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objects of the appropriate colors instead of the plastic chips of the color array, which informants found to be puzzling.

5. Basic and nonbasic color terms appear to be used in different contexts. I note, for example, that basic terms seem to be avoided in fashion advertisements in the United States, where one sees reference to colors such as banana, tobacco, wine, rust, navy, and taupe.

6. The assumption that cognitions are universally agreed upon in a given culture, however, is questioned by further field research. For example, Pollnac (1975) found intracultural variability in color classification among the Ganda, who also show disagreement in other types of classifications, such as those of plants.

7. Spiro has elaborated on these points in a later publication. Presenting a “personality-oriented ethnography” of Burmese kinship and marriage, he describes his work as “unashamedly emic”; that is, it is concerned with ethnographic data in terms of what actors think, feel, believe, desire, and so on” (Spiro 1977:xii). He goes on to point out that his approach is not limited to “how natives think” but also concerns what they think and why they think it; that is, it involves not only cognitive but also motivational and affective aspects. Moreover, Spiro again stresses that personality-oriented ethnography goes beyond the emic dimensions to an etic study, a comparative science of humanity.

8. For summaries of Piaget’s theories and work, see Piaget and Inhelder (1969), Ginsburg and Opper (1969), and Gruber and Vonèche (1978).

INTRODUCTION

Altered States of consciousness (ASC) are of great importance for psychological anthropology, for they can tell us a great deal about certain major dimensions of our common human nature and how it manifests itself in diverse cultural traditions. Such states exist in all human societies. They are known in many different forms and have been integrated into a variety of cultural patterns. They play different roles, are utilized in numerous diverse contexts, and are provided with a multitude of meanings. As we shall see, they represent characteristic types of responses to certain changes in the sensory, perceptual, cognitive, motivational, and affective relationship between individuals and their experience, responses that are to a great extent culturally patterned. In spite of their outward diversity and the variability of their cultural and social significance, altered states share a number of important common features. Yet surprisingly, they have, on the whole, been neglected by psychological anthropologists.

Historical Background

The subject of altered states of consciousness has had a curious history in anthropology. E. B. Tylor, as we saw in Chapter 2, considered trances, visions, and dreams among the basic factors that incited early human beings to develop theories of souls and spirits, in short, of religion. Students of primitive religion, a subject that includes shamanism, the American Indian vision quest, African and Afro-American possession rituals, and so on, found it necessary to deal with altered states. However, they generally studied beliefs and institutions and paid
little attention to the psychological dimension. They saw shamans or possession trancers in ritual settings either as faking or as “hysterical.” In fact, a lively debate developed in the field of Afro-American studies between various lay observers and psychiatrists, who thought that Haitians and Brazilians who become “possessed” on ritual occasions suffered from mental disorders, and M. J. Herskovits (1937a, 1948), who, in the tradition of cultural relativism, argued vigorously that because such behavior was acceptable and desirable according to the local cultural traditions, it was “normal” and should not be discussed in the language of psychopathology. Still, he left unexplained what happens to, or in, the individual, and why some people get to be “possessed” whereas others do not. Although Herskovits sought to explain Haitian and Brazilian possession trance as part of the Western African heritage of these societies, he does not tell us why certain societies of West Africa institutionalized altered states in a particular fashion. This theory also tends to limit our investigation to Afro-America and West Africa; yet, as we shall see, the problem is far more vast.

Clearly, altered states of consciousness represent a problem for psychological anthropology. Yet, although the anthropology of religion, as well as specific local ethnographies, had to take the existence of these states and their contexts of belief and ritual into account, psychological anthropology abstained from dealing with these matters for a long time. There are several reasons for this avoidance. One reason is a matter mentioned in Chapter 6: irrationality had dropped out of fashion with the development of cultural relativism. Visions, trances, and belief in possession were considered by Tylor and his contemporaries as hallmarks of the savage and the barbarian. Cultural relativism, rejecting such evaluations, emphasized the rational and, later, the adaptive nature of culture. One consequence of these orientations was to play down belief and behavior that seemed bizarre or exotic in terms of Western culture, and to emphasize ways in which “primitives” were, in fact, superior in their life-styles to “civilized” Westerners. It is also true that as long as emphasis was placed on the uniqueness of each culture, the differences rather than the underlying similarities were often stressed, and the common features of altered states tended to be overlooked. As a result, the information on which a general theory might have been built was not brought together.

One additional factor interfered: psychological anthropology has had no theory of its own. Instead, whether we deal with personality development, psychological testing, or psychopathology, anthropology has leaned heavily on psychoanalysis, clinical psychology, or psychiatry. For psychologists, the subject of “consciousness” had become taboo when nineteenth century psychological pioneers, under E. B. Titchener at Cornell, found that introspection as a research method yielded highly subjective results that could not be verified. As a result there was no theory for anthropologists to test or utilize that dealt with altered states, and their maintenance. There was some interest in hypnosis, but it did not provide an explanatory system, only a label of dubious usefulness. Even where drugs were used to induce their production, as among many American Indian tribes, the mechanism by which the drugs worked was not understood.

This situation has changed drastically in the last twenty-five years, when several research trends came together with a number of developments in Western society, especially in the United States. Psychologists here now have a lively interest in three types of altered states: dreams, drug-related states, and states of meditation and relaxation. As we shall see, there are other states of equal importance.

In this country, altered states of consciousness burst on the scene in the early 1960s with the burgeoning interest in psychodelic substances. At that time, Timothy Leary and a number of associates at Harvard not only experimented on themselves with LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide-25) but also founded the Psychedelic Review and the International Federation for Internal Freedom (IFIF). Somewhat later, Leary attempted to launch a religious movement, The League for Spiritual Discovery (LSD). These advocates associated the use of drugs, and the states produced by them, with meditation exercises based on various oriental traditions, particularly those of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Hallucinogens, altered states of consciousness, and related matters rapidly drew great public attention and fascination, and since then a substantial literature has grown up in this area. Meanwhile a number of psychologists rediscovered “consciousness” as a field of investigation (see, for example, Ornstein 1972, Tart 1972, White 1972). It became necessary to distinguish between “normal waking” or “ordinary, personal” consciousness and altered states. These, it turned out, were numerous and varied and often perfectly unspectacular, not merely the much touted drug-induced hallucinatory states or religious ecstasies.

A Typology
Arnold Ludwig (1968) listed five major types of ASC, classifying them by the manner in which they are induced. For each of these five types he listed a dozen or more forms, so the total comes to more than sixty different forms of ASC, and the list is not complete. The five sets of causes of ASC are: 1) the reduction of exteroceptive stimulation and/or motor activity; 2) its opposite, the increase of exteroceptive stimulation and/or motor activity; 3) increase of alertness or mental involvement and 4) its opposite, decreased alertness or mental activity; and 5) a series of “somatopsychological” factors. This last group includes not only drug-induced states but states resulting from other changes in body chemistry, due to both internal and external causes, from hypoglycemia to hyperventilation and fevers.

The first two pairs of causal factors involve an increase or a decrease from a presumed preexisting “normal” level of stimulation or activity. When the level is altered, so is the state of consciousness. “Reduced stimulation and/or activity” includes not only such relatively familiar states as highway hypnosis, but also
sensory deprivation produced either experimentally or as a result of solitary confinement. "Increased stimulation and/or motor activity" includes such conditions as mob contagion, religious conversion and healing trances in revivalistic settings, and "dance and music trance" in response to jazz, rock and roll, and other highly rhythmic music. Ludwig also includes here battle fatigue, hysterical conversion neuroses, dissociational states, and so on. Examples of the third type, "increased alertness and/or mental activity," include prolonged vigilance on sentry duty, watching a radar screen, or fervent prayer. The fourth type, "decreased alertness and/or mental activity," is illustrated by a relaxation of critical faculties in daydreaming, boredom, and profound relaxation, or in mediumistic trance and meditation states.

Notice the great diversity among the examples. In our society, some are fairly commonplace, others are unusual and striking events; some are religious in nature, others are pathological; some are socially constructive, others are dangerous and undesirable; some are cases of individual deviance, others are culturally patterned and institutionalized. They are grouped together because they share a limited set of causes.

As Ludwig further points out, these causes, which appear at times to be contradictory (for example, either increase or decrease of stimulation may produce an altered state), lead to states that share a number of important and distinctive features. He lists the following features: alterations in thinking, disturbed sense of time, loss of control, changes in the expression of emotions, changes in body image, perceptual distortion, changes in meaning and significance assigned to experiences or perceptions, a sense of the ineffable, feelings of rejuvenation, and hypersuggestibility. That is, altered states of consciousness are conditions in which sensations, perceptions, cognition, and emotions are altered. They are characterized by changes in sensing, perceiving, thinking, and feeling. They modify the relation of the individual to self, body, sense of identity, and the environment of time, space, or other people. They are induced by modifying sensory input, either directly by increasing or decreasing stimulation or alertness, or indirectly by affecting the pathways of the sensory input by somotopsychological factors. As a result, the rules of perception and cognition that cross-cultural psychology has been investigating (Chapter 6) do not necessarily apply to these states.

**CULTURALLY STRUCTURED ASC**

**Three Examples**

The social consequences of ASC, Ludwig notes, may be either maladaptive or adaptive. Indeed, their cultural contexts and contents are highly diverse. Let us consider some examples of ASC in action.

