruce Greyson.¹ Likewise, Gregory Shushan, stated that they are ‘spontaneous’ and ‘spiritually interpreted episodes that individuals report’ when near death.² There are common features regarding NDE phenomenology such as a feeling of peace or well-being, undergoing an out-of-body experience (OBE), feeling to enter an unearthly environment, approaching a border or limit, encountering a presence (usually deceased entities), and seeing light.³ Due to the mystical and transcendental elements, NDEs can be treated as examples of mystical/spiritual/religious experiences.⁴ Therefore, the project can be of value to the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David,

¹ Bruce Greyson, ‘Near-death experiences’, in *Varieties of anomalous experience: Examining the scientific evidence*, ed. by Etzel Cardena, Steven Jay Lynn, and Stanley Krippner, 315-352 (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2000), [hereafter Greyson, ‘Near-death experiences’], p. 315.

² Gregory Shushan, *Near-Death Experience in Indigenous Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), [hereafter Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*], p. 1.

³ Raymond A. Moody, *Life after life* (Georgia: Bantam books, 1975), [hereafter Moody, *Life after life*], pp. 28, 34, 55, 58, 73, 75-76; Bruce Greyson, ‘The Near-Death Experience Scale: construction, reliability, and validity’, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, Vol. 171, No. 6 (1983), 369-375 [hereafter Greyson, ‘NDE scale’], pp. 372-373; Charlotte Martial, Jessica Simon, Ninon Puttaert, Olivia Gosseries, Vanessa Charland-Verville, Anne-Sophie Nyssen, Bruce Greyson, Steven Laureys, and Hélène Cassol, ‘The Near-Death Experience Content (NDE-C) Scale: Development and Psychometric Validation’, *Consciousness and Cognition*, 86: 103049 (2020), 1-14, [hereafter Martial *et al*, ‘The NDE-C Scale’], p. 5.

⁴ Bruce Greyson, ‘The Incidence of Near-Death Experiences’, *Medicine Psychiatry*, Vol 1 (1998), 92-99, [hereafter Greyson, ‘Incidence of NDEs’], p. 92; John Pennachio, ‘Near-Death Experience as Mystical Experience’, *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1986), 64-72 [hereafter Pennachio, ‘NDE as mystical experience’], pp. 70-71; Janice Miner Holden, ‘After-Math: Counting the Aftereffects of Potentially Spiritually Transformative Experiences’, *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2012), 65-78 [hereafter Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’], pp. 65-67.

which has the stated aim of studying ‘contemporary accounts of religious or spiritual experiences’.⁵

In considering cosmology, it has both a scientific and a humanistic perspective, the former based on the physical cosmic structure and evolution and the latter in people’s worldview, their structure of reality and place in the cosmos.⁶ A cosmological shift, then, is when people experience changes in those perceptions, in other words, in how they think the cosmos is structured, what is encompassed in their reality and how their self is involved within it. This notion of the structure of the cosmos comes along with a term that plays a major role in this investigation, the notion of a “Beyond”, which will be delineated in section 2.1.3 and further defined and discussed according to the findings of the project.

To the best of my knowledge, only one scholar has directly addressed the cosmology of NDErs. Scott Taylor, through 23 in-depth interviews, identified in his participants’ experiences ‘unity as the structure of the non-physical world’ and duality in the physical world, the latter regarded ‘as a subset of the unity universe’.⁷ He posited that ‘the glimpse they had of their transitional experience answered questions about the nature of human existence and the structure of the

⁵ Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC) web page in University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/> [accessed August 17, 2021].

⁶ International Astronomical Union, *Big Ideas in Astronomy: A Proposed Definition of Astronomy Literacy*, 03 May 2019, online brochure <https://www.iau.org/publications/iau/brochures/> [accessed August 31, 2021], [hereafter IAU, *Big Ideas in Astronomy*], p. 40; Nicholas Campion, ‘Cosmos/Cosmologies’, in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, ed. by Robert A. Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad, 359-364 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), [hereafter Campion, ‘Cosmos/Cosmologies’], p. 359; C. Margaret Hall, ‘Cosmology and Therapy’, *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 25, No 4 (1986), 254-263, [hereafter Hall, ‘Cosmology and Therapy’], pp. 257-258; Clifford Geertz, ‘Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols’, *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1957), 421-437 [hereafter Geertz, ‘Ethos, World-View’], pp. 421, 424; Gerald Weiss, ‘Campa Cosmology: The World of a Forest Tribe in South America’, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. 52, Part. 5 (1975), 217-588, [hereafter Weiss, ‘Campa Cosmology’], pp. 219, 426, 508, 510; Christopher Key Chapple, ‘Thomas Berry, Buddhism, and the New Cosmology’, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 18 (1998), 147-154, [hereafter Chapple, ‘Thomas Berry’], p. 147.

⁷ Scott M. Taylor, ‘Near-Death Experiences: Discovering and Living in Unity’ (doctoral dissertation, University of St. Thomas, 2001), [hereafter Taylor, ‘Discovering and Living in Unity’], pp. x, 40.

universe’.⁸ This means that Taylor found changes that involve cosmological elements in some of his participants.

Jeffrey Kripal when discussing the impact of extraordinary experiences (such as telepathy, paranormal events and NDEs) in scientists and intellectuals, talked about ‘the flip, a tipping point’ that leads ‘to new ontologies’ and ‘results in a new *cosmic comparative* perspective that reorients us within an immeasurably larger vision of who we are as a species of the cosmos’.⁹ Similar kinds of changes, viewed as ‘transformative’ were reported by Michael Grosso, Walter Pahnke, Yvonne Kason, Alan Davis *et al* and Janice Holden, where psychedelic, enlightenment, mystical, meditative, near-death and other ‘Spiritually Transformative Experiences’ (STEs) or ‘Potentially’ STEs (pSTEs) also lead to meaningful insights, to a ‘radical shift in reality’, as posited by Holden, to ‘new perceptions of reality and changes in the sense of self and community’ as said by Grosso, and to ontological or major shifts in worldviews as stated by Kason and Davis *et al*.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Holden argued that the process of aftereffects’ integration depends on ‘experience, experiencer, and context’.¹¹ Previous scholars suggest that people that undergo other types of experiences such as paranormal, psychic, mystical, psychedelic and pSTEs go through changes that have cosmological elements involved.

This kind of change has also been identified in NDErs specifically, although not labelled as “cosmological”. Cherie Sutherland described that NDErs can have an ‘ontological shift’, a change in the meaning they give to their daily lives, in their

⁸ Taylor, ‘Discovering and Living in Unity’, p. 1.

⁹ Jeffrey John Kripal, *The Flip: Epiphanies of Mind and the Future of Knowledge* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2019), Kindle edition, [hereafter Kripal, *The Flip*], pp. 11-13, 16-17. Original emphasis.

¹⁰ Michael Grosso, ‘The Deep State of Self-Transformation’, *Explore*, Vol. 14, No.3 (2018), 234-235, p. 235; Walter N. Pahnke, ‘The Psychedelic Mystical Experience in the Human Encounter with Death’, *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (1969), 1-21, [hereafter Pahnke, ‘The Psychedelic Mystical Experience’], p. 12, 20; Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’, pp. 65, 69, 76; Yvonne Kason, *Farther shores: Exploring how near-death, kundalini, and mystical experiences can transform ordinary lives* (Canada: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), [hereafter Kason, *Farther shores*], p. 21; Alan Davis, John Clifton, Eric Weaver, Ethan Hurwitz, Matthew Johnson and Roland Griffiths, ‘Survey of entity encounter experiences occasioned by inhaled N,N-dimethyltryptamine: Phenomenology, interpretation, and enduring effects’, *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, Vol. 34, No. 9 (2020), 1008-1020, [hereafter Davis *et al*, ‘Entity encounter experiences’], p. 1017.

¹¹ Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’, p. 70.

view of the world, and ‘their being within it’.¹² Suzanne Gordon reported that 92% of her participants ‘included reference to a *context shift*: a global shift in awareness of one’s identity and reality’ and she added that many NDErs criticized ‘Western culture’s materialist worldview’.¹³ Kenneth Ring stated that an ‘extraordinary encounter’ such as an NDE, can introduce ‘an entirely new worldview ... or view of the cosmos’ and Penny Sartori argued that there are life-changing outcomes such as feeling being part of an ‘interconnected whole’ and having an ‘expanded worldview’.¹⁴ John Pennachio argued that NDEs result in ‘self-transformation’ where ‘perception goes beyond the social construction of reality and a socially based identity’.¹⁵

Previous scholars suggested that NDErs go through changes in self-perception and direction, in how the world or cosmos is and works, and their perceptions of reality, which are all topics acknowledged in cosmology. But the change is not named as cosmological and is usually regarded as ontological and or transformative. However, it is not so clear if NDErs share a similar cosmology and what could be encompassed in it, how many of the NDErs do present cosmological changes, and how does the NDE act in the person to trigger this shift. Therefore, the present research will contribute to the scholarly literature on the effects of NDEs and mystical/spiritual/religious experiences on cosmology and worldview.

On the other hand, there has also been very little NDE research in Latin America and only one professional study of NDEs in Colombia.¹⁶ Due to this scarcity, this

¹² Cherie Sutherland, *Reborn in the light: Life after near-death experiences* (New York: Bantam, 1995), [hereafter Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*], p. 193.

¹³ L. Suzanne Gordon, ‘An Ethnographic Study of Near-Death Experience Impact and Aftereffects and Their Cultural Implications’, *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2012), 111-129, [hereafter Gordon, ‘Ethnographic Study of NDE impact’], pp. 120, 125.

¹⁴ Kenneth Ring, *The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1992), [hereafter Ring, *Omega Project*], p. 173; Penny Sartori, *What is a Near-Death Experience* (London: Watkins, 2016), [hereafter Sartori, *What is a NDE*], chapter 4.

¹⁵ Pennachio, ‘NDE as mystical experience’, p. 70.

¹⁶ Adriana Sleutjes, Alexander Moreira-Almeida and Bruce Greyson, ‘Almost 40 Years Investigating Near-Death Experiences, An Overview of Mainstream Scientific Journals’, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, Vol. 202, No. 11 (2014), 833-836, [hereafter Sleutjes, Moreira-Almeida and Greyson, ‘40 Years Investigating NDEs’], pp. 834-835; Clara Cantor, Delsy Cogua, María Guerrero, Juan Higueta and Carolina Pamplona, ‘Estudio fenomenológico sobre los cambios en las creencias sobre la muerte en personas

research is going to make an important contribution to the literature by being a pioneer in the study of mystical/spiritual experiences in contemporary non-indigenous people in Colombia.

The main procedure, then, was to gather the testimony of Colombian NDErs. The methodology adopted for this research employs a combination of questionnaires and interviews, quantitative and qualitative research approaches respectively.¹⁷ Thirty questionnaires were gathered from NDErs in Colombia to have an overview of their opinions. According to their answers, a sample of ten experiencers, that had different and varied views, was taken to deepen their cosmological notions through in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Following this introductory chapter, this dissertation continues with a literature review of the notions of cosmology (section 2.1) in both humanistic and astronomical fields and theories of reality and truth. The section ends with the introduction of the concept “Beyond” and a discussion of what it encompasses for the present research. In section 2.2 an overview of the phenomenology and other features of NDEs in Colombia and abroad is addressed. The dissertation then continues with the methodology chapter that gives details about how questionnaires and interviews were designed and performed and a reflexive section regarding my insider/outsider role within the research project. Following this third chapter, comes the findings and discussion part in which the questionnaire results are to be presented and discussed first (section 4.1), and then those from the interviews (section 4.2). Finally, the dissertation ends with a conclusion of the main findings of the research project and how it adds to current scholarship.

con experiencias cercanas a la muerte’ (undergraduate dissertation, Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, 2002), [hereafter Cantor *et al*, ‘Cambios en las creencias sobre la muerte en personas con ECM’], pp. 52-54, 59.

¹⁷ Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (London: Routledge, 1988), <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=85041&site=ehost-live> [accessed September 06, 2021], [hereafter Bryman, *Quantity and Quality*], pp. 12, 46.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cosmology

2.1.1. Humanistic and astronomical views of cosmology

Cosmology is a term that circulates in the astronomy and humanities fields. In the former, it is understood as ‘the science of exploring the Universe as a whole’ and is focused on the Universe’s evolution and structure as defined by the International Astronomical Union (IAU).¹⁸ There have been several historical ‘worldviews’ within the scientific community such as the Ptolemaic, Copernican and Newtonian.¹⁹ Cosmology, then, within the scientific community is mainly regarded as a sub-discipline of astronomy and physics and is nowadays focused on the physical world.

Moving to the humanistic standpoint, cultural astronomer Nicholas Campion and sociologist Margaret Hall consider cosmology as a ‘world view’, one that studies how ‘people and societies locate themselves within the cosmos and engage with it’ in Campion’s words.²⁰ Hall stated that religion, family, beliefs about self, defining what is real and meaningful, are some sociological items that help construct a cosmology.²¹ Anthropologist Clifford Geertz stated that ‘world-view’ is an expression used for the ‘cognitive, existential aspects’ of a society, it ‘is their picture of the way things, in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society’, an ‘assumed structure of reality’.²² He differentiated it from the ‘ethos’, the ‘morals (and aesthetic) aspects of a given culture’ or style or ‘way of life’.

Anthropologist Gerald Weiss and the historian of religion Christopher Chapple relate cosmology to humans’ meaningful place in the cosmos or universe; in Weiss’ words it is a ‘world view’, ‘a complete set of ideas about the nature and composition of the world or universe’, ‘a set of ideas of the totality of reality’.²³ The humanistic perspective of cosmology that will be used in this research, then, approaches cosmology as how people fit themselves into the universe and focuses

¹⁸ IAU, *Big Ideas in Astronomy*, pp. 38, 40.

¹⁹ Delia Perlov and Alex Vilenkin, *Cosmology for the Curious* (Cham: Springer, 2017), p. 6, 26, 351.

²⁰ Campion, ‘Cosmos/Cosmologies’, p. 359; Hall, ‘Cosmology and Therapy’, p. 257.

²¹ Hall, ‘Cosmology and Therapy’, p. 257-258.

²² Geertz, ‘Ethos, World-View’, pp. 421-422, 424.

²³ Weiss, ‘Campa Cosmology’, pp. 219, 426, 508, 510; Chapple, ‘Thomas Berry’, p. 147.

on key queries about their existence, reality, and what is meaningful for them. Thereby, the moral and behavioural facets of the NDErs will have a secondary role in the present investigation.

From the above sources, four key cosmological themes emerge: reality, existence, cosmos and meaning. These topics along with the phenomenology of the NDE were the basis to structure the questionnaire used in this research and to define an outline for the interviews and were key for the analysis stage. However, the literature was focused on the following themes: reality, *Beyond*, phenomenology, and impact on worldview, which will be covered in the subsequent sections.

2.1.2. Reality

What is real and true for a person? There are many philosophical theories about reality, where the dominant interpretation is *physicalism* or *materialism*, which means that the world or reality is primarily physical or made of matter, even consciousness or mind.²⁴ On the other hand, the *dualist* view includes the mind/soul as a primary feature of reality along with matter, although they are absolutely different and independent.²⁵ On the contrary, the *idealist* view claims the dependence between mind and matter, where ‘matter is a function or expression of mind’.²⁶ Differently, the recent *post-materialist* movement goes beyond dualism by saying that ‘there is a deep interconnectedness between mind and the physical world’, where ‘mind and spirit’ are ‘part of the core fabric of the universe’.²⁷ In sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 it will be discussed how the NDErs’ composition of reality was influenced by the NDE, and how matter, mind and spirit are involved in their cosmological ideas.

²⁴ Philip Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), [hereafter Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental reality*], p. 14.; Steve Taylor, ‘Moving Beyond Materialism: Can Transpersonal Psychology Contribute to Cultural Transformation?’, *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, Vol. 36, No.2 (2017), 147-159, [hereafter Taylor, ‘Moving Beyond Materialism’], p. 149; Mario Beauregard, Gary E. Schwartz, Lisa Miller, Larry Dossey, Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Marilyn Schlitz, Rupert Sheldrake, and Charles Tart, ‘Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science’, *Explore*, Vol. 10, No. 5 (2014), 272-274, [hereafter Beauregard *et al*, ‘Post-Materialist Science’], p. 272; Kripal, *The Flip*, p. 113.

²⁵ Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental reality*, p. 1; Kripal, *The Flip*, p. 112; René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. by Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1956), [hereafter Descartes, *Discourse on Method*], pp. 21, 38.

²⁶ Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental reality*, p. 1; Kripal, *The Flip*, p. 112.

²⁷ Beauregard *et al*, ‘Post-Materialist Science’, p. 273.

A person's structure of reality comes with what is true for them. William James stated that 'truth ... is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their "agreement", ... with "reality"'.²⁸ Garry Phillipson argued that there are three main philosophical theories of truth: '*correspondence, coherence and pragmatic theories*'.²⁹ For the first one, Anthony Harrison-Barbet outlined that 'if a belief is to be true it must correspond to a **fact** of some kind which "exists" in the world'.³⁰ This means that there should be a correspondence between the belief and the fact that supports it (between the statement and reality as John Hospers noted).³¹

The coherence view defines, as Harrison-Barbet stated, that 'a statement is true if it "coheres" or "fits in" with other statements thereby forming a complete system'.³² In other words, a belief is true if it fits together with a particular system of beliefs or body of knowledge. Finally, the pragmatic theory, as defined by Hospers and James respectively, says that ' "truth is what works" ', 'true ideas would never have been singled out as such... unless they had been useful'.³³ Therefore, true statements must work in practice. In sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, it will be argued if an NDE challenged what the experiencers thought is *true* and *real*.

2.1.3. A Beyond

Is there a Beyond in the NDErs' cosmos? What is it? Was it real for them before and after experiencing the NDE? To start grasping those questions, it is first necessary to delimitate what is meant by the term *Beyond*. It will be treated as anything similar to the afterlife, life after death, a "spiritual world" or realm or the religiously used "heaven", or another "dimension", "plane" or "state". I prefer to use a *Beyond* for two reasons: first, it was an expression frequently used by the research participants and second, it is inclusive, it does not exclude that it is

²⁸ William James, *Pragmatism* (New York, Dover Publications, 1995), [hereafter James, *Pragmatism*], p. 76.

²⁹ Garry Phillipson, 'Astrology and Truth: A Context in Contemporary Epistemology' (doctoral thesis, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2020), p. 87. Original emphasis.

³⁰ Anthony Harrison-Barbet, *Mastering Philosophy* (London: MacMillan, 1990), [hereafter Harrison-Barbet, *Mastering Philosophy*], p. 81. Original boldface.

³¹ John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), [hereafter Hospers, *Philosophical Analysis*], p. 44.

³² Harrison-Barbet, *Mastering Philosophy*, p. 81.

