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A SURVEY OF MYSTICAL, VISIONARY AND REMOTE PERCEPTION EXPERIENCES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Looking back as far as the late Nineteenth Century, there have been a number of attempts to survey and classify the occurrence of mystical and religious experiences. Starbuck's survey of conversion (1899), which led to James' classic study (1936), was followed later on by Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (1923), and then by Laski's informal inquiry into ecstatic experience (1961) and, more recently, by Hardy's media survey which provided an overwhelming quantity of anecdotal material (Hardy, 1979). Although these informal studies have always revealed a surprisingly widespread occurrence of these experiences, the myth of the rarity and exclusiveness of these encounters has tended to persist until the recent more rigorous surveys of Back and Bourque (1970), Thomas and Cooper in America (1978), Macleod-Morgan in Australia (1985) and Hay and Morisy in Great Britain (Hay and Morisy, 1978). These surveys have revealed that a consistent 20-40% of the population claim to have had at least one encounter of this type in a lifetime.

The survey of Back and Bourque was more a technical exercise in order to determine whether or not "very private" experiences could be investigated through the employment of regular survey and interview techniques. They found this to be possible but concluded by stating:

The greatest difficulty which we found was the definition of an absolute minimum level of the experiences to be reported. It seems reasonable that there is no standard against which to measure the strength of transcendental experiences, and consequently there is variability in defining when an experience is sufficiently strong to be reported in an interview...We have also seen that the attitude of the interviewer toward questions of this kind and the proportion of the whole interview devoted to such questions probably has a further, complicating effect on the threshold definition of the experiences reported. (K.Back and L.Bourque, 1970, p.495)

Over the course of their three sample periods of 1962, 1966 and 1967, the question they employed ("Have you ever had a 'religious or mystical experience' that is, a moment of sudden religious insight or awakening?") brought increasing positive response rates of 20.5, 31.8 and 41.2 percent, respectively. They concluded that it was not a function of cultural change which caused the progressive increase over the three Gallup polls, but rather the interview technique employed which affected the threshold of what an experient would consider reportable (K.Back and L.Bourque, 1970, p.493).

Thomas and Cooper found that one third of their respondents had had intense experiences which they described as spiritual in nature. They, too, concluded that these

apparently subjective encounters could be studied through the application of standard social science techniques. They employed Greeley's general question ("Have you ever had the feeling of being close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?") and categorized the responses into four types which included 1) Uncodable (8%); 2) Mystical (2%); 3) Psychic (12%); 4) Faith and Consolidation (12%) (Greeley, 1974).

Hay's qualitative study also used a single, catch-all question ("Do you feel that you have ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?") and produced a 65% positive response rate amongst postgraduate students in a department of education (1979). This sample revealed a statistically non-significant higher proportion of men claiming to have had these experiences, although in a larger-scale national study conducted together with Ann Morisy, the proportion of women to men was a significant 4:3 (1978). Most of Hay's sample reported that their encounters first occurred during mid-adolescence, a fact which concurs with Starbuck. Hay feels this fact points to a "deep structure", which for him, as for Hardy, is biological (Hay, 1979; Hardy, 1966).

Hay's classification of experience types contained a more detailed breakdown and included 1) Awareness of a power controlling and guiding me; 2) Awareness of the presence of God; 3) Awareness of a presence in nature; 4) Answered prayer; 5) Experience of a unity with nature; 6) ESP, Out-of-the-body, visions, etc.; 7) Awareness of an evil power; 8) Conversion. These categories apparently were drawn from the subject's descriptions. Hay (1979) concludes that with the increasing acceptance of the phenomenological approach in the study of 'private' experience, as witnessed in cognitive anthropology, for example, it is now possible to provide increasingly accurate descriptions of religious experience from a position of ontological neutrality. He feels that although these experiences do not fit our usual definitions of reality, viz., by being repeatable and distinct, they are often believed by experiencers to be more 'real' than ordinary events. He further argues that although there is a great deal of paradox surrounding the occurrence and reportage of these experiences, their recurrence and apparent uniformity and consistency fits the requirements underlying all objective science.

The variety of experience types that have been reported in response to the single, catch-all questions quoted above opens the possibility that we are looking at a broader phenomenon than the previous studies would indicate. Questions couched in religious and/or spiritual terms will obviously miss potential respondents who do not conceptualize their experiences in this way, and those who do may be dismissive of those experiences which do not appear to include an existential shift in ontological perspective in which a 'higher' being or reality appears to be perceived. The previous studies also have been lacking in a clear conceptualization of what they are exploring. This might account for the significant

number of 'uncodable' responses in the Thomas and Cooper study and for the mixture of rational processes (for example, as in the case of 'conversion') coupled with encounters of 'other worldly' powers such as an 'awareness of a power controlling and guiding me'. From the results of these surveys it is apparent there is a need to operationalize the definition of this class of events *prior to* the collection of data, rather than making a *post hoc* assignment of categories. This present study attempts to do just this. The class of events was first conceptually operationalized and then a questionnaire was developed which specified the subclasses as specific questions about specific types of experiences. This method is described in the section which follows.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we will present the results of a non-random survey conducted in selected departments and schools at the University of Queensland and Griffith University in South East Queensland. As in the previous surveys cited above, we will accept, in this study, the use of phenomenological report of private experience, even though we feel that the questions of Hay and others were both too vague and conceptually loaded with a religious bias. As already indicated the pot-pourri of responses obtained in the earlier studies, some classically religious in quality and others not, indicate a possible relationship amongst a fairly broad range of experience types. For heuristic purposes we shall call this class of phenomena *præternatural* experience.¹ Like the conceptualization of Hultkrantz (1983), we must look to the intended quality of 'supernaturalness' but, similar to Hay's position, this usage does not imply any final ontological position. Such a definition operationalizes the events in question as being members of the class of the *præternatural* in that they appear to derive from a 'supernatural' source or somehow stand apart from everyday sensate experience and, in addition, they are recalled in response to the eleven specific categories given in the questionnaire.

Based on the work cited above and information gathered in a preliminary survey,² eleven categories of experience were devised and appropriate questions formulated as part of the questionnaire used in this survey. These categories were: 1) conversion (changing or adopting religious worldview); 2) presence of God or other spiritual power; 3) mystical experience (sense of unity and/or merger with cosmic or ultimate ground of being); 4) the sacred (Otto's Numinous Experience [1958] or Zaehner's panenhenic experience [1980]);

¹We are employing the older spelling to signify our particular operational/intentional definition as opposed to the 'supernatural' as ontological fact.

²This was the informal collection of anecdotal data over a ten year period from counselling clients who reported *præternatural* encounters.

5) near-death-experience (trauma and accident involving visions and/or 'other worldly' experiences); 6) visionary experience (all extra-sense modality veridical-like perceptions); 7) contact with the spirit realm (sensing presences that are not there in a physical way); 8) out-of-the-body-experience (perceptions of flying without extra physical means and perceptions which involve awareness of 'self' as separate from 'body'); 9) remote perception (pre-, post-cognition and telepathy); 10) the existential void (loss of sense of self and existential certainty); and 11) other-world experience (shamanic-like journeys or encounters).

These questions comprised part 2 of the questionnaire. Part 1 requested details of name, address, sex, age, nationality, marital status, education, qualifications and religious affiliation and attendance. Part 3 sought details on attempts made to induce these experiences (if any), self-perception of religiosity and/or spirituality, religious practice (prayer or meditation), drugs usage and mental illness.

A total of 1160 questionnaires were distributed to both staff and students in the departments of Studies in Religion, Social Work, Classics and Ancient History, Education and Philosophy, as well as in the counselling service at the University of Queensland and in the schools of Science, Social and Industrial Administration and Modern Asian Studies at Griffith University. From this canvassing, 316 usable questionnaires were returned and formed the data base for the following discussion. The following section presents the statistical breakdown for the collected data and can be skipped if desired. Section 4, Discussion of Results, presents the qualitative findings of the survey with examples of the types of experiences and a discussion of these results. However, tables 1 - 3 give breakdowns of the experience types and their frequencies which would also be of interest to the non-statistical reader.

