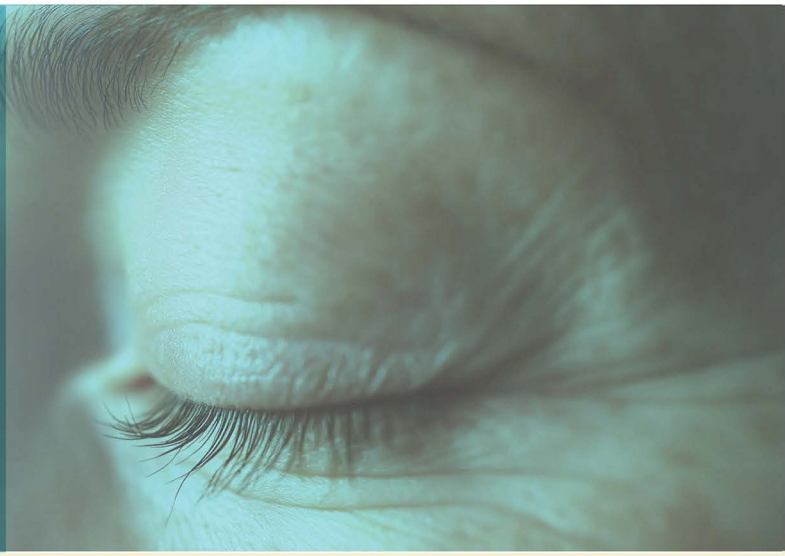
Initial Lucidity: Unexplained Awareness at the Threshold of Life



by Russ Rooney

Lucidity is commonly defined as a state of clear, rational awareness — the sudden ability to think, understand, and communicate coherently after a period of confusion or impairment.[1] In recent years, researchers have documented terminal lucidity: brief, unexpected returns of mental clarity in people near death who were previously unresponsive or severely impaired. Could a similar phenomenon also occur at the very beginning of life? In this article, we call such episodes *initial lucidity*—a term we use to denote sudden, unexpected signs of coherent awareness early in development, offered in loose analogy to *terminal lucidity* at life's end.

If we accept these flashes of consciousness at death as meaningful and worthy of study, we should be no less attentive to comparable signs near the moment of life's beginning. These early moments of awareness, though difficult to measure, challenge the idea that nascent children lack the capacity for conscious experience.

A Classic Case

Below is a frequently cited anecdote of terminal lucidity from a physician's report:

> "We did not believe our eyes and ears. Kathe, who had never spoken a word and was profoundly disabled from birth, suddenly sang a hymn—*'Where does the soul find its home, its peace? Peace, peace, heavenly peace!'* Moments later she died. Medically, I cannot explain this. Anatomically, conscious thought should have been impossible."[2]

For researchers, the key point is the sudden emergence of coherent awareness where none was expected. Peer-reviewed studies have explored whether extraordinary cognition can arise independently of measurable brain function, suggesting that consciousness may have a non-material component. As Father Robert Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D. writes, "Scientific investigation increasingly reveals phenomena—such as terminal lucidity—that challenge a strictly materialist view of consciousness and open the door to understanding the mind as more than brain activity alone."[3] Near-death-experience (NDE) research adds to the puzzle: some patients blind from birth have accurately described visual details from the operating room while clinically unconscious—events that standard neurology cannot yet explain.[4]

> ***"With my first pass of the forceps, I grasped a small leg. Exactly then I felt the first flutter of my own baby—thump, thump—in my uterus.***

Possible Early Life Parallels

If such "end-of-life lucidity" is possible, might an *initial lucidity* also appear early in fetal development?