Here is an excerpt from my Haitian fieldnotes. They refer to a scene that took place in the countryside, when an elderly woman of some means was putting order into her affairs by having a vodou priest (hungan) and his followers perform a week-long series of rituals, which had been neglected for a number of years:

It is early afternoon and a group of men and women are seated under a roof of palmleaves. Two men are playing drums and a number of women are dancing, circling clockwise about the center pole of the structure. Several carry flags, and songs are being sung for Ibo-Lélé, the spirit to whom the ritual is addressed. While this is going on, two chickens are killed and their blood is collected in a clay pot. Suddenly, Ida, one of the women dancers, begins to tremble and sway on her feet. Several times she seems ready to fall, but each time one of the bystanders catches her, and she continues dancing. The others have stopped and all attention is on the woman who is entering trance, or, in local parlance, is being "mounted." Ibo-Lélé is possessing her, in response to the drums, the songs, the dances and the food, all calling him. Ida now dances more and more rapidly, with greater control over her movements. Now she is dancing more and more stiff-limbed, sometimes with her eyes closed. As she circles the center pole ever more closely, several women rush in to snatch away the dishes of sacrificial food that have been set out at the base of the pole, and which risk being turned over as she whirls about seemingly blindly. Finally, she falls on a mat at the edge of the structure, where several women are sitting, the hungan's wife among them, who catches Ida in her arms, as she lands on her knees. At that moment the drums stop and the possessed woman remains motionless. Then, as the drums start again, Ida begins to breathe more and more rapidly, raises herself up on her hands and knees and in two or three low jumps attacks the hungan. He is standing and she tries to get between his legs, and to cause him to fall; then raising herself up, she attempts to pull him down upon her. Now several people are seeking to restrain her, but she seems to have great strength. In the ensuing struggle her skirt begins to climb up and one of the other women pulls it down and tucks it between her legs. In the process, the possessed woman kicks over the jar with the blood and other offerings for Ibo-Lélé, and though it is caugth quickly, some of the contents are spilled on the ground. As Ibo-Lélé's fury appears to increase, several women are waving kerchiefs at Ida to calm her (or him?) and finally the hungan succeeds in leading her away from the dance ground and into the nearby house. There she collapses on a chair and is not seen for the remainder of the day. The ritual is temporarily interrupted, and when the hungan returns he appears exhausted and disheveled. He explains that Ibo-Lélé had been angry because he had been called in the middle of the day, when the sun was too hot (Bourgigny, unpublished).

Quite a different example of ASC comes from a report by R. L. Carneiro on the Amahuaca Indians of the Amazon region of South America. In their dreams and in their ASC these people see spirits, called yoshi.

Every now and then the Amahuaca hold seances in order to interact with yoshi in greater numbers and for a longer time then they usually do in dreams. While many Amazonian tribes rely on tobacco narcosis to achieve spirit visions, the Amahuaca do not. They make use instead of an infusion made from the narcotic plant ayahuasa
Vodou drums are being prepared for baptism in a Haitian mountain community. They will have godparents and will receive names. The ritual drawings on the ground are made of flour. The drums are necessary to call the spirits.

(Banisteriopsis caapi), which has the power to produce extremely vivid and colorful hallucinations ... the stronger the potion the more yoshi one will see. Before long, the drinkers begin to feel dizzy and start a very unusual kind of singing chant in a high-pitched tremolo in which the vocal chords are tightly constricted ... Ayahuasa seances may last a long time. One session we witnessed began about eight o'clock at night and did not end until nearly six o'clock the next morning. Throughout its duration of nearly ten hours the men continued to sing virtually without interruption, pausing only a few seconds to drink some more or to vomit. As the drug takes effect, yoshi begin to appear, one or two at a time. They are said to drink ayahuasa, too, and to sing along with the men. The Amahuaca ask a yoshi where he has been and what he has seen, and he tells them. Unlike dreams, in which yoshi occasionally molest or injure a person, in ayahuasa seances they are generally friendly and tractable. It is just like when Amahuaca come to visit, we were told. A yoshi may stay an hour or two, and then he goes. But then another one comes, drinks with the Amahuaca, talks with them, and then he too departs. In this manner many yoshi may be seen and interrogated during the course of the night ... Taking ayahuasa for the first time is apparently a rather frightening experience for a young man. He goes on to hear voices and to see visions. The medicine man Lame Deer, who was his great-grandfather, speaks to him. At the end of four days, he is taken from the vision pit by the old man who had brought him there and who tells him that he is now a man. As a symbol of this transformation, he takes a new name, that of his ancestor.

Comparing Our Examples

In each of these examples, people seek to come into direct contact with spirits by means of ASC. They do so in the traditional fashion, which a young person, growing up in the society, must learn in order to behave correctly or to have the appropriate experiences. The ASC are not spontaneous or idiosyncratic, but fall into a cultural pattern. The spirits, at least in their broad outlines, are known, and to some extent the seeker is aware of what to expect. Moreover, in each case there are experienced and expert individuals who know what is to be done. Thus, cultural patterning, social practice, learning, and expertise all exist in the ASC situations that we find in these different cultures.

In spirit of these similarities, there are important contrasts among our three examples. To begin with the Amahuaca, they, like many American Indian
groups, use a psychoactive plant substance to produce the ASC; the state is manifested by seeing and hearing things; that is, it is characterized by altered perceptions. Although several people sit together to sing and to drink, each sees and speaks with the yoshi as an individual. Each has a private trance experience.

For the young Sioux, the situation is, in some respects, similar. He, too, has his own private vision, he too hears and sees things. He, too, experiences altered perceptions. There are, however, some important differences: his trance is not induced by drugs but by the preparation of the sweatbath, the fear of isolation, darkness, the expectation of a vision, and the four days of hunger and cold, for he is naked and fasts during this period. Both psychological and physical stress prepare the boy for the experience that will transform his identity.

On most of these points, the Haitian case is quite different. ASC is induced neither through drugs nor through stress and deprivation, but through rhythmic drumming, rhythmic movement in dancing, and group expectations. It is true that in all three situations singing functions as prayer, as the mobilization of symbols and as a way of conjuring up the appropriate images and moods, but this role is different in each case. For the Haitians, unlike the Amahuaca and the Sioux, the ASC involves a public performance, not a private experience. Also, the Sioux vision seeker and the Amahuaca drug takers are men; among the Haitians, on the other hand, although both men and women participate, the individuals who are “possessed,” like Ida in our example, are more likely to be women. The altered state among the Haitians may well consist of changes in perception, of seeing and hearing things, but we know little about it because people do not remember what happens to them during the time they are “possessed.” They probably experience amnesia concerning these periods of time, reinforced by the belief, or cultural dogma, that when the spirit comes, it displaces one of the human being’s souls (there are two), and therefore no memory is possible. In any event, Haitians like the Indians, actively invite the spirits to come, but the spirits do not appear as the hallucinations of individuals, but as personalities, to be observed by all present. The spirit, it is believed, takes over the body of a human individual, who for the time ceases to be herself or himself. The human being, during this time, is the “horse” that is “mounted” by the spirit. In the example we have described, this belief means that it is not a woman named Ida who attacks the hungan in a fit of rage, but rather the spirit Ibo-Lélé. Ida is not responsible for anything she does, and it will not be held against her. In fact as a personality, she is absent. When the scene was discussed by those present, and later by all those who were told about it, no one asked why Ida had behaved in this way on that particular day. The questions all centered about Ibo-Lélé and why he had been angered and whether or not he had rejected the sacrifice offered to him.

**Inducing Altered States**

As we consider our three examples, we find that ASC are used in each of these societies, but they are used in different ways and they are brought about by different means: The Amahuaca use psychotropic drugs, the Sioux primarily use isolation and fasting, and the Haitians use dancing and drums. All use expectations and traditions to help the desired results to come about, and all have some idea of what is to occur. Prelearning takes place before the event, and learning occurs during and as a result of the event. All three of these methods have been used in Western society in a nontraditional context, and comparisons between ASC occurring in such different contexts are instructive.

Wallace (1959) made a detailed comparison between the reactions of North American Indians who take peyote as part of their religious rituals and white subjects who took it as part of a clinical experiment. There were many striking differences both in the behavior and in the subjective experiences of the two groups. The Indians participated in a religious ritual, and they experienced feelings of reverence and frequently also relief from physical illness. The whites found themselves in an experimental setup, without cultural preparation providing special meaning. They experienced wide shifts of mood, ranging from agitated depression to euphoria. Moreover, the whites showed a breakdown of social inhibitions, behaving in various socially disapproved ways, whereas the Indians maintained proper decorum. Changes in perception of self and others were frightening to the whites, those occurring among the Indians fitted their religious expectations. Similarly, the Indians had visions that were in accordance with beliefs and that were culturally patterned, whereas the “visions” or hallucinations of the whites, which were formed without any cultural model, varied among individuals. Also, while the peyote experience led to changes in the Indians both in behavior and in psychological well-being, the whites, as far as the research determined, experienced no long-range changes and no therapeutic benefits.

The differences in the results of taking peyote, then may be related to the cultural differences between the two groups, the mental structure with which they approached the experience, the group context, and the symbolic meaning. The drugs, in other words, do not contain their own “content” but only modify human consciousness for a time. What happens during that time is largely dependent on what is brought to the experience by the individual who participates in it.

The methods by which the Sioux Indian boy acquires his vision is similar to that produced in the laboratory through sensory deprivation. Henney (1973, Henney in Goodman et al. 1974) has reviewed in detail reports of a series of sensory deprivation experiments conducted in this country and in Canada in the 1950s. She found striking similarities between these experiments, in which subjects hallucinated, and a ritual among the Spiritual Baptists on the Island of St. Vincent in the Caribbean. In this ritual, too, individuals are isolated, placed under conditions of restricted mobility and sensory input, and expected to have visions.

In their review of sensory deprivation studies, Henney discovered that although the isolation and limitation of movement and sensory input were related to the production of hallucinations or “pseudoperception,” other factors were of great importance as well. They include the way in which people react to others who have such experiences. Also relevant are the social cues and the explicit or implicit suggestions subjects receive concerning their experiences. Henney concludes that:
In addition to the physiological effects of sensory deprivation on the human organism, psychological and cultural factors appear to contribute significantly to the total phenomenon (Henney in Goodman et al. 1974:79).

