

Review of: "God's characteristics as reported by near-death experiencers"

Yoshija Walter¹

¹ University of Bern

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is an interesting study dealing with subjective near-death experience reports with the goal to extract information about the characteristics of God and Jesus perceived by the experiencers.

Strengths of this paper:

- This paper deals with a research question that is highly pertinent to a variety of disciplines: i.e. psychology, spirituality research, religious studies, consciousness research, neuroscience, the philosophy of mind, and epistemology
- From the perspective of epistemology and philosophy of religion, it is an important question to ask what characteristics of the divine can be seen in such fringe experiences
- The authors are well versed in the NDE literature and the respective scales

Suggestions for revisions or clarifications:

- There are some typos: i.e. "his" instead of "this" in the first paragraph.
- In the first paragraph, the Gospels are listed next to the bible, although the former is a part of the latter (it is not clear why they are listed separately)
- It would be worth referencing Tanja Luhmann, since she works heavily on the question of religious experiences from an ethnographic perspective
- The scientific literature in this domain is barely referenced (i.e. van Elk & Allemann, and so forth)
- The authors' wording is not very cautious as they appear to adopt the emic stances of the experiencers (without critically discussing this): e.g. the authors write in the results section: "God was encountered 84.5% of the time". This sounds like the researchers can be certain that they in fact have encountered God – which, for a scientific study, is not careful language (since they have no way to know that this is in fact the case).
- It is not clear whether the authors make a clear distinction between the fathomed experiences of "God" and of "Jesus" – do they throw both concepts into the same category?
- There are some methodological issues with this study:
 - The authors do not present a clear research question and hypotheses that they want to analyze. Later, they write that it is an exploratory study. Since this is not the first study of its kind (they declare that it is a replication study), clear research goals should have been provided.
 - The data pool can be contested: It is not clear whether a platform where everybody can post his or her own stories

(even anonymously) can be trusted. There are certainly strengths and weaknesses with the data generation, which should be more critically discussed.

- There are several well-established methods for content analysis (see, for example Philipp Mayring or others), but it seems like the authors are doing “their own thing” as they see fit. It would be a stronger case if they would have used already established methods for qualitative analysis and referenced them.

Overall, the research topic is highly interesting and relevant to various fields. It is well worth pursuing further, although, with a stronger methodological foundation.