3. STATISTICAL FINDINGS

The survey sample contained an equal number of men and women (Total N = 316) with a mean age of 29.5 years (min. = 16; max = 65). About 90% of the sample claimed some Christian denomination as their religion at birth with slightly more than 8% claiming no religious affiliation and the remaining 2% accounted for by two Jews, one Moslem and three Buddhists. A Student's t-Test of means for education across sex revealed a significant difference in total years of education between men and women ($p < 0.01$), with men showing a mean of 15.1 years and women 14.2 years. Although men showed a higher average number of qualifications, this difference was not significant ($p > 0.05$). Differences in church attendance between men and women were insignificant as well as those between the sexes on self-perceived religiosity/spirituality. As one would expect, there was a significant dependent relationship between self-perceived religiosity and rank order of rate of church attendance (Chi-Square = 53.6, $p < 0.001$) (Ott, Larson and Mendenhall, 1983).

Respondents were asked to rank the frequency of each of their praternatural experiences on a five point scale, indicating the total occurrence of each event in a life-time. The ranges were roughly logarithmic and were: 'never'; '1-5 times'; '6-20 times'; '21-99 times'; and '100+ times'. From these responses each experience was placed in a rank ranging from 0-4 and a total summary rank was calculated across all experiences for each experient and, in addition, the total number of different experience types was scored for each subject. The distribution of experients and non-experients for all types of praternatural experiences in this survey can be seen in Table 1. The sample obtained contained an overall positive response rate of 82.59% with women showing a higher, but non-significant average total ranking (women = 2.27, men = 1.97; $p > 0.05$; See Table 2). Women also showed a greater average variety of experience types (maximum of 10; women = 3.11, men = 2.59) which was not statistically significant, however (Table 3).

Question 14 of the survey asked if the respondent saw him/herself as a 'religious' or 'spiritual' person. This question did not attempt to differentiate Allport's and Ross's *extrinsic/intrinsic* dimension (1977) but some respondents tended to cross out the word 'religious' in the question and then answer it positively. However, the Chi-Square of religiosity versus rank order of total experience frequency yielded a highly significant result ($X^2 = 27.86$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .298$). The mean rank of total praternatural experience for those identifying themselves as religious or spiritual was 2.43 as opposed to 1.73 for those not. A Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA of ranks performed on total experience rank on the factor of religiosity also yielded a highly significant result ($H = 18.877$, $p < .001$) (Ott, Larson and Mendenhall, 1983). When the responses to questions 2-4 of the questionnaire (presence of God, mystical experience and experience of the sacred) were separated from the others, it was found that most of the significance on the factor of religiosity was attributable to questions 2-4. This seems logical because anyone who ascribes labels and meanings such as God and the sacred to their experiences will, in all likelihood, see themselves as religious and/or spiritual. Whether or not it would be useful to separate the concepts of religiosity and spirituality remains to be ascertained in future research. However, these terms are vague in most minds and a clear operational definition would have to be established first.

Responses to questions 12 and 13 were combined so that any attempt or not to induce praternatural experience could be assigned to one of four categories: never tried (No Try); tried but never succeeded (Negative Try); tried and sometimes succeeded (Sometimes); and whenever tried always succeeded (Always). The Chi-square of this variable against rank order of total experience yielded a highly significant result ($X^2 = 53.87$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .238$), as did a Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA of frequency rank across the above factor of directed (Active) effort ($H = 41.761$, $p < .001$).

It must be noted that of those respondents reporting some experience, more than half (149) never made any active induction attempt. However, for those who did, there was a clear trend of increasing direct conscious involvement with the occurrence of praternatural experiences as subjects had increasing numbers of them. Whether this was cause or effect remains to be seen in further studies.

Table 1
Distribution of Experience Types vs Sex

<u>Experience Type</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>% Total</u>	<u>% Male*</u>	<u>% Female*</u>
NONE	55	34	21	17.4	61.8	38.2
GOD	146	66	80	46.2	45.2	54.8
MYSTICAL	84	44	40	26.6	52.4	47.6
NUMINOUS	115	47	68	36.4	40.9	59.1
NDE	27	10	17	8.5	37.0	63.0
VISIONARY	62	29	33	19.6	46.8	53.2
PRESENCE	113	48	65	35.8	42.5	57.5
OBE	103	49	54	32.6	47.6	52.4
REMOTE PERCEPTION	176	77	99	55.7	43.8	56.2
EXISTENTIAL LOSS	57	31	26	18.0	54.4	45.6
SHAMANIC	24	15	9	7.6	62.5	37.5

*These percentages indicate the proportion of men and women represented in each category.

Table 2
Distribution of Experience Frequency Rank vs Sex

<u>Frequency Rank</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>% Total</u>	<u>% Male*</u>	<u>% Female*</u>
0 (NEVER)	55	34	21	17.4	61.8	38.2
1-5 (LOW)	65	34	31	20.6	52.3	47.7
6-20 (MEDIUM)	65	29	36	20.6	44.6	55.4
21-99 (MED-HIGH)	49	25	24	15.5	51.0	49.0
100+ (HIGH)	82	36	46	26.0	43.9	56.1

*These percentages indicate the proportion of men and women represented in each category.

Table 3
Distribution of Præternatural Experience Type Totals vs Sex

<u>Number of Types</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>% Total</u>	<u>% Male*</u>	<u>% Female*</u>
0	55	34	21	17.4	61.8	38.2
1	51	26	25	16.1	51.0	49.0
2	54	26	28	17.1	48.1	51.9
3	47	20	27	14.9	42.6	57.4
4	42	21	21	13.3	50.0	50.0
5	20	11	9	6.3	55.0	45.0
6	18	11	7	5.7	61.1	38.9
7	11	2	9	3.5	18.2	81.8
8	10	4	6	3.2	40.0	60.0
9	5	3	2	1.6	60.0	40.0
10	3	0	3	1.0	0.0	100.0

*These percentages indicate the proportion of men and women represented in each category.

Respondents were asked to rank their level of religious practice ("meditation, prayer or any similar activity") into one of five levels: Never; 1-4 times/month; 5-10 times/month; 11-29 times/month; and 30+ times/month. Again, a Chi-Square against total experience rank orders revealed a significant dependency relationship ($X^2 = 50.20$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .1999$) and a Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA of total experience rank across the factor of religious practice yielded a highly significant statistic ($H = 22.649$, $p < .001$). Of course, it is not possible to assign a causal direction (if in fact there is one), but the numbers of those who practiced more frequently increased as the rank order of præternatural experience frequency increased and the mean rank of experience rate appeared to increase with increasing religious practice (Mean ranks of religious practice = 1.78; 2.14; 2.48; 2.38; 2.69). Although more than half (164) claimed that they did not engage in any religious practice, it would be an interesting empirical investigation to determine whether experience leads one into practice or vice versa. From casual observation, one is tempted to conclude that increasing occurrences of præternatural events lead to increased overall interest and involvement in their meaning and occurrence and hence the adoption of activities, such as meditation, believed to be germinal to experience induction.

Finally, figures 1 and 2 graphically display the mean rank of experience rate for the factors of 'religiosity' and 'practice' of those experience types which show a statistically significant difference. Numerical values of mean rank are displayed at the top of each column, thereby depicting the relationship of these factors to the average rate of occurrence of præternatural experience for all subjects.³

³'Religiosity' (question 14) is answered either 'yes' or 'no' and 'Practice' (question 15) is ranked from 0-4 based on frequency of engagement.

