

# The Importance of Veridical Perceptions in Near-Death Experiences

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# What's going on in NDEs?

- **Striking phenomenological aspects of NDEs**
  - Hyperreal perceptions
  - Locus of perception is outside the physical body
  - Apparently non-physical veridical perceptions (AVPs) – accurate, verified perceptions of physical environment
  - Indelible memories of the experience
  - Frequently when brain function is compromised (coma, cardiac arrest)
- **Two opposing explanatory hypotheses:**
  - The brain is producing these effects
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  - **Two opposing explanatory hypotheses:**
    - The brain is producing these effects
    - Consciousness or mind has separated from the body
  - **John M. Fischer** (Project Leader, Immortality Project)
    - “Any complete explanation of NDEs must account for all aspects of all NDEs”
- Mitchell-Yellin, B., & Fischer, J. M. (2014). The near-death experience argument against physicalism: A critique. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 21 (7–8), 158–183.



John  
Fischer



# Investigating NDE Veridical Perceptions

- **Michael Sabom with Sarah Kreutziger (1982)**
  - **Prospective study: no targets; analyzed NDE accounts against medical records; evaluated recollection of resuscitation events versus controls**
- **Jan Holden**
  - **Proposed “double blind” visual targets near the ceiling in hospital rooms, dynamically generated (1988)**
  - **Study of AVP cases: 92% completely accurate, 6% minor errors (2009)**



Michael Sabom

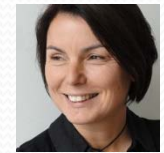


Jan Holden

- Sabom, M. B. (1982). *Recollections of death: A medical investigation*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Holden, J. M. (1988). Rationale and considerations for proposed near-death research in the hospital setting. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 7(1), 19–31.
- Holden, J. M. (2009). Veridical perception in near-death experiences. In J. M. Holden, B. Greyson & D. James (Eds.), *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty years of investigation* (pp. 185–211). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO.

# Investigating NDE Veridical Perceptions ...

- **Prospective studies with targets**
  - **1990 – 2008: five separate studies** (see Holden, 2009)
    - Only a few NDEs, one NDE with AVPs, no reports of seeing the target
  - **Penny Sartori** (2008)
    - Evaluated recollection of resuscitation events vs. controls
    - Compared hallucinations versus NDE perceptions (large differences)
  - **AWARE (AWAreness during REsuscitation) study** (Parnia et al., 2014):  
after 4 years, one NDE with AVPs, no target in room



Penny  
Sartori



Sam  
Parnia

- Holden, J. M. (2009). Veridical perception in near-death experiences. In J. M. Holden, B. Greyson & D. James (Eds.), *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty years of investigation* (pp. 185–211). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO.
- Sartori, P. (2008). *The Near-Death Experiences of Hospitalized Intensive Care Patients: A Five Year Clinical Study*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press..
- Parnia, S., Spearpoint, K., de Vos, G., Fenwick, P., Goldberg, D., Yang, J., ... & Schoenfeld, E. R. (2014). AWARE—AWAreness during REsuscitation—A prospective study. *Resuscitation*, 85 (12), 1799–1805.



# Investigating NDE Veridical Perceptions ...

- **Cardiac arrest (CA) is assumed the best “model” of NDEs**
  - Most closely resembles actual death
  - No blood flow to brain results in complete shutdown of all brain activity
  - Any veridical perceptions during CA imply perceptions without physical senses
  - Hyperreal perceptions and indelible memories require robust brain function
- **1990 analysis: NDEs occurring closer to death have more features**
- **But cardiac arrest is also problematic**
  - Very few survivors; fewer who can be interviewed and followed up
  - Observed lower incidence of NDEs in CA
  - Memory deficits in CA survivors

- Owens, J. E., Cook, E. W., & Stevenson, I. (1990). Features of “near-death experience” in relation to whether or not patients were near death. *The Lancet*, 336, 1175-1177.



