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Select a Specialization: Ph.D. General Psychology; Research Evaluation

Name of Chair:

Thesis or Dissertation Title: Mapping the Features of Nonordinary Conscious States

Introduction to Your Area of Interest:

There has not yet been a concise mapping of the specific types of perceptions and cognitions related to specific features and levels of nonordinary states of consciousness, including mystical and psychic experiences, autistic phenomena like savantism, and also schizophrenic features. Those phenomena have been referred to in the respective literatures of religion (Travis & Shear, 2010), medicine (Grotenhermen, 2009), mythology (Campbell, 2004), anthropology (Castaneda, 1984), and even quantum physics (Capra, 1975), but have not been sufficiently correlated, although Auletta (2007) and Hancock (2006) do offer fascinating approaches to consider, in terms of similarities and consistencies around the world.

Some appropriate methodological ideas are found in texts like Creswell (2009), Patton (2002), and Trochim (2006), but methods more specific to my particular research question can be found in Bond, et al. (2009), Dijkstra and Misirlisoy (2008), Kirchner (2010), Shannahoff-Khalsa, & Carlson (2009), and in Studerus, Gamma, and Vollenweider (2010).

Theory/Theories or Conceptual Framework(s) Related to the Area of Inquiry:

Because I am seeking to discover the contents of the subjects' minds in various states of consciousness, I cannot know in advance exactly what I will find; therefore, the most appropriate qualitative orientation for these research questions would be *grounded theory*, which means that I intend to interact with the participants, back and forth, to keep refining the definitions and

delineations of the states and their respective phenomena, in order to bring similarities and differences into sufficient contrast.

(maximum of 125 words)

Purpose of Your Research:

I propose to provide a detailed map of such subjects as supernatural and psychic phenomena, miraculous visions, out-of-body and near-death experiences. This line of research might shed valuable light on such pathologies as schizophrenia, autism and dementia (Sass & Parnas, 2010). The survey proposed in this current paper is intended to provide qualitative data, according to methods described in Creswell (2009) correlating respondents' experiences with the categories of their subjective states.

(maximum of 100 words)

Your Proposed Research Approach/Methodology:

Check one

Quantitative Study	<input type="checkbox"/>
Qualitative Study	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mixed Methods Study	<input type="checkbox"/>

Describe Your Proposed Design:

This study is structured on in-depth, quasi-experimental interactions with targeted volunteers and appropriate patients. A grounded-theory method will be used to refine the descriptions and categorizations in phases. I plan to ascertain that real experiences are being reported, rather than ideas and impressions that the participants may have gleaned from popular literature or media. I will also filter out my own predispositions and personal experiences; the issue with this is that I believe that only those who have had genuine mystical or psychotic episodes can recognize those

features in a respondent. I will check such assumptions with control sampling and cross-checking techniques.

(maximum of 100 words)

Your Proposed Research Population and How You Would Draw Upon this Population for your Research Inquiry:

I plan to offer a qualitative survey to the leaders of various rituals, workshops, clinics, retreats and cloisters who, in turn, can make the study available to their participants on a volunteer basis.

Those who respond, and are selected, will be practitioners of religious, spiritual or transformational disciplines, and therefore are expected to have the abilities needed to reliably achieve specific non-ordinary states of consciousness. I intend also to include patients with autistic or schizophrenic features who are communicative enough to be able to describe their internal characteristics.

(maximum of 100 words)

Examples of Research Data That May Be Collected:

Most of the participants will be given detailed surveys, but approximately twenty of them, drawn from each of the sampling types, will be interviewed in detail, using methods from Davidow (n.d.) as well as those in Creswell (2009) and Kirchner (2010) for grounded research. The point will be to elicit detail that the subjects may not even realize that they had perceived or remembered, and then go back and forth several times in order to establish consistent categories and relationships. Follow-ups are planned to be done by means of surveys and further interviews, mainly to see if they still agree with the research findings.

(maximum of 50 words)

Social Change Implications:

My theory to be proven is that nonordinary states can be known by their ‘signatures’ (recognizable collections of specific perceptual and cognitive features) irrespective of induction method or diagnosis. This would allow a researcher or a therapist to devise treatments based on just those characteristics rather than on diagnosis or induction method, thereby, hopefully, adapting treatment or research methods much more efficiently. Furthermore, I believe that a deeper, more precise understanding of how the mind is composed, and how its features are related, will foster attitudes of compassion and empathy in both researchers and in society as a whole. Instead of pervasive attitudes of “us and them,” people might think more of each other as “what type and combination of ‘us’ is this person?”

(maximum of 100 words)

Other Information About Your Dissertation Proposal:

A wealth of information and guidance has come down to us from ancient times, and is practiced in the forms of certain religions and yoga; these can be organized and used to deliberately attain the desired states and allow us to understand and develop new therapies and larger ideas than before. Even the most modern branches of psychology have not yet fully dealt with the mystical content (such as was predicted by Jung and Kant), due primarily to limitations in scope and methodologies. This study proposes new methodologies and incorporates knowledge from ancient civilizations and from ground-breaking current research.

(maximum of 100 words)

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