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Qualitative Research Proposal

*A Phenomenological Study of the Impact
of Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness
on Psychologically Normal Volunteers*

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Introduction

Essentially, I wish to know details about psychonormal people's non-ordinary experiences which they have had externally to the research proposed herein. Specifically, I would like to know what kinds of experiences they had in common, what they saw and felt, whether the experiences improved their lives in some way, how durable such changes were, and whether they would seek such non-ordinary states in the future. Many studies have been conducted, for decades, on some of these questions, but I am aware of a critical level of detail which has not been addressed in the literature, which is how conscious and volitional state shifts can be, and whether such knowledge could lead to improved therapies and methods of self-improvement. My hope is that studies such as this currently proposed will lead to answers for such questions.

Because the *content* of people's subjective experiences is neither well-organized nor well-understood, I concluded that this research should be *qualitative* in order to develop a useful base of data for categorization and comprehension. According to the guidelines in Creswell (2007, pp. 58-61), the qualitative tradition I use should be phenomenological. Some of these criteria are:

- a) When it is important to understand the common experience of several people who have shared an insufficiently understood phenomenon, without presuppositions.
- b) There should be a substantial philosophical foundation to the topic.
- c) The meaning of the phenomenon can best (or only) be expressed in the personal terms of the individuals involved.

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Theoretical Rationale

My first and second research questions answer criteria *a* and *c* (above), and are based on theories primarily from Social Psychology, being the need to find meaning, pleasure, or relief in one's strongest (or strangest) experiences, and to share them with others (Bernheim et al., 2006; Dobkin de Rios, Grob, & Baker, 2002; Fiske, 2010, pp. 185-198; Griffiths & Grob, 2010; Griffiths, Richards, McCann, & Jesse, 2006; Kjellgren & Soussan, 2011; Lorencova, 2011; MacLean, K. A., Johnson, M. W., & Griffiths, R. R. (2011; Sunnall, Measham, Brandt, & Cole, 2011; Suri, 2011; Vollenweider & Kometer, 2010; Wilde & Murray, 2010). *Relief*, as used here, can mean physical, as from addictions, or emotional, as with PTSD or terrors. The pleasure to which I refer could range from simple satisfaction or happiness to mystical bliss or orgasmic ecstasy.

My third question involves the need to make sense of the human mind in its relationship to society and to the universe (criterion *b*). For this, we examine theories:

a) that psychedelic experience could be an important tool for exploring the mind, and that specific states could be arranged on some type of scale (Alyushin, 2011; Dittrich, 1998; Norman, E. (2010).

b) that much of the detail of non-ordinary states is non-verbal (Schooler & Engstler-Schooler, 1990; Walley & Weiden, 1973).

c) that heightened creativity could be correlated with decreased latent inhibition in people in non-ordinary states (Carson, Peterson, & Higgins, 2003; Fink, Slamar-Halbedl, Unterrainer, & Weiss, 2011).

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d) that the perception of reality could be modified by hypnotic trance and by many other methods of non-ordinary state induction (Cox & Barnier, 2009; Dubois & VanRullen, 2011; Suri, 2011; Walley & Weiden, 1973).

e) that perceptions and ideations of divinity and the supernatural might be caused by psychoactive substances (de Alverga, 1996; de Araujo *et al.*, 2011).

f) that based on theories of Freud and Jung, dream-type states could be correlated with non-ordinary states (Dixon, 2005; Giannoni, 2003; Shields, 2006; Walker & Johnson, 1974).

g) that cultural and regional influences could affect the degree and quality of hallucinations (Gecici *et al.*, 2010; Hallowell, 2010; McClenon, J. (1997; Melo, 2011; Polito, V., Langdon, R., & Brown, J. (2010; Suhail & Ghauri, 2010).

h) that non-ordinary experiences can have effects like psychic phenomena and synesthesia (Haas, 2011; Hallowell, 2010; Novoa & Hunt, 2009; Rogowska, 2011).

i) that non-ordinary states can support increased self-awareness (Picard & Craig, 2009; Norman, 2010; Rosenthal, 1993).