³³ Hospers, *Philosophical Analysis*, p. 46; James, *Pragmatism*, p. 79.

something beyond death, that is, a place or state that you reach after you die. This afterlife, as defined by Fiona Bowie, is a ‘parallel “world”’ where ‘conscious discarnate entities or energies’ are located after death of the physical body.³⁴

But the Beyond term I try to delineate here may go beyond this previous afterlife concept, in other words, it is not restricted to spirits and souls of dead people, it can be another level or “state” that you can reach while being alive, a kind of parallel realm beyond this physical world, or something beyond the body and our ordinary life. It resembles what is meant by ‘higher states of consciousness’ which Michele Kramer defined as ‘hierarchically advanced realms or worlds of consciousness’.³⁵

Aligned with this, the Beyond concept can also be encompassed by the higher ‘*levels of existence*’ described by perennial philosophy in its ‘Great Nest’, the latter described by Ken Wilber as ‘a great *morphogenetic field*’ where ‘each senior dimension enveloping and embracing its juniors, much like a series of concentric circles or spheres’.³⁶ Wilber stated that *levels of consciousness or self* and *planes or realms of reality* are ‘correlative structures’, but ‘a given level of self can experience a different level or plane of reality’.³⁷ Following Wilber’s notions, the term *Beyond* to be used further on encompasses both the higher planes of reality and the higher states of consciousness. The higher realms of reality would include any realm *beyond* the physical one, including the afterlife or spiritual worlds, and the higher levels of consciousness are those transpersonal or those that go ‘*beyond the personal*’ in Wilber’s words.³⁸ In other words, a Beyond includes something beyond the body, beyond the self, beyond death and beyond this physical reality. In this sense, it might be similar to Rudolf Otto’s ‘wholly other’, something

³⁴ Fiona Bowie, ‘Building Bridges, Dissolving Boundaries: Toward a Methodology for the Ethnographic Study of the Afterlife, Mediumship, and Spiritual Beings’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (2013), 698-733, [hereafter Bowie, ‘Building Bridges, Dissolving Boundaries’], p. 701.

³⁵ Michele Riley Kramer, ‘Experience of higher planes of consciousness in long-term practitioners of integral yoga’ (doctoral dissertation, Saybrook University, 2008), [hereafter Kramer, ‘Experience of higher planes of consciousness’], p. 3.

³⁶ Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), [hereafter Wilber, *Integral Psychology*], pp. 5, 27. Original emphasis.

³⁷ Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, p. 236.

³⁸ Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, p. 106.

‘beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible’, another reality that contrasts to nowadays world.³⁹

Aligned with this perception of a Beyond, the ‘experiential source theory’ or hypothesis claims that spiritual and supernatural beliefs originate from extraordinary personal experiences, where Shushan proposes that afterlife beliefs within religions were based on or originated from NDEs.⁴⁰ A review of whether this notion was found in the Colombian NDErs will be studied in section 4.2.3.

2.2. Near-Death Experiences

2.2.1. NDEs’ features, aftereffects and explanations

The term ‘near-death experiences’ is now widely used within academia, but it was not until 1975 that Raymond Moody coined the term to refer to ‘unusual experiences’ that people report when they were at risk of death.⁴¹ NDE scholars agree that they are a worldwide phenomenon that can happen to anyone, present throughout history, in many cultures, indigenous societies and children.⁴² Researchers estimate that between 17% and 35% of people who almost die can have an NDE.⁴³

³⁹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. by John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1952 [1923]), [hereafter Otto, *Holy*], pp. 26, 29-30, 82.

⁴⁰ David J. Hufford, ‘Beings Without Bodies: An Experience-Centered Theory of the Belief in Spirits’, in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. by Barbara Walker, 11-45 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), [hereafter Hufford, ‘Beings without bodies’], p. 28; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, pp. 5, 206, 239, 241, 243-245.

⁴¹ Moody, *Life after life*, pp. 14, 16.

⁴² Sam Parnia, D.G. Waller, R. Yeates, and P. Fenwick, ‘A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of the Incidence, Features and Aetiology of Near Death Experiences in Cardiac Arrest Survivors’, *Resuscitation*, Vol. 48 (2001), 149-156, [hereafter Parnia *et al*, ‘Qualitative and Quantitative Study of NDEs’], p. 150; Bruce Greyson, Janice Miner Holden and Debbie James, *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), [hereafter Greyson, Holden and James, *Handbook of NDEs*], pp. 2-4, 7; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, pp. 1, 200; Moody, *Life after life*, p. 5; Kenneth Ring and Sharon Cooper, ‘Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in the Blind: a Study of Apparent Eyeless Vision’, *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Vol 16, No. 2 (1997), 101-147, p. 101.

⁴³ Nancy L. Zingrone and Carlos S. Alvarado, ‘Pleasurable Western Adult Near-Death Experiences: Features, Circumstances, and Incidence’, in *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*, ed. by Bruce Greyson, Janice Miner Holden and Debbie James, 17-40 (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), [hereafter Zingrone and Alvarado, ‘Pleasurable Western Adult NDEs’], p. 36.

There have been several attempts to list and categorise the ‘unusual’, ‘transcendental’ and ‘mystical’ features of NDEs. Moody reported eleven common features regarding phenomenology such as a feeling of peace, experimenting an OBE and approaching a border or limit.⁴⁴ In 1983 Greyson developed the ‘NDE scale’ which has been widely used and accepted by scholars to “measure” the NDE’s depth and content.⁴⁵ It encompasses Moody’s list (except the ineffability and dark tunnel items) and included new features. The most recent attempt to have a standardized scale was the one developed by Martial *et al* which was called the ‘Near-Death Experience Content (NDE-C) scale’.⁴⁶ This scale regrouped and changed the wording of the ‘NDE-scale’ and added five more items to it, which included the two that Moody reported and were not considered for the ‘NDE-scale’.

Groth-Marnat and Summers found a positive correlation between the NDE depth (measured by Greyson’s NDE scale) and life changes, where NDErs had significantly greater changes than non-NDErs who lived ‘life-threatening situations’.⁴⁷ On the contrary, Phyllis Atwater argued that it is not the number of elements found in an NDE (what the NDE scale rates) but stress in the experiencer’s context, the factor that makes a ‘threshold experience’, one ‘that pushes a person beyond one’s limits’.⁴⁸

Because NDEs have elements of transcendence, spirituality, consciousness and self-transformation, Greyson, Pennachio and Janice Holden considered that NDEs are mystical, transpersonal and or spiritual experiences.⁴⁹ Transpersonal experiences are ‘experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or

⁴⁴ Moody, *Life after life*, pp. 25-26, 28-30, 34, 55, 58, 64, 73, 77.

⁴⁵ Greyson, ‘NDE scale’, pp. 371, 373; Robert Waxman, ‘Spiritual aftereffects of incongruous near-death experiences: A heuristic approach’, (doctoral dissertation, Saybrook University, 2012), p. 22; Zingrone and Alvarado, ‘Pleasurable Western Adult NDEs’, p. 36.

⁴⁶ Martial *et al*, ‘The NDE-C Scale’, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Gary Groth-Marnat and Roger Summers, ‘Altered Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors Following Near-Death Experiences’, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (1998), 110-125, [hereafter Groth-Marnat and Summers, ‘Altered Beliefs’], pp. 111, 117, 120.

⁴⁸ Phyllis M. H. Atwater, ‘Guest Editorial: NDE as a Threshold Experience’, *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2011), 439-449, [hereafter Atwater, ‘NDE as a Threshold Experience’], pp. 439-441, 443.

⁴⁹ Greyson, ‘Incidence of NDEs’, p. 92; Pennachio, ‘NDE as mystical experience’, pp. 70-71; Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’, pp. 65-67.

cosmos'.⁵⁰ In this sense, NDEs may be related also to other forms of mystical or religious experiences, such as the ineffable and noetic states described by William James.⁵¹ So, NDEs can be treated as examples of mystical/spiritual/religious/transpersonal experiences.

William James stated that mystical experiences are to be known and valued by their 'fruits'.⁵² It does not mean that the origin and phenomenology of mystical experiences are to be ignored, instead, meaningful insights are located in the consequences, after-effects and changes of the experiencers. Between the usual aftereffects in NDErs are a heightened sense of spirituality and purpose in life, a belief that one survives death or belief in an afterlife, loss of fear of death, increased will to help, love and be compassionate with others, less competitive and materialistic feelings, heightened perception of self-worth and less 'concern for others' opinions of oneself' and appreciation of life, everyday moments and nature.⁵³

Between the different explanations given to the NDE phenomenon, there are psychological, physiological/neurobiological and transcendental theories.⁵⁴ For the first one, expectation, depersonalization, dissociation, and fantasy proneness

⁵⁰ Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan, 'On Transpersonal Definitions', *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1993), 199-207, [hereafter Walsh and Vaughan, 'Transpersonal Definitions'], p. 203.

⁵¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1902]), [hereafter James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*], p. 295.

⁵² James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. xxxii, 21.

⁵³ Gordon, 'Ethnographic Study of NDE impact', pp. 123-125; Groth-Marnat and Summers, 'Altered Beliefs', p. 111; Sartori, *What is a NDE*, chapter 4; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 138, 143, 146, 160, 163; Bruce Greyson and Kenneth Ring, 'The Life Changes Inventory - Revised', *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Vol 23, No. 1 (2004), 41-54, [hereafter Greyson and Ring, 'Life Changes Inventory - Revised'], p. 42; Atwater, 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 445.

⁵⁴ Bruce Greyson, Emily Williams Kelly, and Edward F. Kelly, 'Explanatory Models for Near-Death Experiences' in *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*, ed. by Bruce Greyson, Janice Miner Holden and Debbie James, 213-234 (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), [hereafter Greyson *et al*, 'Explanatory Models for NDEs'], pp. 214, 217, 228; Vanessa Charland-Verville, Charlotte Martial, Helena Cassol, and Steven Laureys, 'Near-Death Experiences: Actual Considerations' in *Coma and Disorders of Consciousness*, ed. by Caroline Schnakers and Steven Laureys, 235-263 (Cham: Springer, 2018), [hereafter Charland-Verville *et al*, 'NDEs: Actual Considerations'], p. 255; Parnia *et al*, 'Qualitative and Quantitative Study of NDEs', p. 150.

are the main hypothesis, but no conclusive outcomes have been achieved.⁵⁵ For the second model, the phenomenon has been studied from a biochemical, neurochemical, pharmacological and neuroanatomical perspective where hypoxia, hypercarbia, REM and hallucinations are some of the frequent topics that emerge in the discussion.⁵⁶ However, as Charland-Verville *et al* argue, ‘there is currently no consensual or satisfying scientific explanation for NDEs’.⁵⁷

The third theory, the transcendental one, claims that ‘consciousness functions outside the body’ as stated by Greyson *et al* and supports the ‘survival hypothesis’ (the mind/soul survives the death of the body).⁵⁸ In other words, it favours the “reality” of what is lived, seen and felt during the experience.⁵⁹ The most frequent arguments used in this transcendental view are the enhanced mental activity seen in NDErs, the ‘veridical out-of-body perceptions’, the life-changing aftereffects and the visions of deceased people, especially when the NDEr does not know that the person visualized is dead.⁶⁰ For now, no unique model has strong “proofs” but the transcendental theory dominates NDEs research.⁶¹

2.2.2. NDEs in the Colombian context

Colombia is a very religious country, several surveys have estimated that between 83-93% of the population consider themselves affiliated to a religion (mainly Catholics and Christians).⁶² Even though, in my research about religious/mystical

⁵⁵ Greyson *et al*, ‘Explanatory Models for NDEs’, pp. 214-216; Charland-Verville *et al*, ‘NDEs: Actual Considerations’, p. 256.

⁵⁶ Greyson *et al*, ‘Explanatory Models for NDEs’, pp. 217-219, 224; Charland-Verville *et al*, ‘NDEs: Actual Considerations’, pp. 256-257; Parnia *et al*, ‘Qualitative and Quantitative Study of NDEs’, p. 150; L. Stafford Betty, ‘Are they Hallucinations or are they Real? The Spirituality of Deathbed and Near-Death Visions’, *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (2006), 37-49, [hereafter Betty, ‘Are they Hallucinations or are they Real?’], pp. 39-44.

⁵⁷ Charland-Verville *et al*, ‘NDEs: Actual Considerations’, p. 257.

⁵⁸ Greyson *et al*, ‘Explanatory Models for NDEs’, p. 221; Charland-Verville *et al*, ‘NDEs: Actual Considerations’, pp. 255, 259; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, p. 16.

⁵⁹ Betty, ‘Are they Hallucinations or are they Real?’, p. 39; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ Greyson *et al*, ‘Explanatory Models for NDEs’, pp. 228-231; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, p. 17; Betty, ‘Are they Hallucinations or are they Real?’, pp. 40-43; Charland-Verville *et al*, ‘NDEs: Actual Considerations’, p. 255.

⁶¹ Charland-Verville *et al*, ‘NDEs: Actual Considerations’, p. 259.

⁶² William Mauricio Beltrán, *Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal: Pluralización religiosa, secularización y cambio social en Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2013), [hereafter Beltrán, *Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal*], p. 101; Latinobarómetro, ‘El papa Francisco y la religión en

experiences or NDEs in Colombia, I found that there is a lack of interest in the subject from the academic field. Likewise, Pablo Mella stated that ‘social studies of religion in Latin-American have paid little attention to mysticism’.⁶³ He added that this might be due to the scientific/empiricist mentality of the Latin-American researchers.⁶⁴

So, as expected, testimonies of NDEs are mainly found in Colombian popular culture (newspapers, radio stations, and TV shows) especially in the last decade.⁶⁵

Chile y América Latina’, 2018, <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latNews.jsp> [accessed September 13, 2021], [hereafter Latinobarómetro, ‘El papa Francisco’], p. 15; Gallup World Poll, ‘Wellcome Global Monitor’, 2018, <https://wellcome.org/reports/wellcome-global-monitor/2018/appendix-country-level-data> [accessed September 13, 2021], [hereafter Gallup World Poll, ‘Wellcome Global Monitor’]; Win-Gallup International Poll, ‘Global Index of Religion and Atheism’, 2012, <https://pdfcoffee.com/win-gallup-international-global-index-of-religiosity-and-atheism-2012-2-pdf-free.html> [accessed September 13, 2021], [hereafter Win-Gallup, ‘Global Index of Religion and Atheism’], p. 15.

⁶³ Pablo Mella, “‘Esto no es una pipa”. Mística y estudios de la religión en América Latina: una perspectiva liberadora’, in *América Latina y el Caribe. Territorios religiosos y desafíos para el diálogo*, ed. by Aurelio Alonso (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2008), 365- 395, [hereafter Mella, ‘Mística en América Latina’], p. 365. Original quote in Spanish: ‘Los estudios sociales de la religión en América Latina prácticamente no han prestado atención a la mística’. All translations of Spanish texts are my own.

⁶⁴ Mella, ‘Mística en América Latina’, pp. 366-367.

⁶⁵ Camilo Jiménez Santofimio, “‘Como estamos viviendo, la estamos embarrando”, Juan Manuel Correal, más conocido como ‘Papuchis’, publicó un libro sobre su experiencia con la muerte’, journalistic item for *Semana* journal, 19 august 2013, <https://www.semana.com/como-estamos-viviendo-estamos-embarrando/354635-3/> [accessed September 13, 2021]; Vanguardia, “‘Vi el cielo y el infierno”, dice hombre que resucitó en hospital de Bogotá’, journalistic item for Vanguardia newspaper, 02 november 2013, <https://www.vanguardia.com/colombia/vi-el-cielo-y-el-infierno-dice-hombre-que-resucito-en-hospital-de-bogota-ECVL232215> [accessed September 13, 2021]; Centro Gnóstico Anael, *Testimonio de Ernesto Samper - Murió y Regresó a la Vida*, online video recording, YouTube, 22 March 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEFbRSyhqLg>, [accessed September 13, 2021]; Diana Milena Ravelo, ‘Gloria Polo, la mujer que se “enfrentó” a un rayo y vive para contarlo’, journalistic item for *El Tiempo* newspaper, 31 october 2014, <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-14770075>, [accessed September 13, 2021]; José Antonio Sánchez, ‘La científica que dice haber regresado de la muerte y hoy cree en Dios’, journalistic item for *El Tiempo* newspaper, 01 april 2015, <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-15505296> [accessed September 13, 2021]; Noticias RCN, ‘Dispuesto a contar: Bayardo Ardila y su lucha por sobrevivir’, journalistic item for RCN TV news, 29 october 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp-iAYQ7b-w> [accessed September 13, 2021]; Redacción BLU Radio, “‘Vi el túnel”, sorprendente confesión de ‘la gorda’ Fabiola’, journalistic item for BLU Radio station, 22 July 2019, <https://www.bluradio.com/entretenimiento/vi-el-tunel-sorprendente-confesion-de-la-gorda-fabiola> [accessed September 13, 2021]; Canal REDMÁS, *Más Allá: Experiencias cercanas a la muerte, por red+*, online video recording, YouTube, 20 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pI2ziUZpw9Q> [accessed September 13, 2021],

More recently, anthropologist Esteban Cruz gave a unique academic turn to the phenomenon by defining it, exposing worldwide NDE research and the transcription of some interviews held with local NDEers.⁶⁶ Another attempt to give an academic feel to NDEs in this South American country, was the sole undergraduate study of NDEs made by psychologists Clara Cantor *et al.*⁶⁷ Between the findings is that six of ten experiencers reported that ‘death’s meaning is a transcendent step from a physical state to a spiritual one’. Besides, it was concluded that the symbolic representation of beliefs is very related to what was lived during the NDE.

3. METHODOLOGY

As stated in the introduction, the main methods used were questionnaires and interviews, where the former guided the latter so interviews could respond to the research question. Since the project’s aim is related to cosmology, *what*, *how* and *why* type of questions are the key ones. *What* kind of queries are approached to find facts and ideas, *how* to processes and *Why* to reasons and explanations. Judith Bell claims that surveys serve well with *what* and *how* kind of questions but not with *why* ones.⁶⁸ So she recommends using answers of surveys as pointers to develop in interviews, where body language can be examined and thoughts and emotions can be deepened. Adding to this, Alan Bryman affirms that qualitative

interview to Antonio Navarro Wolf, minute 29; Pulzo, ‘Las 2 dramáticas ocasiones en las que Luz Amparo Álvarez se “burló” de la muerte’, journalistic item for Pulzo online newspaper, 20 october 2019, <https://www.pulzo.com/entretenimiento/luz-amparo-alvarez-salvo-morir-2-veces-PP787287> [accessed September 13, 2021]; Caracol Radio, *La unión entre la ciencia y la espiritualidad*, Podcast “En Armonía, Clara Estrada”, 28 September 2020, <https://alacarta.caracol.com.co/audio/1601327427347/> [accessed September 13, 2021], interview to Ingrid Honkala, minute 3:45.

⁶⁶ Esteban Cruz Niño, *Vida después de la muerte: Testimonios del más allá* (Bogotá: Penguin Random House, 2020), [hereafter Cruz, *Vida después de la muerte*], pp. 53-55, 77-81, 128-131, 135-136, 138-140, 171-174, 179, 190-195, 199, 211.

⁶⁷ Cantor *et al.*, ‘Cambios en las creencias sobre la muerte en personas con ECM’, pp. 52, 86, 97. Original quote in Spanish: ‘El significado de la muerte es un paso trascendente de un estado físico a uno espiritual’.

⁶⁸ Judith Bell, *Doing your Research Project* (New York: Open University Press, 2005), [hereafter Bell, *Research Project*], pp. 14, 157, 225-226.

research help to ‘view the linkages between events and activities and to explore people’s interpretations of the factors which produce such connections’.⁶⁹

The procedures and sampling quantities were based on several matters. First, the whole research was conducted within the covid-19 crisis which made it difficult to have face-to-face contact. Second, because of the small-scale nature of the project, it was not desired to have a representative sample of the population of NDErs in Colombia, instead, an exploratory sample was used. Martyn Denscombe affirmed that these types of samples are useful for small-scale projects and when surveys are to be used to guide qualitative research.⁷⁰

Since we are dealing with testimonies about personal experiences, a phenomenological approach was used. Denscombe argued that this type of research deals with human experience and focuses on first-hand testimonies by presenting their original beliefs, perceptions, meanings and emotions.⁷¹ For a researcher, this can be difficult if those views and understandings challenge his own cosmology. To help in this matter, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, one of the proponents of the “ontological turn”, suggests to ‘take them seriously’ allowing ‘that “visions” are not beliefs, not consensual views, but rather worlds seen objectively’.⁷² On her part, Bowie proposed to use a ‘cognitive, empathetic engagement’ to research death and related phenomena, where the methodology is focused on a curious and open-minded approach where the researcher does not bring in presumptions of its own worldview.⁷³ This means to be empathetic, to be willing to learn and engage with the informer even if this implies being vulnerable to what is being told and not act as ‘an “objective”, emotionless reporter of external “facts”’.⁷⁴

Recruitment was done mainly using personal contacts and social media (Whatsapp, Facebook and LinkedIn), and a few came through a leader of a

⁶⁹ Bryman, *Quantity and Quality*, p. 102.