Figure 1

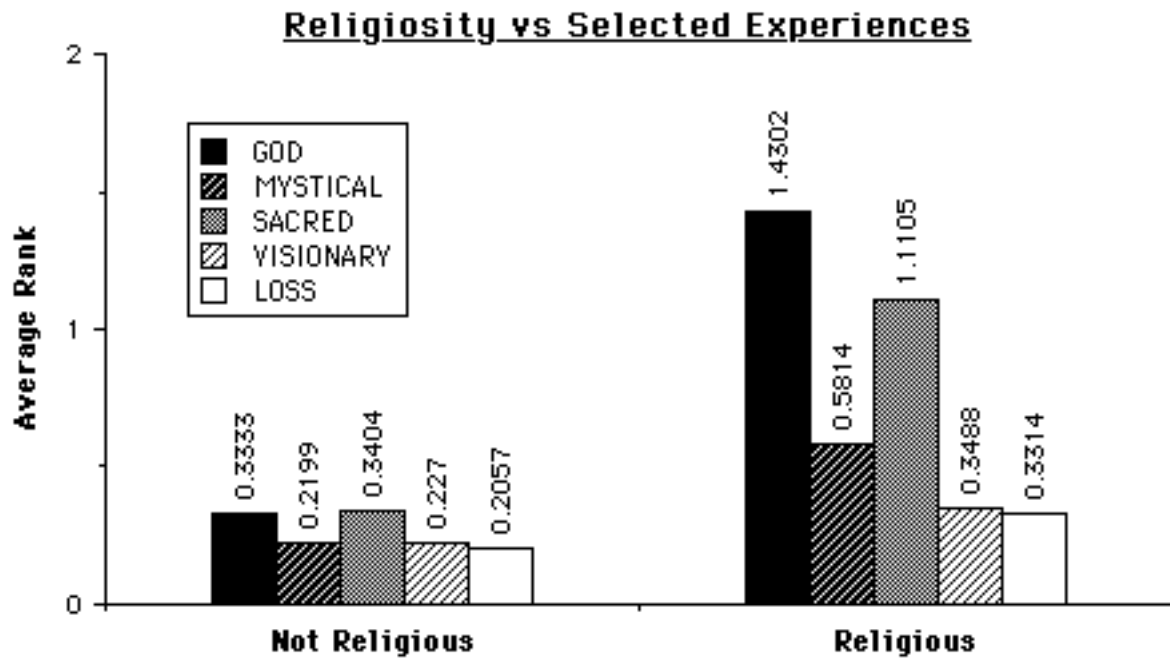
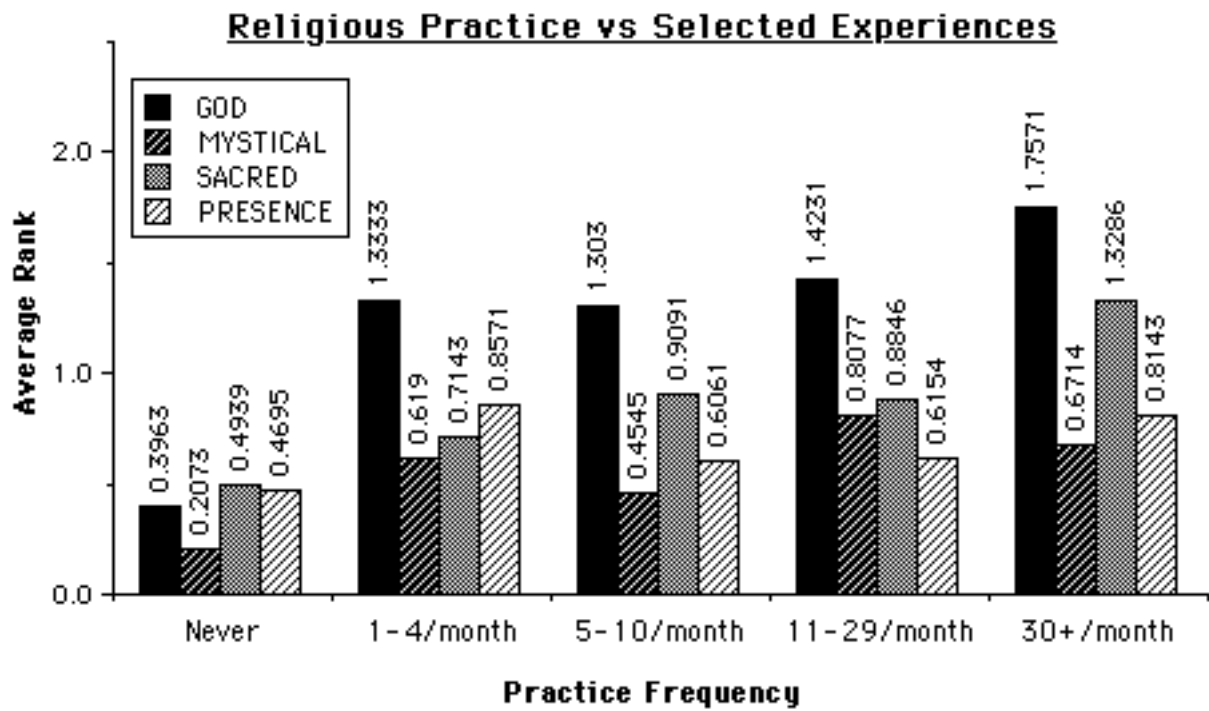


Figure 2



4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The positive response rate of 82.59% is higher than in any other previously reported studies. This could be due to the voluntary and hence self-selecting nature of the survey. If all those questionnaires not returned or returned but not properly completed were counted as non-experients, then the response rate would be 22.50%, which still falls well within the range of these other studies. No doubt unwillingness to take the time to fill in such a lengthy questionnaire would account for many who failed to return them. Meanwhile, the high positive response rate also may be due in part to the fact that subjects who have had experiences (like those described in the questionnaire) would be more likely to complete it because of personal interest in the material, although this certainly would not be their only reason for compliance. In addition, and germinal to the position of this chapter, the high positive response rate may be due to operationalizing this class of experience as well as increasing the number and degree of specificity of the questions asked, thus effectively lowering the threshold for subjects of what they would consider a reportable event. This seems to confirm the position taken by Back and Bourque when rationalizing the progressive increase in response rates in their studies. In this case, however, it is the questionnaire which provides a broader and more 'sympathetic' field of enquiry rather than the interviewer.

Hay, when reporting his qualitative survey of postgraduate education students, explained his higher than average (65%) response rate as due to the quasi-religious nature of an educational vocation (1979, p.166). This fact (if it is so), in conjunction with the possibility that professional educators may give wider and more varied interpretations to Hay's catch-all question will, in effect, generate results more in line with our hypothesized position, viz., this class of events will be better tapped by subdividing it into several types and asking a variety of questions of the survey sample. It is possible that the converse of the usual 'minority' hypothesis for these events is true. In other words, it may be a minority of the population which does not have or is incapable of remembering having had some sort of praternatural experience. The solution, as being suggested here, may be one of ascertaining the appropriate questions to ask and then surveying broadly enough, as well as setting the threshold at a sufficiently low level vis-à-vis Back and Bourque.

For example, as revealed in the interviews conducted as part of this study, a supposed *non-experient* was asked to relate an episode from her life which stood out clearly in her memory. She responded by relating an event which was unmistakably a 'pre-cognitive' type remote perception. She had failed to relate this occurrence to question 9 in the survey, even though she had understood the question. When asked about her failure to recognize the event as pertinent to the survey, she replied that she did not think that it was the type of event to which the questionnaire referred. It was revealed also in subsequent interviews that

several others had failed to record all relevant events. The most common reason given for these omissions was that respondents believed that the events in question were not significant enough or they were not 'religious'. It seems that for some subjects the mere fact that the questionnaire was distributed from the department of Studies in Religion meant, *ipso facto*, that their experiences must have religious significance to be of interest.