Henney's comparison of sensory deprivation subjects and Spiritual Baptists seeking a supernatural vision parallels to a great extent that made by Wallace between experimental subjects and peyotists. Henney's analysis can be extended to a comparison between the Sioux youth and the sensory deprivation subjects as well. On the one hand, there is a traditional cultural relation to a transforming religious vision, and on the other, there is the cultural and social meaning of "laboratory experiments" participated in by volunteer college students. As in the case of peyote discussed by Wallace, the isolation and other limitations on physical and social action set up a condition favorable to the experience of pseudoperception. But what will be perceived and how it will be experienced is related to the cultural context and the traditional meanings provided to the individual.

Much the same can be said of the Haitians, or other possession trancers. This type of altered behavior has been likened to hypnosis, a subject the dynamics of which are little understood. In particular, in the ritual situation we have described there is no interaction between a hypnotist and a subject. One might suggest that the individual hypnotizes herself, as a result of previous experiences and expectations, or that the drums provide cues in a suggestive atmosphere. However, the specific behavior depends both on social and on individual factors. Again, we are dealing with a religious situation and not with the settings in which hypnosis is found in our own society: entertainment, experimentation, or medical healing (hypnosis is now widely used in this country in helping people to lose weight or to stop smoking, as well as to reduce fear and pain in dental work or in childbirth).

Where possession trance appears in a religious context, the behavior corresponds both to a learned model and to certain personal and/or group factors. In some societies, group factors are kept to a minimum, whereas in Haiti they are given great prominence. In the case we have described, Ida gave expression to a group tension specific to the particular series of ceremonies: the woman who was sponsoring them wanted her debts to the spirits settled through a variety of ceremonies, including sacrifices, but she was reluctant to have anyone go into possession trance, that is, to have spirits appear. Because this reluctance was very much against local habits and traditions, and because the prescribed dancing and drumming, which could not be avoided, did stimulate possession trance, Ida, under the pressure of these cues, was in conflict over succumbing to them. The result was an unusually violent possession trance. This is part of Haitian folk knowledge, the women say that there are ways of restraining the spirits, but if you use them and the spirits come just the same, they may come so violently as to kill you. In psychological terms, setting up a conflict between cues for and against possession trance is a dangerous procedure.

In our three examples, then, in addition to the specific manipulations (drugs, sensory-motor deprivation, hyperventilation in dancing, modification of balance, rhythmic drumming, and so on) there are major cultural factors that provide social support, traditional context, cultural content, and religious rewards for undergoing ASC. All our groups believe in invisible spirits who can be persuaded to appear and to interact with humans, but the nature of these interactions is quite different: whereas it is private in the American Indian cases, it is public in the Haitian case. Whereas it is an experience for the former, it is a performance for the latter. In all cases, however, we deal with traditional practices, not with idiosyncratic ones. And, most importantly, in all cases we deal with ritual.

**Altered States and Ritual**

Ritual is a central concept in the anthropological study of religion. In fact, A. F. C. Wallace (1966) has defined religion as "ritual rationalized by myth," that is, ritual explained and made meaningful by a sacred belief concerning natural beings or forces, for there may be secular non-religious rituals as well. Ritual has been variously defined, but there are a number of general points of agreement among anthropologists who have written on this subject. For one thing, it is distinct from "practical" or "rational" or "technological activities," such as hunting, planting and harvesting crops, fishing, cooking, housebuilding, and a myriad of other everyday activities. Second, it is stereotyped and repetitive: for example, there are fixed, traditional, learned ways to call the spirits. Third, ritual occurs in a separate place and time, often at night, or at periods specially set aside. It is thus separated from the ordinary, workaday world. Fourth, symbols of ritual present a different, generally unseen aspect of the world. In the process, the individual's relation to the world is modified. Wallace (1966), in particular, speaks of a "ritual reorganization of experience," a kind of learning, through which the world is simplified for the individual: the complex world of experience is transformed into an orderly world of symbols. At the same time, there is also a transformation of the individual, who acquires new understandings, or in Wallace's terms, "new cognitive structures," and a new transformed identity. In some cases, the identity is membership in a special group or a new status. In the rituals we have described, this change in identity particularly marks the Sioux youth, but also those who drink ayahuasca for the first time, or who are "possessed" for the first time.

For Wallace, the essence of ritual is communication; yet, because ritual is stereotyped and predictable, it tells us nothing new, conveys no information. What is conveyed, however, is meaning, particularly "the image of a simple and orderly world" (Wallace 1966:239). In the rituals we have described, moreover, communication between humans and spirits, as the people conceive of them, is the very purpose of the ritual. ASC, in each case, are the means by which this communication can be accomplished. On the one hand, among the Amahuaca the drug makes it possible to "see" and "hear" the spirits, to ask them questions. For the Sioux, it is the stress that leads to the visionary experience. On the other hand,
the Haitians produce the physical presence of the spirits by having human individuals serve as their vehicles ("horses"). From the observer's point of view, we can say that, as a result of drug ingestion, the Amahuaca hallucinate the presence of the spirits, as do the Siouxs. The Haitian situation is somewhat more complex: one or more persons are temporarily deluded into thinking, feeling, and perceiving themselves to be the spirits whose role they are enacting, while others in the group accept and encourage this role enactment.

As observers, we can also consider these rituals as communication among the participants. The principal aim and result of these three types of rituals are the confirmation and elaboration of belief: the spirits do exist, they come when they are properly called, they say and do certain things, and they have certain collective and individual characteristics. ASC rituals effectively confirm what tradition has said; moreover, because the spirits are heard and seen, their words and actions may be the basis for modifications of ritual, belief, or secular behavior. As such, they are contributors of major significance to the elaboration of a culturally constituted behavioral environment. These are important considerations to which we shall return in Chapter 9.

In his analysis of factors producing altered states, Ludwig does not distinguish between individual, idiosyncratic states and culturally patterned, ritualized ones. We may assume that certain individual states, such as fever delirium, auras preceding epileptic seizures, or trance resulting from drowsiness or boredom occur in all human societies. Anthropological interest focuses on cultural structualization of altered states. We must distinguish also between altered states employed in the context of religious ritual and those that serve recreational purposes. In the words of Weston La Barre (1975:34), "There appears to be no human society so simple in material culture as to lack some sort of mood-altering drug as an escape from the workaday world."

There is reason to believe that the ritual uses of altered states have ancient roots in human history and prehistory. Ralph Solecki (1975) discovered a 60,000-year-old Neanderthal burial at Shanidar cave in Northern Iraq. The human remains had been placed on pine boughs, and there was evidence of a bouquet of flowers. When the pollen was analyzed, seven of the eight plant species represented were recognized as medicinal plants that are still used in the region, as well as elsewhere in Europe and Asia. Peter Furst (1976), in his broad survey of hallucinogens and their cultural uses, wonders whether the Shanidar Neanderthalers also had knowledge of the psychedelic plants that existed in their environment. The so-called "dead man" in the Upper Paleolithic cave painting at Lascaux, in France, probably represents a man in trance. The healing plants and the trancing relate well to the function of the shaman, which is so widespread in hunter-gatherer societies, and for which there are various other types of archaeological evidence, such as the painting representing a dancing "sorcerer" at another ancient French site, the cave of Les Trois Frères.

Weston La Barre (1972) has argued that hallucinatory "revelations" (visions, trances, dreams) are the source of all religions. The necessary requirement is that the visionary must be able to persuade others to accept the truth of the revelation and its applicability to them. If, as La Barre argues, the visionary's experience consists of an expression of unconscious wishes, these wishes must be shared by followers if they are to find their own meaning in the message. Many such cases have been known in modern times and in recorded history. On the other hand, we also have evidence of numerous instances in which the would-be prophet was unsuccessful in getting others to share that private world and a result not only failed as a religious leader but was rejected as heretical or mad.8

In an extensive study of the social and cultural patterning of ASC (Bourguignon 1973b), we found that such states exist in religious contexts in 90 percent of a sample of 488 societies. This sample, which was drawn from the Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock 1967), included all parts of the world and traditional societies at various levels of technological complexity. In fact, 90 percent represents a conservative judgment, for in the 10 percent of the cases for which no reports of such ritualized ASC were found, we could rarely be sure that we were not simply dealing with incomplete accounts. Moreover, for North American Indians, where the ethnographic studies are quite detailed and of high quality, we found reports of ASC in 97 percent of the sample societies.

Cultural Interpretations of Altered States

The cultural patterning of ASC involves beliefs or interpretations of what occurs during these states. We have distinguished several types of such explanatory systems (Bourguignon 1968a). On the one hand there are "naturalistic" or empirical explanations, of the kind provided by Ludwig. These explanations are formulated in terms of the normative world view of Western society, as expressed in medicine. They represent an etic approach, which can be applied whenever and wherever ASC are observed. This approach may be contrasted with an essentially emic one, which we identified in the societies in our sample, in a still larger group from which we collected additional data, and also in the history of Western societies (Bourguignon 1976). Two principal types of emic explanations appear over and over again: ASC are explained either as due to "possession" by spirit entities, or as involving experiences of one's soul or spirit, often as resulting from an encounter with the spirit. This encounter may happen by sending one's soul on a spirit voyage or "trip," or, as in the case of the Amahuaca and the Sioux, by having the spirits come to visit. We have called the first type "possession trance" (PT) and the second "trance" (T). The Haitians on the one hand and the Amahuaca and the Sioux on the other then represent the two basic types of culturally patterned, institutionalized ASC. Both of these emic types of explanations are essentially "supernaturalistic": they involve both ritual and what (Wallace 1966) has called a "supernatural premise." The etic explanation involves neither ritual nor supernaturalism.

Figure 2 divides supernaturalistic explanations of ASC into two basic categories, possession beliefs and nonpossession beliefs. Both are evaluated at some
times and places as positive and in others as negative. In the Haitian example, we have a belief in a spirit presence during ASC rituals. The spirits are invited and the possession trance is desirable and positive. In the tradition of the Middle Ages, which has been somewhat revived and exploited in this country in recent years, we have a belief in demonic possession that requires a ritual of expulsion or exorcism. Possession trance is explained, in this context, as an invasion of the body and the will by evil forces, which must be driven out through religious ritual. In certain areas of the world, notably in East Africa, there exists a third alternative: manipulating or transforming the evil, illness-causing, possessing spirit into an ally. This approach appears in the zar cult, which has been reported for the Amhara of Ethiopia (Leiris 1958, Messing 1959, Morton 1977), the Somali (Lewis 1971), and the Egyptians (Saunders 1977). Such beliefs and practices, in one form or another, are found throughout many parts of Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East, and among the descendants of these people in the New World, such as the Haitians.

