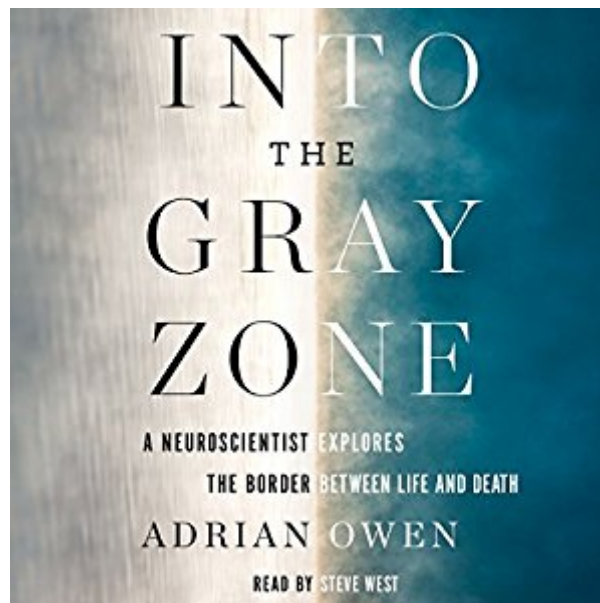


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# Into The Gray Zone: A Neuroscientist Explores The Border Between Life And Death



## Synopsis

In this startling and thought-provoking book, which will remind listeners of works by Oliver Sacks and Atul Gawande, a world-renowned neuroscientist reveals his controversial, groundbreaking work with patients whose brains were previously thought vegetative or nonresponsive but turn out - in up to 20 percent of cases - to be vibrantly alive, existing in the "gray zone". Into the Gray Zone takes listeners to the edge of a dazzling, humbling frontier in our understanding of the brain: the so-called "gray zone" between full consciousness and brain death. People in this middle place have sustained traumatic brain injuries or are the victims of stroke or degenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Many are oblivious to the outside world, and their doctors believe they are incapable of thought. But a sizeable number are experiencing something different: intact minds adrift deep within damaged brains and bodies. An expert in the field, Adrian Owen led a team that, in 2006, discovered this lost population and made medical history. Scientists, physicians, and philosophers have only just begun to grapple with the implications. Following Owen's journey of exciting medical discovery, Into the Gray Zone asks some tough and terrifying questions, such as: What is life like for these patients? What can their families and friends do to help them? What are the ethical implications for religious organizations, politicians, the right to die movement, and even insurers? And perhaps most intriguing of all: In defining what a life worth living is, are we too concerned with the physical and not giving enough emphasis to the power of thought? What truly defines a satisfying life? This book is about the difference between a brain and a mind, a body and a person. It is about what these fascinating borderlands between life and death have taught us about being human.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I received a free electronic copy of this book from Netgalley, Adrian Owen, and Scribner in exchange for an honest review. Thank you all, for sharing your hard work with me. Adrian Owen outlines and details his work with patients suffering neurological damage due to accident or illness over the last 29 years, the equipment and processes used to recognize consciousness in those persons diagnosed as being in a vegetative state. This was a hard book to read. In our world we get used to happily-ever-after. We see it in our books and our films, those adult fairy tales that carry the day. Every inch of progress made in neuroscience was hard fought on several fronts - general perception, funding, equipment. But these scientists have climbed those unknown mountains, and found many positives for those suffering injury, Parkinson's or Alzheimers, and found new ways to communicate with people in the Grey Zone. What a wonderful breakthrough!

There are endless ways to damage ourselves. There are endless ways to damage our brains, possibly the most frightening condition of all. Because "We Are Our Brains" our awareness, our consciousness, our personalities. In *The Gray Zone* examines those minds trapped in their unmoving bodies, still able to observe, retain and exist. But on the outside, no one knows that. Without intending to, neuroscientist Adrian Owen has spent a lifetime discovering how to penetrate those immobile presences, and actually communicate with some of them. It is a very upbeat voyage of discovery, emotionally told. Owen makes it not just bearable but fascinating. It is very difficult to stop reading. His own relationships were fraught with brain damage "that of his mother and his ex. His own childhood was marred by the medical torture of cancer. But the unshakeable enthusiasm, joy at discovery and excitement of at achievements large and small have made for a breakthrough career, and a clear acceleration towards the day when brains will be able to communicate. The stories are of men and women of all ages, seemingly vegetative.

Owen's early research on the brain led him to the realization that different thoughts are processed in different areas, because our brains are that specialized. There is a place in the brain that does nothing but process places, and another that does nothing but process actions. If you think of a place where you took action, your brain will hand off the thought from one section to the other. Owen's breakthrough idea was to put vegetative patients in an fMRI scanner and tell them to think of an action (playing tennis) for a while or walking through their home for

“eyes” •. The live scans now possible show the various areas of the brain light up in response to yes/no questions, proving these inanimate people are still in there, still aware, still fighting. Possibly one in five is conscious enough to provide this sort of “conversation” •. More remarkable, perhaps, is that some recover. Owen has had face to face conversations with patients who remember his experiments. Their experiences, their observations, and their trials are beyond gripping “ they are heart-rending. The lesson, if there is one, is to treat vegetative patients with total respect. They want to know names, titles and roles. They want explanations of what treatment they are about to receive. The pointless chatter and undeserved reinforcement are very much appreciated if not critical to their potential appreciation and quality of life. Into the Gray Zone is a shock and an inspiration. There are surprises at every turn. There is suspense, success, failure and reward. It is a book of life. David Wineberg

Adrian Owen is a world renowned neuroscientist who has conducted research involving cognitive abilities in people with traumatic brain injuries. In his newly published book, Into the Gray Zone, Owen writes about the cutting edge procedures he and his colleagues have developed in order to try to establish whether or not patients who have been diagnosed as being in a persistent vegetative state are, in fact, cognizant of their surroundings. Although some parts of the book are difficult to comprehend, Owen successfully explains in layman’s terms, how the injuries sustained by patients impact various parts of the brain, and what long term consequences they produce. Each chapter details the experiences Owen has encountered while working with specific patients and their families. Each person experienced a sudden, unexpected brain injury that left them trapped inside their body with no way to communicate their thoughts! The damage sustained by their brains has placed them in the “gray zone”-- somewhere between life and death. Each story is heartbreaking. Yet Adrian Owen is optimistic that advances in brain research and technology will someday provide better outcomes for people with traumatic brain injuries. I would give this book more stars if I could. It is one of the most interesting and informative books I have ever read. Thank goodness for these intelligent, dedicated researchers whose goal is to help people when others have simply given up on them. I was moved by Adrian Owen’s comment about his research: “Beyond the elegant experiments and dazzling technology, the heart of gray-zone science is about finding people who have been lost to us and reconnecting them with the people they love and who love them. Each contact still feels like a miracle.”. What began as a scientific journey more than twenty years ago, a quest to unlock the mysteries of the human brain, evolved over time into a different kind of journey altogether: a quest to pull people out of the void, to

ferry them back from the gray zone, so they can once again take their place among us in the land of the living.Â¢Â¢ Â¢

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