In this section each of the eleven questions and their associated praternatural experience types will be further delineated and discussed drawing from specific examples of experient responses. Although 'conversion' was considered to be a possible result of a praternatural experience but not an occurrence itself, it is still included to illustrate the type of responses to this question. Following each praternatural experience category heading are the significance levels (if any) for the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA for the experience rank (rate) across the factors of 'religiosity' and 'practice'. These statistics are then followed by the question used to evoke the response in each category together with response examples and discussion of the responses.

1. Conversion

"Have you ever encountered a time in your life, either precipitated by crisis or good times, which led to a relatively sudden revision of values and a desire to join a religion?"

This category is not counted as a praternatural experience in the final tally of responses because while it may be the end result of a praternatural encounter, it does not meet the operational definition of 'supernatural' givenness. Wainwright separates what he calls ordinary religious experiences, which are bound up with devotional life, from the mystical and numinous ones.

Nevertheless these more ordinary experiences should, I think, be distinguished both from numinous experiences and from mystical experiences, for they do not appear to involve the sense of immediate presence which characterizes the latter. For the same reason, there is no *prima facie* case for the supposition that these experiences provide an independent source of knowledge, that they involve a glimpse of reality or some aspect of reality which is normally hidden from us. (Wainwright, 1975)

It is for this reason as well that the question on conversion is asked but not counted in the total score of praternatural experiences. This question can help us to evaluate questions 2, 3 and 4 which are sometimes answered affirmatively when, in fact, they refer to Wainwright's ordinary, devotional experience. An example of a typical conversion is given by a 33 year old woman:

The first time (was when) I was 25, I had had a series of terrifying nightmares and a number of other experiences including feeling a 'presence' which seemed very hostile. The second, I was 32, (an experience) at the other end of the spectrum... there is beauty, worthwhileness in life (which) encouraged me to take up yoga and learn about meditation.

The conversion was instigated by the experiences, but was not the experience itself. Another typical example is illustrative of the role of emotional upheaval and loss in the conversion process. An 18 year old male reported:

During early weeks at the University I became very depressed and everything went down hill. Meanwhile my elder brother and sister appeared to have everything go right. They were both members of the Way International Research Group. Hence my affiliation with the group.

No doubt praternatural experience often plays a role in the process that leads to conversion, but in terms of the above operational definition, we cannot include this type of behaviour as an experience relevant to this study.

2. Presence of God or other spiritual power

[Religiosity: $H = 73.8$, $p < 0.001$; Practice: $H = 82.3$, $p < 0.001$]⁴

"Do you feel that you have ever been directly aware of or influenced by the presence of God; or, have you ever felt as though you were very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?"

This was an adaptation of Hay's more general question combined with Greeley's. By using the combination, it was hoped that the intent of the question would indicate a perspective broader than standard theological conceptualizations of God, whilst including an experience of divinity as a subset of the general class. A typical example of a response to this question was that of a 55 year old female:

Around age 35. Facing surgery - terrified - prayed - an inexplicable calm followed. I felt 'outside myself'. Many responses did, however, indicate that the subject's experience was very shaped by religious beliefs as in the case of this 29 year old female:

I think I have become aware of the presence of "God", since in certain stressful times I may close my eyes and feel myself going deep within and everything is dark and quiet. Twice when I have done this, outward circumstances have changed, as if someone understood and intervened.

But some who had this kind of experience did not find it 'protective' or re-assuring, such as this 20 year old female:

Went to a bible study class with a friend - to find out what bible study is. I was 19+ and it was 3:30pm in afternoon...sitting around a dining table and discussing the bible. I questioned the truth of the bible and God at that time. The lesson ended at 5:30pm, we prayed and I felt something strange happening - as if my soul or body was going to leave my chair. I was going to fly, lifted up by some power. I got scared, so I opened my eyes and everything was normal again.

In quite a few instances, across several of the experience types, one can place a number of the experiences in more than one category. The one chosen by the experient, however, seems to be dependent on which characteristics or experiential qualities are emphasized in the recall. This, of course, will be influenced by the religious and cultural backgrounds of the experients, operating on the three levels of interpretation as suggested by Moore (1978).⁵

⁴Alpha was set at 0.05

⁵These are: 'Retrospective' interpretation or "References to doctrinal interpretations formulated after the experience is over." 'Reflexive' interpretation or "References to interpretation spontaneously formulated either during the experience itself or immediately afterwards." 'Incorporated' interpretation or "References to features of experience which have been caused or conditioned by a mystic's prior beliefs, expectations and intentions."

The following encounter by a 39 year old female could be interpreted as the 'sensing of a presence' (question 7), but in this case the ontology was understood as divine by the recipient and hence placed in answer to this question.

I was aged 31 at the time of my 2nd daughter's birth. When told of her chances of survival (premature baby) and during the following crucial 48 hours I constantly felt "someone" was with me, and encouraging me to keep faith. This, I did, and she pulled through.

It is possible that praternatural experience may take on religious significance and meaning as a result of what might be labeled 'ontic shift'. For example, two subjects can each have a pre-cognitive experience and whereas one will interpret the episode as an extension of perception beyond ordinary sensate experience, the other will attribute to it a divine, 'cosmic' or ontologically 'other' source. The research currently being undertaken here appears to indicate that this ascription is a result of an experient feeling 'as if' there has been an ontological 'shift', viz., a sudden change into another 'reality' or 'plane' and/or making contact with other-worldly 'beings'. For others, on the other hand, a similar phenomenological occurrence does not appear to have the same degree of existential impact and thus does not engender such beliefs. This, of course, is not an attempt to 'reduce' the ultimate ontology of these events to mere psychological factors, but rather to suggest how the assignment of category might be made by the experient. In positing this notion of 'ontic shift', we are attempting to follow Smart's advice and separate that which is believed to be 'real', from that which may or may not 'exist' (1973, p.54). Reality in this definition seems to be what is personally and culturally acceptable as 'sensate experience' and 'knowledge', whereas the ultimate ontology of the events (once 'bracketed')⁶ in question remains, like the hidden variables of quantum physics, unknown directly and most likely unknowable (Bohm, 1985). However, 'ontic shift' results when we attempt to re-assign the experience of reality as coming from a new or wholly 'other' source.

3. Mystical experience

[Religious: H = 13.5, p < 0.001; Practice: H = 26.6, p < 0.001]

"Would you say that you have had a 'mystical experience'; that is, an intense sense of union with the cosmic, divine or ultimate ground of being?"

This category was intended to coincide with Stace's 'introvertive' mysticism (1960, pp.110-111) but did not try to make discriminations like those of Zaehner, comparing Christian with other types of mysticism (1980). This question did, however, bring forth a variety of experiences, some of which fit the classic definitions of mystical experience. Take this report by a 21 year old male:

⁶'Bracketing' here refers to Husserl's *epoche* - a suspension in the belief in the existence of objects.

I had a particular experience once, while in the privacy of my own room. I felt and had such an intense union with God that I blacked out.

On the other hand, some responses in this category seemed to be more like Laski's description of ecstasy, as in this case of a 50 year old male whose experience was triggered by an intense aesthetic awareness:

At a concert in the City Hall when (I was) around 18 years old. In the middle of Schumann's piano concerto I had a mind blowing awareness of PURE BEAUTY. Time seemed to stop and I was lifted to a state of bliss.

Other episodes, such as the following one reported by a 20 year old female, were less specific and somewhat vague about the phenomenological content.

My "mystical" experience happened when I was in Indonesia on a student exchange - I was 18 at the time. Thirty of us had to climb up to a temple (Imogiri) in the mountains of Java. After waiting an hour, we were sent into the shrine one by one, made to crouch prostrate in front of the shamans and a blessing was given over our heads. I did feel something, as if I was a part of a whole universal entity or something "whole".

