

# Fantasy proneness correlates with the intensity of near-death experience

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## Objective

When facing a life-threatening situation, some people will report lived various phenomenological experiences (e.g. seeing a bright light & a dark tunnel, out-of-body experiences) that are intriguing by their extra-ordinary aspect. They are commonly referred to as “Near-Death Experiences” (NDEs). Similar phenomenological experiences termed “NDEs-like” (i.e. containing a comparable content & intensity)<sup>1</sup> have been reported in situations where there was no genuine threat to the individuals’ life. To date, little is known about experiencers’ personality characteristics. This study focuses on **fantasy proneness** (a habitual engagement in imaginative activities)<sup>2</sup> as one potential variable that may shape people’s reports of “classical” NDEs & “NDEs-like”.



## Method

### 5 groups of participants:

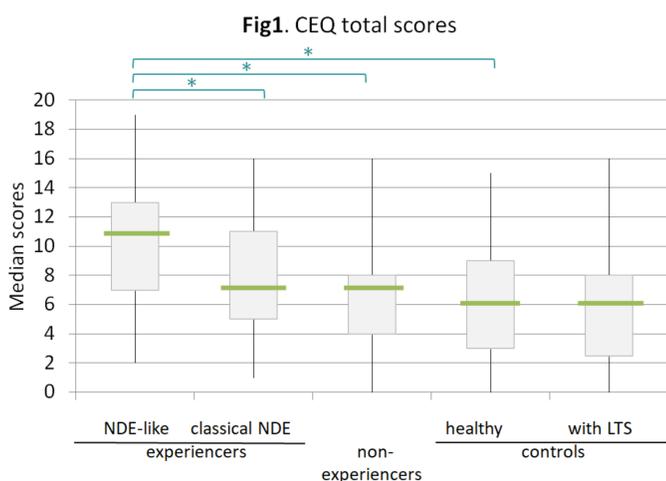
- 51 experiencers reporting a “classical” NDE
- 57 experiencers reporting a “NDE-like”
- 20 ‘non-experiencers’ reporting an experience but not qualified as NDE (w/o life-threatening situation)
- 50 individuals who had been exposed to a life-threatening situation but no recall of a NDE
- 50 healthy participants

To gauge the presence of a life-threatening event (i.e. severe brain injury): they were asked whether they had gone through a period of coma & whether they had stayed in intensive care.

The Creative Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ)<sup>2</sup> & the Greyson NDE scale (to screen for NDE criteria [ $\geq 7/32$ ] & to observe the reported intensity of the experience)<sup>3</sup> were administered to all participants.

## Results

Greyson NDE scale total scores were not different between experiencers groups [ $t(106)=.25$ ;  $p=.79$ ]. Total CEQ scores were significantly different between all groups. “NDEs-like” experiencers obtained higher CEQ total scores than classical NDE experiencers, non-experiencers and healthy controls groups (see Fig1).



Among individuals who claimed to have had a NDE (whether or not they reached the cut-off of 7/32 on the Greyson NDE scale<sup>3</sup>), Greyson NDE scale total scores were positively correlated with total CEQ scores (see Table1). Looking at the subsamples separately, we found a positive correlation for “NDEs-like” experiencers ( $r=.33$ ;  $p<.007$ ), but not for classical NDEs experiencers ( $r=.28$ ;  $p=.054$ ). Nevertheless, a Fisher’s z test showed that the two associations were not significantly different ( $z=.28$ ;  $p=.39$ ).

Table1. Correlations (N = 128)

Greyson NDE scale	CEQ total score
Total score	<b>.32*</b>
Subscale scores	
<i>Cognitive</i>	.22
<i>Affective</i>	<b>.27*</b>
<i>Paranormal</i>	<b>.26*</b>
<i>Transcendental</i>	<b>.28*</b>

Data are Spearman correlations; \* $<.001$

## Conclusion

Our findings support the view that strong engagement in fantasy by individuals recalling “NDEs-like” might make these persons more likely to report such subjective experiences when exposed to suitable physiological and psychological conditions (e.g. meditation). Although both experiencers’ groups did not differ in terms of intensities of experience, “NDEs-like” experiencers showed a greater engagement in fantasy than those with classical NDEs. We found an association between individuals’ investment in fantasy & the NDE reported intensity. Although these correlations do not imply any form of causality, we can hypothesize that the experience’s reported intensity depends on how strongly the individual is involved in fantasy processes.

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### References:

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<sup>2</sup>Merckelbach H, *et al.* The Creative Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ): a brief self-report measure of fantasy proneness. *Pers Individ Dif.* (2001)  
<sup>3</sup>Greyson B. The near-death experience scale. Construction, reliability, and validity. *J Nerv Ment Dis.* (1983)