⁷⁰ Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide. For Small-Scale Social Research Projects* (New York: Open University Press, 2014), [hereafter Denscombe, *Good Research Guide*], p. 63.

⁷¹ Denscombe, *Good Research Guide*, pp. 141-142.

⁷² Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, ‘Zeno and the Art of Anthropology: Of Lies, Beliefs, Paradoxes, and Other Truths’, trans. by Antonia Walford, *Common Knowledge*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2011), 128-145, p. 133.

⁷³ Bowie, ‘Building Bridges, Dissolving Boundaries’, pp. 698-699, 703, 711.

⁷⁴ Bowie, ‘Building Bridges, Dissolving Boundaries’, p. 711.

spiritual organization that agreed to distribute a request for experiencers. It was determined during the recruitment process that there would be no limit on the time that has passed since the experience, based on Greyson's claim that the memory of the NDE's main elements is not lost, nor changed over time.⁷⁵

Fieldwork was done during May 2020 and March 2021. A pilot questionnaire was done first, as suggested by Bell, with personal contacts.⁷⁶ From their suggestions, several changes were made to the survey. After this, I asked two NDErs to pilot this second version. From their comments, some changes were done to reach the final version.

The final questionnaire (see a blank copy in Appendix 1) was answered by 38 Colombian adults (over 18 years old), but only 30 of them reported having had an experience whose characteristics fit what was defined by Moody, Greyson and Shushan on NDEs.⁷⁷ Therefore, eight people were removed from the target group. For example, some people reported being near the death of a relative, having had a mystical experience but not in a health situation or having a risk of death but not identifying any mystical elements.

Thereby, for the present research, participants had to fulfil two basic elements to say they had an NDE and not an "NDE-like" situation. First, to have lived themselves a near-death situation where their life was threatened or health compromised, and second, to report something they considered as 'unusual', 'spiritual', 'transcendent' and or 'mystical' during the episode. Some participants had doubts about the second element and before answering the questionnaire asked for my help to discern if they had an NDE or not; usually, they received a "yes" answer.

The design of the questionnaire included three sections: demographic information, description of the NDE and cosmology related questions. In the second section, I decided not to use Greyson's scale for three reasons.⁷⁸ First, it would make the questionnaire too long. Second, this research is not focused on measuring the

⁷⁵ Bruce Greyson, 'Consistency of near-death experience accounts over two decades: Are reports embellished over time?', *Resuscitation*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (2007), 407-411, p. 410.

⁷⁶ Bell, *Research Project*, p. 147.

⁷⁷ Moody, *Life after life*, pp. 14, 16; Greyson, 'Near-death experiences', p. 315; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Greyson, 'NDE scale', pp. 372-373.

NDEs “depth”, rather the aim is to understand the meaning the event had for the NDErs. And third, I found wording restrictive in some questions and not all major phenomenological NDE features were covered.

From the people who volunteered to do an interview (77% of the group), I purposely selected ten individuals that had diverse opinions according to their questionnaire responses. These ten individuals were approached for a first interview that lasted between 1.5 and 3.5 hours. Months later they were interviewed for a second time (a couple even held a third interview) to delve into themes that emerged during the analysis and to resolve doubts. These interviews lasted around 70 min. In some cases, punctual doubts or questions were discussed via text messages or audios. All interviews used an online semi-structured format using the Zoom software, where the video camera was enabled to look at the people’s corporal movements (see guiding questions in Appendix 2).

For the analysis of data, transcription and coding processes were performed. Denscombe described that coding is tagging the information and then classifying it into categories.⁷⁹ Thematic coding was done by focusing on four major themes (as presented in the literature review): phenomenology of the NDE, what is real, a Beyond, and impact in worldview. This was done with the aid of the Atlas.Ti software.

Greyson, Holden and James raised the difficulty of ‘how to establish that experiencers have in fact changed as a result of the NDE’, and not because of ‘aging, maturity or other life experiences’.⁸⁰ To this end, I was careful on those types of questions, trying to delve with the interviewees on how the NDE had influence, if any, in changes they have had in their life.

Concerning ethics, before answering, the participants were provided with my identification, the aim and importance of the study, and the confidentiality agreements. This was based on the Ethical guidelines given by BERA (British Educational Research Association). All participants authorized the usage of their data, and those who were interviewed signed informed consent forms and approved to record video and audio.

⁷⁹ Denscombe, *Good Research Guide*, p. 163.

⁸⁰ Greyson, Holden and James, *Handbook of NDEs*, pp. 12-13.

3.1. Reflexive considerations

The membership role within the target group is important because the examiner has a direct influence in the gathering and analysis of data.⁸¹ I am aware, therefore, that I can be seen mainly as an outsider because I have not had a near-death experience before. Even though, I can partly be an insider because I am Colombian and I had an anomalous experience four years ago, which, during this project, I have found that can be classified as a mystical or spiritual experience.

While evaluating my aftereffects under the literature for this research, I found that I can name my shift as “cosmological”. This self-observation and auto-evaluation can be framed as autoethnography, a method that according to Carolyn Ellis *et al*, ‘seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience’.⁸² In other words, my particular experience, both the experience per se and its aftereffects, was used to help in the comprehension of the NDErs’ worldview and the study of a possible cosmological change.

In some way being a Colombian experiencer that had a cosmological shift, made me know what to ask. This can be regarded as an ‘emic’ perspective (participative, insider) that can enable the researcher to ask contextualised questions. ‘To ask things that make sense in “their” framework’, as stated by Clive Ruggles.⁸³ Acknowledging my subjectivity does not mean that I am not aware of my own biases. Therefore, I was careful not to include leading questions and to avoid the assumption that all experiencers had a cosmological change as I did.

On the other hand, for an ‘etic’ or outsider position it is difficult to have an open environment and trust with the target group.⁸⁴ So, I tried to build confidence by engaging with the participants in a gentle, transparent and professional way. Additionally, in the introductory part of the questionnaire, I said that I was

⁸¹ Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle, ‘The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol 8, No. 1 (2009), 54-63, [hereafter Dwyer and Buckle, ‘Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research’], p. 55.

⁸² Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, ‘Autoethnography: An Overview’, *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2011), 273-290, p. 273.

⁸³ Clive Ruggles, ‘Indigenous Astronomies and Progress in Modern Astronomy’, *Accelerating the Rate of Astronomical Discovery*, Vol. 99 (2010), 1-18, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Dwyer and Buckle, ‘Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research’, p. 58.

sympathetic with those kinds of experiences and an open-minded person that would not judge their beliefs, which echoes Bowie's suggested methodology for afterlife studies.⁸⁵

Some of the trust gained can be verified by some comments made by participants during the interviews. Several told me that they decided to tell me their experience because they knew me and trusted me. Eight participants (27% of the surveyed group) are known but not close people I have met throughout my life. One of the not-known ones told me that at the beginning she was not sure to tell me certain things but later on she decided to do it, she said 'I wanted to tell you that I appreciate a lot that from you, for your listening and open attitude, because it is not easy'.⁸⁶ Another interviewee said that he did not open himself to everybody, he asserted 'I do not feel judgement from your side hence you make me feel well... I can open myself so, so openly, folklorically, or so naturally with you at this moment'.⁸⁷ This tells me that, fortunately, an open environment was achieved during the interviews and that the further testimonies are sincere.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Questionnaire

This section presents the questionnaire results and the discussion versus previous research. The purpose of the survey was to have a broad view of phenomenological aspects of the NDEs lived by Colombian people, and of the diversity of aftereffects that could point to a cosmological change. It was also aimed to help the selection of participants that would be interviewed in a subsequent stage.

The surveyed group consisted of 21 women and 9 men of varied ages, including two experiencers that had the NDE when they were less than twelve years old (see Table 1). Although more Colombian women answered the questionnaire than

⁸⁵ Bowie, 'Building Bridges, Dissolving Boundaries', p. 698.

⁸⁶ Original quote in Spanish: 'Quería decirte que aprecio mucho eso de ti, por tu actitud de escucha y de apertura, porque, pues por eso, no es fácil'.

⁸⁷ Original quote in Spanish: 'no siento juzgamiento de tu parte entonces me haces sentir bien... A que en este momento yo me pueda abrir tan, tan abiertamente, folclóricamente, o tan naturalmente contigo'.

men, scholars have found that gender does not affect the incidence of having an NDE.⁸⁸ What may have happened, in agreement with Taylor, is that women were more prone to share their experiences than men.⁸⁹ Furthermore, there was a high level of educational attainment in the group: the majority (83%) has gained at least a professional degree in a university and 60% of the group has done postgraduate studies. Even though there were also informants with lower education levels, confirming that NDEs can happen regardless of the education of the experiencers.⁹⁰ Most of the participants experienced one NDE (73%) while the rest experienced more than one. This supports Atwater's statement that 'it is not uncommon for an individual to have several NDEs during his or her life'.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Janice Miner Holden, Jeffrey Long, and B. Jason MacLurg, 'Characteristics of Western Near-Death Experiencers', in *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*, ed. by Bruce Greyson, Janice Miner Holden and Debbie James, 109-134 (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), [hereafter Holden, Long and MacLurg, 'Characteristics of Western NDErs'], p. 116.

⁸⁹ Taylor, 'Discovering and Living in Unity', p. 39.

⁹⁰ Holden, Long and MacLurg, 'Characteristics of Western NDErs', p. 118.

⁹¹ Phyllis M. H. Atwater, *Near-death experiences: The rest of the story. What they teach us about living, dying, and our true purpose* (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads, 2011), p. 38.

	Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Age at survey (years)	18-29.9	3	10%
	30-39.9	8	27%
	40-49.9	7	23%
	50-59.9	5	17%
	60-69.9	6	20%
	Not available	1	3%
Age at NDE (years)*	5-11.9	2	7%
	12-19.9	5	17%
	20-29.9	11	37%
	30-39.9	8	27%
	40-49.9	3	10%
	50-59.9	1	3%
	60-69.9	0	0%
Near-death situation	Accident related	11	37%
	Illness related	10	33%
	During surgery or childbirth	5	17%
	Homicide/suicide attempt	3	10%
	Others	1	3%
Years that have passed since NDE (measured when they filled the questionnaire)	< 1 year	4	13%
	>= 1 and < 5	4	13%
	>= 5 and < 10	1	3%
	>= 10 and < 20	6	20%
	>= 20 and < 30	9	30%
	>= 30	6	20%
Gender	Masculine	9	30%
	Femenine	21	70%
Residence	Bogotá (capital city)	18	60%
	Another city in Colombia	6	20%
	Another country	6	20%
Place where raised	Cities (urban)	26	87%
	Towns or rural zone (countryside)	4	13%
Highest education level	Technical or technological	5	17%
	Graduate (professional)	7	23%
	Postgraduate (specialisation or master)	16	53%
	Doctorate or higher degrees	2	7%
Quantity of NDEs lived per	One	22	73%
	More than one	8	27%
* For those who had more than one NDE, the age reported is from the NDE that had the biggest impact in the participants.			

Table 1. Demographic information of the surveyed group (n=30)

4.1.1. NDE phenomenology reported by the surveyed group

The thirty Colombian NDErs surveyed were asked to describe their NDE in their own words and no specific questions about the different expected phenomenological aspects were included. This results in having a partial

description of their NDEs because some elements might not have been important for NDErs to tell or they did not want to mention them. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the research, it is not necessary to have a complete picture of the NDEs lived by the surveyed group.

In Table 2 it is shown the more frequent NDE features reported by the thirty surveyed NDErs. As was discussed previously, results should be interpreted as the minimum percentage of experiencers that reported a certain parameter. For example, at least 63% of the group felt peace/calm sensation, and so on.

Comparing to the NDE-C scale that is the more complete study to date of what to expect in NDE phenomenology, all but one parameter was found in the Colombian group. The exception was the *precognition* item which was not reported to be felt *during* the NDE (as it is evaluated in the NDE-C scale) by any of the surveyed NDErs.⁹² Additional characteristics to those covered by the NDE-C scale were found in the surveyed group (highlighted in Table 2 with an asterisk): feeling that it was a unique experience, feeling freedom and feeling that loved ones kept me here. Colombian results can also be covered by the NDE phenomenological themes found by Cassol *et al*, Charland-Verville *et al*, Van Lommel *et al*, and Parnia *et al*.⁹³ This supports the scholarly claim that NDEs are a worldwide phenomenon that also occurs in children.⁹⁴

⁹² Martial *et al*, 'The NDE-C Scale', p. 5. My emphasis.

⁹³ Helena Cassol, Benoît Pétré, Sophie Degrange, Charlotte Martial, Vanessa Charland-Verville, François Lallier, Isabelle Bragard, Michèle Guillaume, and Steven Laureys, 'Qualitative Thematic Analysis of the Phenomenology of Near-Death Experiences', *Plos One*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2018), 1-14, pp. 6-8; Vanessa Charland-Verville, Jean-Pierre Jourdan, Marie Thonnard, Didier Ledoux, Anne-Francoise Donneau, Etienne Quertemont and Steven Laureys, 'Near-death experiences in non-life-threatening events and coma of different etiologies', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, Vol. 8, Art. 203 (2014), 1-8, pp. 3, 6; Pim van Lommel, Ruud van Wees, Vincent Meyers and Ingrid Elfferich, 'Near-death experience in survivors of cardiac arrest: A prospective study in the Netherlands', *The Lancet*, Vol. 358 (2001), 2039-2045, [hereafter Van Lommel *et al*, 'NDE in survivors of cardiac arrest'], p. 2041; Parnia *et al*, 'Qualitative and Quantitative Study of NDEs', p. 153.

⁹⁴ Parnia *et al*, 'Qualitative and Quantitative Study of NDEs', p. 150; Greyson, Holden and James, *Handbook of NDEs*, pp. 7, 87.

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Peace/calm sensation	19	63%
Feel to be in another world, dimension or environment	19	63%
Feel to be in a journey or path	19	63%
See light or white mist	17	57%
See a human-like entity	15	50%
Unique experience*	15	50%
Undescribable experience	12	40%
Feel being out of the body	11	37%
Feel being in a tunnel-like place	8	27%
Change in time perception	8	27%
Feeling of dying	8	27%
Feel freedom*	7	23%
Hear voices	7	23%
Feel lightweight, like to be floating	7	23%
Feel accompanied by a "presence"	5	17%
Feel that loved ones kept me here*	5	17%
Feel warmth	4	13%
Feel that the body does not respond	4	13%
*Not covered by the NDE-C scale		

Table 2. Most common phenomenological parameters reported by the surveyed group (n=30).

On the other hand, 27 surveyed participants (90%) thought the NDE was real, two answered that they did not know if it was real and one did not answer the question. This means that nobody said that it was *not* real. This is aligned with what NDEs researchers have found worldwide in the last three decades: that the experiences are real for NDErs.⁹⁵ Besides, at least three Colombian NDErs interviewed by Cruz and other journalists also stated that the NDEs were real.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ring, *Omega Project*, p. 97; Holden, Long and Maclurg, 'Characteristics of Western NDErs', p. 133; Holden, 'Aftereffects of pSTEs', p. 67; Taylor, 'Discovering and Living in Unity', pp. 85, 92, 100, 160; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, p. 5; Betty, 'Are they Hallucinations or are they Real?', p. 43; Pim van Lommel, 'Near-Death Experiences: The Experience of the Self as Real and Not as an Illusion', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 1234 (2011), 19-28, [hereafter Van Lommel, 'The Experience of the Self as Real'], pp. 26-27.

⁹⁶ Cruz, *Vida después de la muerte*, pp. 122, 131, 195; José Antonio Sánchez, 'La científica que dice haber regresado de la muerte y hoy cree en Dios', journalistic item for El Tiempo newspaper, 01 april 2015, <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-15505296> [accessed September 13, 2021].

4.1.2. NDE impact on the worldview of the surveyed group

There were several questions, that as a whole, were designed to point to a possible NDE impact on worldview in the Colombian NDErs surveyed. As shown in figure 1, 27 participants (90%) think that the NDE gave them at least moderate learnings. This echoes the noetic quality, or ‘states of knowledge’ or ‘insight’, of James’ mystical experiences.⁹⁷

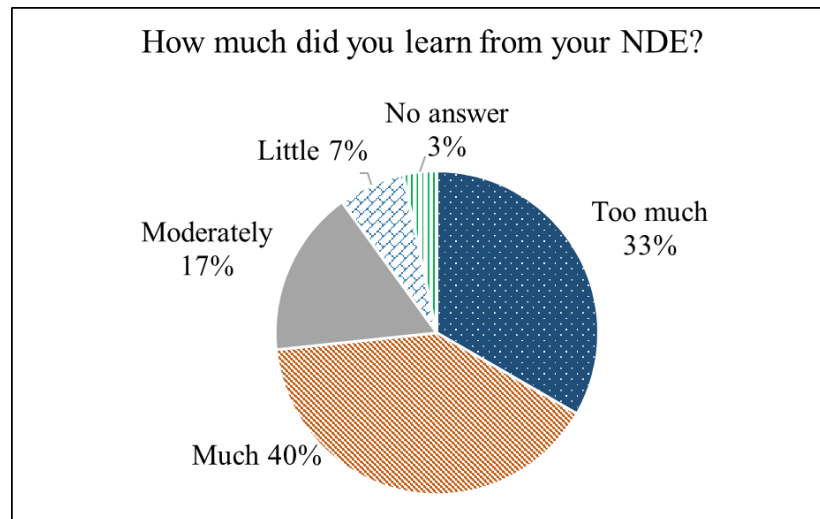


Figure 1. Degree of NDEs learnings according to the surveyed group (n=30)

Even if the majority of the surveyed participants felt that the NDE brought many learnings, not all of them thought it was a life-changing event. In figure 2 it is shown that 24 of them (80%) think that the NDE did change their lives at least in a moderate way. Moreover, 23 participants (77%) agree or “strongly” agree that the NDE has given a new meaning to their life (figure 3). Similarly, 77% perceived psychological or behavioural changes as being triggered by the NDE. On the contrary, six respondents (20%) did not perceive any of these changes.

⁹⁷ James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 295.