Among American Indians possession trance also occurs, but it is not always associated with the concept of “spirit.” Often, as in the case of the Yurok shaman (Kroeber 1925), it involves a belief in “powers” that take over the person of the shaman or shaman candidate. These powers, which deal with pain and with healing, are not personalized and anthropomorphized (or zoomorphized) as the spirits are.

Nonpossession beliefs that explain altered states appear to be more varied, although we may again distinguish between positive and negative evaluations of the ASC. On the positive side, we have mystic states that involve communication with spirits either by means of visions or by means of the shaman’s spirit voyage. The visions may be experienced in a public setting or privately. The shaman’s voyage, if it is not primarily concerned with visions, may have two specific practical applications. One is divination: diagnosing illness, discovering the causes of troubles, or foretelling the future. The other is the healing of patients. If the patient is ill, because his or her soul is absent, having perhaps been stolen by an enemy, the aim of the shaman’s voyage may be to get the soul back. Trance may be explained also as due to the absence of the tranceur’s soul: either the shaman’s, who is communicating with spirits, or the patient’s, whose soul has been stolen or worse, eaten. Finally, trance may be due to bewitchment.

Although this list of emic explanations is not exhaustive, it does indicate a wide variety of beliefs linked to ASC. The particular ritualization of ASC will reflect the beliefs concerning this state. The state will be intentionally self-induced only if it is considered a positive good; it may be induced in others as part of therapy or group initiation, which, at times, may be synonymous. It should be noted that these emic explanatory systems say nothing about the manner in which ASC are induced, or even whether they occur spontaneously or are brought about intentionally.

Figure 2
SUPERNATURAL EXPLANATIONS OF ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS (FROM BOURGUIGNON 1968).
not only possession trance coexist in the same society. Similarly, in our analysis possession by a spirit (or some other disorder) and this experience is interpreted as resulting from possession by a spirit.

It is clear from examples that possession that is not acted out in ASC behavior may coexist in a single society with possession trance. Similarly, in our analysis of ASC and their emic explanations, we find cases in which both trance and possession trance coexist in the same society.

In our examples we have seen that a belief in possession may be used to explain not only ASC, but also the acquisition of power or the presence of illness. Finally, there is the third case, which appears to be limited to Africa, in which possession explains witchcraft. Among many African peoples, such as the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1937) or the Fang (Fernandez 1961), it is believed that certain individuals are inhabited by a witchcraft being, which leads them to cause harm to others, often without being aware of doing so. A strikingly similar belief exists among some New Guinea peoples, such as the Kaluli (Schieffelin 1976).

As this brief review shows, the broad concept of possession covers a great variety of specific beliefs. In one form or another, it occurs in all parts of the world. In our sample from the Ethnographic Atlas, referred to earlier, we found that 74 percent of our 488 societies had one or more forms of possession belief (Bourguignon 1973b). The fact that the concept is so widespread and that the context of the beliefs and their specific applications are so varied suggests that we are dealing with a very old idea, one that has been modified and fitted into various kinds of cultural patterns. Yet it is also striking that the possession concept is not found with equal frequency in all parts of the world. It has its highest incidence in the Insular Pacific and its lowest among the societies of aboriginal North America (52 percent) and South America (64 percent). The cultures of the New World, then, are significantly different with respect to these beliefs, as indeed in respect to much else, from those of the Old World.

Although we may be impressed with the extent to which possession has been used as an explanation, it is also striking how much less frequently it appears than the integration of ASC into the repertory of religious rituals. This fact, together with the observation that possession belief is not always linked to ASC, suggest the hypothesis that they did not originate together and that ASC experiences did not give rise to the possession concept. Rather, possession belief and ASC appear to have independent histories, and to have been joined, perhaps on several occasions, under particular circumstances.

The emic theories that account for ASC and the various applications of possession belief represent a variety of “ethnopsychologies,” psychological theories characteristic of various cultures, traditional ones for the most part. It should be stressed that the concept of “possession” is not synonymous with a type of ASC, although people frequently speak and write about “possessions states” or “possession behavior.” Strictly speaking, these terms apply only where an altered state is interpreted by both the actor and those in the actor’s social environment as due to “possession” of some kind. Bear in mind also that what people believe about ASC affects their behavior. It is obviously impossible for possession trance to occur where a belief in possession is absent. In Haiti, for example, where spirits are believed in and each is characterized by particular types of behavior, food and drink preferences, and typical attributes, people must somehow learn to behave appropriately in their altered states in order to be recognized and accepted as possessed by a given spirit, whether Ibo-Lelé or some other well known entity. Such emic psychological theories account for behavior under various circumstances, and for different kinds of experiences, in waking life and in sleep, in health and illness, and so on. Some remnants of such traditional theories are still found in our own speech habits. For example, we may say that a man was “beside
himself” with rage or grief, or “I don’t know what got into her,” or “I was not myself” (but someone else?), and so on. Even the Greek roots of “enthusiastic” (god within) and “ecstatic” (standing outside) reflect such ancient beliefs.

Trance Types

The distinction between trance (T) and possession trance (PT) however, is more than a device for classifying altered states in terms of types of enic explanations. When Bourguignon and Evascu (1977) focused on the societies in which these culturally institutionalized states occur, we discovered that our sample could be broken down into four types of societies or “trance types”: 1) societies that exhibit T only, 2) those that have T but also PT, 3) those with PT only, and 4) the 10 percent that has neither form of ASC, as far as we can tell. Because this last group is so small and also because we could not really be sure that “no ASC” did not really mean “no report,” we dropped this final group from our analysis. Examining regional distribution of the three types of societies (T, T/PT, PT), we found that T is highly correlated with North America and to a lesser, but still significant extent, with South America. In North America, the vision quest is an important factor, and in South America, the widespread use of hallucinogens is directly related to the high incidence of T. On the other hand, we found PT to be significantly correlated with sub-Saharan Africa, and to a somewhat lesser degree, with the circum-Mediterranean region. PT is so rare in North America that we have a statistically significant negative association between this type of ASC and North America as a major ethnographic area (Bourguignon and Evascu 1977).

These regional distributions are interesting, but they do not tell the whole story. What about cultural complexity? After all, North American Indians were predominantly hunter-gatherers, whereas the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa were traditionally horticulturalists (Bourguignon and Greenbaum 1973). In a first series of tests (Bourguignon 1973b) we found that our three types of societies showed statistically significant differences in twelve societal characteristics, six of them clearly related to differences in societal complexity. This finding encouraged us to pursue the matter further. Rather than merely asking whether our three types of societies were more or less complex, we selected four variables and broke them down into a series of steps. The variables were class stratification, jurisdictional hierarchy, the degree or percentage to which a society’s subsistence economy is dependent on production (animal husbandry, agriculture, or a combination of the two), and finally, percentage of dependence on agriculture. The results showed clearly that the greater the societal complexity and the higher the level of subsistence economy, the more likely the society was to have PT rather T. However, many of our 488 societies were closely related either historically or geographically, and a test of diffusion showed that our results might be accounted for through these relationships. We therefore proceeded to select a much smaller sample of eighty-four societies, being careful to avoid possible causes of “contamination” through cultural diffusion. The results again confirmed the relationship between societal and economic complexity and trance type (Bourguignon and Evascu 1977).

How can we account for this relationship? A closer look at how ASC are produced and the cultural role they play may help us in understanding these functional associations. To begin with, American Indians frequently used drugs to achieve altered states of consciousness. La Barre (1972, 1975) several times reviewed the extensive evidence for the existence of what he called a “New World narcotic complex,” covering a great portion of the Americas, from the southern half of the United States to most of the region of the Amazon Basin and the Andes. Pointing out that the botanical sources of hallucinogens (in mushrooms, cacti, and vines, as well as in many seeds, barks, flowers, roots, and saps) are available in the Old World as well as the New, the botanist R. E. Schultes asked why eighty or more varieties of hallucinogens were known to American Indians, whereas the peoples of the rest of the world were familiar with only about six such substances. La Barre (1972:272) relates this greater knowledge of hallucinogens to a specialized interest in the subject resulting from “the ubiquitous persistence of shamanism among the aboriginal hunting peoples of the New World.” The relationship between the two is explained by the observation that “ecstatic-visionary shamanism is, so to speak, culturally programmed for an interest in
hallucinogens and other psychotropic drugs” (italics in original). La Barre points out that the old religions of shamanism of the hunting peoples of Eurasia and Africa were thoroughly transformed by the new traditions that resulted from the Neolithic Revolution. That is, the new relationship among humans, plants, and animals brought about by the domestication of plants and animals was expressed in new symbolic forms and new rituals.

All of this discussion is consistent with our findings, both with regard to the geographic distribution of trance and possession trance, and to the relationship between trance type and subsistence economy. It should be added that we found few cases of drug-induced ASC in sub-Saharan Africa, where PT is the dominant form of ASC. For a number of New World societies, combining data from both North and South America, we found (Bourguignon 1968b:20) that where drugs were used, trance (T) was much more likely than possession trance (PT). This relationship was highly significant statistically. As to the importance of the hunter-gatherer mode of life, which is typically associated with shamanistic religions, it must be stressed that when La Barre speaks of “aboriginal hunting peoples of the New World” he refers to the great majority of North American native societies and to a significant minority of the groups of South America. Of the North American societies coded in Murdock’s Ethnographic Atlas, 77 percent had a heavy reliance on hunting, gathering, and fishing for their subsistence; and so did 28 percent of South American societies. By contrast, only 4 percent of the societies of sub-Saharan African depended heavily on these activities for food (Bourguignon and Greembaum 1973: Table 6). Notable among this group, however, were !Kung, among whom visionary trance states play a significant role.

