



LOG ID	BOOK REFERENCE	RCT FILTER	CONFIDENCE TIER
SEC D.5	DIRECTORY D: THEORETICAL SANDBOX - END-OF-LIFECYCLE THEORIES (Receiver Hypothesis)	OFF	CONSENSUS

AUDITED CLAIM

SYSTEM PAYOFF (DELETING FEAR SUBROUTINE)

SYSTEMS MODEL — AS STATED IN THE BOOK

Clinically, this sustained drop in **death anxiety** correlates with a downstream decrease in **defensive psychological behaviors**, such as worldview defense and threat avoidance.

VALIDATION QUERY

Does surviving a near-death experience result in a significant long-term reduction in the fear of death and decreased defensive psychological behaviors?

EMPIRICAL FINDING

Longitudinal psychological studies indicate that surviving a near-death experience is robustly associated with a significant, long-term reduction in the **fear of death**. While direct behavioral tracking of survivors is limited, Terror Management Theory and related clinical proxies suggest that this profound drop in death anxiety naturally reduces distal **defensive psychological behaviors**, such as worldview defense and social avoidance.

PRIMARY ANCHORS

- Greyson, 1992, Death Studies
- Van Lommel et al., 2001, The Lancet

ABOUT THIS RECORD

Each claim in the book is decompiled from its IT metaphor into a naked, falsifiable scientific claim, then anchored to a **primary peer-reviewed source**. Claim and anchor are queried against the Consensus academic database (200M+ papers) under a fixed protocol — top-tier **Q1/Q2 journals only**, preprints excluded, human studies only. If a hypothesis fails the audit, the build is rejected: the AI generates the syntax; the peer-reviewed grid validates the physics.

CONFIDENCE TIERS

- CONSENSUS** ◀ **this log** — broadly established, highly replicated mechanics.
- EMERGING** — plausible, actively researched; no universal consensus yet.
- EXPERIMENTAL** — contested, extrapolated, or purely theoretical.

RCT FILTER — Controlled Studies is ON for interventions (a forced action must beat a control) and OFF for mechanisms (so foundational neuroscience isn't blocked).

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Yes, near-death experiences usually reduce fear of death long-term, but evidence for reduced defensive behavior is thinner.

1. Introduction

Near-death experiences are consistently associated with lower long-term fear of death, but the evidence is much stronger for that outcome than for reduced defensive psychological behaviors. The best-supported studies compare people who had an NDE with both people who survived life-threatening events without an NDE and people with no such event, and they repeatedly find less death anxiety or death threat among NDE experiencers (■ Greyson, 1992; Van Lommel et al., 2001; ■ Bianco et al., 2019). Prospective and long-term follow-up work suggests these changes are not just immediate post-crisis reactions: transformation after NDE appears to consolidate over years, and differs from changes after cardiac arrest without NDE (Van Lommel et al., 2001; Bourdin et al., 2017).

The second part of the question is less settled. Terror management theory predicts that lower death anxiety should reduce worldview defense, avoidance, and other distal defenses (Burke et al., 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003). But direct NDE studies rarely measure those behaviors. Instead, the literature mostly infers them from adjacent markers such as greater death acceptance, altered death representations, higher self-esteem, less avoidant behavior, and reduced in-group defense in simulations (■ Bianco et al., 2019; Greyson, 2003; Michael et al., 2025).

Does surviving a near-death experience result in a significant long-term reduction in the fear of death and decreased defensive psychological behaviors?

N = 7

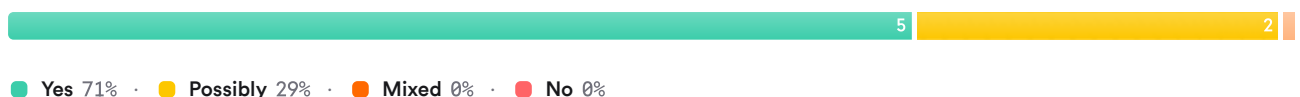


FIGURE 1 Consensus on NDE effects on death anxiety

The meter should lean positive for fear of death, because multiple independent NDE studies converge there. It should be interpreted more cautiously for defensive behaviors, because that part relies on indirect evidence and a much smaller set of direct measures (■ Sweeney et al., 2022; ■ Martial et al., 2024; Michael et al., 2025).

2. Methods

This deep search ran over more than 170 million research papers indexed in Consensus, spanning Semantic Scholar, PubMed, and other academic sources. The workflow identified 592,014 initial papers from the main query, screened 230 machine-filtered records, judged 128 as eligible after relevance filtering and citation expansion, and included the top 50 most relevant papers for synthesis.