Still others contained a number of James' classic elements such as transience and passivity (1936, p.372) and, in this case of a 28 year old male, photism or the experience of the 'light' as described by Bucke (1923, pp.72-73):

...whilst receiving a meditation technique, fully conscious, I saw a hand, palm forward, in front of me which moved aside to reveal a brilliant light...it was very momentary - as soon as I noted to myself what I was experiencing it disappeared and everything was normal.

A few respondents indicated that they wanted to reply affirmatively to this question, but felt that their experiences were not intense enough to fulfil the requirements. However, others described a continuous background awareness as being mystical in quality. As in some of the other categories, these descriptions could be placed with the 'sacred' as well. Again, this may be a function of setting the threshold to a lower level and increasing the number and variety of questions in order to attain a higher degree of specificity.

4. The sacred (Numinous)

[Religious: $H = 35.8$, $p < 0.001$; Practice: $H = 30.4$, $p < 0.001$]

"Have you ever experienced a sense of the sacred in everything around you in which you perceived that all was connected together as one?"

This roughly corresponds to Stace's 'extrovertive' mysticism (1960, pp.61-62) as well as Otto's 'numinous' experience but does not necessarily include the sense of the 'Tremendum' (1958). Typical of this category is Zaehner's *panenhenic* or nature mysticism (1980, p.28) as reported, for example, by a 42 year old female respondent:

After an exhausting personal-growth course weekend I stretched out on the grass in a park and suddenly felt I was not "on" the grass, but "of" the grass, (and the trees, and the sky, and the river).

The majority of the responses to this question fell into this category, but the experience was not confined to beautiful natural surroundings as exemplified by this 36 year old female:

The feeling of "oneness" and incredible order in the universe and euphoria with it has happened just out of the blue with no wanting many times. I remember one incident when I was washing up! Suddenly, every action took on a special meaning and somehow fitted into a higher order or unity.

However, the experience was not always blissful and it is in these instances that we may be seeing the 'Tremendum' come into play in its negative aspect. A 20 year old female related:

The most recent experience was about 2 months ago. I was studying late for mid-semester exams. Round about midnight, I was alone and I suddenly felt frightened of everything - of everything around me, except my books.

For a minority, on the other hand, the experience of unity and sacredness stems from a rational source, as in the case of this 38 year old male:

As a practising scientist I have often perceived the oneness of our world, our natural relationship with it, and the remarkable synthesis of fundamental laws which govern its behaviour. The unfolding truth about the nature of this universe presents us with a story far more remarkable and fascinating than imagination could create.

One is not sure, however, from such descriptions whether this rational entry has the same existential power and impact on awareness and perception that is reported by the majority of experiencers in this category who experience the 'numinous' or the *panenhenic*.

5. Near death experience (trauma)

[Religious: NS; Practice: NS]

"Have you ever had an accident or major surgery after which you remember having had an intense vision or awareness?"

This question overlaps somewhat with questions 6, 7 and 8 in that it evokes experiences of those types but within the context of trauma. It encompasses what has come to be called 'near death experience' (Moody, 1975). However, it is somewhat broader, including 'visionary', 'out-of-the-body' and 'presence' experiences. The classical 'near death experience' as described by Moody appears to show a phenomenological similarity over a broad range of reports. In this survey, on the other hand, very few responded positively to this question (8.7%) and still fewer from the sample fitted Moody's description. One that approached the standard scenario was reported by a 58 year old female:

I had lost a lot of blood, and was virtually bleeding to death (unknown to me at that time). I had sunk down into a lovely cool cave outside of which greenery grew and water ran. I seemed to understand that I was dying, but had no fear - this place was where I wanted to be. I felt safe and secure. Fortunately (??), doctors and nurses rushing around brought me back to a slight measure of consciousness - I was being given blood transfusions.

The common element of the 'light' is missing, as are the 'guides' who so often appear in these recollections, but the elements of a sense of peace and 'going home' are illustrated by the contentment with her surroundings.

Another commonly reported aspect of traumatic or life-threatening episodes, often portrayed in fiction, is the instant replay of events and the flashing past of one's whole life, as illustrated in this example of a 36 year old female:

During a car accident where I was the driver and only vehicle involved, I experienced a slowing down of the events and a sort of flashing past of my whole life. I thought of an old woman with whom I had had professional contact. She had advanced cancer and I was involved in getting her to hospital. I later learned she had died at the same time I had the accident.

This experience also contains an element of unconscious 'remote perception' (question 9) or what Jung would have called 'synchronicity' (1969, Vol.8). The separation of these classes of experience has primarily a heuristic value and their overlap can be seen as further evidence for the need to place them in the single operational class of the *præternatural*, yet maintaining the distinctions which differentiate them. NDE's, in particular, appear to be defined primarily by the traumatic method of induction but contain phenomenology and existential qualities from a number of the other categories.

Another example of an obvious crossing over of 'types' is seen in this experience of a 54 year old male:

Sitting in a chair and having the feeling of drifting/sinking slowly backwards - (jumped up abruptly) and saying as I was standing up - I'm not ready to die yet.

The 'sinking' sensation might be understood as the early stages of a 'merger' with some other 'reality' but for this subject the experience was of falling and dying. For others it might herald the beginning of an out-of-body experience (question 8) or a mystical experience (question 3), depending on the ontological status and meaning given to it by the experient.

The traumatic type of experience often leads to a revamping of personal values, as in the case of a 48 year old female:

At age 46 I suffered a post operative pulmonary clot and I realized I could have very easily died. The awareness I experienced was a clear understanding of who were the givers and the takers in my life. It was the first time I understood why I did not want certain people near me as I had nothing left to give. I also experienced a need to live for myself and not for my children. It led me to a determination to get on with my life.

This sort of change in existential perspective has often been heralded as one of the typical end results of mystical experience. Bharati argues against this when he asserts, for example, that if one was a 'stinker' before a mystical encounter, one will probably remain so afterwards unless one makes particular efforts in an ethical direction (1976, p.53). The mystical experience, itself, will not necessarily alter an experient in this dimension. This may be the case, but when *præternatural* experiences engender a radical 'ontic shift', the likelihood of efforts towards ethical transformation seem to increase. Perhaps it is this sudden change of perspective in which one finds oneself cast in a new image in relation to the world which provides a radically different awareness of self and thus a need to revamp one's ethics to match the newly experienced ontological relationship.

6. Visionary experience

[Religious: NS; Practice: NS]

"Have you ever seen or heard something which you realized in retrospect was not really there in the same way as ordinary everyday objects, people and events?"

This category included the 'seeing' of spectres, people and events which appeared to be occurring contemporaneously and co-spatially but were not presented in the normal sensate manner. Hearing voices and music that did not come from the usual physical sources were also included. Something during the event or immediately after it made the recipient of the vision aware that it was not happening in the usual physical way. As stated previously, there has been a considerable overlap of types and although the following experience of a 40 year old female was initiated by a car accident (trauma), its visionary qualities were dominant and so she responded with it to question 6.

The day before my 21st birthday - in the middle of crashing a car which had gone out of control, with no control in the wheel, flying through the air, I saw, and felt two hands placed over mine on the wheel, and the wheel was WRENCHED around to the other direction. The hands were greenish white, very strong, old Man's hands, with gnarled knuckles and raised semi-lunar valves. The sleeves were caftan-like, and disappeared into nothingness. The other occupant of the car also had his hands on the wheel, and felt the strength of the wrench, but did not see the hands. A car coming the other way, stopped, expecting to see us killed as the car was flying through the air; when suddenly, it veered in mid air and went the other way. Neither of us in the car were hurt. I had the mental message at the time it happened; "Not yet. You have much more to learn." I have been doing my best to learn ever since.

The sense of being 'guided' and 'protected' by a higher power, and hence an engendered 'ontic shift', was present here with attendant changes in life meaning and values.

Less dramatic and more typical was the following encounter of a 33 year old female:

I awoke to find someone beside my bed, who beckoned me to go with them. I started to get up, but became very frightened and panicky. The person slowly vanished.

