Murdock published his World Ethnographic Sample in 1957. He produced his "carefully selected sample" by dividing the world into "six approximately equivalent ethnographic regions", and subdivided each into ten areas, each in turn, including a maximum of ten societies. He thus arrived at a total of 565 cultures. His choices were based on five formal positive criteria for inclusion in any of the subareas:

a. The most populous or most extensive society
b. The best described society
c. An example of each basic type of economy and rule of descent.
d. One example of each linguistic stock or subfamily.
e. Any "relatively distinctive" cultures in the subarea.

He also states two criteria for exclusion: a) geographically contiguous societies or b) societies with mutually intelligible languages unless their inclusion is specifically warranted by one or more of the five positive criteria. The sample therefore is carefully constructed and every attempt is made to represent diversity. In fact, each subarea appears as a heterogenous group of societies, rather than as a homogenous grouping of similar cultures, as the traditional concept of the culture area might lead one to expect. Individual societies are included because of their diversity, rather than because of their representative or typical nature, the number of people they represent, the size of their territory, or their historical importance. The emphasis is emphatically on cultural variability. This variability extends to time as well as space, so that we find such historically remote groups as the Scythians (450 B.C.) the Babylonians (2000 B.C.) the Hebrews (800 B.C.) etc. with the majority of societies being studied in the ethnographic present.
Similarly, large scale, complex industrial modern societies are represented as well as tribal societies of only a few hundred souls. We shall return to this matter of diversity presently. There seems to have been no direct follow-up on the World Ethnographic Sample, although a number of publications have utilized the materials presented in the sample. (e.g., Gault and Haberstein, Spiro).

With the first issue of Ethnology, Murdock began the quarterly publication of the Ethnographic Atlas. The Atlas is different from the World Ethnographic Sample in several ways, but for the present, we shall be concerned only with the sample. The Atlas has now reached over 1,000 societies, almost twice as many as the World Ethnographic Sample. Many, but not all of the societies of the World Ethnographic Sample are now included, some additional ones being picked up at each new installment. The division of the world into six regions and each into ten subareas has been maintained, although some individual societies have been shifted from one subarea to another. However, the basic concept of a "carefully selected sample" appears to have been abandoned, and areas vary widely in the number of societies included. In Africa, the numbers vary from 9 for African Hunters (formerly, Pygmy and Khoisan) to 21 for South African Bantu to 59 for Equatorial Bantu. The choices seem to be based primarily on availability of sources. (Incidentally, "African Hunters" is an economic classification, whereas the other areas appear to be classified by geographic criteria. On the other hand, "Moalem Sudan" which is placed in the Circum-Mediterranean area appears to be located there primarily for cultural reasons.)

While the World Ethnographic Sample avoided geographically adjacent groups or people speaking mutually intelligible languages, the Atlas does not. Thus, two Ibo groups are included in the Guinea Coast area, Af10 Ibo (Essinhibe), Af23 Afikpo, and two Yoruba towns, Af6 Yoruba (Ibadan) and Af34 Ife, as well as the related Egba (Af32). This high degree of local specificity, taking one
monograph on another locality of the same tribe raises difficult methodological questions. Frequently there is the problem of whether any items in the sample can be referred to other localities of the same tribe and makes one wonder about the applicability of more broadly generalizing studies. This problem becomes particularly difficult when one community study in Denmark, or Spain, or France, or China is included in the sample. What is the relevance of such an inclusion? We have begged this problem so far, by excluding Europe and the United States from our sample, although we have included studies of some specific Chinese and Japanese localities. Our sample consists of three groups of societies:

2. Some societies included by Murdock in the World Ethnographic Sample but not yet taken up into the Atlas.
3. A sizeable number of societies not included by Murdock in either the Sample or the Atlas. This group includes some of the societies for which we have the best data on dissociation and related matters.

In view of the problem of sampling and the recent attempts at solving the old problem of identifying association between traits as due to historical or functional factors (or in the older language, as due to diffusion or independent invention) Murdock recently took up the discussion of sampling again, primarily with reference to Africa, and to a more limited degree, for the Circum-Mediterranean area. He divides Africa into some 87 cultural clusters, and suggests that a sample for a correlational study should include no more than one member of each cluster, but if possible, each cluster should be represented. So far, we have data on one or more member of 67 of these clusters. That is, in 129 sub-Saharan societies, on which we have data concerning trance and spirit possession, on which the Ethnographic Atlas has significant amounts of data, one or more societies are included for each of 67 clusters. Several
clusters are therefore over represented. Rewinning of our correlations with a sample of 129 reduced to 67 would present an interesting check on our correlations. A cursory glance at our coding would seem to indicate the Murdock's subareas in sub-Saharan Africa are indeed heterogeneous, but that the clusters are (perhaps) fairly homogeneous. If this observation holds, it would also tend to support Murdock's picture of clusters.