# Moving the study of AVPs forward

- **New news**
  - **New analysis of NDEs in coma cases versus non-life-threatening cases**
  - **New analysis of the quality of memories in NDEs**
- **A fresh look at AVPs**
  - **Compilation of AVPs with independent, third-party verification**
  - **What does it take to establish the timing and locus of perception?**
  - **Are neurological explanations actually viable?**
- **Are NDEs objectively real?**
  - **NDEs with multiple witnesses; shared NDEs**
  - **Apparitional NDEs**
- **Future of AVP investigation**
  - **What will it take for eventual acceptance of the separate-mind hypothesis**



# A radical new view of NDEs

- Vanessa Charland-Verville, Steven Laureys and colleagues (2014) from University of Liège in Belgium
- Compared 140 NDEs from coma versus 50 NDEs from non-life-threatening events (sleep, fainting, meditation, alcohol use, etc.)
- No difference in the *intensity* (NDE scale) and *content* (NDE elements) between non-life-threatening NDEs and coma NDEs



Vanessa  
Charland-Verville



Steven Laureys

- Charland-Verville, V., Jourdan, J.-P., Thonnard, M., Ledoux, D., Donneau, A.-F., Quertemont, E., & Laureys, S. (2014). Near-death experiences in non-life-threatening events and coma of different etiologies. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8(203).



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- No difference in the intensity (NDE scale) and *content* (NDE elements) between non-life-threatening NDEs and coma NDEs
- “Closeness to death” and physiological or psychological factors are not determinative in NDEs (our conclusion)
  - NDEs involve a common state of consciousness
  - Many triggers but a single common “proximate cause”: the separation of consciousness from the physical body
  - Requirement of cardiac arrest or zero brain electrical activity is irrelevant to the NDE itself



Vanessa  
Charland-Verville



Steven Laureys

- Mays, R. G., & Mays, S. B. (2015). Explaining Near-Death Experiences: Physical or non-physical causation?, in review *Journal of Near-Death Studies*.

# Memories of NDEs

- Marie Thonnard, Steven Laureys and colleagues (2013) from University of Liège in Belgium
- Compared the memories of NDEs with memories of others who were in coma without an NDE
  - Significantly more characteristics: visual details, memory clarity, memories of being involved in the event & emotional content



Marie Thonnard



Steven Laureys

- Thonnard, M., Charland-Verville, V., Brédart, S., Dehon, H., Ledoux, D., Laureys, S., & Vanhaudenhuyse, A. (2013) Characteristics of near-death experiences memories as compared to real and imagined events memories. *PLoS ONE* 8(3): e57620.



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    - Significantly more characteristics: visual details, memory clarity, memories of being involved in the event & emotional content
  - NDEs can't be considered as imagined events; NDE events are really perceived
    - Contradicts skeptics' assertions: NDEs are dream-like memories or are altered memories of real events
    - NDEr remembers being actively involved in the event
    - "What makes the NDEs 'unique' is the perception of the experience itself"
- Thonnard, M., Charland-Verville, V., Brédart, S., Dehon, H., Ledoux, D., Laureys, S., & Vanhaudenhuyse, A. (2013) Characteristics of near-death experiences memories as compared to real and imagined events memories. *PLoS ONE* 8(3): e57620.



Marie Thonnard



Steven Laureys

## Dutch book on paranormal aspects of NDEs

An important book published in Dutch in 2013 by NDE researchers Titus Rivas, Anny Dirven and Rudolf Smit

Summarized 78 verified cases of veridical perceptions and other paranormal events in NDEs



- Only cases with independent third-party corroboration have been included
- IANDS is translating and will publish this book in English; the authors are adding several additional recent cases
- Working title – *The Self Does Not Die*
- Jan Holden is the editor; Robert and Suzanne Mays will write the foreword to this edition
- IANDS is still asking for donations to complete the publication and to publicize the book: [www.iands.org/translate](http://www.iands.org/translate)
- Rivas, T., Dirven, A., & Smit, R. H. (2013). *Wat een stervend brein niet kan: aanwijzingen voor parapsychologische verschijnselen rond bijna-doodervaringen; de harde kern van bevestigde casussen*. Leeuwarden, Netherlands: Elikser B.V. Publishing.