This night-time encounter of an unexplained 'guest' who then 'fades away' is by far the most typical. Experiencers often reported being awakened to find the spectre standing at the end of the bed trying to attract attention. Here, too, there is a cross-over between what is generally believed to be religious experience and a 'psychic' one, as illustrated in this example from a 45 year old male:

The only experience I would equate with my understanding of a 'vision' occurred one Christmas Eve about 6-7 years ago. I was in bed (but not asleep), very stimulated by a moving Christmas Eve service. I can only describe what happened as a sense of being surrounded by light and hearing exultant singing that I did not recognize. It left me with a feeling of elation.

Here the visionary and auditory event has a definite religious form and possesses the quality of having emanated from some spiritual, other-worldly source.

7. Contact with the spirit realm (presences)

[Religious: NS; Practice: NS]

"Have you ever felt a presence of someone who was not there in a physical way?"

This category was primarily concerned with the sudden feeling that someone or something was present when there was no outward physical or usual sense modality experience. Perhaps the most often reported episode of this type was the feeling of a weight on the chest - as if another body was pinning the experient down when there was nobody apparently there in the usual way. A 42 year old female related a typical instance:

I was asleep. It was my first day in London so I had gone to bed fairly early. I became conscious of a weight on my body that felt like the weight of a man. I was startled and reached for my money belt even though half asleep. Next I was aware of a shiny blue coat moving through the light from the street. During my stay in this house I was often aware of other presences.

A variant on the above encounter was that of being physically touched by a disincarnate 'hand' as reported by this 28 year old female:

I awoke one night with the awareness that 'someone' had laid a hand 'gently' across my forehead. I really felt this physical force and awoke with a scream. Although the presence was momentarily still there - there was in fact no one else in the room or house.

In response to this question several experients claimed that the presence they sensed was God or Jesus Christ. In all such cases the subjects were committed Christians and tended to actively and apparently consciously filter all their experiences through this worldview in the manner of Moore's retrospective interpretation. Occasionally, however, as in the case of this 18 year old committed Christian male, the presence was oppositely interpreted:

When sleeping or near awakening I felt the presence of something very powerful and highly evil which appeared in the roof corner of my room and seemed to spread throughout the room and crush me. When awakening I felt the presence of something or someone lying across or on top of my body and crushing me in its embrace. I could not open my eyes and when I screamed no sound emerged. The experience only halted after I began to mentally pray to God to help me.

By far the most common experience was 'feeling' the active presence of a dead relative or friend. This appeared to be particularly noticeable for experients immediately after such a death, with the 'presence' gradually becoming less distinct and finally fading away over a period of time ranging from days to years. In some cases, there even may have been physical sensations, like being caressed or touched by the presence, but in most of these episodes the encounter was experienced as reassuring as, for example, with this 40 year old female:

(The) events (took place) during (my) mid-thirties, but occurred separately, over a period of some few days immediately after the deaths of two people who were both close to me and whose deaths saddened me greatly. The feeling of their presence was diffused rather than... being any sort of life-like apparition. The effect was a reassuring one and not frightening in any way.

Again, in the above episodes, we see the crossing over of phenomenological types such as visionary experience (question 6) and the experience of 'presences' in which one either 'feels' the 'presence' and then sees the apparition or vice versa. As noted above, the 'presence' sensed can be religiously interpreted in either its positive or negative aspect and thus phenomenologically also crosses over into question 2 (God or spiritual force) as well.

8. Out-of-the-body-experience

[Religious: NS; Practice: NS]

"Have you ever had a vivid experience, while either awake or dreaming, of suddenly finding yourself in a new location apart from where you recall yourself last being physically; and/or, have you had the sensation of 'flying' to a new location without any physical means; and/or, have you had the experience of seeing yourself from a perspective 'outside' of yourself?"

Although there were occasional problems of misinterpretation of this question, most participants seemed to grasp its intent. A small minority, however, answered positively when referring to the sudden location changes that are often experienced in 'normal' dreaming and were therefore eliminated from this category. A common response from those who understood the intent of the question was typified by this report of a 23 year old female:

I sometimes see myself lying in bed at night from the top of the room (when I'm awake, but with my eyes closed).

I sometimes get the feeling I'm "flying" out of myself and end up somewhere I'm not at all familiar with.

This report contains the two most common phenomenological features of this category; 1) visualizing oneself (one's body, presumably) from a perspective physically removed from one's body and 2) 'flying' to a new location. This alteration of perspective can be caused by mind-altering substances, such as nitrous oxide at the dentist, or by the impact of an accident, as in the case of this 18 year old female:

Whilst playing in a neighbour's cubby-house when I was about 8 or 9, I grabbed at a loose board which came off the cubby-house and I fell backwards onto the ground. A friend who was with me at the time stopped the board from hitting me, by catching it before it fell. I remember seeing my body lying on the ground and my friend catching the board, from a "flying" or "out of the body" position.

While some find the experience of floating upward pleasant, others panic and it seems that the sudden onrush of fear terminates the experience, as for this 31 year old female:

I was resting one afternoon, when I felt myself leaving my body. I only seemed to rise about 5 feet or so, but panicked and returned.

A less common variety of this experience is to find oneself 'inside' another person, seeing oneself from the other's vantage point, as reported by this 20 year old female subject:

When I was in primary school, I think I was 10 or 11, one day when the lesson was on, a student from another class brought in some books for the teacher. I was sitting on the last row in the classroom looking at her, then suddenly I was the teacher. I was in the teacher and was looking at myself. I even saw the books she had on her desk. Later when I was me again, I made an excuse to go up to her, just to see if the book I saw was actually there and, amazingly, it was!

The out-of-body experience has at least three of James' defining characteristics for mystical experience, viz., transience, passivity, and noeticity, as well as a transcendent quality in which events are often perceived as being more real than reality itself. Again, as in previous categories, the degree of 'ontic shift' engendered in an OBE, combined with the experient's worldview, determines whether it will be perceived as religious experience or not. One subject reported that 'flying' above the world and 'seeing' everything from this

broadened perspective induced in her the phenomenology of the 'numinous' and a sense of the 'sacredness' of everything.

9. Remote perception (pre-, post-cognition and telepathy)

[Religious: NS; Practice: NS]

"Do you ever feel that at times you know about events before they happen; and/or you know people's thoughts or feelings without being told; and/or you know about past events without having heard or read of them?"

This category is the general class of experience the subset of which Targ and Harary have called 'remote viewing' (clairvoyance) (1983). Using a well controlled double-blind technique, they have conducted some convincing experiments to demonstrate this cognitive capacity in a laboratory at the Stanford Research Centre. 'Remote perception' can be taken as the general rubric for this type of occurrence which is experienced as if it is in one of the sensory modalities but yet operates across time as well as space. In other words, this type of perception appears to involve the conveyance of information across time and/or space without the apparent transfer of momenta (photons, mechanical vibration, etc.) characteristic of normal sensate perception but is experienced in a quasi-sensate and predominantly cognate fashion. This experience often takes the form of 'externalized' visualizations or 'internalized' mental 'pictures' (or sounds, smells and tactile sensations), as well as feelings of 'certainty' and 'knowledge' which have no visual or auditory components.

Many of the subjects' reports described the occurrence of this type of experience as a déjà-vu phenomena and, although many could not identify where they experienced the scene before, they were often able to accurately predict to themselves what would happen or be said next. A minority claimed that the déjà-vu experience resulted from encountering a situation in 'real life' which had previously occurred in a dream. Almost as common as déjà-vu was the experience of suddenly 'knowing' (again we see the characteristics of passivity, transience, noeticity) as reported by this 58 year old woman:

I had been very concerned about a friend of mine who was having marital problems, but didn't understand why. I woke one morning and instantly on waking knew that her husband was having a relationship with another woman we both knew. Although she had wondered if he was, she had no real proof, nor did I, if this was so (and if so who it might be). I did not tell her about my own enlightenment (whilst awake but no doubt coming out of a dreamtime). However, some months later it proved to be true when he left her for the other woman.