Thus we have one basic psychosocial theory for research questions #1 and 2, and nine categories of theory for RQ3. Due to the limitations extant for my present study, my proposal will address only items *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *g* (depending on diversity of respondents), *h*, and *i*. Item *a* would require a larger study than my present circumstances can accommodate, although it is definitely a long-term goal of mine.

Empirical Rationale

Empirical support for my study has been demonstrated in various categories:

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a) The observation of how music (instrumental, drumming, and chanting) induces and augments altered states (Aldridge, Fachner, & De Rios, 2005).

b) How people continue to seek satisfaction, arousal, pleasure, or other 'high' state (Back-Madruga et al., 2003; Kjellgren & Soussan, 2011).

c) Observation of increased creativity in conjunction with decreased inhibition (Carson, Peterson, & Higgins, 2003; Fink, Slamar-Halbedl, Unterrainer, & Weiss, 2011).

d) Improved openness and communication in therapy and meditation groups (Cutter, 1967; Halsband, Mueller, Hinterberger, & Strickner, 2009).

e) Improved responsiveness to both psychological and physical therapies (Griffiths & Grob, 2010; Kirchner, 2010; MAPS, 2010; Vollenweider & Kometer, 2010).

f) Enhancement of personal meaning and spirituality (Griffiths, Richards, McCann, & Jesse, 2006; Lorencova, 2011; Polito, Langdon, & Brown, 2010).

g) Non-verbal vs. verbal cognition in altered states (Schooler & Engstler-Schooler, 1990).

h) Demonstration of the ability to draw gradations among altered states (Studerus, Gamma, & Vollenweider, 2010).

i) Demonstration of the ability to change one's own conscious state volitionally (Vaitl et al., 2005).

Of these nine categories of empirical research, my proposed study should be able to contribute to items *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, *e* (if such information is offered by the participants), *f*, *g*, and possibly *i*, if occurring with the participants. Item *h* might be prominent in some future study.

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Methodological Rationale

The following categories and techniques of qualitative methodology are expected to illuminate my own research on the proposed topic:

- a) using altered states as tools for exploring the brain and mind (Alyushin, A. (2011; Picard & Craig, 2009; Rogowska, 2011).
- b) using panels, focus groups, and hermeneutics for achieving consensus to clarify issues and procedures (Bond et al., 2009; Maher, Robertson, & Howie, 2011).
- c) using subconscious induction to manipulate and assess alterations of perception and cognition, and to foster recall of deeply embedded memories (Cox & Barnier, 2009; Novoa & Hunt, 2009; Walker & Johnson, 1974).
- d) using personality questionnaires for pre-screening (Cutting & Murphy, 1988; McEvoy et al., 1996).
- e) using altered-state questionnaires for assessing the effects of non-ordinary experiences (Dittrich, 1998; Sumnall, Measham, Brandt, & Cole, 2011).
- f) the phenomenology of delusions and hallucinations with respect to culture and region (Gecici et al., 2010; Suhail & Ghaurim, 2010).
- g) assessing improvements and changes in the lives of psychedelic subjects (Kirchner, 2010; Lorencova, 2011; MacLean, Johnson, & Griffiths, 2011).
- h) the phenomenology of recreational use of psychedelics (Kjellgren & Soussan, 2011).
- i) the use of phenomenological analysis to study non-ordinary experiences in general (Wilde & Murray, 2010).

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I intend for my research to benefit from all of the above methodologies, with the notation that item *i* is mainly a generalization of the others. Therefore I am considering eight categories of phenomenological methods for my research.

Review of Literature

Theories Pertaining to the Topic of this Proposal

The concept of redemption is used to illuminate a study (Dobkin de Rios, Grob, & Baker, 2002) which compares normal methods for treating addictions against the use of hallucinogens in spiritual settings. While my proposed research is not about curing addictions, the theme of hallucinogens as spiritual sacraments contributes much to what my research hopes to demonstrate – that altered states induced by such substances, in the correct setting, can bring about life-changing transformations.