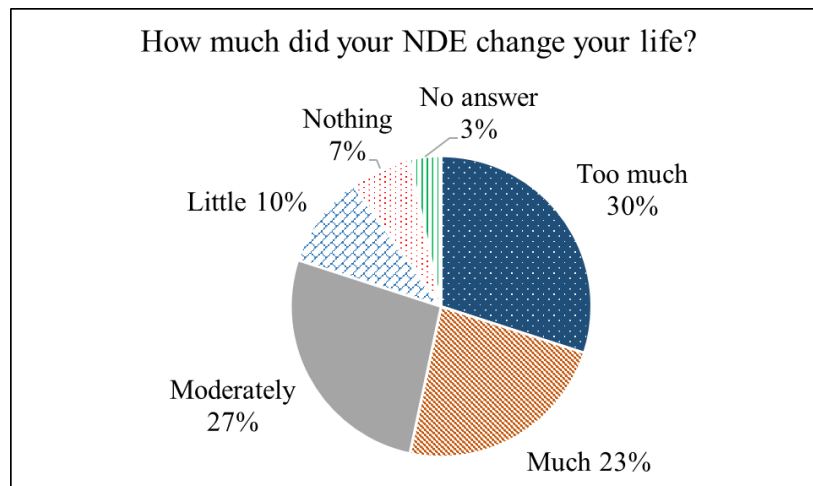


Figure 2. Degree of life-change perception due to the NDE according to the surveyed group (n=30)

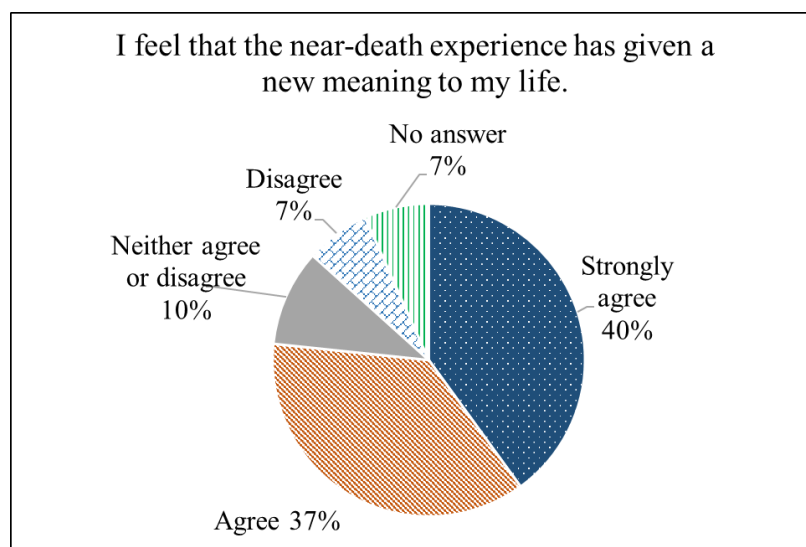


Figure 3. Level of agreement of perceiving the NDE as a meaningful event according to the surveyed group (n=30)

The above results challenge the notion that *all* NDErs perceive changes in their lives due to the experience, such as Gordon's findings where 100% of her NDErs described life changes or Ring's and Evelyn Elsaesser's assertion that an NDE 'has the power to drastically alter and improve the lives of those who are visited by one'.⁹⁸ The last quote implies that *every* person that has an NDE will have drastic changes in their lives, where my research and others have found that this is

⁹⁸ Gordon, 'Ethnographic Study of NDE impact', p. 124; Kenneth Ring and Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino, *Lessons from the light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience* (Reading: Perseus Books, 1998), [hereafter Ring and Elsaesser, *Lessons from the light*], p. 4.

not exact. More recent studies are closer to my findings, between 14% to 21% of NDErs reported no aftereffects or said that their life was not changed by the event.⁹⁹ Therefore, not all NDErs are changed by this event but a high percentage (around 70%-80%) do notice important shifts in their lives following their NDE.

Some of these shifts can be in the spiritual and religious context. As shown in Table 3, 24 participants (80%) considered themselves religious before the NDE, usually affiliated to Catholicism and Christianity, which agrees with what one normally finds in the general population in Colombia.¹⁰⁰ But after their NDE only 20 NDErs (67%) consider themselves to be affiliated with a religion. Results also show an increase (from 10% to 33%) in the participants that consider themselves *spiritual but not aligned with a religion in specific* following their NDEs, where the majority were Catholics that turned to be *spiritual*.

Parameter	"Before the NDE I considered myself _____"		"Nowadays I consider myself _____"	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Spiritual but not aligned with a religion in specific	3	10%	10	33%
Atheist	0	0%	0	0%
Agnostic	1	3%	0	0%
Catholic	22	73%	15	50%
Other	0	0%	1	3%
Christian - Includes evangelic, protestants and pentecostals	2	7%	4	13%
I do not know or did not know	2	7%	0	0%
Total	30	100%	30	100%

Table 3. Changes in religious affiliation within the surveyed group.

⁹⁹ Russell Noyes, Jr., Peter Fenwick, Janice Miner Holden and Sandra Rozan Christian, 'Aftereffects of Pleasurable Western Adult Near-Death Experiences', in *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*, ed. by Bruce Greyson, Janice Miner Holden and Debbie James, 41-62 (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), [hereafter Noyes *et al*, 'Aftereffects of Western NDEs'], p. 45; Atwater, 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 442; Jeffrey Long and Paul Perry, *Evidence of the Afterlife: The Science of Near-Death Experiences* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), [hereafter Long and Perry, *Evidence of the Afterlife*], p. 177.

¹⁰⁰ Beltrán, *Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal*, p. 101; Latinobarómetro, 'El papa Francisco', p. 15; Gallup World Poll, 'Wellcome Global Monitor'; Win-Gallup, 'Global Index of Religion and Atheism', p. 15.

There is also a very high trend of participants (93%) that believed in God (with doubts or not) before the event happened (see Table 4). This, again, is aligned to the Colombian religious context, where 94% of the population considered themselves ‘believers’.¹⁰¹ From those believers that had doubts, many of them moved to be sure of the existence of God following their NDEs, mainly because the NDE *confirmed* its existence.

Parameter	"Select the statement that best fits the religious beliefs that you had before the NDE ."		"Select the statement that best fits your current religious beliefs."	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I know that God exists.	23	77%	26	87%
I have some doubts, but I believe in God.	5	17%	2	7%
I do not believe in God, but I believe in a higher power/force.	0	0%	1	3%
I do not believe in God, but I know there is a higher power/force.	1	3%	0	0%
I do not believe in God, nor in a higher power.	0	0%	0	0%
I didn't know.	0	0%	0	0%
None of the above.	1	3%	1	3%
Total	30	100%	30	100%

Table 4. Changes in religious beliefs about a higher power or God within the surveyed group.

On the other hand, the low trend of going away from organized religions and towards an individual spirituality, confirms some scholarly studies and challenges others because there is no ‘clear pattern of pre- and post-NDE religious affiliation’.¹⁰² Even though, through the interviews, it will be studied how the NDE had any influence on religious and spiritual beliefs and how this is immersed in the cosmological context.

Adding to the changes perceived by the Colombian NDErs, participants reported physical and psychic changes that may have been triggered by the NDE (see

¹⁰¹ Beltrán, *Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal*, p. 92.

¹⁰² Holden, Long and Maclurg, ‘Characteristics of Western NDErs’, p. 119.

Appendix 3). These results confirm that usually NDEs or pSTEs do encompass various shifts in the physical and psychic levels.¹⁰³

But even if there is a vast majority of the Colombian participants that perceive numerous changes after their NDEs, not the same quantity agrees that this makes the event *transformative*. As shown in figure 2, only 53% state that their NDE changed their life to a high degree. This is aligned to the result that half of them (50%) agree or “strongly” agree that they felt transformed after their NDE (figure 4).

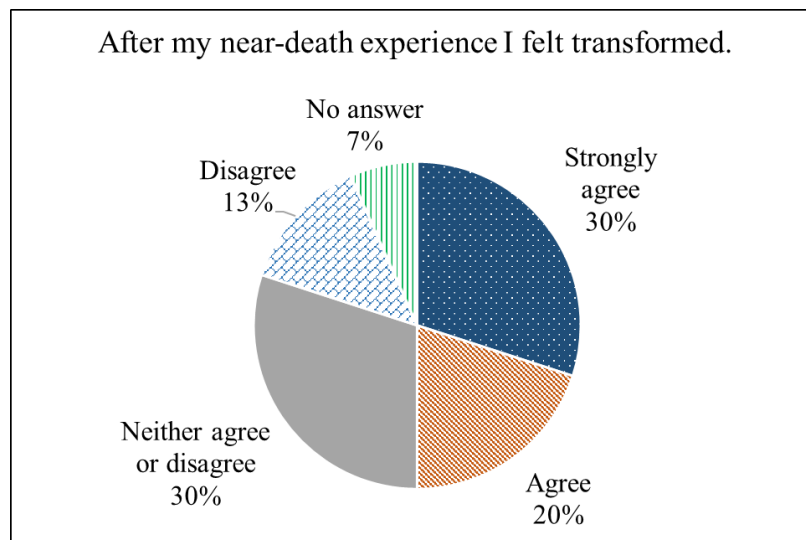


Figure 4. Level of agreement of perceiving the NDE as a transformative event according to the surveyed group (n=30)

These results challenge what one can normally find in NDE studies: that it is an event that transforms the *majority* of the lives of those who experience them.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Farnoosh Massoudian Nouri, ‘Electromagnetic aftereffects of near-death experiences’ (doctoral dissertation, University of North Texas, 2008), pp. 67, 97; Cheryl Fracasso and Harris Friedman, ‘Electromagnetic Aftereffects of Near-Death Experiences: A Preliminary Report on a Series of Studies Currently Under Way’, *Journal of Transpersonal Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2012), 34-55, p. 50; Bruce Greyson, Mitchell B. Liester, Lee Kinsey, Steve Alsum and Glen Fox, ‘Electromagnetic Phenomena Reported by Near-Death Experiencers’, *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2015), 213-243, pp. 223, 227; Ring and Elsaesser, *Lessons from the light*, pp. 128-129; Kason, *Farther shores*, pp. 179, 216, 225; Gordon, ‘Ethnographic Study of NDE impact’, p. 124; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 240; Groth-Marnat and Summers, ‘Altered Beliefs’, p. 111; Noyes *et al*, ‘Aftereffects of Western NDEs’, pp. 49-50; Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’, p. 71, 73-74.

¹⁰⁴ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 191, 193, 243; Kenneth Ring, *Heading toward Omega: in Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: Quill,

But, who is saying that the event is *transformative*? In the cited literature, researchers are the ones who relate NDEs with ‘transformation’ or ‘ontological shift’, where it is implied that this occurs to most of the experiencers.¹⁰⁵ On the contrary, in the present research, it was the experiencers the ones who decided if they felt transformed or not. A better naming is the one used by Holden where an NDE can be classified as a ‘*potentially* spiritually transformative experience’.¹⁰⁶ In other words, NDEs have the potential to transform (in this there is unanimous scholarly agreement, including present research), but it depends on some factors such as ‘experience, experiencer, and context’ as specified by Holden.¹⁰⁷ These factors are the ones to be studied in more detail in section 4.2.3 with the interviews’ findings.

As discussed in the introduction a cosmological shift can be associated with ontological changes, radical shifts in reality and worldview, that a lay person can relate to the common word *transformation*.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the survey was useful to know that some NDErs are not cosmologically impacted by their experience and that half of them have the potential to experience this type of change.

4.1.3. The perception of a Beyond in the surveyed group

Besides the life-changing or transformation feeling perceived by the surveyed group, their before-after thoughts about something similar to the *Beyond* term I delineated in section 2.1.3 also add to what could be a cosmological shift. This is because a Beyond can be a part of the structure of reality for experiencers, and this notion is deeply cosmological.

Several questions were raised in the survey to have a broad overview of these thoughts (see Table 5). About thinking there is *another world or dimension different from the physical world we live in*, the pre-NDE scenario started with

1985); [hereafter Ring, *Heading toward Omega*], p. 120; Van Lommel *et al*, ‘NDE in survivors of cardiac arrest’, p. 2043; Greyson and Ring, ‘The Life Changes Inventory - Revised’, p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 193, 243; Ring, *Heading toward Omega*, p. 120; Van Lommel *et al*, ‘NDE in survivors of cardiac arrest’, p. 2043; Greyson and Ring, ‘Life Changes Inventory - Revised’, p. 42.

¹⁰⁶ Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’, p. 66. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’, p. 70.

¹⁰⁸ Kripal, *The Flip*, pp. 11-12, 17; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 193; Kason, *Farther shores*, p. 21; Davis *et al*, ‘Entity encounter experiences’, p. 1017.

53% of agreement (Table 5) and then increased to 73% of agreement (22 NDErs) in the post-NDE context. It is to highlight that not only the sum increased, but also the percentage of people who chose the *Strongly agree* option.

What do you think about the following statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No answer	Quantity of agreement
I went to another world or dimension during my NDE.	30%	23%	30%	7%	7%	3%	53%
Before my NDE I thought that there was another world or dimension different from the physical world we live in.	17%	37%	20%	10%	3%	13%	53%
I think that there is another world or dimension different from the physical world we live in.	43%	30%	13%	7%	0%	7%	73%
Before my NDE I believed there was life after death.	23%	23%	30%	7%	0%	17%	47%
Since my NDE I believe there is life after death.	37%	23%	17%	10%	3%	10%	60%

Table 5. Results to survey questions related to a Beyond (n=30).

Even if most of the surveyed group nowadays agree with the existence of another realm or dimension different to the physical, not the same amount agree with the belief that there is *life after death*. Before their NDE 14 participants (47%) agreed with this belief and after the event, 18 experiencers (60%) agreed. From the additional comments regarding their post-NDE thoughts about *another world or dimension* three themes emerged. First, it was very common that NDErs used elements of their experience to describe a Beyond. Second, some of them described the Beyond as a dimension, plane or world that differs from our physical world. And third, the Beyond was also related to what happens after you die, or afterlife. Some examples of verbatim for each of these themes are displayed in Table 6.

Theme	Verbatim
Description of a Beyond using the NDE elements experienced	It must exist, I perceive that I was going to another place of a very different condition from my world.
	Yes, in fact it is the spirit the one that comes out of this shell called the body.
	Yes, I felt it and Jesus told me and confirm it.
	I believe there is a heaven, a place to be at peace.
The Beyond as a dimension, place different to the physical	I firmly believe that there is a dimension in which souls unfold freely.
	I am sure that there are entities that live in a different way than the physical.
	I do believe that there is another plane, there must be an answer to so many phenomena that happen.
	Today I believe not only that there is another world or dimension, but many different dimensions to the physical world in which we live in.
The Beyond as an afterlife	I think that when we die we must go to a different place from our world.
	I believe that heaven exists to live an eternity.
	The soul lives forever. That after death is another space full of light and peace. We detach ourselves from this body and transcend.

Table 6. Examples of verbatim of the diverse meanings and descriptions of a Beyond within the surveyed group.

Hence, the concept of the Beyond as Bowies' afterlife, was one way used by the surveyed participants to depict a Beyond, but it became short to the testimonies that I was receiving.¹⁰⁹ Some of them described something bigger, another plane not restricted only to those that have died. However, its features were not very clear but a good starting point to delve into the interviews. Moreover, the increase towards a belief in a Beyond (name it as *life after death* or *another world*) supports scholarly claims that after their NDEs, experiencers tend to increase their beliefs in life after death, afterlife and one's survival beyond death, and this notion was 'based on personal experience' as stated by Sutherland.¹¹⁰ This strengthened belief in a Beyond found in the surveyed group, that for some was *confirmed*

¹⁰⁹ Bowie, 'Building Bridges, Dissolving Boundaries', p. 701.

¹¹⁰ Gordon, 'Ethnographic Study of NDE impact', p. 123; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, pp. 81-82, 239; Ring and Elsaesser, *Lessons from the light*, p. 127; Van Lommel *et al*, 'NDE in survivors of cardiac arrest', p. 2042.

through the experience itself (as some of the verbatim show), can be viewed as a way of expanding the realm of reality, and therefore, adds to the possibility of finding a cosmological shift in the researched NDErs.

4.1.4. Summary of questionnaire findings

The questionnaire gave the necessary information for what it was aimed at. It indicated that NDEs also occur in Colombian people with similar NDE features to those found in the literature. While some NDErs in Colombia do not perceive any changes following their NDEs (around 20-30%), the rest do, and there is a high probability that around half of the surveyed group experienced a cosmological shift in their lives after living the NDE. Those NDErs that have the potential of being cosmologically impacted felt that the NDE transformed them and changed their lives in a great way. Besides, at least 60% of the Colombian NDErs believe or are certain that a Beyond exists, which can be regarded as an afterlife or another world or dimension different to the physical world we live in. The NDE confirmed its existence or introduced new elements to it and this might be why there was an increase in this belief after living their NDEs. The survey's results helped to guide the selection of experiencers to be interviewed to find the underlying meanings, factors and processes that only qualitative research can bring to light.

4.2. Interviews

The interviews aimed to go deep and understand how the NDE impacted their lives, and the reasons behind that influence to see if there were any cosmological elements involved. Even though some experiencers lived their NDEs when they were young, so it was unlikely to see a clear change in their lives, as was also acknowledged by Taylor.¹¹¹ However, it could help to understand if the interviewees (independent of when they had their experience) have a common cosmology. That is the reason why I interviewed two of them (they were eight and twelve years old at the time of the NDE); unlike Taylor who dismissed people who experienced their NDEs when they were under 15 years of age.¹¹² The other

¹¹¹ Taylor, 'Discovering and Living in Unity', p. 39.

¹¹² Taylor, 'Discovering and Living in Unity', p. 39.

eight interviewees had their NDEs while adults and the time that passed since their NDE is very varied, from seven months to more than twenty years.

The first pattern I recognized, was that seven of the ten interviewees lived in a stressful context before their NDEs. They went through suffering/tragic moments: physical, verbal and sexual abuse, abortions, hunger, poverty, death of a child, infidelities, addictions and stressful family conflicts. Three of them, before their NDEs, felt that their lives were worthless, felt tired of life and one of them tried to commit suicide. Their post-NDE scenario is more encouraging: life is now meaningful, suicide thoughts were eradicated, and many of them did changes in their lives to stop/avoid subsequent abuses and addictions. This pre-NDE stressful situation was also reported by other scholars: stress was a frequent theme before NDEs, childhood trauma is reported more frequently by NDErs than by non-NDErs and suicide considerations or actions were reduced after the NDEs.¹¹³ How this stressful context is involved in a cosmological shift is deepened in section 4.2.4.

4.2.1. NDE phenomenology reported by the interviewed group

Each of the first interviews started with a description of their NDEs. This first approach gave a very detailed description, but, not strictly complete as I became aware later when I decided to complete the NDE-C scale with the participants, one month after the article's publication.¹¹⁴ This questionnaire was filled during the second interviews which helped me to gain more qualitative details for each of the items. For those three that had experienced more than one NDE in their lives, we merged them all in one questionnaire.

The scores of the NDE-C scale are tabulated in Table 7. The most frequent items were *peacefulness/well-being* (10/10), *extrasensory perception* (10/10), *harmony/unity* (9/10), *leaving the earthly world* (9/10) and *encounter* (8/10) and were usually rated as strong or extreme sensations. These items were also very

¹¹³ Atwater, 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 440; Holden, Long and MacLurg, 'Characteristics of Western NDErs', pp. 125-126; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 86; Bruce Greyson, 'Incidence of Near-Death Experiences Following Attempted Suicide', *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1986), 40-45, p. 41.