Search Strategy

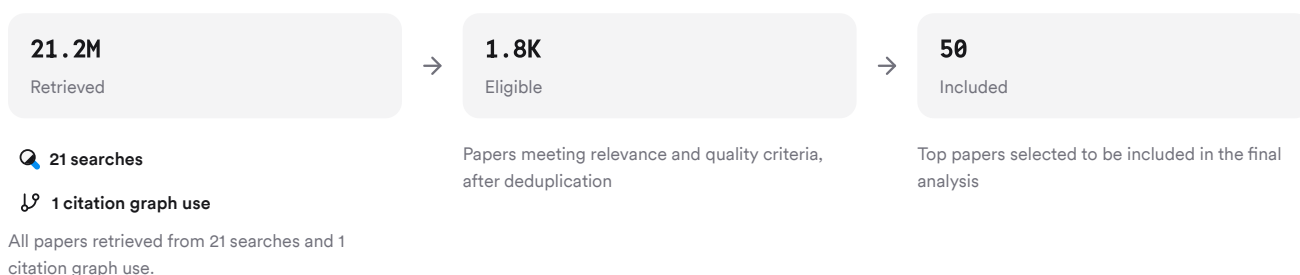


FIGURE 2 Deep search screening and inclusion flow

Searches combined near-death experience outcomes, terror management theory, death anxiety, defensive behavior, long-term follow-up, and contrastive null-result queries.

3. Results

3.1 Key Papers

Three papers anchor this literature because they directly compare NDE experiencers with appropriate controls and assess enduring death-related attitudes. Greyson 1992 established lower death threat with an NDE dose-response pattern, van Lommel 2001 added prospective cardiac-arrest follow-up over years, and Bianco 2019 tested mediators linking NDE to lower death anxiety (■ Greyson, 1992; Van Lommel et al., 2001; ■ Bianco et al., 2019).

Paper	Summary
(Van Lommel et al., 2001)	Lower death threat ; deeper NDE linked to less threat (■ Greyson, 1992)
(Li et al., 2024)	Years-long transformation distinct from non-NDE cardiac survivors (Van Lommel et al., 2001)
(■ Greyson, 1992)	Lower death anxiety partly mediated by self-esteem and death representation (■ Bianco et al., 2019)

FIGURE 3 Foundational papers on NDE psychological outcomes

3.2 Death Anxiety

Across retrospective, prospective, and survey designs, NDE experiencers usually report less fear of death than comparison groups. In Greyson's study, death threat was significantly lower in 135 NDE experiencers than in both near-death non-experiencers and people never close to death, and lower threat tracked greater NDE depth (■ Greyson, 1992). In Bianco's controlled sample, NDE experiencers reported lower death anxiety and viewed death more as transformation than annihilation; mediation analyses linked the association partly to self-esteem and death representation (■ Bianco et al., 2019).

Longer-term studies point in the same direction, though less uniformly. In the Dutch cardiac-arrest cohort, the transformation process after NDE took several years and differed from survivors without NDE (Van Lommel et al., 2001). A large 2024 study of 834 NDE experiencers versus 42 life-threat-only controls again found decreased fear of death and stronger afterlife belief in the NDE group (■ Long & Woollacott, 2024). But a small 1-year ICU follow-up found that most NDE patients did not change their opinion on death, and only 18% reported being less afraid of death, similar to non-NDE ICU survivors (■ Martial et al., 2024).

3.3 Defensive Behavior

Direct evidence that NDEs reduce defensive psychological behaviors is limited, but what exists points in that direction.

Dimension	Natural NDE	Life-threatening event without NDE	Related experimental analogues	Citations
Death acceptance	Higher approach acceptance	Lower	Not primary outcome	(Greyson, 2003)
Avoidance behavior	Less avoidance despite intrusive thoughts	More avoidance implied	Mindfulness/OBE analogues reduce defensiveness	(Michael et al., 2025; Niemiec et al., 2010)
Worldview defense	Rarely measured directly	Rarely measured directly	Simulated NDE reduced national defense	(Barberia et al., 2018)
Death representation	Transformation rather than annihilation	More annihilation-oriented	Survival model implicitly induced	(■ Bianco et al., 2019; Bourdin et al., 2017)

Dimension	Natural NDE	Life-threatening event without NDE	Related experimental analogues	Citations
Self-related buffering	Higher self-esteem	Lower	Humility/mindfulness reduce defensive responding	(Bianco et al., 2019; Kesebir, 2014)

FIGURE 4 Comparison of defensive indicators across related literatures

This inference is plausible because mortality salience reliably increases worldview defense, social avoidance, and self-esteem striving in the broader literature (Burke et al., 2010; Routledge et al., 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003). If NDEs durably reduce death anxiety, some downstream reduction in these defenses is theoretically expected. But only a few studies directly test the behavioral outcome, so the conclusion remains moderate rather than definitive (Bianco et al., 2019; Michael et al., 2025).