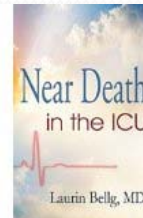


## Dutch book on paranormal aspects of NDEs ...

- **Types of AVPs**
  - AVPs occurring in the immediate environment (10 cases).
    - Al Sullivan
  - AVPs of events or objects beyond the reach of physical senses (14 cases).
    - Maria's shoe
    - 1985 quarter
    - 12-digit serial number
  - AVPs during cardiac arrest (30 cases).
    - Lloyd W. Rudy's patient
    - Laurin Bellg's patient Howard



Laurin Bellg



Lloyd Rudy

- Rivas, T. & Smit, R. H. (2013). A Near-Death Experience with Veridical Perception Described by a Famous Heart Surgeon and Confirmed by his Assistant Surgeon. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 31(3), 179–186. YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLioDuvQRo8>
- Bellg, L. (2015). *Near Death in the ICU*. Appleton, WI: Sloan Press.

## Dutch book on paranormal aspects of NDEs ...

- **Other paranormal aspects of NDEs**
  - **Telepathic communication with a living person (4 cases).**
    - Example: George Rodonaia
  - **Communication with unknown deceased persons (5 cases).**
    - Example: Colton Burpo
  - **Deceased loved ones give paranormal information (5 cases).**
    - Example: Eddie Cuomo
  - **NDEr appears as an apparition to others (5 cases).**
    - Examples: Mary Gosse, Olga Gearhardt, Laurin Bellg's cancer patient
  - **Psychic abilities after an NDE (3 cases).**
    - Example: Cherylee Black
  - **Miraculous healings after an NDE (9 cases).**
    - Example: Anita Moorjani



## Establishing the timing and locus of perception

- **Unusual objects that are not physically possible for NDEr to see**
  - **Objects not familiar to NDEr**
  - **Objects unfamiliar to anyone else immediately present**
  - **Objects impossible for anyone immediately present to see**
  - **Objects at a large distance**
  - **Hidden targets near the ceiling**

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- **Unusual events that are not physically possible for NDEr to observe**
  - Sequence and details of the unfolding event
  - Time of the event relative to the NDEr's physiological condition
  - Event occurring in the presence of the NDEr but out of physical sensation
  - Event occurring beyond the NDEr's physical presence
  - Hidden targets: random compositions of elements, changing over time



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  - Hidden targets that are randomly composed and changed over time
- **Best cases**
  - Detailed, purely visual event or unusual object, perceived at a distance or with physical vision blocked
  - Contemporaneous with a known physiological condition of electrical flat line
  - Immediate verification by independent investigators

## Are neurological explanations viable?

- **No physiological explanation fits all cases, especially near-death-like cases (NDLEs)**
  - Hypoxia, hypercarbia, administered drugs, etc.
  - Endogenous neurochemical factors: endorphins, DMT, etc.
  - Temporal lobe seizure, REM intrusion, etc.
- **The subjective experiences of these physiological conditions are not like NDEs**
  - Cases where the person has experienced both, e.g. hypoxic G-LOC and an NDE

- Greyson, B., Kelly, E. W. & Kelly, E. F. (2009). Explanatory models for near-death experiences. In J. M. Holden, B. Greyson & D. James (Eds.), *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty years of investigation* (pp. 213-234). Praeger Publishers.