¹¹⁴ Martial *et al*, 'The NDE-C Scale', p. 1.

frequently perceived by the NDE-C group of Martial *et al* (between 82% and 90%) except *encounter* which was felt only by 55% of their participants.¹¹⁵

NDE-C item		Interviewee										Average	Standard deviation
		#1	#2	#3*	#5	#7*	#13	#16	#17*	#20	#24		
NDE-C1	Time perception	1	2	4	3	0	4	4	4	3	0	2.5	1.6
NDE-C2	Speeded thoughts	0	4	0	0	3	0	4	4	0	3	1.8	1.9
NDE-C3	Voice	0	0	4	4	4	0	0	3	0	0	1.5	2.0
NDE-C4	Understanding	1	0	3	0	3	3	4	2	3	2	2.1	1.4
NDE-C5	Peacefulness/well-being	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	3.8	0.4
NDE-C6	Harmony/unity	3	4	0	3	4	2	4	2	4	4	3.0	1.3
NDE-C7	Bright light	4	4	3	0	0	0	4	3	4	3	2.5	1.8
NDE-C8	Unusual sensation	1	0	4	4	0	2	4	3	3	1	2.2	1.6
NDE-C9	Extrasensory perception	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	2	3.5	0.7
NDE-C10	Precognition	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
NDE-C11	Out-of-body experience	0	2	4	0	0	0	4	4	0	4	1.8	2.0
NDE-C12	Leaving the earthly world	3	3	4	0	3	3	4	3	3	3	2.9	1.1
NDE-C13	Life review	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	2	1.0	1.3
NDE-C14	Encounter	4	0	4	4	3	0	4	4	4	3	3.0	1.6
NDE-C15	Non-existence/void/fear	2	0	4	0	3	1	0	3	0	0	1.3	1.6
NDE-C16	Border/point of no return	0	3	3	0	4	0	4	4	0	3	2.1	1.9
NDE-C17	Come back	0	4	0	0	3	2	4	4	0	0	1.7	1.9
NDE-C18	Dying	0	2	4	3	0	0	0	4	3	0	1.6	1.8
NDE-C19	Gateway	0	4	0	0	4	0	4	4	4	4	2.4	2.1
NDE-C20	Ineffability	0	4	4	2	2	1	4	2	2	3	2.4	1.3
Total score		26	47	53	29	47	24	60	63	41	41		
Scale: 0= not at all, none; 1 = slightly; 2 = moderately; 3 = strongly, equivalent in degree to any other strong experience; 4 = extremely, more than any other time in my life and stronger than 3.													
*Lived more than one NDE. Rating covers all NDEs lived by the participant.													

Table 7. Responses from the interviewed group to the NDE-C scale.

Most of the interviewed group (8/10) had a total score higher than 27, the cut-off proposed by Martial *et al*.¹¹⁶ Those two that had lower scores, were the ones who lived their NDEs when they were young and had only one so far. This does not mean that what they lived was not an NDE, as Martial *et al* recognised, it just means that their NDEs were not so rich as others.¹¹⁷

4.2.2. What is *real* for interviewees?

From now on, original quotes will be used to allow the NDErs to express in their own words the findings of this study. Some of them authorized displaying both

¹¹⁵ Martial *et al*, 'The NDE-C Scale', p. 6.

¹¹⁶ Martial *et al*, 'The NDE-C Scale', p. 11.

¹¹⁷ Martial *et al*, 'The NDE-C Scale', p. 11.

name and surname (the latter which will be displayed only on the first mention), while others preferred only their name. None wanted the use of a pseudonym.

Linked to the NDE phenomenology is the feature that for *all* the interviewed participants the NDEs were *real*, as acknowledged by NDErs abroad.¹¹⁸ This means that, for them, everything that was felt, seen, heard and experienced during the NDE actually occurred. Pilar Acosta gave a complete description, ‘real is that it exists, I mean, it was not my mind, it was not my imagination. It is something I lived, I have the certainty of the experience, it is too much real. This was not a dream’.¹¹⁹

Likewise, Luis González said ‘because you feel it, I lived it! I lived it! It is the perception; nobody is going to believe you’ and María stated ‘it is something that I lived, that I experienced, it is not that I made it up or was told about it, but something that I saw. So, it is something that happened’.¹²⁰ Similarly, the rest of the interviewees and some surveyed participants also associate what is real, and the NDE itself, to something lived, experienced and felt with your senses. They deny it was a dream or a mind product because it was a physical sensation or manifestation. And there is a ‘certainty of the reality of the experience’ as was also found by Holden in most pSTERS.¹²¹

Additional to this, five interviewees commented that the consequences or what happened after the experience support the reality of their NDE. Leoncio Bravo was almost killed when some men tried to steal his car. A second before a gunshot, a man’s face appeared in front of him and said ‘Stay calm, move backwards’ and Leoncio did it and reversed the car. In that instant, the gun was fired, and the bullet entered his face. But surprisingly, he had no serious injuries

¹¹⁸ Ring, *Omega Project*, p. 97; Holden, Long and Maclurg, ‘Characteristics of Western NDErs’, p. 133; Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’, p. 67; Taylor, ‘Discovering and Living in Unity’, pp. 85, 92, 100, 160; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, p. 5; Betty, ‘Are they Hallucinations or are they Real?’, p. 43; Van Lommel, ‘The Experience of the Self as Real’, pp. 26-27.

¹¹⁹ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Real es que existe, o sea, no fue mi mente, no fue mi imaginación. Es algo que yo viví, tengo la certeza de la experiencia, es demasiado real. Esto no fue un sueño’. All translations of the Spanish quotes from the participants of this study are my own.

¹²⁰ Original quotes in Spanish: Luis: ‘Porque se siente, ¡yo lo viví! ¡yo lo viví! Es la percepción, nadie te va a creer’. María: ‘Es algo que yo viví, que yo experimenté, no que me lo inventé ni me lo contaron, sino algo que yo vi. Entonces sí es algo que pasó’.

¹²¹ Holden, ‘Aftereffects of pSTEs’, p. 72.

nor needed any surgery at all.¹²² When I asked Leoncio what is real for him, he answered, ‘to see him, hear him, and having acted based on what he told me’.¹²³

Likewise, Erika Doncel described that ‘they are experiences that have happened to me at certain times, but they have to be real and for me, they are more than real because there are still the consequences of that experience. It was real because it is real that I never convulsed again’.¹²⁴ Erika told me that she had seizures since she was a child, she tried a lot of medicines, and nothing appeared to help. After the NDE, when she started her spiritual path through the Christian church she had some mystical experiences which ended in removing the seizures completely from her life, without medical treatment.

Angie went through a similar situation, she suffered from chronic rhinitis that made her even bleed from her nose, she tried many treatments and did not improve. She said that the NDE cured her, and this makes the experience real, ‘I no longer have rhinitis. After that event, about 15 days later, I was surprised because I was suffocating on nothing, I mean, any smell, anything gave me an allergy and then I didn’t’.¹²⁵

Besides the physical and healing changes, some interviewees also acknowledge that other changes in behaviour and beliefs add to the argument that the NDE was real. Juana Santos, who had an OBE during a car accident and stated that felt transformed by the experience, said ‘I feel that something that is not real to me would not make me react in that way’.¹²⁶ In this regard, L. Stafford Betty claimed that an argument that supports the hypothesis that the NDEs are real and not hallucinations is the life-changing consequences because hallucinations rarely change the person who suffers them.¹²⁷

¹²² Original quote in Spanish: ‘Tranquilo, arranque hacia atrás’.

¹²³ Original quote in Spanish: ‘El verlo, oírlo y haber actuado en razón a lo que me dijo’.

¹²⁴ Original quotes in Spanish: ‘Son experiencias que me han pasado en determinados momentos, pero tienen que ser reales y para mí son más que reales porque pues igual están las consecuencias de esa experiencia. Fue real porque es real que yo jamás volví a convulsionar’.

¹²⁵ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Ya la rinitis no la tengo. Después de ese suceso como a los 15 días estaba extrañada porque yo me ahogaba con nada, o sea cualquier olor, cualquier cosa me daba alergia y después no’.

¹²⁶ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Siento que algo que no es real para mí, no me haría reaccionar de esa manera’.

¹²⁷ Betty, ‘Are they Hallucinations or are they Real?’, p. 43.

Previous thoughts that real is something that happened and was sensed, and that the consequences add to the argument of being real, echoes two of the theories of truth described in section 2.1.2. The correspondence theory claims that something is true if it corresponds to a fact, and that is exactly what the Colombian NDErs expressed.¹²⁸ That the NDE was real because it was lived, sensed and to perceive something with the senses is a fact, corresponds to what we know for reality. Besides, the pragmatic theory claims that something true is useful, it works; and for at least half of the interviewed group, the NDE is true and real because it helped them, in some cases, it aided for healing previous diseases, and made them change.¹²⁹ In other words, what NDErs are telling us is that what they lived and experienced during and after their NDEs are covered by two of the three main theories of truth.

Adding to this, if they consider their experiences real and true, they can become noetic (evoking James' term).¹³⁰ 'Knowledge is justified true belief' as defined by David Hufford.¹³¹ What most of the Colombian NDErs are expressing is that once they recognise that the experience is real and true, everything that was shown, said and visualized became knowledge, and this may be the reason behind the result that 73% of the surveyed participants considered that the NDE gave a *high* degree of learning. Besides, all interviewees considered their NDEs meaningful, and this meaning was given to certain mystical elements of the experience (feeling peace, seeing presences, OBE, time perception, among others), and *not* to have nearly died. These NDE mystical elements gave insights and knowledge about what happens when you die, how the world works and how to view life. In other words, in the learnings, there are cosmological aspects involved.

Coming back to the three theories of truth, the coherence view has not yet been analysed. It claims that a belief is true if it coheres with a body of knowledge or system of beliefs.¹³² So, for the judgement, you need to compare versus a previous scheme. In some respect, the NDErs would agree that the NDE is coherent because it was felt through the senses, and that is already *known* in our daily

¹²⁸ Harrison-Barbet, *Mastering Philosophy*, p. 81; Hospers, *Philosophical Analysis*, p. 44.

¹²⁹ Hospers, *Philosophical Analysis*, p. 46; James, *Pragmatism*, p. 79.

¹³⁰ James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 295.

¹³¹ Hufford, 'Beings without bodies', p. 19.

¹³² Harrison-Barbet, *Mastering Philosophy*, p. 81.

system. However, some of them sensed something else that you do not normally feel, that is, challenges ordinary sensations. Elizabeth shared a detailed account of what she felt that exemplifies this,

I perceived it [NDE] with all my senses, that is why I say it is true. That feeling of plenitude is a feeling that as a human being I have never felt nor I have ever felt it again. I was in a very nice place that was not this world.¹³³

Using other words, Erika Doncel said ‘that was an experience like ... extrasensory, it is not something that you live every day or that you can provoke’.¹³⁴ Likewise, Juana stated ‘the real for me is, the real something that I can perceive with the five mundane senses, but that I can also perceive with what intuition or what one calls the sixth sense’.¹³⁵ These testimonies, then, show that their reality is not just the five senses, it goes beyond that, and maybe that is why the ten interviewees felt an *extrasensory perception* and nine out of ten perceived *leaving the earthly world* as was described in the phenomenology section. What exactly is encompassed in these sensations that go beyond the normal, and how it fits in or not in their pre-NDE worldview (coherence theory) will be discussed in the next two sections.

Some of them felt that expanded reality during the NDE and others described having felt it in other instances of their lives (usually post-NDE events) such as paranormal experiences, OBEs and meditation. Previous findings are aligned to what NDE researchers have reported, that NDErs are sure that their experiences were real or hyperreal; ‘more real than ordinary consciousness’ as stated by Greyson, were ‘actual encounters with another realm of existence’ as posited by Holden *et al*, ‘added dimensions of self’ as specified by Taylor, and a real ‘interaction with transmaterial entities’ and environments as described by

¹³³ Original quote in Spanish: ‘La percibí [experiencia cercana a la muerte] por todos mis sentidos, por eso digo que es cierto. Esa sensación de plenitud es una sensación que como ser humano nunca ni había sentido ni yo la he vuelto a sentir nunca más. Yo estuve en un sitio muy agradable que no era este mundo’.

¹³⁴ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Eso fue una experiencia como extrasensorial, no es algo que tu vivas todos los días o que tu puedas provocar’.

¹³⁵ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Lo real para mí es, lo real algo que puedo percibir con los cinco sentidos mundanos, pero que también puedo percibir con lo que la intuición o lo que uno llama el sexto sentido’.

Holden.¹³⁶ The participant's testimonies, then, are aligned with the transcendental explanation to the NDE phenomenon that acknowledges the possibility that consciousness can function without the body, hence, supports the reality of the experience.¹³⁷

4.2.3. What is a *Beyond* for interviewees?

As was discussed in section 4.1.3 there was an increase in the belief of a Beyond, named as *life after death* or *another dimension or world* in the surveyed group, but not everyone agreed with those statements. Although I selected interviewees that showed distinct points of view, it was found that *all* of them have the belief or certainty that there is a Beyond. What came up is that some of them do not like to call it "another world", or "life after death".

For example, Álvaro said 'there has to be something, there has to be something else, with the loving ones that had died'.¹³⁸ Luis claimed, 'death is just a step, there must be something else, this is a transition state'.¹³⁹ And while describing his NDE, where time perception was seriously altered he added 'you feel that you are not a physical entity but that you are present. The state of consciousness is deeply embedded'.¹⁴⁰ For her part, Pilar stated that 'the other side is like I went to another world and came back. But something completely supernatural, different, another stage, another space, like another dimension'.¹⁴¹ As seen before, Pilar's view resembles Otto's 'wholly other'.¹⁴² Previous quotes resonate with Cantor *et*

¹³⁶ Bruce Greyson, 'Cosmological Implications of Near-Death Experiences', *Journal of Cosmology*, Vol 14 (2011), 4684-4696, section 1; Holden, Long and Maclurg, 'Characteristics of Western NDErs', p. 133; Taylor, 'Discovering and Living in Unity', p. 161; Holden, 'Aftereffects of pSTEs', p. 67; Ring, *Omega Project*, p. 97; Van Lommel, 'The Experience of the Self as Real', pp. 26-27.

¹³⁷ Greyson *et al*, 'Explanatory Models for NDEs', p. 221; Charland-Verville *et al*, 'NDEs: Actual Considerations', pp. 255; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, p. 16-17; Betty, 'Are they Hallucinations or are they Real?', p. 39.

¹³⁸ Original quote in Spanish: 'Tiene que haber algo, tiene que haber algo más, con los seres queridos que hayan muerto'.

¹³⁹ Original quote in Spanish: 'La muerte nada más es un paso, debe haber algo más. Este es un estado de transición'.

¹⁴⁰ Original quote in Spanish: 'Tu sientes que no eres un ente físico pero que estás presente. El estado de conciencia está metido profundamente'.

¹⁴¹ Original quote in Spanish: 'Al otro lado es como yo fui al otro mundo y volví, pero algo completamente sobrenatural, diferente, otro estadio, otro espacio, como otra dimensión.'

¹⁴² Otto, *Holy*, pp. 26, 29-30, 82.

al research where 6/10 Colombian experiencers reported that when you die you transcend ‘from a physical state to a spiritual one’.¹⁴³

As was exemplified in Pilar’s testimony, for the depiction of a Beyond most interviewees (9/10) use some of the NDE elements they experienced. María’s description also represents this feature, ‘I think there should be a state of calm. If it is to stay in that sensation that I had, it’s wonderful. That’s why I say that it is like another plane because it is a sensation that I have never experienced on Earth’.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, Catalina Cifuentes stated ‘I think that this is how heaven must feel like, like when I woke up from the surgery, a peace, feeling pleasant, not thinking about anything’.¹⁴⁵ This unearthly environment and feel made them think that a Beyond is another world or realm. Hence, the belief in a Beyond has its foundations on experience, as was also overviewed in the surveys and argued by Sutherland.¹⁴⁶ This agrees with Cantor *et al* findings in Colombian NDErs where ‘their symbolic representation [of beliefs] is closely related to what was experienced in the NDE’.¹⁴⁷ This also resonates with the ‘experiential source hypothesis’ and Shushan’s specific proposal where beliefs in an afterlife are based on extraordinary experiences such as NDEs.¹⁴⁸

As previously seen, a Beyond was also usually described as an afterlife or something that happens after you die, but not restricted to it. For example, Luis depicted it as a state of consciousness as earlier quoted. Angie offers a complex view about it, she believes in four complementary ‘planes’ for humans, the ‘physical’, ‘sentimental’, ‘spiritual’ (that few can reach), and ‘something beyond the universe’; and an additional one that she calls it ‘God’, and she specified that

¹⁴³ Cantor *et al*, ‘Cambios en las creencias sobre la muerte en personas con ECM’, p. 86. Original quote in Spanish: ‘De un estado físico a uno espiritual’.

¹⁴⁴ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Yo pienso es, que debe haber un estado como de tranquilidad. Si es uno quedarse en esa sensación que yo tuve, es maravilloso. Por eso digo que sí es como otro plano, porque es una sensación que terrenalmente yo nunca he experimentado.’

¹⁴⁵ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Yo creo que así se debe sentir el cielo cómo como cuando me desperté de la cirugía una paz, estar rico, no pensar en nada.’

¹⁴⁶ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, pp. 81-82, 239.

¹⁴⁷ Cantor *et al*, ‘Cambios en las creencias sobre la muerte en personas con ECM’, p. 97, original quote in Spanish: ‘La representación simbólica de éstas [creencias] guarda estrecha relación con lo vivenciado en la ECM [experiencia cercana a la muerte].’

¹⁴⁸ Hufford, ‘Beings without bodies’, p. 28; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, pp. 5, 206, 239, 241, 243-245.

‘I don’t see it as worlds but as existences beyond’.¹⁴⁹ Angie’s testimony is a clear example of a ‘transpersonal’ experience, where the self transcends the ordinary context.¹⁵⁰ In this way, experiencers helped me to name and demarcate the Beyond concept better by giving me notions of higher levels or states of consciousness that you reach while still alive, similar to those described by Kramer and Wilber.¹⁵¹ In this sense, for further research, I would suggest not to use, “life after death” or “another world or dimension” terms. At least for Colombians, it would be good to use the expression “a Beyond” or “something beyond and different to the physical reality we live in”.

On the other hand, if the idea of a Beyond is based on what was lived and sensed, it may mean that it is true for them. For most of them, a Beyond must be a fact, which echoes the correspondence theory.¹⁵² Catalina directly referred to this by saying, ‘I really believe absolutely in heaven because I saw angels, because to feel that calm from the time I woke up and that it was an infinite peace’.¹⁵³ Even though they are not sure about the complete picture of the Beyond, its features and structure, they just know that it exists and that the NDE introduced new elements to it.

For example, half of the interviewees (5/10) think that a Beyond is not physical (some of them call it *spiritual*), while four of them think that it is both physical and non-physical, and one participant does not know whether is physical or not. This brings a different cosmological picture of the one offered by Taylor with his NDE findings, where there were two differentiated worlds or universes, the physical and the non-physical that overlap, and that Taylor diagrammed as a conjunction of sets.¹⁵⁴ However, he stated that ‘the physical world is a subset of the non-physical world’, and it is unknown why he did not diagram it as a subset

¹⁴⁹ Original quotes in Spanish: ‘Existen varios planos. El físico, el sentimental. El espiritual. Algo más allá que el universo. Dios’. ‘No lo veo como mundos sino como existencias más allá’.

¹⁵⁰ Walsh and Vaughan, ‘Transpersonal Definitions’, p. 203.

¹⁵¹ Kramer, ‘Experience of higher planes of consciousness’, p. 3; Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, p. 236.

¹⁵² Hospers, *Philosophical Analysis*, p. 44.

¹⁵³ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Yo de verdad creo absolutamente en el cielo porque vi ángeles, porque sentir esa tranquilidad de la vez que me desperté y que era una paz infinita’.

¹⁵⁴ Taylor, ‘Discovering and Living in Unity’, pp. 144-145.

(the physical within the non-physical), and especially if one of his participants talked about oneness and being part of something bigger.

Besides, Taylor did not connect his NDEs' accounts to higher levels of existence, but at least three of his experiencers did refer to them using terms like 'awareness', 'simultaneous consciousness' and 'another type of existence'.¹⁵⁵ This means that a Beyond that encompasses both non-physical worlds of reality and higher states of consciousness was also described by the NDErs that Taylor interviewed.