Gianna Jessen survived a 1977 saline-instillation abortion at roughly seven months' gestation. The hyper-saline solution, intended to scald and asphyxiate the fetus, instead induced premature labor and she was delivered alive, later developing

cerebral palsy likely caused by oxygen deprivation. Although she retained no conscious memory of the procedure, her adoptive parents report that at age four she screamed and covered her ears upon hearing the sharp crackle of a fireplace. Two physicians familiar with her case theorized that the sound triggered an implicit memory of the caustic saline "sizzling" around her in utero.[5]

Or consider this example from abortionist Lisa Harris, M.D., who described performing an abortion at 18 weeks while she was 18 weeks pregnant herself. At the exact moment she dismembered a fetus of the same age as her own, she felt her child move for the first time:

> "With my first pass of the forceps, I grasped a small leg. Exactly then I felt the first flutter of my own baby—*thump, thump*—in my uterus. Tears flowed before my conscious mind caught up. My body reacted without input from training or political convictions. It was brutally visceral—one of the rawest moments of my life."[6]

No obvious physiological mechanism explains the perfectly timed awareness Harris reported, but this convergence of two prenatal realities—life preserved and life ended—offers a window into the moral tension many abortion providers report. Harris's account does not prove fetal consciousness, but the timing of her baby's first kick raises a similar challenge to a strictly materialist view of the human mind as simply the human brain operating in isolation, informed only by the senses.

Objective Indicators of Prenatal Awareness

While emotional accounts can be compelling, the strongest evidence of early awareness comes from behavioral and neurological research.

Gianna Jessen interviewed on Huckabee Today

A study published in *Early Human Development* found that babies between 23 and 30 weeks gestation could learn through habituation—reducing their response to repeated stimuli. This ability to detect, remember, and adapt to sensory input reflects active neural processing. Because habituation is considered a fundamental building block of cognition and attention, these findings strongly suggest that nascent children may possess early forms of conscious awareness long before birth.[9]

Signs of consciousness may emerge even earlier than we imagine. A landmark 2010 study using motion capture found that 14-week-old twins reached for each other's faces and mouths more often—and with greater care—than they did toward the uterine wall, suggesting purposeful, relational awareness rather than mere reflex.[10]

Real-time ultrasounds during early amniocentesis shows 12-week children in the womb rapidly withdrawing from an approaching needle even before it touches them—an instinctive defensive act incompatible with a purely reflexive organism.[11]

These findings provide compelling evidence that children may possess conscious experience in the womb. This underscores the urgent responsibility to ensure that laws fully protect the preborn at every stage of development.

Conclusion

Across the human lifespan—from the womb to the deathbed—sudden, unexplainable flashes of awareness challenge the claim that consciousness is merely the by-product of measurable brain function. These episodes indicate that nascent children may possess real, responsive awareness at stages when our culture most readily dismisses them. If we are willing to recognize lucidity at life's end, we must also honor it at life's fragile beginning—when that awareness is most in need of protection.

1. Lucidity definition, Merriam Webster.

2."Terminal Lucidity in People with Lifelong Cognitive Impairment," digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc461761/m1/11/.

3. Robert J. Spitzer, *Science at the Doorstep to God* (Ignatius Press, 2023).

4. Ibid., pp. 130–132 (review of NDE data in congenitally blind patients).

5. Jessica Shaver Renshaw & Gianna Jessen, Gianna: Aborted and Lived to Tell About It (Focus on the Family, 1995), p. 38.

6. Lisa Harris, "Second Trimester Abortion Provision: Breaking the Silence and Changing the Discourse," Reproductive Health Matters 16:31 (2008), p. 76.

7. Leader, L. R., Baillie, P., Martin, B., & Vermeulen, E. (1982). The assessment and significance of habituation to a repeated stimulus by the human fetus. Early Human Development, 7, 211–219. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-3782(82)90084-6

8. Castiello et al., "Wired to be social: The ontogeny of human interactive behavior," PNAS (2010).

9. Nicholas M. Fisk et al., "Fetal behavioural responses to invasive procedures," Archives of Disease in Childhood—Fetal and Neonatal Edition 77, no. 1 (1997): F F23–F27.

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