In the Fink, Slamar-Halbedl, Unterrainer, and Weiss paper (2011), psychoticism, poly-drug usage, and latent inhibition are compared among three sets of participants: actors, students, and addicts/alcoholics. The research question was whether creativity correlated with the three dysfunctions mentioned. My interest lies in taking those dysfunctions as non-normal states and examining whether creativity is enhanced by various such states, which applies to my third research question.

The Griffiths, Richards, McCann, and Jesse study (2006) investigated whether psilocybin could induce mystical experiences (this has been established) which could lead to sustained personal meaning and spirituality – this latter part is significant for my second research question. The authors findings on that point were positive but inconclusive, so I believe that leaves room for my research to fill the gaps.

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Research Findings on the Topic of this Proposal

The Kirchner thesis (2010) is a rather comprehensive mixed-methods study on the effects of LSD state alteration on people. Part of the study was phenomenological, using interviews and questionnaires, whereas the other part was based quantitatively on clinical case studies. The conclusion was that the LSD-induced altered state can lead to long-term changes but, without lifestyle reinforcement, the rule was a return to previous patterns of dysfunction. Understanding why, and under what circumstances, long-term changes do and do not occur is a key factor in my research.

The Lorencova paper (2011) focused on whether altered states produced by alcohol and marijuana can lead to increased spirituality in people. The principal instrument was the Prague Spiritual Questionnaire, evidently designed exclusively for Czech people, from 155 respondents who used either alcohol or marijuana. The findings were that marijuana users, whether or not they also drank alcohol, demonstrated more spirituality than either alcohol-only users or those who used neither, irrespective of other demographics. Conversely, religious drug users showed higher spirituality than their non-religious peers. From this type of research I am guided to ensure that I ask respondents about their lifestyles as a way of understanding the causes of long-term changes.

The Norman research (2010) examined the paucity of agreement on what is conscious and what is unconscious or subconscious, in relation to attempting research on themes dependent on knowing to which state one is referring. The author recommends a graduated scale of consciousness, which is very much in line with my intention of

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creating an operational map of non-ordinary states, although such states go well beyond the ordinary view of merely conscious, unconscious, subconscious, and perhaps dreaming.

Methods Applicable to the Topic of this Proposal

A five-round Delphi study (Bond et al., 2009), among seven experts in meditative states, demonstrated the application of a hermeneutic process in reaching consensus on a subjective phenomenon which, in their case, was to find a working definition for meditation as therapy. Among other attributes of such meditation, the panel agreed that it should involve an altered state of consciousness, enlightenment or mystical experience, and possibly suspension of the rational intellect. This is what I plan to investigate in my proposed research – among other things, whether meditational states produce similar states and results as states attained by other methods, such as with psychedelics.

The Kjellgren and Soussan paper (2011) studied the recreational use of an “Internet drug” (4-HO-MET) in Sweden. Despite vast disparities of resulting mood and mental state from the drug, most users were eager to repeat their experience. Since I expect to get a certain number of volunteers whose non-ordinary states were induced through informal or recreational usage, I wish to understand what motivates my participants to seek altered states. I believe that a greater understanding of this phenomenon could greatly help with treating addictions and with curbing recreational drug use.

The Rogowska paper (2011) is actually a method for categorizing a typical feature of altered states, which is synesthesia. The author divided types of synesthesia into three

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main classes, each with several subtypes, and he generally distinguished the types by the circumstances under which they occur; e.g., from low blood sugar or from emotional shock). Although I would want to use a finer system of typing, I still gain methodological knowledge from the way the author went about his classifications, and that should assist me in classifying the reports and responses of my own participants.

Research Question(s)

My research questions represent two basic lines of inquiry, the first being in the general purview of social psychology and the second being a follow-up question for the first. The third question might fall among cognitive psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, and cosmology, but I am still proposing to illuminate it phenomenologically.

RQ 1: Were the volunteers positively impacted by their non-ordinary experiences?

RQ 2: Did those experiences create significant, durable changes in subjects' lives?

RQ 3: What were the specific features of those experiences that promoted positive change?