The cosmological structure that was implied by some of the interviewees of the present study is more compatible with the subset scheme and with Wilber's 'wholes within wholes' or 'concentric circles or spheres'.¹⁵⁶ María's testimony is very close to this notion, 'there is a beyond, I say like a large world, like the sum in engineering, the sum of this physical world plus another world [the spiritual], and we are all there, because those people [diseased people she saw during her NDE] are there, they were present'.¹⁵⁷

When I heard María's account and saw her arms' movement, I thought of the Russian dolls or Matrioshka, those dolls that are within dolls. Catalina, on her part, used another analogy while describing heaven that resembles this concept of concentric wholes,

I imagine it is like when you unite with God. Did you see when there is a light bulb in a living room? That this is the main bulb, and one enters a bathroom and turns on the light, and it is a tiny light only for the bathroom. That light is one [yourself], but that light unites with the main one and it is a single light, that is how I imagine heaven, it is a union.¹⁵⁸

Adding to this, Luis said that we live like in the middle of 'the Earth that is material and heaven that is ethereal, non-material. We are like a vessel that

¹⁵⁵ Taylor, 'Discovering and Living in Unity', pp. 125-126, 147.

¹⁵⁶ Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Original quote in Spanish: 'Hay un más allá, yo digo como un gran mundo, como la sumatoria en ingeniería, la sumatoria de este mundo físico más otro mundo y ahí estamos todos, porque esas personas están ahí, estuvieron presentes'.

¹⁵⁸ Original quote in Spanish: 'Yo me imagino que es como cuando te unes con Dios. ¿Viste cuando hay un bombillo en una sala? Que ese es el bombillo principal, y uno entra a un baño y prende la luz, y es una luz pequeñita sólo pal baño. Esa luz es uno, pero esa luz se une con la luz principal y es una sola luz, así me imagino yo el cielo, es una unión'.

contains that part that wants to go up', to heaven.¹⁵⁹ So, for at least these three NDErs, those physical and non-physical worlds, levels or dimensions are not completely separated, and the physical is shorter and contained within the one or ones beyond.

This notion of being within something bigger and a sense of interconnection was reported by all ten interviewees. They might not describe it as the model of concentric dimensions, but they are sure that we are part of something bigger. Related to this, Álvaro stated, 'we are all part of something, of a big thing' and he used the metaphor of being screws of a machine, where each one provides a different service.¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth also mentioned something similar, 'we all make a very large universe, we are all part of this world. The essence of being is what unites us. I feel that the inner part of us, which must be the spirit, we are all equal, corporeality is what makes us into groups'.¹⁶¹ Leoncio expressed this more religiously, 'we are all children of someone, we all depend on someone and that same person made us all. For me, it is God Almighty'.¹⁶² He agreed that God is that big thing that we are all part of.

So, in the interviewees' structure of reality, there are aspects that go beyond the physical body and world, in other words, they are not covered by a materialist point of view nor by the scientific cosmology.¹⁶³ A surveyed participant commented on this: 'science does not have all the answers'.¹⁶⁴ On the contrary, a 'Beyond', 'God', 'spirit' and or 'soul' (participants gave different and various names to it) is a relevant part of reality, that complements the body and influences the physical world. This notion is aligned to the *post-materialist* view, where mind and spirit are both aspects of reality and there is an 'interconnectedness

¹⁵⁹ Original quote in Spanish: 'La Tierra que es lo material y el cielo que es etéreo, no material. Somos como una vasija que contiene esa parte que quiere ir hacia arriba'.

¹⁶⁰ Original quote in Spanish: 'Todos formamos parte de algo, de una cosa grande'.

¹⁶¹ Original quote in Spanish: 'Todo el mundo hacemos un universo muy grande, todos hacemos parte de este mundo. La esencia del ser es lo que nos une. Siento que en la parte interna de nosotros, que debe ser el espíritu, todos somos como iguales, la corporalidad es la que nos hace en grupos'.

¹⁶² Original quote in Spanish: 'Todos somos hijos de alguien, todos dependemos de alguien y a todos esa misma persona nos hizo. Para mí, es Dios Todopoderoso'.

¹⁶³ Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental reality*, p. 14; Beauregard *et al*, 'Post-Materialist Science', p. 272; IAU, *Big Ideas in Astronomy*, pp. 38, 40.

¹⁶⁴ Original quote in Spanish: 'La ciencia no tiene todas las respuestas'.

between mind and the physical world'.¹⁶⁵ As regarded earlier, for the NDErs who were interviewed there is a sense of connection between us, for some the physical world is within the spiritual one and therefore, they are not separated nor disconnected as the dualist theory claims.¹⁶⁶

4.2.4. Cosmological impact on interviewees

Even if I saw many changes in the interviewed NDErs not all of them can be catalogued as cosmological. I will use myself as an example of the different elements involved in a cosmological shift. In other words, I will make use of auto-ethnography.

The meaning I gave to my anomalous experience, is that my pre-scheme of reality was incomplete. Reality was bigger than I thought. This thought triggered a moment of self-reflection, to think about who am I, what am I doing and how do I contribute to this world. This made me seek my purpose in life and, fortunately, I had the clarity to shape this purpose and the principal aftereffects were a career change from science to humanities and a spiritual shift from being an atheist to a spiritual person.

As can be seen, there were four main cosmological elements in my experience: the meaning I gave to the experience (in short, **meaning**), my self-reflection that triggered transformation (**existence**), change in what I thought was real (**reality**), and a shift in my place in the universe (**cosmos**). Those four elements were the basis of the initial steps of fieldwork (section 2.1.1).

If a person did not experience alterations in any of those cosmological features, well there was no cosmological shift. If there were only a few, maybe there was a low-degree change in cosmology and if all these elements were present one can say that he/she had a high-degree cosmological shift. According to this, my experience cosmologically impacted me at a high level.

Following this order, the evidence suggests that the NDEs lived by Elizabeth and Leoncio did not impact their cosmologies. The meaning Elizabeth gave to her NDE was of gratitude of being able to live longer and of knowing that 'the day

¹⁶⁵ Beauregard *et al*, 'Post-Materialist Science', p. 273.

¹⁶⁶ Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental reality*, p. 1; Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, pp. 21, 38.

that I really have to leave, it is not fear, it is not pain, it is not suffering, it is plenitude'.¹⁶⁷ So, she gained knowledge about what happens when you die. But this did not contradict with what she had been told by the nuns (she was raised in Catholicism) and what she knows is offered by other religions: that when you die you go to a peaceful place.

Even if Elizabeth was beginning to experience an OBE during her NDE, this did not surprise her nor made her rethink her notions of reality. Besides, when she was describing the plenitude felt during her NDE she added, 'I felt it [peace] especially when I did my analysis that I could die in peace. That as a human being I had done the best that I could within my qualities, defects. I said, it's time and I can go in peace'.¹⁶⁸ So, the life review or moment of self-reflection happened during the NDE and the result was that she had done a good job. Therefore, it is implied that there was no need to make any life changes. She does not view the NDE as a tipping point, nor as an event that changed her view about her place in this world.

On his part, when I asked Leoncio, what did your NDE mean to you? he replied 'God is always with me. God protects me a lot. That everything you do you don't have to wait to die to pay, because all the things you do in this life, either they pay you or they charge you. So, it is better to always do things right'.¹⁶⁹ For him, do things right is to be coherent and serve others. He told me that he interprets the face he saw before the gunshot as an angel sent by God, so it reaffirmed his beliefs in God by saying 'for me that has been a demonstration that yes, there is someone who takes care of me'.¹⁷⁰ As if the angel was like proof that he was doing a good job and was paid for doing things right. So, again, as with Elizabeth, the NDE did not contradict his previous worldview and beliefs, and there was no

¹⁶⁷ Original quote in Spanish: 'El día que me toque realmente irme, no es de miedo, no es de dolor, no es de sufrimiento, es de plenitud'.

¹⁶⁸ Original quote in Spanish: 'La sentí [paz] sobre todo cuando yo hice mi análisis que me podía morir en paz. Pues que como ser humano había hecho lo mejor que yo podía dentro de mis cualidades, defectos. Yo dije, es el momento y me puedo ir en paz'.

¹⁶⁹ Original quote in Spanish: 'Dios siempre está conmigo. Dios me protege mucho. Que todo lo que tú hagas no tienes que esperarte a morir para pagarla porque todas las cosas que tú haces en esta vida, o te las pagan o te las cobran. Entonces es mejor hacer las cosas bien siempre'.

¹⁷⁰ Original quote in Spanish: 'Para mí eso ha sido una demostración de que sí, hay alguien que me cuida'.

need to change. Similarly to Elizabeth, Leoncio's NDE did not change his view about reality nor his place in the cosmos.

From the years that I have known Elizabeth, and from the quantitative and qualitative information gained with Leoncio and that I could evidence in social media, I can say that both of them exhibit most if not all of the post-NDEs characteristics cited in the literature: experiencers wish to help and are empathic with others, they have self-worth, appreciate life and nature and have a high sense of spirituality and love, believe in a Beyond, material objects and competitiveness are not so important for them, they do not fear of death and they enjoy the little moments.¹⁷¹ And it was not the NDE the one that triggered the development of these features, they already had them before the event and maybe were enhanced throughout life.

The evidence suggests that the meaning Elizabeth and Leoncio gave to the phenomenology and their self-reflection towards the NDE was vital for them to decide if there was a need to change. They felt like they were on the right path, so no need to challenge their current structure of reality nor how they engage with the cosmos, two of the main cosmological elements as described by Campion, Chapple, Geertz and Weiss.¹⁷²

Something that differentiates Elizabeth and Leoncio from most of the rest of the group (including Catalina and Luis who had their NDEs when young but excluding María) is that they did not perceive their childhood or previous NDE-life as tragic or with suffering and abuses. This means an absence of stress in their framework of the time. However, María did not feel that her life had been traumatic or with suffering before her NDE either. In María's words, it had 'good, bad and more or less moments as everyone else'; but, as we will see further on, she showed cosmological changes.¹⁷³ Even though, María had her NDE after premature delivery, a situation that naturally comes with a high dose of stress for

¹⁷¹ Sartori, *What is a NDE*, chapter 4; Gordon, 'Ethnographic Study of NDE impact', pp. 123-125; Groth-Marnat and Summers, 'Altered Beliefs', p. 111; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, pp. 138, 143, 146-147, 157-158, 160, 163; Greyson and Ring, 'Life Changes Inventory - Revised', pp. 42, 46-47; Atwater, 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 445.

¹⁷² Campion, 'Cosmos/Cosmologies', p. 359; Chapple, 'Thomas Berry', p. 147; Geertz, 'Ethos, World-View', pp. 421, 424; Weiss, 'Campa Cosmology', pp. 426, 510.

¹⁷³ Original quote in Spanish : 'Como todos los seres he tenido momentos buenos, malos, regulares'.

the mother. Therefore, my findings support Atwater's claim that the presence of high stress in the NDEr context can be a factor that makes an experience a 'threshold' one.¹⁷⁴

Additionally, Elizabeth and Leoncio's testimonies challenge Groth-Marnat and Summers' result that the NDE depth (measured by the NDE scale) and aftereffects are positively correlated.¹⁷⁵ Both Elizabeth and Leoncio's achieved a total score of the NDE-C scale above the 27-cut-off score (and they lived only one NDE) and nevertheless, they did not exhibit aftereffects.¹⁷⁶

Elizabeth and Leoncio's experiences also challenge Sutherland's NDE integration routes in the sense that the trajectories defined by her imply that there is always 'work to be done'.¹⁷⁷ They are not in Sutherland's 'blocked' or 'arrested trajectories' because they did value and took out meaning from their experiences although they did not have any changes.¹⁷⁸ Sutherland claims that if this change does not happen it is because there is a contextual or personal condition that disables the experiencers to integrate the experience, which is not the case for Elizabeth and Leoncio.

On the other hand, Pilar and Álvaro did manifest changes following their NDEs but in cosmological terms, they were low-degree ones. Pilar had her NDE after surgery and in a stressful moment in her life. She stated, 'from all this what I rescue is my meaning of life. Because I had very little will to live. So, I think that [the NDE] completely changed my life-view. That made me say "no, life is worth it"'.¹⁷⁹

So, Pilar also had her moment of self-reflection, but contrary to Elizabeth and Leoncio, this item made her challenge her existence and beliefs about herself and life's meaning and this made her feel transformed. These existential and

¹⁷⁴ Atwater, 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 439-441.

¹⁷⁵ Groth-Marnat and Summers, 'Altered Beliefs', p. 111.

¹⁷⁶ Martial *et al*, 'The NDE-C Scale', p. 11.

¹⁷⁷ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, pp. 219, 222, 230-231, 235, 237.

¹⁷⁸ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, pp. 230, 235.

¹⁷⁹ Original quote in Spanish: 'De todo esto lo que yo rescato es, mi sentido de la vida. Porque yo tenía muy pocas ganas de vivir. Entonces creo que eso [la experiencia cercana a la muerte] me cambió por completo el panorama de la vida. Eso me hizo decir "no, la vida vale la pena".'

meaningful aspects are cosmological as stated by Chapple, Geertz and Hall.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, the specific NDE element she connected to her new way to view life was the encounter with a presence that she calls ‘God’. But the belief in God was not new, she explained, ‘that [the NDE] reaffirmed my belief that there is life after life, of course. If I believed before, well now more. My faith was strengthened and made my communication with God stronger’.¹⁸¹ Hence, Pilar did not challenge reality aspects since God and a Beyond were already real for her. She changed her ‘attitude of life’ to have ‘a harmonious relation with the world’.¹⁸² In other words, this affected mainly the ‘ethos’, her ‘way of life’ and not the world-view as defined by Geertz.¹⁸³

Similarly to the meaning that Pilar gave to her NDE, Álvaro said that his NDE was an ‘attention call. With the accident one sees life differently, one is not only work. Enjoy more what you have’.¹⁸⁴ Like Pilar’s feelings before her NDE, Álvaro also felt tired of life and during his NDE he saw the image of her daughter asking him if he was not going to go to her 15th-year-old birthday party. This made him return from the path he was taking (that he associated with death) to show her daughter that he was going to be with her. This vision made him value more his family, made him change to be more spiritual and less materialistic. As was seen here, Álvaro gave meaning to the mystical element of the NDE.

Besides, Álvaro thought ‘it was not the time to leave this world, I was missing something, if I’m still alive why is it?’.¹⁸⁵ His NDE occurred during an accident that left him paralytic and this made him question God, but not his existence per se. He started to believe in destiny, viewed as a ‘preset’ that a superior being controls.¹⁸⁶ As well as Pilar, Álvaro also had existential and meaning elements

¹⁸⁰ Chapple, ‘Thomas Berry’, p. 147; Geertz, ‘Ethos, World-View’, p. 421; Hall, ‘Cosmology and Therapy’, p. 257.

¹⁸¹ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Eso reafirmó mi creencia de que hay vida después de la vida, claro. Que antes creía, pues ahora más. Se afirmó más mi fe y que fuera más fuerte mi comunicación con Dios’.

¹⁸² Original quote in Spanish: ‘Yo cambié mi actitud de vida. Tener una relación muy armoniosa con el mundo’.

¹⁸³ Geertz, ‘Ethos, World-View’, pp. 421-422, 424.

¹⁸⁴ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Llamados de atención. Con lo del accidente que uno ve la vida distinto, uno no sólo es trabajo. Disfrutar más lo que tiene’.

¹⁸⁵ Original quote in Spanish: ‘No era el momento de irme de este mundo, que me faltaba algo, ¿si sigo vivo, por qué es?’.

¹⁸⁶ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Preestablecido’.

that made him change his way of life, but there were no changes in his view towards reality or the cosmos. This made them both express many of the aftereffects, previously outlined, that NDErs abroad manifest.¹⁸⁷ Pilar and Álvaro are classified as having experienced a low-degree cosmological shift because there were existential and meaning reconsiderations and indeed changes, but no ontological ones.

On the contrary, Angie, Erika, Juana and María did manifest changes in their views towards reality and their place in the cosmos along with the other changes experienced by Pilar and Álvaro and this makes them be classified in a high-degree level of a cosmological shift. First, the four of them consider their NDEs as moments of internal reflection. Juana said that her last NDE meant ‘a personal awakening, a search for the self. It allowed me to see life and my own life, and my purpose, and my place in the world from a very different point of view’.¹⁸⁸ She felt deeply transformed and now feels that can ‘live authentically’.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, María said ‘it is an experience that marks you. I was more materialistic, more driven by the desire for achievement, and I changed. I believe that being here is for something and if we are in the world, it is to make the world a better place’.¹⁹⁰

Likewise, for Erika her first NDE meant ‘a refilling in life, a start over in everything, perceive life in a different way’. When she was trying to commit suicide, she felt a presence that comforted her, as if ‘come and we inject you with strength and will to live’.¹⁹¹ After her second NDE and other mystical experiences that came after she said ‘I’m going to live again. I say that you lose meaning in

¹⁸⁷ Sartori, *What is a NDE*, chapter 4; Gordon, ‘Ethnographic Study of NDE impact’, pp. 123-125; Groth-Marnat and Summers, ‘Altered Beliefs’, p. 111; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, pp. 138, 143, 146-147, 157-158, 160, 163; Greyson and Ring, ‘Life Changes Inventory - Revised’, pp. 42, 46-47.

¹⁸⁸ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Un despertar personal, una búsqueda del yo. Me permitió ver la vida y mi propia vida, y mi propósito, y mi lugar en el mundo desde un punto de vista muy diferente’.

¹⁸⁹ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Vivir yo de manera auténtica’.

¹⁹⁰ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Es una experiencia que te marca. Era más materialista, más impulsada por el deseo de logro y yo cambié. Yo creo que el hecho de estar aquí es para algo y si estamos en el mundo es para hacer del mundo un sitio mejor’.

¹⁹¹ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Un retanqueo de la vida, un empezar de nuevo en todo, percibir la vida de otra manera. Venga le inyectamos fuerzitas y ganas de vivir’.

life the moment you stop dreaming, in growing, in moving forward, in learning and being a better person'.¹⁹²

Angie, on her part, said that 'it was like finding my inner self' when she saw herself as a kid during the NDE.¹⁹³ Angie's NDE meant to her 'a 180-degree turn in my life, it meant a change of myself with myself' to 'understand more every day, what do I do, what function do I serve, what mark do I leave on the world?'.¹⁹⁴ This concern made Angie change her career from administrative assistant to nurse. Erika's and Angie's words are other examples that the meaning the NDEs give to their experience lies in the mystical elements. Besides, previous quotes suggest that Angie, Erika, Juana and María had profound existential and meaningful queries and concerns towards their place in the world, which are key cosmological elements as stated before.

On the other hand, these four participants changed their perception of reality after their NDEs. According to Weiss and Geertz, the structure of reality is a main cosmological element; in Weiss' terms cosmology is a 'set of ideas about the nature and composition of the world or universe... including the hidden reality'.¹⁹⁵ To exemplify this, Juana said that with her last NDE (the third one),

I finally understood what was that feeling of me getting out, how could I be in two places at the same time? The meaning is the reencounter with that spiritual dimension. What I realized after that experience is that I had a conflict not with the existence of a supreme being but with the idea of religion.¹⁹⁶

In other words, for Juana, it became real that she has both a physical body and a spiritual part. She gained the certainty of the existence of a spiritual dimension (a Beyond) and a supreme being. María had a similar perception, she stated 'those

¹⁹² Original quote in Spanish: 'Voy a volver a vivir. Yo digo que tú le pierdes sentido a la vida en el momento que dejas de soñar, en crecer, en avanzar, en aprender y en ser mejor persona'.

¹⁹³ Original quote in Spanish: 'Fue como encontrarme mi yo interno'.

¹⁹⁴ Original quote in Spanish: 'Un giro de 180 grados en mi vida, significó un cambio de mí misma conmigo misma. Comprender cada día más, ¿qué hago, qué función cumplo, qué huella dejo yo en el mundo?'

