Letter to the Editor

Some Additions in the Algorithm for Out of Body Experiences

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We would like to congratulate Valarie Laws and Elanie Perry for their thoughtful paper on developing the algorithm for near body experiences (Laws and Perry, 2010). Indeed, it is of grave importance to select the cases on the basis of strict exclusion criteria, so that the sample that is obtained is a representative of Near Death Experiences (NDE) as pure as could be. However, we observe that the algorithm could have been more accurate if following points would be taken into consideration.

1) The algorithm they mention should be limited to NDEs because of the fact that there are numerous out-of-body experiences (OBE), which cannot all be clubbed in one category. As the authors themselves mention in the introduction, the OBEs can be found in religious context as well as in substance abuse. In such cases, the algorithm mentioned by the authors cannot be applied.

2) We believe that step No.1 in the algorithm should consist of the “floating phenomena” that the NDE individual is able to see something which can only be visible due to freedom of individual to move around. For example, seeing the objects placed on the top shelf of a rack, whose height is so much that it cannot be visible by the patient in standing or sitting position, or the events occurring in other room (in which case, the consciousness will be supposed to move through the wall). We would like to address this because these experiences, if occur actually with adequate accuracy, are worth consideration above every other experiences. But at the same time, we also advocate that the accuracy should be tested by passing it through the stringent criteria set up by the authors.

3) As the authors mention by themselves that till date we cannot know for sure what constitutes a sufficiently convincing case of NDE/OBE. In this scenario, it is advisable to not directly discard the cases at the outright, rather collect data from these cases as much as possible. Recently, there have been evidences of interest among researchers about the physiological correlates of NDE states, especially the electroencephalogram (Chawla et al., 2009; Beauregard et al., 2009). Although these cases studied by Chawla et al., (Chawla et al., 2009) would not have passed through the algorithm set by the authors, but still, the unique EEG
pattern cannot be ruled out to be something unique, which could turn out to be possible NDE marker in near future. Thus we suggest that instead of “Discarding” the cases who do-not fulfil the superficial criteria as established by the authors, it would be better to collect physiological information from these patients so that possibly some of these cases could turn out to be NDE at the physiological level.

**Ex: QUESTION 1**

**WAS THE PATIENTS PROCEDURE, (DURING WHICH THEY REPORTED AN NDE/OBE) AN EMERGENCY / UNPLANNED?**

YES-GO ON TO QUESTION 2

NO-COLLECT THE PHYSIOLOGICAL DETAILS OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND LEAVE THEM OUT OF THE STUDY

4) The psychiatric aspects of NDE have not been adequately highlighted in the algorithm. The authors themselves quote that dissociative experiences could mimic NDE. Similarly, Greyson report that 33% of his psychiatric study population had experiences of NDE (Greyson, 2003). So we believe that at the last step of the algorithm before labelling the individual as ‘sifted’ should be a psychiatric referral of such individuals having NDE and if other psychiatric components are detected after a detailed psychiatric workup, such cases should not be included in the study. However, as we mention above, we would still advocate collecting physiological data of such individuals for possible future use.

We suggest that these points should be kept in consideration for any algorithm set to select the OBE/NDE cases for the purpose of any study.

**References**