Of the three questions, only the third has been insufficiently addressed in the literature, since instruments and methodologies have been used for decades for the first two research questions (Bernheim et al., 2006; Dittrich, 1998; MacLean, Johnson, & Griffiths, 2011; Kirchner, 2010; Studerus, Gamma, & Vollenweider, 2010). Therefore, the main purpose of RQ1 and 2 is to establish a baseline for comparing my methods with previously validated studies, thereby supporting the findings for RQ3.

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Rationale for Use of Qualitative Research Design and Methods

Creswell (2007, pp. 57-59) described phenomenology as the qualitative tradition which abstracts the individual experiences of a few people to a more general synthesis of the meaning of the phenomenon that they experienced. It is generally considered that part of this tradition is that, unlike in quantitative analysis, the researcher does not attempt to objectify the subjects and distance himself from the phenomenon but, instead, accounts for his biases and preconceptions relative to the inquiry. This is precisely what my proposed study seeks to do: to analyze the reports of a limited number of psychologically normal individuals who have had either multiple non-ordinary states of consciousness, or who have recently had their first such experience. My relationship to the research is that I have had decades of non-ordinary experiences in my own life; this sets a strong foundation for understanding what my subjects will report but, at the same time, produces the need for me, as the researcher, to account for my predispositions in my findings.

Why Qualitative Research is Appropriate for Answering my Research Questions

According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999*b*, pp. 29-34), qualitative research (as ‘ethnography’) is used for clarifying a problem, identifying which groups or individuals are affected, exploring what an unknown (or insufficiently known) situation consists of, documenting a process whose steps and features are insufficiently described elsewhere, and describing features or outcomes of a situation which has not been sufficiently defined.

Of those rationales, the phenomenon in which I am interested – the specific details of non-ordinary states of consciousness – fits all of those criteria. The research

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literature offers only general and subjective descriptions of, mostly, how the subjects felt during or after their non-ordinary experiences (see the Literature Review, above), with only little data or findings pertinent to specific psychic features (e.g., telepathic, clairvoyant, mediumistic, precognitive, bilocalational) or one's ability to move volitionally from one state to another while keeping the transitions at a conscious level. Such details have been described, to various degrees, in religious and occult literature, but not addressed in proper psychological research.

Why I am Using the Particular Tradition of Phenomenology

As I synopsised in the Introduction, Phenomenology is used when it is important to understand the common experience of several people who have shared an insufficiently understood phenomenon, without presuppositions, when the meaning of the phenomenon can best (or only) be expressed in the personal terms of the individuals involved, and when there is a substantial philosophical foundation to the topic (Creswell).

These criteria clearly fit my research questions and my overall purpose, which is to deepen understanding of the subjective phenomena of non-ordinary states of consciousness. The philosophical foundation derives from (among others) the Four-Stage model of Tibetan Buddhism: intellectual understanding, direct experience, stabilized illumination, and liberation (Walsh, 2012). Another statement of this foundation is from Castaneda (1981):

1st stage: The *tonal*, in which everything is named and classified, and the ordinary personality shifts back and forth among numerous pre-set assemblage-point positions.

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2nd stage: Heightened Awareness, in which one is aware of the shifts of the first stage, but can do little about them. The content of this stage is always remembered, but only in the second or higher stages.

3rd stage: Second Attention, or *the nagual*, in which everything exists on its own terms, with no name or category, and a higher state of cognition (Silent Knowledge) is present. In this stage the individual is able to manipulate attention to change people's perceptions.

4th stage: "Burning with the fire from within" – unified consciousness, in which a being is free (liberated) to move from one reality to another, at will.

Why the Particular Methods and Participants I Propose are Appropriate for Answering my Research Questions

Questionnaires

The 5D-ASC (Dittrich, 1998), or equivalent, will provide the basic data for all three of the research questions, comprising general depictions of the altered states experienced, and also the responders' subjective and emotional reactions to them.

In-depth interviews

The interviews will allow the selected participants to express their descriptions and reactions in their own words, and will also allow the researcher to investigate particular points which the participant may not have recalled, and to observe their demeanor. The interviews should deepen and expand the data for all three research questions (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999b, p. 128).

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Focus groups

The focus group will be helpful in defining what features and responses are shared among the participants in relation to all three research questions, and it will also allow observations on how this population interacts with each other, thus providing a cultural basis (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999*b*).