¹⁹⁵ Geertz, 'Ethos, World-View', pp. 421, 424; Weiss, 'Campa Cosmology', pp. 219, 510.

¹⁹⁶ Original quote in Spanish: 'Yo por fin entendí que era esa sensación de estar me saliendo, ¿cómo yo podía estar en dos sitios al mismo tiempo? El significado es el reencuentro con esa dimensión espiritual. Lo que me di cuenta después de esa experiencia es que yo tenía un conflicto no con la existencia de un ser supremo sino con la idea de la religión'.

who interpret and teach it [religion], misinterpret and misteach it. And they have not taught us that part that we are body *and* spirit'.¹⁹⁷ So, as well as Juana, she challenged that part of religion according to what she lived. María added

What I experienced I didn't know, so I never believed in it because I didn't know it. I believe that life is short, bodily life, because the other life can be infinite. I still believe in God. What I believe is that there is a beyond, I mean, what this event did is that there is something, there is a different plane.¹⁹⁸

Differently, Angie also challenged certain previous beliefs, 'my family is very spiritual, they believed a lot and they told me that the spirit exists, but I didn't feel that it existed'.¹⁹⁹ And when I asked her *what demonstrated to you that the spirit exists?* she replied, 'the moment I tell you that I see myself in a room, I see my body and I feel that I am not in it'.²⁰⁰ Besides, Angie expected to see during her NDE a man dressed in white and judging her but since that did not happen, that belief is not true anymore.

Therefore, the evidence suggests that for Angie, Juana and María the spiritual part of the being started to be part of reality, not because it was aligned to what was taught by religion but because they experienced it. Juana and Angie through an OBE and María through a visual image of dead loved ones. This echoes the scholarly claim that NDErs are certain of the survival of the soul because of feeling being outside their bodies.²⁰¹

Coming back to the coherence theory of truth (a belief is true if it fits together with a particular system of beliefs or body of knowledge), this process of comparing was done by the three of them and they concluded that what they felt,

¹⁹⁷ Original quote in Spanish: 'Los que la interpretan y la enseñan [religión], la malinterpretan y mal enseñan. Y no nos han enseñado esa parte de que somos cuerpo y espíritu'. My emphasis.

¹⁹⁸ Original quote in Spanish: 'Lo que viví no lo conocía, entonces jamás creí en eso porque no lo conocía. Creo que la vida es corta, la vida corporal, porque la otra vida puede ser infinita. Yo sigo creyendo en Dios. Lo que creo es que si hay un más allá, o sea lo que hizo este evento es que si hay algo, hay un plano diferente'.

¹⁹⁹ Original quote in Spanish: 'Mi familia es muy espiritual, creían mucho y me decían es que el espíritu existe, pero yo no sentía que existiera'.

²⁰⁰ Original quote in Spanish: 'En el momento en el que te digo que me veo en una sala, veo mi cuerpo y siento que yo no estoy en él'.

²⁰¹ Noyes *et al*, 'Aftereffects of Western NDEs', p. 52.

heard and saw in their NDEs was more important to what they were told about.²⁰² The reality of what they lived (both during the NDE and afterwards such as aftereffects or physical changes) challenged those previous beliefs.

Differently, Erika's structure of reality also became clear after the NDE. She said,

That there is a God, that he is real, that he is tangible, and that he is there at all times, I never doubted it again. For me, my life changed at 22 when I met God, which was the first time I had that experience in that kitchen. But I always believed that there was a God.²⁰³

So, for Erika, God's existence was not a challenge to previous beliefs but a confirmation. For her, it did *cohere* with her previous religious system of beliefs and this supported the idea of being true. Therefore, for these four participants, the NDE and subsequent experiences gave the necessary 'proofs' about the existence of a spiritual part of the being, of a Beyond, of 'God' for Angie, Erika and María.

This change in reality is the cherry on the cake for the notion that these four women had a high-degree cosmological impact after their NDEs. For some it was enough with one NDE, for others, several NDEs were needed to structure the whole shift and for others, subsequent mystical experiences confirmed the path that the NDEs had traced. Angie, Erika, Juana and María went through an existential enquiry based on the meaning they gave to their NDEs. This meaning changed their perception of life and the cosmos, their view of reality and how they engage with it. This was a cosmological or 'ontological shift' as posited by Sutherland.²⁰⁴ These four NDErs also support Noyes *et al*'s claim that 'their experience materially altered their view of themselves and their world, and subsequent changes reflect the new reality' and Gordon's findings where 8/10 participants referred to a '*context shift*: a global shift in awareness of one's identity and reality'.²⁰⁵ This suggests that a high-degree cosmological change can be potentially found in 50-80% of the NDErs.

²⁰² Harrison-Barbet, *Mastering Philosophy*, p. 81.

²⁰³ Original quote in Spanish: 'Que existe un Dios, que es real, que es tangible, que te conoce y que está ahí en todo momento, jamás lo volví a dudar. Para mí, mi vida cambió a los 22 años cuando conocí a Dios, que fue la primera vez que tuve esa experiencia en esa cocina'.

²⁰⁴ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 193.

²⁰⁵ Noyes *et al*, 'Aftereffects of Western NDEs', p. 57; Gordon, 'Ethnographic Study of NDE impact', p. 120.

Moreover, all ten Colombian NDErs confirmed Holden's statement that their transformation process depends on 'experience, experiencer, and context'.²⁰⁶ Any NDE mystical element or combination can result in a cosmological change or not, it is the **meaning** the experiencer gives to the mystical element(s) the one that guides an **existential** reflection, that can yield no need to change beliefs, depending on their framework -stressful or not-, and previous cosmology. Or, on the contrary, self-reflection can trigger a shift in life perception, to ask about our place in the **cosmos** and to change the ideas about the structure of **reality**.

Additionally, whether the Colombian NDErs that were interviewed had a cosmological change or not, or if they lived their NDEs when young or as adults, they do share some basic cosmological elements, behaviours and principles. They believe we are part of something bigger and all of them believe in a Beyond, even if the details and models are somewhat distinct, they are sure that there is something beyond this physical reality, that might be catalogued as spiritual. Besides, they have self-worth; spirituality and love are important aspects of their lives; they have an attitude of service for helping others; they value nature, life and family; they are not materialistic nor competitive; they are not afraid of death; and they enjoy the present, the ordinary moments. All these are already mentioned aftereffects that characterise NDErs.²⁰⁷ Some interviewees might not have completely developed one or two of these aspects, but they possess the vast majority.

Hence, an NDE may act like a compass that gives you an orientation towards a certain path. If you are a kid, it shows you the way ahead of you. For Catalina and Luis that experienced their NDEs when young, the NDE and other types of mystical/spiritual/anomalous experiences all together reinforced the direction to take. Catalina exemplifies this by saying that she was a Catholic for many years but then she realized that 'a religion that has led and/or covered up so much darkness cannot be related to the peace that I experienced in the presence of the

²⁰⁶ Holden, 'Aftereffects of pSTEs', p. 70.

²⁰⁷ Sartori, *What is a NDE*, chapter 4; Gordon, 'Ethnographic Study of NDE impact', pp. 123-125; Groth-Marnat and Summers, 'Altered Beliefs', p. 111; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, pp. 138, 143, 146-147, 157-158, 160, 163; Greyson and Ring, 'Life Changes Inventory - Revised', pp. 42, 46-47; Atwater, 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 445.

Angels’.²⁰⁸ Luis said that NDEs ‘marks a line for you. They are those pivot points where you decide in this complex world of possibilities’.²⁰⁹

But if you are an adult and your reality encompasses a Beyond idea and you are oriented towards previously described behaviours and principles, the NDE compass confirms that you are heading towards the right direction, so no need to change your course. But if you are moving towards a different direction, the NDE makes you aware of that and shows you a different path, as trying to reorient you. The NDE, then, can be viewed as a cosmological compass. But is the experiencer who decides what path to take, the NDE acts just as a tool, enabling free will.

Sometimes, as found by Sutherland, there is a minority of experiencers who reject that the NDE had any meaning or value.²¹⁰ This may be because they deny it was real, as one of Sutherland’s participants claimed.²¹¹ This was not the case for any of the participants of the present study but because of the small sample size, it is not ruled out that it may happen. So, these few NDErs might not be aware of the tool in hand. As stated before, for some NDErs to go in the “right” direction they might need more than one NDE or other types of mystical experiences that as a whole highlight the proper course.

Ring and Elsaesser proposed something similar by saying that ‘Light as Master Therapist, whereby it guides the individual back on track’ when people are following a ‘self-destructive course’.²¹² In this study, this applies only to those who were tired of life but not to the rest, and it was not always light the mystical element of the NDE that gave meaning. So, the NDE as a compass might be a better analogy for what the experiencers lived.

4.2.5. Summary of interviews findings

The Colombian NDErs that were interviewed believe that their experiences were real because they were sensed and there were tangible consequences. They share a

²⁰⁸ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Una religión que ha encabezado y/o encubierto tanta oscuridad no puede estar relacionado con la paz que experimentaba en presencia de los Ángeles’.

²⁰⁹ Original quote in Spanish: ‘Ese tipo de evento o suceso que te ocurre y que te marca una línea. Son esos puntos pivote donde en este complejo mundo de posibles tú decides’.

²¹⁰ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 235.

²¹¹ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 236.

²¹² Ring and Elsaesser, *Lessons from the light*, p. 228.

common cosmology with certain behavioural and psychological attitudes, they think we are part of something bigger, and they believe in a Beyond or something beyond and different to the physical reality we live in. Two from the eight interviewed experiencers that had their NDEs when adults did not have any cosmological impact at all, two of them had a low-degree cosmological change (only meaning and existence cosmological elements were present) while four interviewees were cosmologically impacted by their NDEs in a high degree (the cosmological elements meaning, existence, reality and cosmos were present). The NDE acted like a cosmological compass that gave them a certain orientation where they could evaluate themselves and see if they were on the right path or not.

5. CONCLUSION

This research project aimed to evaluate in a group of thirty Colombian experiencers if their NDEs impacted their cosmologies, and if so, how. To this end, the participants first answered thirty questionnaires to have a broad overview of the NDE phenomenology and aftereffects found in this Latin-American country. The survey indicated that NDEs also occur in Colombian people, regardless of gender, education level, religion and age and the testimonies reported similar NDE features to those found in the literature. While some NDErs did not perceive any changes following their NDEs (around 20-30%), the rest did, and there is a high probability that around half of the surveyed group experienced a cosmological shift in their lives after living the NDE.

Besides, at least 60% of the Colombian NDErs believed or were certain that a Beyond exists, that can be regarded as an afterlife or another world or dimension different to the physical world we live in. The experience itself confirmed its existence or introduced new elements to it and this might be why there was an increase in this belief following their NDEs. The questionnaire guided the selection of interviewees and themes to cover subsequently, to find underlying explanations and dynamics that quantitative research cannot offer.

From the thirty participants, ten were selected to have two or three in-depth interviews. Two of them had the NDE when they were young so their context disabled finding a cosmological shift. However, their testimonies were of help to

see the meaning they gave to their NDEs, how it impacted them and to study their cosmologies compared to those that lived their NDEs when adults. From that information it was found that the meaning the interviewed group gave to their NDE lies in the mystical elements, where insights and knowledge reside; and they all share a similar worldview. First of all, they present all or the majority of the behavioural and psychological attitudes that scholars have also found in NDErs worldwide, such as appreciating themselves, life, family and nature, willing to help others, having a heightened sense of love and spirituality, less fear of death, materialist and competitive feelings are less present in their lives and they are focused in the present.²¹³

Second, they are sure that a Beyond exists, in other words, it is part of their reality. Using Wilber's ideas of higher levels of consciousness and realms of reality, a Beyond would include both.²¹⁴ And third, the ten interviewed participants believe that we are interconnected and part of something bigger, where some of them regarded the physical world as being within a non-physical realm.

The ten Colombian NDErs described a Beyond based on their experience and that is why some of them regarded it mainly non-physical (or spiritual) and some of them think it is also physical. Besides, some participants define a Beyond as a different state of consciousness, usually when having an out-of-body experience or when time perception was seriously altered. Others depicted a Beyond as another world or realm beyond the physical one we live in because they felt an unearthly environment. Previous findings echo the 'experiential source hypothesis' where spiritual, afterlife and supernatural beliefs have their origin in extraordinary personal experiences such as NDEs.²¹⁵

²¹³ Sartori, *What is a NDE*, chapter 4; Gordon, 'Ethnographic Study of NDE impact', pp. 123-125; Groth-Marnat and Summers, 'Altered Beliefs', p. 111; Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, pp. 138, 143, 146-147, 157-158, 160, 163; Greyson and Ring, 'Life Changes Inventory - Revised', pp. 42, 46-47; Atwater, 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 445.

²¹⁴ Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, p. 236.

²¹⁵ Hufford, 'Beings without bodies', p. 28; Shushan, *NDE in Indigenous Religions*, pp. 5, 206, 239, 241, 243-245.

Therefore, the interviewees' cosmology challenges materialism and scientific cosmology because the latter views are based on matter and the physical world.²¹⁶ Even if the Colombian NDErs trust the reality of their NDEs because they felt them with their senses and there were palpable consequences, for them a non-physical Beyond, spirit and or soul are also important aspects of reality that are connected with the physical realm, which resonates with the post-materialist view.²¹⁷ This shared cosmology was not clearly delineated before by NDE scholars except by Taylor who proposed also a non-physical world besides the physical one, but regarded it only as another realm of reality and did not link it to higher states or levels of consciousness.²¹⁸

From the ten interviewed NDErs, eight of them had their NDEs when adults. It was found that two of them did not experience any cosmological changes following their NDEs. What they saw and felt during their NDEs did not contradict previous beliefs. The NDE phenomenology and the meaning they gave to the experiences was oriented towards a 'right' path where there is no need to change and reaffirmed their current worldview.

On the contrary six of the eight participants did experience shifts that had cosmological elements involved. Two of them had a low-degree cosmological change because although they had existential and meaningful aspects involved in their change, they did not experience impact towards their view of reality and their place in the cosmos. The other four NDErs went through a high-degree cosmological shift because what they lived during their experiences expanded their perceptions of what is real. A spiritual dimension, a Beyond, or even God became real for them, something that can be felt with the senses or that can be known with extrasensory perception. The NDEs made them rethink their purpose in life and their role in the cosmos which is certainly bigger than the physical world we are used to.

The result that 6/8 experiencers did have a cosmological shift and 2/8 did not, reflects that the questionnaire design and execution were well oriented, gave the

²¹⁶ Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental reality*, p. 14; Taylor, 'Moving Beyond Materialism', p. 149; Beauregard *et al*, 'Post-Materialist Science', p. 272; IAU, *Big Ideas in Astronomy*, pp. 38, 40.

²¹⁷ Beauregard *et al*, 'Post-Materialist Science', p. 273.

²¹⁸ Taylor, 'Discovering and Living in Unity', pp. x, 144-145.

necessary information to guide the interviews and the selection of interviewees was representative.

The present findings agree with the NDE scholarship that claims that most NDErs go through ontological or transformative changes that involve shifts in worldview, identity and structure of reality, in other words, cosmological changes.²¹⁹ This Colombian study confirmed also that not all experiencers perceive the NDE as a life-changing event.²²⁰ The present study suggests that around 20-30% of the Colombian NDErs will not report any changes or very few that are almost negligible to the experiencer. Therefore, a relevant amount of NDErs will experience a cosmological shift (around 70-80%), where most of them will live it in a high degree.

Finally, a theory is presented of how the NDE acts in the experiencers to trigger a cosmological shift or not. I suggest that an NDE functions like a cosmological compass, a tool that shows a certain orientation so experiencers can assess if they are or not on the correct path. The course that it marks is the shared cosmology that has been previously described where there are common behaviours and psychological attitudes, where a Beyond is part of the structure of reality and where there is a sense of interconnection in the world and that humans are part of something bigger. So, if an experiencer has already a cosmology that encompasses this, the NDE reaffirms it and no major changes are needed. If you are young the NDE traces the direction to follow. And if an NDEr has his/her life course towards a different path, the NDE shows a better possibility so they can reorient themselves.

Since the process of transformation depends on 'experience, experiencer, and context' as regarded by Holden, some NDErs might need more than one mystical/spiritual/anomalous experience to notice the tool(s) in hand and be open to using it.²²¹ This opens a possibility for further research to see if the NDE-as-a-

²¹⁹ Sutherland, *Reborn in the light*, p. 193; Gordon, 'Ethnographic Study of NDE impact', p. 120; Ring, *Omega Project*, p. 173; Sartori, *What is a NDE*, chapter 4; Pennachio, 'NDE as mystical experience', p. 70.

²²⁰ Noyes *et al*, 'Aftereffects of Western NDEs', p. 45; Atwater, 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 442; Long and Perry, *Evidence of the Afterlife*, p. 177.

²²¹ Holden, 'Aftereffects of pSTEs', p. 70.

cosmological-compass theory applies to NDEs worldwide and to see if other kinds of personal experiences act similarly.

This dissertation brought to light that it is important to embrace rare cases. In this case, the NDErs who had their experiences when they were young and those who did not experience any change at all after having their NDEs. At first sight, one would think that it is unlikely that those testimonies can contribute to the research, but the opposite was true. Further research on the cosmology of these minorities might bring unexpected insights.

This research, then, becomes an important contribution for Latin America and especially Colombia where academic research in mystical experiences such as NDEs is very scarce.²²² It also adds to current scholarship focused on mystical/spiritual/religious experiences because it presents how NDEs impact the cosmology and worldview of those who lived them by proposing a novel way to see it. If you are facing a near-death situation and identify mystical or transcendental elements, you might be gaining a life tool that can show you the direction of your next steps.

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²²² Sleutjes, Moreira-Almeida and Greyson, '40 Years Investigating NDEs', pp. 834-835; Cantor *et al*, 'Cambios en las creencias sobre la muerte en personas con ECM', pp. 52-54, 59.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1. Appendix 1. Questionnaire with explanatory notes



COSMOLOGY OF COLOMBIAN NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCERS²²³

This questionnaire is part of an academic research project conducted by myself Natalia Sánchez, for the dissertation component of the Master in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology in the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. I am a Colombian graduate of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia,²²⁴ open-minded, and sympathetic with this kind of experience and I won't judge your beliefs whatsoever.²²⁵ Your time (max 30 min) will be greatly appreciated and if you like, I can send you a summary of the dissertation upon completion.²²⁶

Near-death experiences (NDEs) are psychological episodes with transcendental or mystical features that people report when there was a risk of death or clinical death.²²⁷ If you have 18 years or more and think you had this kind of experience, I will ask you to continue and serve as a volunteer for my research. My research is focused on your beliefs of the cosmos, reality, meaning and personal identity, before and after the event. The idea is to see if the NDE impacted your cosmology and if so how.²²⁸

This research will contribute to the scholarly literature on the effects of mystical/spiritual/religious experiences on the cosmology and worldview of people that lived them, from a country where very little research has been done on these types of experience in general.

Important considerations

I assure security, confidentiality and anonymity about all personal information you are going to share with me. Unless requested otherwise, I will not use your name nor any of your personal data that could identify you in the written work

²²³ The questionnaire was given to the participants in Spanish, Colombia's home language.

²²⁴ This University has an academic reputation within the country, those who have graduated here are considered serious and high professionals. This is to build trust with the participants.

²²⁵ To build trust.

²²⁶ To thank for the participant's time as suggested in the 'Disclosure' section in BERA, British educational research association, *Ethical guidelines for educational research* (London, 2011), [Hereafter BERA, *Ethical guidelines*], p. 8.