Precognitions and contemporaneous remote perceptions often occur as a dream whilst asleep, as in this episode reported by a 33 year old female:

I dreamt my father was fighting a huge fire, I felt it was a place where he was working although it was unfamiliar to me. I could hear him shout "let it burn, just save that cooker!" and I saw a huge stainless steel cooker in the midst of the fire. I awoke in a cold sweat and couldn't go back to sleep. It wasn't until approximately 5.20am that I suddenly felt calm and could sleep. The next morning I discovered my father's office that backed onto a store had burned down during the fire. Dad had been fighting the fire and he told the firemen to let it burn but to save a cooker that had only just arrived at the store and was worth \$22,000. They had the fire under control by 5.20am.

Although many of these episodes relate to people known to the experient, some relate to impersonal world events, as exemplified by this report of a 29 year old female:

...when I was really young I had visions of a man being shot - either someone important or famous and (in the vision) my parents were fishing at the time of the shooting. (Later) my parents were fishing when President Kennedy was shot.

Again, the cross over of types is evident in that this episode is reported as a 'vision', but what is emphasized, phenomenologically, for this subject is the precognitive remote perceiving. Also, as in all these categories of the præternatural, *the experience seems to descend on the recipient from some source outside the usual, natural world of ordinary events and perceptions.*

10. The existential void (loss of self)

[Religious: H = 3.9, $p < 0.05$; Practice: NS]

"Have you ever experienced, without any obvious external cause, a loss of certainty and security so great as to leave you with a long-term fear and insecurity?"

This is a category derived from Laski's work and confirmed by my own interviews with individuals who came for psychological counselling because of feelings left over from similar experiences. It appears to represent a radical ontological state change in the perceived structure of 'self', but unlike mystical or numinous episodes, fear seems to dominate and there is no definite conclusion, viz., the realization of God, the void, etc. Instead, the experient's sense of egological certainty appears to deconstruct causing fear and uncertainty which is followed by only a partial reintegration of the 'self'. It is included in the overall category of the præternatural because of the profound existential state shift which characterizes this encounter and gives the recipient the impression of it having descended from a source beyond immediate sensate reality. A classic example of this experience type is given in this episode reported by a 18 year old male:

... when I was in first year (of university) I came across a couple of days where out of the blue I couldn't do anything or fare any more. People terrified me, bright light made me feel sick. I hid in my room (and at college that's a difficult thing) for those two days, but even when I worked up the courage to go outside and back to Uni I still avoided people by going out of my way, and couldn't for the life of me walk across the Great Court in daylight for months afterwards. All pretty minor I suppose, but it's only now I've recovered completely from it. And there never was any reason for it. I just woke up that day feeling half jolted out of my body, utterly awkward.

Whether or not there was a reason for this episode remains to be determined through a more in-depth psychological investigation. But in either case, the experience appears to descend from 'nowhere' and it profoundly uproots the experient's self-concept.

This class of præternatural event may be the prototype of the introvertive mystical experience but one that never culminates, leaving the experient in an infinite regress of fear and distorted perceptions which generally are regarded as pathological and schizophreniform. Hunt suggests that there is a biological basis for such cognitive behavioural state changes in the capacity for 'tonic immobility', as seen in lower animals

(1984). When operating in conjunction with the 'recombinatory capability' of human cognitive 'microgenic structures', this capacity generates the experience of voidness and ontological shift, characteristic of this state and of mystical experience.⁷ He states that this 'negative capability' is triggered by a sense of being overpowered and this is in line with the majority of reports, which attribute the onset to contemplating death or the vastness of the universe leading to feelings of personal fragility and insignificance that no amount of self-bolstering can overcome. However, such reductionist explanations ultimately fail on the grounds of their inability to account for the devastating existential impact which often follows these occurrences. Chickens certainly do not appear to have prolonged existential crises following 'tonic immobility' and Hunt's mapping of this behaviour unto human mystico-religious responses would appear to be a bit too simplistic and naive.

11. Other world experience (shamanic journey)

[Religious: NS; Practice: NS]

"While awake, have you ever suddenly been cast into a strange new world or reality which had a vividness that made the whole experience appear to be absolutely real although in retrospect you realized that the entire episode may not have physically happened?"

Although shamanic visionary experience contains many elements from previous categories (questions 6, 7, 8 and 9), it is given a separate class because of the totality of the experience. It appears from the writings of Eliade (1964), Elkin (1977), Harner (1980), Castaneda (1972, 1974) and others that shamanic journeys to the 'upper' and 'lower' worlds are the prototypes of ecstatic, mystical and visionary experiences, as well as containing elements of visionary experience, remote perception, OBE and, in some cases, NDE. In this survey only one 40 year old male subject reported what can be described as a classical initiatory experience of traveling to another 'realm' to experience disincorporation and then rebirth:

I was lying on my bed listening to the radio when the news of Martin Luther King Junior's assassination came on. I experienced a great sense of loss and shock and as I lay there I became aware of a green luminous glow emanating from my chest which spread out to envelop the entire room. While absorbed in watching this phenomenon I suddenly found myself in an entirely new location - a landscape with mountains. I looked down and saw my body start to unravel. The flesh was stripped away and then the muscles and sinews until only a skeleton was left. After some time I witnessed my body re-assembled and I moved out across this strange new landscape. After some time I 'returned' to my room and could still see the glowing, green luminosity which then gradually faded away.

⁷Hunt uses the term 'tonic immobility' to describe what is commonly called 'animal hypnosis'. For example, when one holds a chicken firmly without letting it move, it will remain in that position when released until such a time as another significant stimulus occurs. This is believed to be a biologically evolved survival mechanism in the face of totally overwhelming odds. By 'freezing' the chicken can possibly 'fool' its predator into thinking that it is not alive and of no interest. Hunt sees the 'negative capability' (the entry into the void of an 'introvertive mystical state in the case of Homo Sapiens) as a similar response to an overwhelming affective/cognitive event, viz., a cascading into an affective/cognitive tonic immobility in order to escape overpowering circumstances.

A more typical account is given by this 42 year old female:

After my infant son's funeral, I was lying on a bed in my mother's house and suddenly I was standing on a long, winding, white road. I knew if I walked on I would come to where my son was but I looked back and could clearly see into the kitchen in my mother's house, where my husband and other son were, and I knew I couldn't leave them, so I turned and went back.

Sudden shock and stress seem to play a major role in the onset of most of these encounters. Harner suggests that the drumming characteristic of shamanic trance journeys of so many pre-literate societies produces a sonic driving of the electrical activity of the brain into a synchronous state which he believes is part of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the induction of 'shamanic consciousness'. Additionally, the austerities and mortifications practiced so widely by shamans may, in combination with incessant drumming, be a way of artificially inducing the same conditions of stress as seen in the onset of the spontaneous cases.

In the case of the shamanic journey, as in all of the above categories of experience, the onset of the episode seems to require a switching of conscious 'state'. Krippner has attempted to classify what he believes are the possible states of consciousness experienced by human beings (1972), but such a list fails because it represents the experiences of a Western psychologist only and hence is not exhaustive. On closer scrutiny, it seems to typify only different modes of what appear to be three primary states: sensate waking, sleeping and what he labels 'expanded' consciousness (trans-sensate waking), which would subsume a number of his other categories such as 'trance', meditation, hypnopompic, hypnogogic, etc. There are, no doubt, differing depths and intensities of all three primary states and it would seem that Krippner's classification might result from both a lack of an appropriate descriptive language as well as an incomplete empirical (experiential) data base from which to make his comparisons.