Journal Entries

Listed in LeCompte and Schensul (1999*b*) as “content analysis of secondary text,” these transcripts could provide data beyond what was recalled by the participants, and also give clues to subconscious changes and responses which may have occurred in them.

Proposed participants

Using volunteers responding to invitations on research boards, in journals, and in transformational retreats and workshops will help to ensure that those participants who are selected will be comfortable with the topic and will probably have sufficient relevant knowledge and experience to make valuable contributions to my research. My pre-screening methods will help to ensure that participants are psychologically stable adults and are able to understand what will be expected of them. Physical condition and demographics will be noted but not used as selection criteria, thus providing a broad population sample which will help in the final analysis.

Methodology

Context of the Study

Candidates may respond to my invitations and notices from anywhere in the world, with only the stipulation that they speak enough English to understand the

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invitation and to communicate with me via email or postal mail. All of my communication with them will be from my personal computer in my private office, with the possible exception of volunteers from local colleges, whom I would endeavor to interview in person, if they pass pre-screening.

Participants/Sample

Many of the volunteers will be self-selecting from research boards and appropriate online forums. Others will be invited by the leaders of relevant workshops and retreats. The Walden participant pool is a dynamic, ever changing pool that is open to the Walden community of students, faculty and staff. Criterion sampling is the main strategy to be used – psychonormal people who have already experienced altered states of consciousness, or who are about to, in controlled settings to which they have been screened and registered outside of my research.

The Walden participant pool acts as a bulletin board to announce a study within the university, so that sample is based on the university as a whole, and I will attempt to recruit participants from other universities as well, especially one local to me. I will need participants to be reliable and emotionally stable, and my pre-screening procedures are expected to fulfill that requirement, and should obviate any need to determine whether their non-normal experiences were supervised. I will exclude any applicants who are under-aged or otherwise members of vulnerable populations. Older people will be welcome.

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Role of the Researcher

With many hundreds of non-ordinary experiences, over decades of my life, I will definitely be a participant observer. My extensive background in the proposed subject will illuminate which instruments and questions I select, and how I approach interviews and focus groups. I understand that my experience creates automatic bias, so I have included remedies for that in my procedures, including hermeneutics and cross-checking.

It is possible that I may know some of the participants; this will not be an issue with respect to questionnaires and journal pages, due to the pseudonym arrangement, but I plan to avoid any face-to-face interaction with such people, as with interviews and focus groups, in order to avoid personal bias. Therefore I would exclude such participants from those specific functions.

I have a trusted colleague who will help me with sorting responses and other data collected, and transcribing and encoding them. However, all of the analysis and reporting will be my personal responsibilities.

Procedures

Ethical Procedures

In the pre-screening, I will ensure that the applicants have no physical or psychological impairments which would interfere with their participation or with the validity of the study. I will encode volunteers' names and any other identifying features, and destroy recordings of interviews with them after extracting the relevant data. I will list all potential benefits and risks to them on the Informed Consent form, and require their signatures on it before they could participate. I will ensure, through adequate pre-

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screening, that all participants are properly prepared and are volunteering willingly. I will have a peer researcher or a faculty supervisor check my methods and my security arrangements. I will apply for, and obtain, IRB approval before proceeding with the research (APA, 2010; Creswell).

Through my pre-screening process, I will ensure that no minors or other vulnerable populations will be included, although elderly, disabled, and financially challenged volunteers would be accepted. I will make every effort to follow APA Ethical Principles in acting for the benefit of society while not harming participants; being dependable and responsible regarding science, humanity, and the academic community; being truthful and compliant, and making clear and sensible agreements; avoiding trickery except when its usage is essential to the research; researching with fair and impartial methods so that I, as the researcher, admit to, and correct, whatever biases and limitations I may have; and ascertaining that each participant knows what the research comprises, and what hazards there may be (APA).