²²⁷ I include the definition because in Colombia NDEs is not a common concept and people may think that if they lost a beloved one is that they experienced a near-death episode, or maybe if they crashed their vehicle (and nothing strange was viewed/sensed) can also be counted as that. That's why the "transcendental" and "mystical" words are being used. Even though, if there are people that are unsure, section B of the questionnaire will aid to differentiate if they had or not an NDE as in this definition.

²²⁸ Here I state the aim and rational of the research for the participants, complying to Colombian policies and the 'Voluntary Informed Consent' section in BERA, *Ethical guidelines*, p. 5.

that will result from this fieldwork.²²⁹ Findings are meant to be published in an academic journal and then disclosed to the general public.

Firstly, I kindly ask you to complete the questionnaire and if you wish, you could offer yourself to participate in an online interview.²³⁰ Depending on the number of volunteers for the interview and their responses in the questionnaire, you may be selected or not to continue the process. While filling the questionnaire and/or during the interview, you can omit any questions that you do not want to answer, and are free to withdraw from the process anytime you like.²³¹

I am very grateful for your contribution to this research.

I agree with data management and I accept that my responses are used in this research project²³²

Yes ☐ No ☐

This questionnaire is divided into three main parts

- A. Personal information
- B. Description of your NDE.
- C. Your understanding of the cosmos or worldview

A. PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other Which? _____
2. Nationality²³³ ☐ Colombian ☐ Other Which? _____
3. City of residence²³⁴ ☐ Bogotá ☐ Other Which? _____
4. Zone where you were raised²³⁵ ☐ Big city (urban) ☐ Small towns or rural zone (countryside)
5. Do you consider yourself a scientist?²³⁶
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't know
6. What is the highest education level that you have completed? ²³⁷

²²⁹ In order to comply to Colombian policies and the 'Privacy' section in BERA, *Ethical guidelines*, p. 7.

²³⁰ In order to comply to Colombian policies and the 'Voluntary Informed Consent' section in BERA, *Ethical guidelines*, p. 5.

²³¹ In order to comply to Colombian policies and the 'Right to Withdraw' section in BERA, *Ethical guidelines*, p. 6.

²³² In order to comply to Colombian policies and the 'Voluntary Informed Consent' section in BERA, *Ethical guidelines*, p. 5.

²³³ Personal and factual (objective) question. To prove that my target group are Colombians. Although recruiting strategy is to gather Colombian people, it can be used to remove a participant from the target group in case a foreign completes the survey.

²³⁴ Personal and factual (objective) question. To describe the target group.

²³⁵ Personal and factual (objective) question. To describe the target group. Hypothesis.

Rural zones or populations in Colombia are associated with more mystical experiences (like if nature, forests, jungle will add the probability to see strange things or beings).

Rural people are seen as more open to talk about them as if they were natural.

²³⁶ Personal and inventory (think) question. Based on Kripal, *The Flip*, scientists are highlighted when being 'flipped' due to their radical changes on worldview, hypothesis: a non-scientist may not have such a radical shift, or none at all.

Select a unique option

- ☐ Primary education
- ☐ Secondary education
- ☐ Technical or technological education
- ☐ Undergraduate
- ☐ Postgraduate (specialization or master)
- ☐ Doctoral and higher

B. NDE DESCRIPTION

Remember that for the current investigation a Near-Death Experience (NDE) is a psychological episode with transcendental and/or mystical features that people report when they were at risk of dying. There are people that in the same critical situation of health (for example a severe illness) had several NDEs in different moments of the illness. Some people had only one NDE in their lives, while others had different illnesses in separate moments of their lives and in some of them, they had one or more NDEs. Therefore, when I ask to think about the NDE, I don't refer to the physical episode of health but to the event where there were mystical and/or transcendental elements that were felt/seen/experienced during the risk of death.

7. How many NDEs have you experienced?

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ More than 5

*Important note: If you had more than one experience, in the rest of the questions please refer to **THE ONE THAT IMPACTED YOU THE MOST**.*²³⁸

8. How old were you when you had the NDE? _____ years²³⁹

9. How long ago did the NDE happened?²⁴⁰ _____

10. What physically happened to you that triggered the near-death experience? e.g. you had a heart attack, you had a car accident, you were in surgery, etc.²⁴¹
If possible, be specific, please.

²³⁷ Personal and factual (objective) question. To describe the target group.

²³⁸ Personal and factual (objective) question. Experimenting several NDE happens. Why the one that IMPACTED the most? Because of the aim of the project, if NDEs **change** the cosmology of the experimenter. Also supported by Atwater (2011), 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 439.

²³⁹ Personal and factual (objective) question. This is to identify people that had the NDE when they were children, they are less likely to report a change in cosmology.

²⁴⁰ Personal and factual (objective) question. Hypothesis. People having experienced the NDE less than 1-2 years ago are less likely to experience a cosmological shift? Personal experience answer: Not necessarily, my sense of reality being bigger as what I thought was an immediate thought, I was certain about it, just the day after. But it took me some months to find answers to my experience and make changes in my life (I decided to change my vocation in 6 months). In one year I was already doing something else (starting the MA). I associated aftereffects (e.g. feeling beings) to the experience maybe a year later. Taylor selected individuals 'who were two or more years away from their near-death experience'.

²⁴¹ Personal and inventory (think) question. To provide a context of the situation and guarantee that the target group are those whose life was threatened.

11. What was felt/seen/experienced during the NDE that you consider mystical and or transcendental?²⁴² If possible, give a detailed description, please.
-
-

12. How intense would you describe your NDE?²⁴³

Remember to think in the mystical and/or transcendental elements that you felt/saw/experienced during the risk of death.

☐ Very intense ☐ Intense ☐ Moderately intense ☐ Little intense ☐ Not intense

Explain your answer _____

13. Have you told others about what you felt/saw during the NDE?²⁴⁴

☐ Yes ☐ No

13.1. If Yes, how did other people react to the sharing of your experience with them? _____

13.2. If Yes, how did you feel with the reaction that others had when you told them your NDE? _____

13.3. If No, why haven't you shared your experience with others?²⁴⁵

C. UNDERSTANDING OF THE COSMOS, OR WORLDVIEW

14. **Nowadays** I consider myself²⁴⁶:

Select a unique option

☐ Catholic ☐ Christian – Includes evangelic, protestant and pentecostal
☐ Atheist ☐ Agnostic
☐ Spiritual but not aligned with a specific religion
☐ Don't know
☐ Other Which? _____

15. **Before my NDE** I considered myself²⁴⁷:

Select a unique option

☐ Catholic ☐ Christian – Includes evangelic, protestant and pentecostal

²⁴² Personal and inventory (think) question. To obtain the NDE features and narrative.

²⁴³ Personal and inventory (think) question. Atwater (2011), 'NDE as a Threshold Experience', p. 439. 'It's the intensity that shifts experiencers into what I call a "threshold experience"'.

²⁴⁴ Personal and inventory (think) question. Based in Holden, Janice M., 'After-Math: Counting the Aftereffects of Potentially Spiritually Transformative Experiences', p. 75-76. When NDErs tell others about their experience, others response to the NDE impacts the integrity of the experience, and therefore, possible changes in cosmology. Personal experience: I had a positive response about my experience, I was helped and found answers, therefore, I feel I integrated my experience in a better way.

²⁴⁵ Participants have been found to be reserved in telling others. Hypothesis: In Colombia this type of experiences may feel like a taboo and people are afraid of telling them to others and being ridiculed or not believed. If this is the case, there is a background cultural factor that may be influencing the integration of the experience.

²⁴⁶ Personal and inventory (think) question. To describe the target group. Categories adapted to the Colombian context.

²⁴⁷ Personal and inventory (think) question. To describe the target group and beliefs previous NDE. Based on Waxman, 'Spiritual aftereffects', p. 59-61, spiritual and religious changes in NDErs.

- ☐ Atheist ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Spiritual but not aligned with a specific religion
- ☐ Didn't know
- ☐ Other Which? _____

15.1. If there was a change in your religious affiliation, explain what motivated that change. _____

16. Select the statement that best fits your **current** religious beliefs²⁴⁸.

Select a unique option

- ☐ I know that God exists
- ☐ I have some doubts, but I believe in God
- ☐ I do not believe in God, but I believe there is a higher power/force
- ☐ I do not believe in God, but I know there is a higher power/force
- ☐ I do not believe in God, nor a higher power
- ☐ I do not know
- ☐ None of the above

17. Select the statement that best fits your religious beliefs **before your NDE**²⁴⁹.

Select a unique option

- ☐ I knew that God existed
- ☐ I had some doubts but I believed in God
- ☐ I did not believe in God, but I believed there is a higher power/force
- ☐ I did not believe in God, but I knew there is a higher power/force
- ☐ I did not believe in God, nor a higher power/force
- ☐ I did not know
- ☐ None of the above

17.1. If there was a change in your religious beliefs, explain what motivated that change. _____

18. Did you change your vocation/profession **after** the NDE?²⁵⁰

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA

If you answered Yes continue with the next two questions (18.1 and 18.2), if not continue to question No. 19.

18.1. How much did the NDE influence your decision of vocation/profession change?

Select a unique option ☐ Too much ☐ Much ☐ Moderately ☐ Little ☐ Nothing

Explain your answer _____

18.2. What was the change on vocation/profession? Write the previous and the current vocations. _____

²⁴⁸ Personal and inventory (think) question. To describe the target group. Options inspired in Ecklund, Religion among scientists. Eben Alexander said, "I didn't just believe in God, I knew God".

²⁴⁹ Personal and inventory (think) question. To describe the target group and beliefs previous NDE. Based on Waxman, 'Spiritual aftereffects', p. 59-61, spiritual and religious changes in NDEs.

²⁵⁰ Personal and inventory (think) question. To describe the target group. To see if the NDE influenced their vocation change. And maybe to correlate it with previous cosmologies e.g. scientific and materialistic vs non-scientific. Based on Waxman, 'Spiritual aftereffects', p. 59-61, occupation changes in NDEs. Based on Holden, change in vocation, in p. 74, After-math of Potentially Spiritually Transformative Experiences. Based on Sartori, *What is a Near-Death Experience*, Chapter 4. Simplify career. Based on Ring, *Lessons from the light*, p. 31. Career change in NDEs.

19. How much did you learn from your NDE? ²⁵¹

Select a unique option

☐ Too much ☐ Much ☐ Moderately ☐ Little ☐ Nothing

Explain your answer _____

20. How much did your NDE changed your life? ²⁵²

Select a unique option

☐ Too much ☐ Much ☐ Moderately ☐ Little ☐ Nothing

Explain your answer _____

21. Do you think that the NDE was real? ²⁵³

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't know

22. Have you noticed any psychological or behavioural changes that may have been triggered by the NDE? ²⁵⁴

Select one or several options.

- ☐ Yes, in my relationship with my family ☐ Yes, in the practice of my religion
☐ Yes, in my relationship with my friends ☐ Yes, in the practice of my spirituality
☐ Yes, in my relationship with strangers ☐ Yes, in my relationship with material objects
☐ Yes, in how I feel in certain situations ☐ Yes, in my relationship with money
☐ Yes, in how I act in certain situations ☐ Yes, others Which? _____
☐ Yes, in my relationship with nature
☐ Yes, on how I environmentally impact planet Earth
☐ No, I haven't perceived any psychological or behavioural change as being triggered by the NDE.

23. Think about physical or psychic changes that may have been triggered by your NDE. Omit those that are related to your injury/illness/accident itself. Complete the phrase according to the next example: for the first option think

²⁵¹ Personal and inventory (think) question. Based on William James' noetic quality (state of knowledge, insight, revelation) of mystical experiences, p. 295.

²⁵² Personal and inventory (think) question. Measures the impact, if any, of NDE in their lives. Based also on William James' noetic quality of mystical experiences, p. 295. Based on Holden, 'spontaneous metamorphosis', 'profoundly different person' in p. 74, After-math of Potentially Spiritually Transformative Experiences. Based on Sartori, *What is a Near-Death Experience*, Chapter 4. "What are the life changing effects of NDEs?". Based on Ring, *Lessons from the light*, p. 4. NDE can alter and improve the life of NDErs.

²⁵³ Reality is one of the components of cosmology, defining what is real and what not. Based on Margaret Hall, Nancy Abrams and Joel Primack. Based on Ring, the Omega Project, perception of reality in NDErs, p. 97.

²⁵⁴ Personal and Cultural (other people, nature) and factual (action based) question. Based on Holden, changes in relations, time-investment in spirituality and religion, p. 72-74, After-math of Potentially Spiritually Transformative Experiences. Based on Sartori, *What is a Near-Death Experience*, Chapter 4. Changes in attitude towards others, less materialistic. Based on Ring, *Lessons from the light*, p. 26. Money and material things are not important for NDErs, p. 125, Behavioural changes. p. 31. Concern for nature/planet.

of a phrase like “My sensitivity to light _____ after my NDE”. Please fill the table by selecting a unique option for each row.²⁵⁵

	Strongly increased	Increased	Not changed or I have not been aware of whether there was a change	Decreased	Strongly decreased
Sensitivity to light					
Sensitivity to sound					
Sensitivity to taste					
Sensitivity to touch					
Sensitivity to smell					
Allergies					
Metabolism					
Tolerance to pharmaceuticals					
Sleep pattern					
Personal level of energy					
Healing abilities					
Paranormal abilities					
Psychic abilities					
Mental capacity					
Sensitivity to electromagnetic fields (light bulbs, watches, computers, cell phones, etc)					

24. Regarding psychological, behavioural, physical and psychic changes after your NDE, how would you rate them as a whole²⁵⁶:

²⁵⁵ Many scholars report physical/psychic/biological changes in NDErs and other kind of spiritual experiences. Based on Holden, biological aftereffects in p. 71, After-math of Potentially Spiritually Transformative Experiences. Based on Sartori, *What is a Near-Death Experience*, Chapter 4. Physical changes. Based on Ring, *Heading toward Omega*, Paranormal abilities, p. 169. Based on Ring, *Lessons from the light*, p. 31, 128-131 EM changes, sensitivity, seeing energy, psychic ability, healing, paranormal, mental awareness, physiological, energetic changes, sleep. Ring, the Omega Project, p. 153 psychophysical changes in NDErs.

Select a unique option

- ☐ No changes at all
- ☐ Slight changes
- ☐ Noticeable changes
- ☐ Radical changes

25. If you found any psychological, behavioural, physical, and/or psychic changes, which one has impacted you the most and why?

26. If you found any psychological, behavioural, physical, and/or psychic changes, how do you think that these changes relate to your NDE?

27. What do you think about the following statements?²⁵⁷

Select a unique option for each row

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel that the near-death experience has given a new meaning to my life.					
After my near-death experience, I felt transformed.					
I went to another world or dimension during my NDE.					
Before my NDE I believed there was life after death.					
The NDE made me understand the structure of the universe or cosmos.					
Since my NDE, I believe that there is a sense of wholeness and interconnectedness in the world.					
Since my NDE, material things have lost meaning in my life.					
Before my NDE I thought that there was another world or dimension different from the physical world we live in.					
Since my NDE I believe there is life after death.					
I think that there is another world or dimension different from the physical world we live in.					

²⁵⁶ Atwater, the rest of the story. P. 72-73. physiological and psychological aftereffects

²⁵⁷ Some items (27.3-27.6) were designed to challenge/confirm Taylor's findings.

28. Explain your answer to the last item of question 27 “I think that there is another world or dimension different from the physical world we live in.”

29. Something you want to add or deepen? _____

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

I want to receive a summary of the findings upon completion of the dissertation²⁵⁸

Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answered YES, please give me an e-mail where I can send you the document²⁵⁹. If you want to maintain your anonymity, then, answer “Yes”, leave this space blank and days after the submission of the questionnaire please contact me at 3164427495 or hnsanchezs@unal.edu.co. This way I will not track your answers.
e-mail _____

I agree to collaborate with an interview to delve into the subject²⁶⁰

Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answered YES, please write the following information²⁶¹:

Name _____

e-mail _____

Phone number. _____

Do you have a relative or loved one that has an external view of your behaviour and beliefs before and after the event?²⁶²

Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe ☐

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!

²⁵⁸ To thank for the participant’s time as suggested in the ‘Disclosure’ section in BERA, *Ethical guidelines*, p. 8.

²⁵⁹ This means that people that answered ‘No’ will not give his name, e-mail nor phone number so they will have complete anonymity since I won’t be able to track who answered.

²⁶⁰ In order to comply to the ‘Voluntary Informed Consent’ section in BERA, *Ethical guidelines*, p. 5.

²⁶¹ This means that people that answered ‘No’ will not give his name, e-mail nor phone number so they will have complete anonymity since I won’t be able to track who answered.

²⁶² It is possible to interview relatives, to have an external point of view.

7.2. Appendix 2. Guiding interview questions

Not all the following questions were asked to the NDErs interviewed. They were just a guide to follow to cover all major themes. The order presented here was usually not followed, the order selected was dependent on what the interviewee was introducing during the conversation. Many other questions not listed here came along the conversations to understand better their opinions and perceptions, and to delve more into certain topics.

Phenomenology

- Can you please describe your NDE?

Reality

- You answered that you think that the NDE was real, why?
- What is real to you?

Meaning

- What did the NDE mean to you?
- What were the physical/psychic changes (not related to the injury/illness/accident itself) that you noticed and that may be attributed to the transcendental experience, and what do they mean to you?
- How has the meaning that you give to material things/money changed since you had your NDE? How can you tell that it was because of the NDE and not due to other life circumstances?
- Have you had any other similar mystical or paranormal experiences before or after your NDE? Can you describe them? What do they mean to you?

Cosmos

- What is the cosmos for you? What are the elements of this cosmos? Was this perception influenced by your NDE? This other side/beyond is it physical, spiritual or what features does it have?
- Do you think you have a role/function in this universe?
- What do you think will happen when you die? Did you have this perception before the NDE? Why?
- You answered that you agree that there is a sense of interconnection in the world, why do you think that? Did you have this perception before the NDE? Why?

Existence

- What did you learn from your NDE? Is this learning associated with the risk of dying, or with the NDE itself?
- You answered that your life changed after the NDE, why, how?
- You answered that you felt transformed after the NDE, why, how?
- You answered that your spiritual/religious beliefs changed after the NDE, why?
- Is there a difference between the ____name of the NDEr____ before and the ____name of the NDEr____ after the event? If yes, what?

7.3. Appendix 3. Physical and psychic changes within the surveyed group.

Physical changes	Frequency	Percentage
Increase in personal energy	10	33%
Decrease in personal energy	2	7%
Increase in sensitivity to electromagnetic fields (light bulbs, watches, computers, cell phones, etc)	9	30%
Decrease in sensitivity to electromagnetic fields (light bulbs, watches, computers, cell phones, etc)	1	3%
Increase in light sensitivity	7	23%
Changes in sleep pattern (increase or decrease)	7	23%
Increase in sound sensitivity	6	20%
Changes in tolerance to pharmaceuticals (increase or decrease)	4	13%
Changes in smell sensitivity (increase or decrease)	3	10%
Increase in allergies	3	10%
Changes in taste sensitivity (increase or decrease)	2	7%
Increase in metabolism	2	7%
Increase in touch sensitivity	1	3%
Summary of physical changes		
No physical changes	7	23%
No answer in any of the options	4	13%
Reported at least one physical change after the NDE	19	63%
Psychic changes	Frequency	Percentage
Increase in mental capacity	5	17%
Decrease in mental capacity	1	3%
Increase in paranormal abilities	4	13%
Increase in psychic abilities	4	13%
Summary of psychic changes		
No psychic changes	12	40%
No answer in any of the options	9	30%
Reported at least one psychic change after the NDE	9	30%