**Visionary Trance.** Although the hallucinatory or visionary trance state is of such great importance in the Americas, it is not always induced by drugs. The case of the Sioux medicine man John Lame Deer illustrates the widespread guardian spirit complex. The solitary quest for a vision, the four days of isolation and fasting, occasionally, as among the Cheyenne (Gladin 1957) various kinds of mortifications and self-tortures—these were essential parts of this pattern. Although in several tribes women or girls also sought visions, it was a predominantly male activity. Swanson (1973) noted that this North American practice served as a kind of puberty initiation but was notably different from the typical initiation ceremonies of Africa and Australia, with their group activities and initiation “schools.” Swanson speaks of the guardian spirit quest as a rite of “empowerment” by means of which the seeker “inducts himself” into adulthood. The vision is a distinctive feature of this complex. By means of it, the spirit bestows power on the individual. This power is a gift that the recipient, as Swanson (1973:360) puts it, “on his own volition, might use or neglect.” This idea receives support from La Barre (1972:274), who writes: “In this male-centered hunting society,” curiously a boy’s manhood and manly prowess in hunting and war and sexuality all came as gifts from the outside—that is, as ‘medicine power’ imbibed from the outside, generalized, impersonal, mana-like, supernatural…” (italics in original). Because this gift is acquired from spirits that must be approached in a fearful quest, Swanson argues that the guardian spirit complex is linked to individual initiative, requiring the individual’s own need and desire for the power. The quest, then, constitutes an effective test of the boy’s independence, his discretion, and the strength of his motives. Such personal characteristics are important in societies, says Swanson, in which, in addition to group goals and interests, individuals have a considerable degree of autonomy to pursue their own goals. Considering the findings of Barry, Child, and Bacon (1959), in a study to which we have referred a number of times, Swanson suggests, that a substantial but not complete dependence on hunting, gathering, and fishing will produce the type of socialization pressure toward self-reliance and achievement consistent with such a religious pattern. Swanson’s statistical analysis of data on forty-two societies of Native North Americans confirms this hypothesis.

A study by D’Andrade (1961) on the use of dreams to seek and control supernatural powers also has bearing on the present discussion. D’Andrade himself points out that, on the basis of the ethnographic literature, it is not always possible to distinguish among dreams, drug states, visions induced by other means, and related conditions. The similarity between trance states and dreams, both of which are private, internal experiences, is great, and in cultural terms, they are often either interchangeable or used together in some way. For example, the Diegueño Indians of California used the drug toloache (Datura stramonium) in the initiation of their “dream doctors” or shamans. As one of them explained:

*Toloache* puts you into a kind of dream state of mind that stays with you the rest of your life, and you never forget what you have learned. It helps you to keep on learning and gives you real power in everything. Without it you aren’t a real doctor (Tofelmeier and Luomala 1936:201).

D’Andrade coded a worldwide sample of sixty-four societies for the use of dreams to seek and control supernatural powers; those with this cultural complex are, in fact, more likely to be societies where visionary trance is present than where it is not (Bourguignon 1972). It was D’Andrade’s purpose to test the hypothesis that using dreams in this fashion—to acquire a spirit helper in fantasy—results from anxiety about being alone, on one’s own, and under pressure to be independent. He tested this hypothesis by means of two indicators, suggesting that societies that use dreams to seek and control supernatural powers are more likely to be 1) those where the son moves away from the parental home, local groups, or village after marriage, than where he does not, and 2) those in which socialization pressures for independence and self-reliance are great. D’Andrade, basing his work on the work of Barry, Child, and Bacon (1959), expected societies heavily dependent for their subsistence on hunting, gathering, and fishing to use dreams in this manner. Both of these hypotheses were confirmed.

There are some interesting points of agreement and of difference between the approaches of Swanson and D’Andrade. Swanson says that where the individual
boy is pushed to be independent and self-reliant, he must make himself a man and not expect a group to do it for him. He must demonstrate his fortitude by the rigors of the quest for a guardian spirit, from whom he acquires power, which is then his own. Yet, as La Barre (1972) notes, the power is conceived of as coming to the boy from the outside, it is not a natural part of his own development. Indeed, he may well be afraid in the process of acquiring it; moreover, spirits are called by showing them dependence, weakness, and humility. They give the boy power because they take pity on him. D'Andrade says that where the boy must leave his parents and be on his own, and where he is pushed to be self-reliant, he will be anxious; unable to be dependent on human support, he will seek supernatural help, or one might say, fantasize such support to bolster his self-confidence.

This analysis suggests a possible line of explanation for the association between trance (T) and hunting, gathering, and fishing economies. Pushed to be self-reliant early in life, and required to achieve as self-reliant and independent individuals as adults, boys in such societies are exposed to special kinds of anxieties. On the one hand, the vision, the guardian spirit, and the power so acquired compensate for the stresses arising from unsatisfied dependency longings in childhood, and on the other, they give the young man support in his enterprises. Trance, then, not only gives expression to this situation but also provides a remedy.

We have been speaking not only about certain kinds of societies, but also certain individuals, specifically men. Visionary trance, whether part of the guardian spirit complex or drug-induced in other settings, is far more frequently reported as practiced by men than by women. Certainly the socialization pressure for independence is consistently greater for boys than for girls, and hunting is a much more independent and risk-laden activity than gathering. However, there may be other factors, in somewhat different settings, which also make trance (T) primarily a male experience. Among them are the social context and symbolic content, of the use of hallucinogenic drugs such as ayahuasca (also called shori, yaje, or caapi) reported for a number of Amazonian tribes.

Janet Siskind (1973) describes the ritual of drinking shori (Banisteriopsis caapi) among the Sharanahua in the jungle of Eastern Peru. The men drink the prepared hallucinogenic as a group, but each man sings his own songs, calling his own spirits. Through the songs and through the mythology associated with shori, as well as through the telling of their visionary experiences, young men must "learn to shape the visual illusions and the physiological sensations into the mold and form of the spirits . . . Men sing of what they see and their singing calls the visions" (pp. 136-137). Furthermore, the taking of shori is frightening, and this fear is linked, in Siskind's view, not only to the sensations and visions produced by the drug but also to the group:

When the Sharanahua first take shori they are frightened. The [hallucinated] snakes that encircle them are only slowly transformed, after months of taking part in the ritual, into beautiful images. This transformation of terror into euphoria . . . is a significant part of the ritual. The terror of shori for a Sharanahua is the terror of strangers, the very men with whom one takes shori. For most young men these are not his (sic) kinsmen, but [strangers] in whose village or household he has found a wife. As the young men continue to take part, their fears fade, the snakes are beautiful, and they begin to learn to call the spirits and to "know" (Siskind 1973:137).

Among these matrilocal people, a boy seeks a wife in the family of his father's sister. The men of the village, therefore are unrelated to each other. Shori ritual, Siskind believes, functions as a ritual of solidarity for the men. The women, being related to each other, do not require such a ritual. However, beyond the establishment of solidarity, there is another level, that of fantasy and regression, which relates to mastery:

The terrors of shori are childhood terrors, and the experience of trance is one of helplessness. Like an infant one is in the control of shori and the spirits. By giving up the cultural role of adulthood, as the man [in the myth] gives up his being a hunter to imitate the tapir [by copulating with Snake-Woman] one again experiences desires long buried for freely given satisfaction, sex without antagonism, friendship without rivalry . . . The intense pleasure of shori lies in these moments of connection . . . (Siskind 1973:141).

The author suggests (p. 147) that the true meaning of the ritual is a repeated "hallucination of social unity" where none exists in reality. The dynamics of the ritual, says Siskind (p. 145), involve "a feeling of communality between the men achieved through their shared desire and antagonism toward women. There is no other basis for male solidarity at Marcos." The myths and some of the songs are evocative of sexual images, and at least some of the visions involve women as well as snakes. Some men liken shori to sex and feel sexual desire under its influence.

The ritual and the symbolic meanings associated with the same drug are reported by Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971, 1972) for the Tukano Indians of the northwestern Amazon region of Colombia. Summarizing the myth that describes the origin of the drug, he states:

Therefore, in the context of Tukano mythology, yaje [the drug] has a marked sexual character. Hallucination and coitus are equivalent, not in the sense of recreation or gratification but rather as an experience full of anxiety, because of its relationship to the problem of incest (1972:96).

Various sexual associations link the plant, the making of the drink, the vessel in which it is macerated, and various other ritual elements. The pot with its decorations represents the uterus, and while drinking from it the men may insult it, as they would insult "a female being who had defied them, presenting a danger they are ready to confront" (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972:101). Men take the drug in order to return to the uterus, to begin at the beginning of the universe and of humanity, and to encounter the tribal divinities. The creation of the universe is associated with the establishment of the social order and of the laws of exogamy:
On the other hand, a return to the womb is considered an incestuous act, since the person becomes identified with a phallus which enters into the maternal cavity, where he now passes through an embryonic stage of rebirth. . . For the Indian the hallucinatory experience is essentially a sexual one. To make it sublime, to pass from the erotic, the sensual, to a mystical union with the mythic era, the intra-uterine stage, is the ultimate goal, attained by a mere handful, but coveted by all . . . In the words of an Indian educated by missionaries . . . "To take yajé is a spiritual coitus; it is the spiritual communion which the priests speak of." (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972:103–104).

A full analysis of these citations and of the rich data presented by Reichel-Dolmatoff would take us far afield. For now, the masculine, sexual symbolism associated with trance and hallucination as it appears among these Amazonian peoples is to be stressed.

Although these Amazonian groups do not depend for their subsistence primarily on hunting, gathering, and fishing, La Barre’s reference to “male-centered hunting societies” does apply to them. For example, Siskind tells us of the Sharanahua that although they depend for 60 percent of their subsistence on agricultural products, their society is strongly focused on meat, which is obtained by hunting. Hunting, indeed, is the principal occupation of men, and it is also an exclusively male occupation.