Tart urges that we develop 'state specific sciences' and he provides us with a general paradigm for such an approach (1975). He argues that we cannot understand reports of experiences which take place in one state while listening to them in another. From this position one can go further and assert that different languages are more appropriate for different states and, as Whorf believes, the European languages have severe limitations when confronting notions such as timelessness, force and intensity (Carroll, 1956). Therefore, our attempts to describe praternatural experiences are forced into the mould of both the constraints of our Western cultural framework and an inadequate language resulting in what Tart rightly asserts to be the considerable difficulty we experience in our attempts to describe one state or its events while in another.

In the case of the praternatural experiences described in this chapter, we can identify two general types: 'Ontic' and 'Perceptual'. When, as in the case of OBE, visionary or remote perception experiences, the phenomenology includes sensate-like phenomena, we are

able to report this aspect of their phenomenology without too much difficulty provided the 'contents' of the experience are somewhat similar to that of ordinary waking sensate experience, viz., objects, people and events that fit our linguistic framework. These experiences generally can be classified as the 'Perceptual' types. However, when the focus, or primary awareness of the experience, is centred on an intense state shift in which there is a significant degree of ontological 'deconstruction' and subsequent ontological reassignment with sensate content becoming secondary, such as in the case of introvertive mysticism, then the experience can be considered to be of the 'Ontic' type.⁸ It is as a result of this latter type that experiencers seem to feel that words fail in any attempt to convey what happened.

In the 'Ontic' case, the base state change, or the sudden descent of the experience as if from a praternatural source, appears to be inaccessible to language (and even prior to language) so that *the state itself becomes the existential operational definition of reality*. All other consequent changes in state, which are accompanied by a profound sense of 'ontic shift', further reinforce our sense that we are moving in and out of differing realities. Indeed, most of our lives are spent primarily in either the waking sensate or sleep states and hence any major conscious shift out of them, of which we are consciously aware, is experienced as highly unusual and, *ex nihilo*, a descent of the praternatural.⁹

Being conscious of the 'shift' itself is essential for one to experience the change as having its origins in an 'other reality'. Many of these experiences, such as remote perception, are so fleeting, and to some experiencers so common, that the shift is never consciously experienced. Instead, only the sensate-like phenomenological content is remembered and appears to the experiencer as if it dropped in from 'nowhere' like an unbidden thought or memory but without an awareness of state change and/or ontological ground. The 'shift' is more apt to be noticed when the experiences are rare and unusual, and therefore novel, and one finds that experiencers who have had very few such encounters more often tend to assign other-worldly sources and/or religious meanings (divine or demonic) to the resultant phenomenology.¹⁰ These ascriptions of religious import are, in most cases, in line with

⁸Ontological 'deconstruction' derives from the movement of literary critique known as 'deconstructionism'. This viewpoint asserts that the 'reading' of the text is the 'writing' of the text. In other words, the reader's perception of the meaning of the text, in a sense, creates the actual intent of the text. In the current context, some experiencers 'rewrite' the ontology assigned to their experiences by 'discovering' some 'ultimate' or 'underlying' source and thus 'rewrite' meaning through a re-assignment of the ontological roots of their experience.

⁹An intense state change, with its totality of 'psychological' and 'physical' causes and attributes, *is* the operational matrix which defines (creates) the existential sense of what is 'real' and hence the beliefs about what ultimately 'exists'.

¹⁰This appears to be the case when one compares the statements made by 'high' and 'low' occurrence experiencers in follow-up interviews.

current worldviews held by the experients or, in some cases, with worldviews soon to be found, which 'fit' the 'facts'.

From the above discussion it would seem that mystical encounters and experiences of the divine by definition must always have a fairly high degree of 'existential impact' and hence resultant sense of 'ontic shift'. In the case of mystical experience, there may be sensate-like content, as in Otto's numinous or Stace's extrovertive mysticism, or it may be phenomenologically 'empty', as in the instances of Buddhist Shunyata or introvertive mysticism (Stace, 1960). However, the *apparent shift* of ontological ground must be prominent and noticeable for the experient, such that it is capable of disturbing the ontological foundations of his existential worldview in order to qualify as 'Ontic'.¹¹ As we have noted, on the other hand, this sense of ontological shift is not always present, as, for example, in 'remote perception'. In these 'Perceptual' experiences the recipient still feels, nonetheless, that his/her experience has 'descended' as if from some trans-sensate (præternatural) source but *without great existential impact*, and thus without the need for ontological reassignment. It is, therefore, the degree of existential impact which appears to determine whether or not a given præternatural event is regarded as having mystical, cosmic or religious import, and, in turn, this seems to be determined by the degree of familiarity the experient has with any given type of encounter as well as by previous personality factors and worldview.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This survey, although not a random representative sample of the population studied, nonetheless reveals a general consistency with previous surveys in that it demonstrates a widespread occurrence of præternatural phenomena in a selected, educated population. Respondents often have remarked in follow-up interviews that they have never related their experiences to others before this survey. This is consistent with the pattern that is emerging vis-à-vis the widespread occurrence of mystical, visionary and remote perception experiences in the general population in the context of a pronounced cultural silence about such experiences.

By operationalizing the præternatural as a class of related phenomenological and psychological events and by producing separate questions which emphasize differing salient

¹¹ Here, 'existential worldview' means the belief system which is operative at the perceptual, affective and behavioural levels without necessarily having a cognitive component. The experient acts 'as if' something is 'real', and this implies the ultimate form and quality of what is 'out there'. Ontological foundations, or 'what is', are thus those perceptual, behavioural and affective activities from which we derive our sense of the 'real' no matter what we may believe conceptually or express linguistically. From this lived activity (existential worldview) the experient derives an ontological conception as a second order process. However, if the perceptual-affective-behavioural matrix undergoes a radical enough shift (state change), then the existential boundaries surrounding and defining the 'real' change accordingly. This change leads to a re-assignment of ontological beliefs referred to as 'ontic shift'.

features of this general class, we have demonstrated that the percentage of experiencers in the population might be even greater than other studies have led us to believe. The anecdotal data further suggests that the divisions between classes of events is somewhat arbitrary with most of the features characterizing either the 'Ontic' or the 'Perceptual' experiences as being widely distributed throughout both classes. However, separating the experiences into a variety of questions is a useful technique because it lowers the 'threshold' for the respondent, thereby encompassing events otherwise missed by the single catch-all questions of other studies.

As we continue to explore phenomenological (consciousness) events, it is apparent that we may be looking at a fundamental capacity in human cognitive behaviour whether this capacity originates from a 'deep' biological structure as suggested by Hardy and Hay, from the cognitive 'negative capability' as hypothesized by Hunt, or from some other innate aspect of our psychology. Whatever the origins of this function, it is inextricably connected to and part of the processes of consciousness. By recognizing that these experiences can be understood as operations (functional formations) of consciousness and overt behaviour and, further, by recognizing that the apparent ontological shift which sometimes accompanies these state changes is the result of achieving a particular intensity and formation of perceived consciousness alteration, we may not only shed some light on the epistemological paradox of the mystical state, but on normal, sensate experience as well.

This conceptualization of mystical and related experiences may go some way to resolving the differences between scholars such as Almond (1982), who posits 'contentless' mystical experience, and Katz (1978), who in following on from Garside's position (1972), suggests that all mystical experience is shaped and interpreted by and through the religious and cultural context in which it arises. The 'contentless' experience would appear to be the sense of 'ontic shift' but, of course, all reportage must take place through language and context which give form to the phenomena of the experience. Hence the experience can be understood as both 'contentless' and contextually determined.

It would seem, therefore, that this sort of 'operationalized' empirical research into the nature of praternatural experience is not only a very useful way of studying the distribution of its occurrence, but it can contribute to an explication of the possible psychological mechanisms of induction, as well as aiding in the resolution of the ontological debate surrounding mystical, visionary and remote perception experiences.

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