Identifying documents will be assigned code numbers and locked in a filing cabinet. Participants will be pre-screened for medical fitness and psychological stability, and they will be given detailed orientations and caveats, especially concerning the raising of uncomfortable memories and emotions. However, they will have also been screened by their workshop and retreat leaders. I will take care that other people around my office will not observe the data or video interviews. If it turns out that a volunteer is known to me, I will eliminate them from the face-to-face interviews.

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The videoconferenced interviews will be recorded on digital voice recorders, and will be deleted after they have been analyzed. Anonymized researcher notes will be taken from participants' journals and any other written materials, which will be returned to their owners. Notes on researcher observations will be keyed to the pre-arranged pseudonyms. These notes will be stored electronically on my office computer, under special password which will be known only to me and one colleague. At the close of the research, all such data and notes will be archived to password-protected optical disk and erased from the computer.

Selection of participants

Invitations and announcements

I will place announcements of the research on the M.A.P.S. mailing list, on the Erowid and Lycaeum websites, on appropriate pages of FaceBook and similar online forums, and in appropriate journals and magazines. I will email known leaders of psychedelic workshops and spiritual retreats, asking them to invite their attendees to participate in this study. Volunteers are expected to respond by email or postal mail. I will also place announcement on the Walden University Research page and, to the extent possible, on the research sites of other universities. University volunteers are expected to respond by email.

Many of the volunteers will be self-selecting from research boards and appropriate online forums. Others will be invited by the leaders of relevant workshops and retreats. The Walden participant pool is a dynamic, ever changing pool that is open to the Walden community of students, faculty and staff. Criterion sampling is the main

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strategy to be used – people who have already experienced altered states of consciousness, or who are about to, in controlled settings to which they have been screened and registered outside of my research. The Walden participant pool acts as a bulletin board to announce a study within the university, so the sample is based on the university as a whole.

Pre-screening forms and questionnaires

Along with the standard Walden University Informed Consent form, I will send (by email or postal mail) a pre-screening questionnaire based on the MMPI-2 (Pearson), subsets 1, 4, 6, and 7 (assuming that this instrument is within budget for the proposed research) and the Cutting and Murphy Social Knowledge Questionnaire; these are proven valid indicators of mental and emotional stability.

Qualified responders will then be sent the 5D-ASC (Dichter) questionnaire, or equivalent. It is hoped that most of these will be filled out and returned, as they will be a key source of data for this study, being a validated assessment of altered states of consciousness.

Inclusions and exclusions

Ideal candidates for inclusion would be people who are either experienced with non-ordinary states, or those who have been diligently prepared to have them. I would like to have an equal number of each, but a low response number could affect the proportion. I will exclude any who seem unreliable, frail or unstable, or who are taking medication for mood stabilization. I will make note of demographics of any demographic

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data offered but, since the primary criteria are experience and preparedness, I do not plan to select on demographics.

If a candidate was able to return a properly filled-in questionnaire, I will assume that they speak sufficient English for the study, although possibly not enough to be one of the interviewees. If pregnant women were allowed to participate in a workshop or retreat, or were supervised by a medical or psychological professional, or experienced an altered state on their own, I will simply be recording such circumstances; it would not impede my study in any conceivable way. It would be a disservice to pregnant women, and a gap in the research, to exclude otherwise qualified pregnant women.

Data collection techniques

Data sources

For pre-screening, I plan to use subscales 1-4, 6, and 7 of the MMPI-2 (Pearson, n.d.), and the Cutting and Murphy Social Knowledge Questionnaire (Cutting & Murphy, 1988), in order to check for stability and reliability of respondents. All candidates who pass pre-screening will be given the 5D-ASC (Dittrich, 1998) questionnaire or equivalent. A free videoconferencing tool like Skype (n.d.) will provide interview and focus-group data (recorded with a digital voice recorder), and (e)mailed pages from participants' journals will provide supplementary data.

The prescreening questionnaires will be sent (by email or postal mail), with the Informed Consent forms, to all volunteers who apply to be included in my research. These will be filled out and returned the same way, and only those who return all the

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forms, and whose prescreening results are normal, will be included. I estimate that it could take up to three months for all the documents to be returned and processed.