The relationship between hunting, men, and trance is not limited to the Americas. The !Kung of Botswana furnish an excellent example from Africa. According to several authors (Marshall 1965, Lee 1968, Katz 1976) half or more of the men are “medicine owners.” Trance results not from drugs but from rhythmic dancing, autosuggestion, hyperventilation, and concentration, and its purpose is to cure or to avert illness and misfortune. Lorna Marshall says that “the dance is one concerted religious act of the !Kung and brings people into such union that they become like one organic being” (1965:270). Dances occur in the evening and last throughout the night, or longer. A fire is built and women sit around it, forming a circle. Their singing helps the male dancers go into trance. The !Kung say that trance is brought about by heating up the medicine substance in their stomachs by means of dancing. Medicine is transferred to others, either to cure them or to make them into medicine men, by the trancers rubbing their bodies. Illness is said to come from ghosts, or from an evil spirit. According to Marshall, medicine men may rush out into the darkness and scream at these spirits, and when they then fall unconscious into deepest trance, it is believed that their spirits leave their bodies and go out to meet these evil beings.

This pattern is quite different from the ones we have discussed so far. Trance is induced by the means we have come to associate with possession trance, rather than by drugs or by solitary deprivation, fasting, and mortifications. It is, however, limited to men. It is linked to curing, as is trance among curing specialists in the South American groups, where, however, others also may seek the trance experience. Although !Kung medicine men come together to dance, each has his own visionary experience and each does his own curing. The collective behavior fits well with the image of the !Kung as cooperative and focused on sharing. Yet it is interesting that among such peaceful, nonaggressive people, the spirits of the dead are thought to be so hostile to the living as to send them illness and harm!9

Possession Trance. Having explored the pattern of interrelationships among trance, hunting, and men, let us look at possession trance (PT) and explore the social context and cultural and symbolic content of this pattern. As we reported earlier, possession trance is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, and to a somewhat lesser extent in the circum-Mediterranean area. It also appears with a certain frequency in Eurasia and the Insular Pacific. It is frequent in Afro-America among the descendants of African peoples who have maintained the religious tradition of their ancestors to a significant extent. Haitian vodou is a case in point.

As mentioned earlier, PT is more likely to be found in societies with heavy dependence on agriculture and food production, as opposed to hunting, gathering, and fishing. A value system in which agricultural production is given prominence is also of importance here. Following Barry, Child, and Bacon (1959) again, we expect in such societies greater emphasis on obedience, reliability, and nurturance—in a word, compliance. Moreover, Barry, Bacon, and Child (1957) have shown that regardless of economy, nurturance, reliability, and obedience rank higher in the socialization of girls than in that of boys. Therefore, it might be said that in contrast to hunting and gathering societies, high accumulation societies stress the “female” values of obedience, responsibility, and nurturance.

Haitian teenager in a carnival mask, made of orange and grapefruit peels. As with trance states, representational masks are much more frequently used by men, than by women in all parts of the world. Like possession trance, they produce a temporary change of identity.
Possession trance appears to be a typically female phenomenon. Although we have no hard statistical evidence to support this claim, numerous ethnographers and others describing possession trance rituals report that a majority of those going into possession trance are women, or that possession trance cult groups are composed exclusively of women (see also Lewis 1971). For example, most of the detailed case histories of possession trancers reported in Crapanzano and Garrison’s (1977) volume deal with women, and all come from complex societies. Moreover, possession trance typically occurs in group rituals and is supported by cult groups. This fact, in itself, is an interesting and noteworthy phenomenon. Among other things, it raises a question about the possible relation between the group nature of the PT behavior and the greater field-dependence of women—the differentiation of women as separate individuals, reported by Witkin (1966), which we discussed in Chapter 6.6

We shall take a brief look at some examples of societies in which women are active in possession trance rituals, and consider some of the surrounding circumstances. J. D. Gussler (1973) presents a review of the literature on possession trance among a number of South African tribal groups, among them the Zulu, the Swazi, and the Xhosa. One of the most important contexts of possession trance in the traditional life of these societies appears in the cult of diviners, most of whose members are women. A woman joins such a cult as a result of having fallen ill, if her illness is diagnosed as due to spirit possession. The diviner who discovers this cause will then initiate the woman into her cult group, in order to produce a cure. As in the East African zar cult, mentioned earlier, the spirit causing the illness is not driven away but turned into an ally. Some former patients eventually become cult leaders themselves. Gussler points out that among these several Bantu groups—societies that have strict hierarchies—women have generally a low status. Although they may have warm attachments to their natal family, at marriage they move to live among strangers, where they have a lowly position and even may have to compete with co-wives for the attention of a husband.

The woman’s new life is hemmed in by a great many taboos, and her range of activities is severely restricted. Among these taboos are limitations on various foods rich in animal proteins and vitamins A and B. They are imposed on women in particular when they are thought to be in periods of ritual vulnerability, such as at menstruation, at marriage, and after childbirth. These are also times, however, when the human body is especially in need of these food substances. Gussler relates the high incidence of spirit possession, or ukuthwa as illness, in women in these societies to the social, psychological, and nutritional stresses to which they are exposed. The high maize diet, with its lack of animal protein and vitamins A and B, leads to a high incidence of pellagra in Southern Africa, and this disease, as Gussler documents, has many symptoms that resemble the ukuthwa illness of the Zulu and their neighbors. During the initiation-cure rituals cattle are slaughtered as sacrifice to the ancestors, and as Gussler notes, established diviners may have a good and regular supply of beef. Thus, joining the cult of diviners

may improve the symptoms both as a result of nutritional changes and because the woman now has much greater freedom and prestige.

Lenora Greenbaum (1973a) found a strong statistical association among African societies between “fixed internal status distinctions” (slavery and social stratification) and the pressure of possession trance. She suggests (1973b) that possession trance is related to the existence of a rigid social structure, and proposes the hypothesis that “in a rigid society, . . . one where the social structures deny the individual freedom for achievement and personal control over his daily life activities, possession trance is likely to be widespread” (Greenbaum 1973b:59). By having a “possessed” medium make decisions for the individual, and thus letting the spirits assume the responsibility for these decisions, the individual is given a degree of elbow room. By defining spirit possession somewhat more narrowly as spirit mediumship, Greenbaum finds strong support for her hypothesis in a review of data on fourteen African societies. The Zulu and their neighbors, whom Gussler has considered in greater detail, represent a good example of a rigid society with fixed status distinctions, and it is the women who are the most tightly controlled in these male-dominated societies.

A situation quite different from that of the South African Bantu, such as the Zulu, and the Somali and others among whom we find the zar cult, is found in West African societies such as the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Fon of Dahomey. These two groups, incidentally, are also important because much of their religious heritage has been maintained in the Americas, from Cuba to Brazil, by people who were brought there as slaves. In West Africa, possession trance cults are organized to worship clan ancestors or the principal gods of the tribes. People join the cults for various reasons, including illness and infertility, but such disturbances are not considered to be evidence of possession. The majority of the possession trancers in these cults, although not often their leaders, are women.

Possession trance cults in which women predominate are not limited to Africa and Afro-America. For example, Clive Kessler (1977) reports such cults in the Malay state of Kelantan. Although the healers are men, the majority of the patients, he notes, are women, a fact that he relates to the stress inherent in their social position. Another example comes from the United States, where, according to June Macklin (1977), two and one-half times as many women as men are spirit mediums licensed by one of the major spiritualist organizations.

I. M. Lewis (1971) interprets Zulu possession cults, like the zar cult from which most of his first-hand data come, as expressions of the war between the sexes. Illness is a tool that women use to manipulate their menfolk, in particular their husbands and their kin, into paying for initiation-cures, and then permitting the patient, or temporarily cured patient, to join a society of women and thus to acquire a degree of freedom. Generalizing more broadly, Lewis argues that these cults deal with peripheral amoral spirits, which reflect the peripheral social position of women. They are not the “main morality cults” of the society, an observation that as we have seen, does not hold true, for example, for the ancestor cults of the Fon, which also have a majority of female members. Lewis claims,
moreover, that those men who join the cults, where this option is available to them, also suffer from social disabilities. Lewis expands his thesis to say that possession cults—except in certain small-scale societies, where they are the main morality cults and are dominated by men—are expressions of social protest for the depressed and despised categories of people. He suggests that Haitian *vodou* can be understood in such terms as well.

An analysis of Haitian *vodou*, however, shows some of the difficulties of Lewis' thesis. First of all, *vodou* reflects a strong syncretism of African and Catholic beliefs. The spirits of African or local origin are identified with saints of the Catholic church. Even more importantly, God, or as the Haitians say, *Bon Dieu*, is the central figure of their beliefs, even though ritual, for the most part, deals with the spirits, variously called *saints* or *loa*. The spirits, moreover, are not amoral; although they may be either good or evil, they enforce the central moral values of the society. *Vodou* is the folk religion of the peasants and the urban masses, representing 90 percent of the population. The women in the *zar* cult may be able to manipulate the men, who are their oppressors, by mystical means, for the men, too believe in the spirits. The Haitian lower class, however, cannot use religious power in its dealings with the dominant minority. Lewis' argument tells only part of the story, for although social deprivation applies not only to women, but also to most of the men, the women still represent a majority of the possession trancers.

It is undoubtedly true that possession trance cults provide for some measure of social manipulation, as Lewis, Gussler, and Greenbaum point out. This manipulation, however, is surely not the whole story, if we are to understand the frequent observation of the predominance of women in possession trance cults. A comparison with visionary trance (A), which we discussed earlier, should be of some help here. Let us recapitulate: trance is more likely to be found in small-scale, relatively simple societies dependent on hunting, gathering, and fishing for most of their subsistence; it is experienced primarily by men. It may be induced through mortification and isolation, as in the vision quest, where it is part of the initiation into manhood. Or it may be induced through hallucinogens. At least in some cases, it may be related, as Siskind (1973) has shown, to a social structure based on matrilocal residence, in which men live among strangers. This reminds us of D'Andrade's hypothesis that the practice of using dreams to seek and control supernatural power is associated with male anxiety about being alone and required to be independent and self-reliant.