3.4 Mechanisms And Boundary Conditions

Several mechanisms recur across the corpus. NDEs appear to shift death representation from annihilation to transition, increase self-esteem, and increase approach-oriented death acceptance, all of which are associated with lower death anxiety (Bianco et al., 2019; Greyson, 2003; Long & Woollacott, 2024). Experimental analogues support causal plausibility: a virtual out-of-body experience reduced fear of death relative to control, and the authors interpreted this as implicit learning that consciousness could exist apart from the body (Bourdin et al., 2017).

The broader existential literature also helps explain why defensive behavior might change. Mortality salience increases worldview defense and punitive or avoidant responding, while mindfulness and humility reduce those responses (Burke et al., 2010; Niemiec et al., 2010; Kesebir, 2014). However, NDEs are not uniformly beneficial. Distressing NDEs occur in at least a notable minority, and some survivors report difficulty integrating the experience into life afterward (Michael et al., 2025; Martial et al., 2024).

Results Timeline

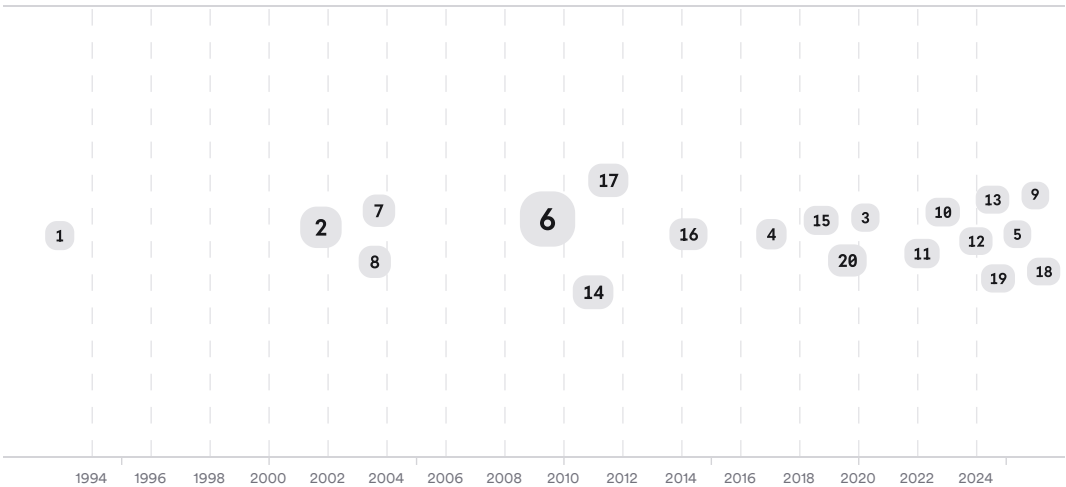


FIGURE 5 Timeline of NDE and death-anxiety research; larger markers indicate more citations

The arc runs from foundational death-threat studies in the early 1990s, to prospective cardiac-arrest follow-up in the 2000s, to newer work on mediators, simulations, and integration challenges. The field has broadened, but direct long-term behavioral tests still lag behind attitude measures (Greyson, 1992; Van Lommel et al., 2001; Martial et al., 2024).

Top Contributors

Type	Name	Papers
Author	B. Greyson	[565c06e76fef5196854b6e1ddd0eda8e][0de1e757d2ce58bba0bfb22f17945914]
Author	C. Martial	[de8c3b77d681591d8a687b1ae187e6c4][3ae5933506a158e584e22b324bc29991]

Type	Name	Papers
Author	Y. Bergman	[dcb6d80e4a335bc990d5fbeeac41d85c][ccfa22dc463b5c428460c9f3a9178994]
Journal	<i>Death Studies</i>	[565c06e76fef5196854b6e1ddd0eda8e][293b7b325c0655d4ae9e82b7f0943a20] [04abf7ac990d585b8c5dac2ea7e24fa0]
Journal	<i>PloS ONE</i>	[91e7d74ce644527b86fa9cd079cef9d0][0c2b03779f0958cd90f4db91887cab52]
Journal	<i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>	[91aac0ab7e075711a11237a878b52bb2][72273f0fa675509dbda6e3156530cb7f] [91a8bff83b4a5af99cc6da12e927c768]

FIGURE 6 Authors and journals most frequent in included papers

4. Discussion

The strongest conclusion is that NDEs are associated with lasting reductions in fear of death, not merely transient relief. That finding appears across multiple designs, populations, and eras, including controlled retrospective comparisons, large cardiac-arrest cohorts, and recent large surveys (■ Greyson, 1992; Van Lommel et al., 2001; ■ Long & Woollacott, 2024). The fact that deeper NDEs predict lower death threat strengthens the case that the experience itself, rather than simple exposure to danger, matters (■ Greyson, 1992; ■ Bianco et al., 2019).