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- **No correlation of NDEs with physiological factors**
  - Many NDEs occur with no hypoxic condition
  - Many people near death with hypoxia do not report an NDE
  - If hypoxia were the *cause* of NDEs there would be a strong correlation
  - Same case for all other physiological explanations
  - ➔ A common proximate cause for NDEs is likely

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- Consciousness is associated with a sustained level of cortical electrical power
- Neurological explanations of accurate conscious perceptions of events at a distance during an NDE are a stretch



## Are there objective validations of NDEs?

- **Simultaneous “group NDEs”**
  - **Accounts consistent among the NDErs**
  - **Example: Jake and the Hotshots (Gibson, 1999)**
- **“Shared NDE”**
  - **Healthy person observes the process of the NDE, account matches the NDEr’s subjective experience**
  - **Similar to shared-death experience “SDE” (Moody & Perry, 2010; Fenwick & Fenwick, 2008)**
  - **Example: Jan Price (1996)**

- Gibson, A. S. (1999). *Fingerprints of God: Evidences from near-death studies, scientific research on creation, and Mormon theology*. Bountiful, UT: Horizon.
- Moody, Jr., R. A., & Perry, P. (2010). *Glimpses of Eternity: Sharing a loved one’s passage from this life into the next*. New York: Guideposts.
- Fenwick, P., & Fenwick, E. (2008). *The Art of Dying: A journey to elsewhere*. (chapter 9). New York: Continuum.
- Price, J. (1996). *The Other Side of Death*. New York: Fawcett Columbine.

## Is there any objective validation of NDEs ...

- “Apparitional NDEs”
  - NDEr visits another person out-of-body, communicates and both accounts are verified as consistent
  - Examples:
    - Mary Gosse (Alvarado, 2010)
    - Olga Gearhardt (Morse & Perry, 1994)
    - Laurin Bellg’s cancer patient (Bellg, 2014)

- Alvarado, C. S. (2010). “The Dying Mother:” Historical citations of Mary Goffe’s seventeenth-century near-death apparition. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 29(1), 241–253.
- Morse, M., & Perry, P. (1994). *Parting Visions: Uses and meanings of pre-death, psychic, and spiritual experiences*. New York: Villard Books.
- Bellg, L. (2014). Patient NDEs in the ICU. 2014 TMI Professional Seminar, The Monroe Institute, Faber, Virginia.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdScjvc14xE>



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- **Objective perception and corroboration of the subjective NDE content**
  - **Confirm the objective existence of the mind or spirit of the NDEr**
  - **Especially if:**
    - **Corroborated as occurring at same time**
    - **Observed details match**
    - **Information is communicated or NDEr’s presence made known**

# The future of AVP investigation

- **AWARE study limitations**
  - Projections for producing statistically meaningful results – several decades
  - Controlled experimental study is impractical because conditions can't be fully controlled – not necessary for a “scientific” study
  - Cardiac arrest is too restrictive, too long to get results
  - Compare with broader in-hospital phenomenological studies (e.g. Sabom, Sartori, Bellg)



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  - Compare with broader in-hospital phenomenological studies (e.g. Sabom, Sartori, Bellg)
- **Proposal: a single-hospital investigation of all cases likely to have resulted in an NDE**
  - In conjunction with a graduate program
  - All rooms in hospital equipped with visual targets, preferably driven by computers
  - Interview all possible cases and document any unusual events
  - Verify and document all details in depth as soon as reported (Mays & Mays, 2009)
  - Targets are more likely ultimately to be seen

- Mays, R. G. & Mays, S. B. (2009). On the scope of analysis for the AWARE study. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 27 (3), 195–201.



## Eventual acceptance of the mind-entity model

- **AVPs are the critical first step to establish the fact of mind separation**
  - Only reasonable explanation for veridical perceptions
  - NDEs occurring in widely varied circumstances imply a *common proximate cause*
  - Only reasonable explanation applying to “all aspects of all NDEs”
  - Weight of the evidence and the wide variety of cases



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  - Weight of the evidence and the wide variety of cases
- **Identify the neurological interface between the mind and the brain**
  - Already there is broad explanatory power for several “enigmas” of consciousness
  - There should also be significant explanatory power for specific neurological problems
- **With both steps there will be eventual acceptance**