If we contrast this group of features with those linked to possession trance, some striking differences appear. Possession trance, it will be recalled, is more likely to occur in more complex societies, those dependent to a greater extent on agriculture or a combination of agriculture and animal husbandry. They also are more likely to be societies with social stratification and more complex political structures. Such societies, as Greenbaum (1973b) has suggested, are also more likely to be rigid. As we saw among the Zulu (as well as such other groups mentioned earlier as the Somali or the Malay), woman leave their natal families to live among strangers. These, then, are not societies in which one might expect men to experience anxieties about having to be alone. It is the women who are exposed to the threats of an alien social environment. Yet, if we go back to the findings of Barry, Child, and Bacon (1959), these are societies in which people, and women in particular (Barry, Bacon, and Child 1957), are reared to be compliant, obedient, reliable, and nurturant, rather than independent and self-reliant. They will not seek spirit help to augment their own powers to be able to deal with a hostile group. Instead, the call on powerful, authoritative spirits to act in their place. It may well be the least compliant, most strong-willed of the women who find adaptation to their new lives most difficult and who may therefore be most in need of the escape mechanism provided by the possession trance cults. Note, too, that whereas the North American vision quest, where it exists, is obligatory for young men, the possession trance cults always exist only for a minority. Each type of ASC, in its own way, reveals sources of stress within these different types of societies.
dependency is particularly true of the initiatory experiences of the vision quest. The possession trancer, on the contrary, acting out a role before an audience, is involved in an active performance. The physically passive visionary interacts with the spirits; the psychologically passive possession trancer's body is used as a vehicle by means of which the spirits interact directly with her audience, while she is psychologically absent.

We now turn to a comparison of the imagery, the symbolism, and the fantasy linked to each of our two states. In each case, the imagery concerns two basic themes: mastery and sexuality. Note that the physically passive trance is linked to an active imagery: the trancer sends his soul on a trip, a spirit journey; he speaks with spirits or even struggles with them to bring back the soul of a patient. He obtains a boon from them, be it a cure, some special power, or knowledge. Active possession trance, on the other hand, is represented by a dependent, passive imagery. The possession trancer is the spirit's wife, her mount (horse, mule, or camel), his vehicle or vessel. She is mounted, ridden, or entered, indeed possessed by the spirit. The trancer remains himself and gains power by interacting with another entity, whether through the piri of that other, as in the vision quest, or through struggle, as in the shaman's journey. By contrast, the possession trancer ceases to be herself; she becomes another through identification and for a time loses her own identity, becoming the passive instrument of that other.

In both instances, however, the theme of mastery is striking: the trancer achieves mastery by having power, knowledge, success, or special gifts bestowed by a supernatural entity. The possession trancer achieves it by abdicating her own self, identifying with or making room for a more powerful self who takes over her body and who performs powerful acts while residing in that body. It is striking that the altered state typical of women involves an active performance linked to a passive fantasy, whereas the altered state typical of men involves a passive experience frequently linked to an active fantasy.

These types of states and experiences appear to "make sense" in terms of the socialization practices of the societies in which they occur, of the typical roles assigned to men and women, and of the stresses that are given relief in these ritualized states. We have already noted that socialization of women typically emphasizes obedience and lack of independence. In possession trance, obedience and dependency are given ultimate expression. Yet it also shows how the very obedience, by reaching a maximum, becomes a means for manipulating life situations. One ceases to be oneself, one identifies with and impersonates a more powerful other. And it is as that other that the apparently obedient and passive individual may not only ventilate suppressed or repressed feelings but also initiate changes in her own life as well as in the lives of others.

The male who is taught to be an independent and self-reliant hunter seeks the protection of an imaginary helper in the person of the hallucinatory spirit in visions as well as in dreams. The woman's problem is quite different. She cannot deal with it directly but must use the hierarchical features of her social structure to work for her, getting a powerful ally, sometimes an ancestor, to work on her behalf.

This situation explains in part the observation that has been made frequently that possession trance appears to be a self-serving process, in which the spirits appear to express the wishes of the possessed individual without much disguise. This observation has led to the charge, probably justified in some instances, that an altered state does not actually occur but is merely simulated. However, simulation is by no means always the case.

It must be remembered that the pressures of a rigid and hierarchical social structure cannot, by themselves, explain the institution of possession trance cults, or the psychological transformation of individuals. We need another element, a personality structure that involves a certain type of self-perception as well as characteristic ways of dealing with interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts. Social norms and values, mediated by the socialization process, are key elements in this situation. The imagery and symbolism of ASC rituals can provide further insights. We considered earlier the sexual imagery involved in many of the hallucinatory trance rituals. Let us now consider the corresponding imagery of possession trance, as expressed in this case not through what is seen and heard but through what is acted out and the way in which it is explained in mythological themes.

We have already mentioned the widespread use of the metaphor of "mounting" for spirit possession, in which the possession trancer is the spirit's horse, mule, or camel. The possessed individual may also be called the spirit's wife. The Fou of Dahomey, for example, use both of these expressions, and a cult initiate is called a hunst (wife of spirit), a term that has survived in Haitian vodou. There, a male spirit, impersonated by or "possessing" one individual, may address a woman as "my wife." Also, female spirits may insist on marrying a human man, who must then set aside a special room in his house for this spirit wife, who comes to him in his sleep. Crepanzano (1977) has described and analyzed the relationship between a Moroccan husband and wife and their spirit spouses. Zempleni (1966) has reported at some length on the possession trance rites of the Lebo and Wolof peoples of Senegal. These rite are part of, primarily, women's cults. Among the ailments are reproductive disorders of women, which are said to be due to the spirit fiancés or spirit husbands, who must be exorcized. Many of the possessing spirits, however, are ancestral spirits, and the symbolism of the ritual is basically one of submission. Nonetheless, initiation is referred to as marriage between the possessed woman and her possessing spirit. During ritual dances, overt sexual behavior may be mimed, including rape, and it is said that some women experience orgasm during possession. This situation is made more complex by the observation that women may be possessed by females as well as males, that women possessed by male spirits may mime sexual interactions with other women, and so on.

The whole symbolism of the relationship between humans and spirits as love and marriage is not limited to Africa, Afro-America, and the Mediterranean region. For example, Spiro (1967:212) reports the marriage of Burmese female shamans to their spirits. There are, indeed, also certain striking Christian paral-
lels, such as the marriage of Catholic nuns to Christ. In her book on the south Italian village of Torregreca, Ann Cornelissen (1969) offers a striking description of such a ceremony. One is also reminded of the various Judeo-Christian interpretations of the Song of Songs.7

In comparing the sexual imagery of possession trance, as it appears primarily in African and Afro-American cults, with that of Amazonian Indians described earlier, several differences are immediately obvious. The Amazonian men, as we have seen, engage in fantasies under the action of the drugs, while the African and other women possession trancers act out fairly complex roles. The men's fantasies are directed toward women, and also at a reduction of the anxiety and the hostility they feel towards both their sexual partners and their kinsmen. The women's behavior in possession trance, on the other hand, frequently involves a degree of male impersonation. Also, the fantasies of the Amazonian men involve a degree of regression, a feature which appears to be absent from possession trance behavior. Because the Indian men engage in fantasies, these experiences are complete in themselves. The possession trance, as behavior, however, may have considerable social consequences, not only for the woman herself but also for her group.

**Summary.** We may now summarize briefly some of the salient points reviewed in this discussion: Institutionalization of altered states of consciousness is virtually universal in human societies. However, the types of states, their method of induction, and their ritualization and interpretation vary from society to society.

We have distinguished two broad types of ritualized altered states of consciousness: trance and possession trance. They are linked to differing levels of societal complexity and ultimately, to different levels of subsistence economies. They are also differentially distributed geographically; the Americas, predominantly hunting societies, have trance, and Africa, primarily agricultural societies, has possession trance. These two subsistence types are distinguished also by differential patterns of socialization.

Patterns of socialization also distinguish the sexes, with males—particularly in hunting societies—being socialized for independence and self-reliance, and women—particularly in agricultural societies—being socialized for obedience and compliance. In view of the differences in socialization associated both with subsistence differences and sex differences, it is not surprising to find differences in altered states by sex as well as by type of society. We have suggested, on the basis of some evidence, that hallucinatory trance, often induced by drugs, is more characteristic of males, particularly in hunting societies, whereas possession trance is more characteristic of women, particularly in agricultural societies.

The type of altered state institutionalized and the nature of the institutionalization itself reveal points of stress within a society. These typical points of stress vary from society to society, from subsistence level to subsistence level. The stresses relate to socialization patterns and sex roles, and to the positions in the social system that are under greatest pressure, such as young men or newly married women. Young men feel pressure to perform and achieve as independent individuals, often in hostile settings (as in hunting, warfare, or sex), young women feel the shift from natal home to the control of a mother-in-law, conflict with co-wives, or the need to produce offspring. I wish to suggest that it is this variation in types of stresses, together with differences in socialization goals and practices, that leads to a society's "choice" of a "female type" of altered state (possession trance) as prototypical or of a "male type" (hallucinatory trance).