The weaker link is from reduced death fear to reduced defensive behavior. Terror management theory robustly shows that death awareness can intensify worldview defense, anxiety, and avoidance in general populations (Burke et al., 2010; Routledge et al., 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003). Some NDE-relevant evidence fits that model: NDE experiencers show greater approach-oriented death acceptance, less avoidance relative to intrusive thoughts, and shifts toward self-transcendence and compassion (Greyson, 2003; Michael et al., 2025; ■ Long & Woollacott, 2024). But most of these are proxy measures, not direct longitudinal tests of worldview defense, threat avoidance, or self-esteem striving after natural NDEs.

Study quality also limits causal inference. Much of the NDE literature is retrospective and self-selected, which leaves room for recall bias, expectancy, and interpretation effects (■ Sweeney et al., 2022; Barreto, 2025). The prospective ICU study provides an important counterpoint because it found much smaller effects on fear of death at one year (■ Martial et al., 2024). At the same time, the broader death-anxiety literature supports the clinical importance of any true reduction, because death anxiety is moderately to strongly linked to distress, anxiety symptoms, and broader psychopathology (Menzies et al., 2024; Menzies et al., 2019).

Claim	Evidence Strength	Reasoning	Papers
NDEs are associated with lower long-term fear of death	 Strong	Replicated across multiple direct NDE studies, including controlled and prospective work	(■ Greyson, 1992; Van Lommel et al., 2001; ■ Long & Woollacott, 2024)
NDE depth predicts larger reduction in death threat	 Moderate	Seen in more than one direct study, but still observational	(■ Greyson, 1992; ■ Bianco et al., 2019)
NDEs likely shift people toward death acceptance and transformed death beliefs	 Moderate	Consistent direct findings, plausible mechanism for reduced anxiety	(■ Bianco et al., 2019; Greyson, 2003; ■ Long & Woollacott, 2024)
NDEs reduce defensive psychological behaviors in the long term	 Moderate	Theory and indirect markers support it, but few naturalistic behavioral tests exist	(Michael et al., 2025; Barberia et al., 2018; Niemiec et al., 2010)

Claim	Evidence Strength	Reasoning	Papers
Effects are uniformly positive and easy to integrate	 Weak	Contradicted by distressing NDEs and integration difficulties in some survivors	(Michael et al., 2025;  Martial et al., 2024)

FIGURE 7 Key claims and evidence across included papers

5. Conclusion

The literature supports a yes to the first half of the question: surviving a near-death experience usually does result in a significant long-term reduction in fear of death. The answer is more qualified for the second half: decreased defensive psychological behaviors are suggested by theory, proxy measures, and a few analogue studies, but they are not yet demonstrated with the same consistency in direct long-term NDE cohorts.

Research Gaps

The main gap is not whether NDEs alter death attitudes, but whether they measurably reduce specific defensive behaviors over time, in whom, and under what interpretations of the experience.

Topic/Outcome	Longitudinal natural NDE cohorts	Behavioral defense measures	Mechanism testing	Distressing NDE subgroup
Fear of death	4	GAP	3	1
Worldview defense	GAP	1	1	GAP
Avoidance behavior	1	1	1	1
Self-esteem and meaning	2	GAP	3	1

FIGURE 8 Research coverage across core NDE outcomes

Open Research Questions

Direct behavioral tests are the clearest next step for this field.

Question	Why
Do natural near-death experiences reduce worldview defense, social avoidance, or threat-monitoring on behavioral tasks over 1-5 years?	Current evidence for reduced defensiveness is largely inferred from theory, proxies, or simulations rather than measured directly.
Which aspects of an NDE predict lower death anxiety most strongly: out-of-body experience, mystical intensity, life review, or changed afterlife beliefs?	Dose-response signals exist, but the active components of the experience remain poorly isolated.
Why do some NDE survivors report distress or no reduction in fear of death despite the average positive trend?	Null and adverse outcomes are clinically important and may reveal moderators of benefit versus difficulty integrating the event.

For the question asked: the evidence is strong that NDEs usually reduce long-term fear of death, but only moderate that they also reduce defensive psychological behaviors.

These search results were found and analyzed using Consensus, an AI-powered search engine for research. Try it at <https://consensus.app>. © 2026 Consensus NLP, Inc. Personal, non-commercial use only; redistribution requires copyright holders' consent.

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