**Mythology and World View**

The drug-induced fantasies of the American Indians are linked to elaborate transcendent mythological and cosmological systems, whereas the mythic "range" of the African women's cults is much more limited. We shall consider these more limited schemes first. In societies where possession trance is practiced, the ritual behavior involves the acting out of certain mythic themes. The possession trance reveals the identity and characteristics of the spirits: they are largely anthropomorphized, and often they are ancestors. They are then, in some sense, part of the human group, which they enlarge in time and space. Their demands are those of powerful humans: obedience, food, and sex. Like powerful chiefs or heads of families, they punish the disobedient. The American Indian myths are by far more elaborate. Harner (1973b:134) says of the Jivaros that "the normal waking life is explicitly viewed as 'false' or 'a lie.'" The supernatural world is the "real" world for them, and this world can be entered through the use of hallucinogens. To what extent can the construction of this "real" world be explained on the basis of characteristic responses to certain drugs? This is an interesting question to which answers exist at present only in rudimentary form. La Barre (1975) notes to the need to distinguish between psychophysiological constants in the hallucinatory process resulting from the use of certain drugs, and constants in the symbolic content of hallucinations. For example, certain drugs appear to "promote a feeling of flying through the air" (La Barre 1975:13). Some produce "macropsia," the enlargement of what is perceived—which may explain myths of giants—and others lead to "micropsia," the reduction in size of what is seen. This condition may be the basis of stories of "little people." Both of these legendary forms are widespread. Some drugs also modify the subjects' perception of the size of their own bodies. They are reminiscent of Alice in Wonderland, who found a bottle labelled "drink me," which had dramatic effects on her size.

Siskind (1973:136) makes the distinction between psychophysiological and symbolic factors explicit:

The small scrolls and rope-like images may be produced directly by the chemical acting on the nerves, but the visions that the Sharahuana seek are learned from other men and from the beliefs they share . . . Jaguars, snakes and beautiful women cannot be found in a vegetable substance or located at nerve endings . . . The young men must learn to shape the visual illusion and the physiological sensations into the mold and the form of the spirits.
The greater elaboration of hallucination-supported mythologies, is striking, and it requires more detailed study. For the moment, we may say that where the dream world of hallucinations is given cultural support and is defined as "true" reality, with the waking world merely its reflection if not an outright "lie," motivations for waking behavior must be sought to a considerable extent in this hallucinatory dream world. It becomes itself a dimension of culture, which has generally been neglected in analyses of the interaction between culture and personality.

Siskind speaks of the cultural beliefs that shape hallucinatory images. In fact, we may distinguish between cultural and personal symbolism, and the constant interaction between the two. The mythological content, which is culturally shared and to a degree prescribed, arose out of personal expressions of unconscious fears and desires of individuals, and new modifications from this personal source are always possible. On the other hand, personal, idiosyncratic content in hallucinations or in possession trance behavior, which deviates to a considerable extent from the cultural model, is more likely to occur when individuals are disturbed or in some way out of step with their peers. In Chapter 8, when we deal with ethnopsychiatry, we shall consider some of these deviant or pathological positions.

ALTERED STATES AND SOCIALIZATION

What enables people to experience altered states? The question is not asked as often as it should be, for it generally assumed that anyone who takes drugs or is hypnotized will enter an altered state. In fact the subject is more complex, as we have already seen. It is important to stress again that ASC of the types we have been discussing are culturally patterned to a high degree, and so is the expectation that appropriate individuals will experience these states when they are supposed to do so, but not at other times and places.

Because the states are so highly patterned, they entail several kinds of learning. One kind is the acquisition of the appropriate personality dispositions. We have already referred several times to the different sorts of socialization imposed on boys and girls, and to the differences among societies of different subsistence types. There are also, of course, characteristics of socialization that apply specifically in individual societies. For example, Gregory Bateson (1976) speaks of certain components of socialization for ASC in Bali, where there are many different kinds of possession trance. Balinese socialization is highly kinesthetic: for example, when children learn to dance, individual limbs are manipulated, in contrast, for example, to Western dance instruction, in which the child is expected to follow a model. There is, moreover, a great concern for balance. The disruption of balance is basic to the kind of disorientation, of separation of the self from the body, as it is perceived, that underlines the induction of an altered state. At the other extreme is Harner's report (1973b:90) that the Jivaro administer a strong hallucinogen to a disrespectful boy, in order for him to "see the supernatural world" in his trance. This experience, it is expected, will teach him that his father has knowledge and consequently is to be respected. Siskind (1973) for the Sharahuana and Carneiro (1964) for the Amahuaca tell of learning to see the correct things. On the other hand, Lame Deer has given us a description of how the puberty fast of the Sioux is both a learning experience and an experience of identity transformation. Katz (1973) has shown how, among the !Kung, trance constitutes a type of socialization. In Haiti, children play at possession trance to the amusement of their elders, and first possession trance experiences often occur among adolescents in such play situations.

Learning, then, operates at several levels: First, the child acquires the basic personality dispositions, such traits of independence and dependence and attitudes toward the self and the body. Next, the child learns the basic structure of the universe, the existence of spirits and their behavior, and the manner in which their presence may be perceived or induced. This prelearning is requisite before a ritual ASC may be experienced successfully. What has been learned previously can be called upon when a stressful situation arises or a personal crisis develops. The process of facing the problem with the resources available constitutes a further level of learning. At a fourth level is the ritual itself, which, as we discussed earlier, is itself a type of learning process. At each stage, the attitude and behavior of others supports and authenticates what is learned, considers it desirable and rewards it, or to the contrary, considers it inappropriate and provides ritual means for dealing with the situation. This second response arises particularly when personal symbolism takes precedence over the cultural one.

Finally, the ASC experience itself affects the further development of the individual, the individual's place in society, and the world view that is informed, in some basic sense, by the experience of, at least, some members of a society, of extraordinary events in relation to self and spirit others.

Because ASC provide an avenue for the expression of both social and personal stresses, we return to them not only in our discussion of mental health and illness (Chapter 8) but also in our consideration of the psychological dimensions of social and cultural change (Chapter 9).

ALTERED STATES IN OUR OWN SOCIETY

In our discussion so far most of the examples of altered states have been drawn from traditional societies, with only occasional references to modern societies. As we look around, however, it is clear that altered states play an important role in our own society as well. In the 1960s there were veritable drug cults, many of which attached religious or mystical meanings to experiences with hallucinogens. At the same time, there has been a growth of new religions, as well as the revival of old forms, in which emphasis was placed on more or less complex altered states. Most prominent among these old forms have been evangelical Christian
groups emphasizing intense conversion experiences, gifts of the spirit such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), and healing. Many of these practices have moved from backwoods traditional groups and tent revivals to modern electronic missions. The Catholic Church has seen the development of a Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic movement, and so have some of the Protestant churches. A second type of religious group stressing and encouraging altered states of consciousness has come from the Orient, from India and Japan primarily. A third type has come from Latin America: spiritism from Puerto Rico and various Afro-Caribbean forms from Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad, and elsewhere.

Not only have these groups attracted large numbers of followers, but there has also been a major interest in books dealing with altered states and related experiences. The success of the writings of Carlos Castaneda is a case in point, and readers may have wondered why no references to this author have appeared in our discussion so far. There is every reason to believe, as Richard de Mille (1976) has carefully documented, that Castaneda’s writings are fiction rather than documentary reports of the author’s experiences with the Yaqui medicine man Don Juan and the witch Doña Soledad. Passing novels off as field reports constitutes a hoax on a credulous public. The enormous popularity of Castaneda’s writings, then, appears to tell us more about his readers and their fantasies than about Yaqui beliefs and rituals.

While many have looked for religious experiences, probably an even larger number have sought out altered states in ways largely stripped of their original religious meanings: Transcendental Meditation and Yoga, for example, have been widely advertised as means of stimulating physical and psychological well-being, or, particularly in the case of TM, of achieving success as that word is ordinarily understood in the United States: in terms of money and career. In secular contexts, altered states of various kinds, especially drugs and relaxation (meditation) have been used in therapeutic settings by medical practitioners. Together with a disenchantment with many aspects of traditional psychotherapies, the drugs and the Oriental methods of approach to mental healing have led to renewed research concerning human consciousness. Science, in this case, appears to have followed popular culture, rather than the other way around.

The counterculture of the 1960s has gone, but the interest in religious experiences and in altered states has remained as its heritage, together with a skeptical stance concerning rationality, technology, and a society based on them. The skepticism has been reinforced by the energy crisis and the new scarcity of the 1970s. The traditional churches have not filled the void, but electronic evangelism has done so to a remarkable degree.

Weston La Barre has written that religion is “the response of society to problems the contemporary culture failed to solve” (La Barre 1970:44). The flourishing of the new and revived religions suggests the failure of other institutions in our society to meet major needs of many people.

NOTES

1. See especially Benedict (1922).
3. A. F. C. Wallace (1969) traces the wide cross-cultural distribution of the image of the trip as a cultural scheme for interpreting hallucinatory and mystical experiences. He concludes that “every real trip brings heightened awareness of the real world” (p. 155). It is perhaps no accident that every example he cites, whether actual or from television drama, involves male protagonists.
4. Although hunting large game is universally a male specialty, we now know that with the exception of the Eskimo, the vegetable food collected by women actually forms the major basis of subsistence in “hunting” societies. Nonetheless, prestige is centered on the men’s activity and their success in their frequently unrewarded efforts.
5. It is interesting that another nonaggressive group, the Ifaluk, as reported by Spiro (1953), also have hostile spirits of the dead who cause evil, including illness and madness through possession.
6. The widespread existence of such groups represents an interesting contradiction to L. Tiger’s claim, in his book Men in Groups (1969), that there exists a biological basis for “male-bonding,” the tendency to form exclusively male groups. A comparable female tendency is said to be absent because women lack the underlying biological characteristics. See also Nancy Neis’ article on women’s associations among the Jaw of West Africa (1974).
7. The phenomenon is, of course, much more widespread, and many more examples could be cited. The theme is represented in somewhat attenuated form in such familiar lines from Protestant hymns as: “And he walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own,” and “Jesus, lover of my soul.”
8. This distinction between the chemical effect of the drugs and the cultural and personal content of visions is graphically shown in the following quotation from Gordon Wasson’s book (1961 [orig. 1959]:319).

All my visions had a pristine quality: when I saw choir stalls in a Renaissance cathedral, they were not black with age and incense, but as though they had just come, fresh carved, from the hand of the Master... (Wasson 1961 [orig. 1959]:319).

Clearly, personal and cultural experiences contribute to the content of drug-induced hallucinations.