The included individuals will next be sent the 5D-ASC questionnaire, by mail or email, to be filled out and returned, once they have had whatever non-ordinary experience they have signed up for, externally to my research. Some of them will have already had their experience(s), whereas others may be awaiting their first such encounter impending in the near future. The estimate is that this process could take two months, and will help to answer Research Question #1.

It is hoped that ten of the participants will be available for videoconferenced interviews. Skype has recording available, but privacy is not assured that way so, instead, I will record the conversation on a separate digital voice recorder and take notes as to my observations of the subjects' demeanor and cues. At completion of the study, I plan to delete the recordings and keep only the notes and analyses. I expect this phase to take up to two months, including transcription and analysis of the data, and it will help in answering all three research questions. The interviewees will be asked questions like:

“What influenced you to seek an altered state?”

“Have you noticed any significant changes in your life?”

“Were these changes positive or negative for you?”

“Can you recall any specific details of your experience which seemed to have had the most significance for you?”

“How did those perceptions impact you?”

“Was one such experience enough for you, or would it make sense to repeat it? If the latter, how often and in what way?”

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Eight of the participants (the number based on relevant personal experience), plus two alternates in case of drop-outs, will be selected for a focus group, to be held on a videoconference. If necessary, a second session may be held later on. The videoconference itself is expected to take two hours (plus another two if repeated). Including scheduling and analysis, this phase could take up to two weeks, and it will help to answer Research Questions #1 and 2. They will be asked questions like:

“What, to you, were the most salient features of your experiences?”

“How difficult was it to enter into your non-ordinary states, by whatever induction methods you had?”

“What were the most in-common features of your experiences, in terms of intensity, after-effects, specific details, and life changes?”

“Was it helpful to you to share your experiences with the other members of this group?”

All of the participants will be encouraged to maintain journals of their impressions related to their non-ordinary experiences. It is hoped that at least 20 of these will be made available (by mail or email) for analysis, and then returned to the participants. Those whose pages were emailed will be kept as raw data and keyed to whatever pseudonyms the participants chose at the beginning. I expect to take one week to analyze the journal data, once I have collected them, and these may help answering all three research questions.

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Data collection tools

The Creswell text (2007, pp. 148-149 & 156-157) elaborated the value of combining various data-gathering approaches. In my study, information missed from participants' interviews would be supplemented with journals and ethnographic data, and with researchers' observations, field notes, and summaries of both the participants and their environments (settings). In addition, the various qualitative software tools available (MAXQDA, n.d.; QRA, 1998; QSR, n.d.; Researchware, n.d.; SSD, 2004) will provide cross-checking and verification methods for ensuring that the data reflects the views of the participants rather than the bias of the researchers (Creswell, pp. 164-173).

My primary data-collection method would be *key-informant in-depth interviewing* (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999b, p. 86; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, pp. 133-144). I plan to begin with just allowing volunteers to report their experiences in their own words, and then supplement those with questions drawn from psychedelic research literature (Studerus, Gamma, & Vollenweider, 2010). I plan to also make use of *researcher field notes* so that I can compare participants' reports with what I observed or otherwise learned in the given settings. A third component will be what the participants write in their *journals* (Hampton & Morrow, 2003) during the weeks following their non-ordinary experiences; these writings may augment what they reported in the interviews.

The 5D-ASC questionnaire will give broad foundational data for all three RQs, providing for responses on emotional, perceptual, and cognitive levels. The videoconferenced interviews will give specific data on subjective impact of their experiences and on details of the states of consciousness they experienced. The journals

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are expected to yield insights and details not available on the conscious level in the questionnaires or interviews. The focus group will help to profile and categorize the details of their non-ordinary states.

Datapoints yielded

The 5D-ASC seeks responses to these general categories: Experience of Unity, Spiritual experience, Blissfulness, Insightfulness, Anxiety, and Changed Meaning of Percepts. The interviewees will be asked about life changes due to the experience, whether those changes were positive or negative, what kinds of perceptions or insights they had, and how such phenomena impacted them.

The journal entries will be scanned for insights into the above categories and questions, and the focus group will be asked to come up with categories and meanings of their experiences, and compare how different inductions and settings influenced their experiences and insights.

The following chart summarizes and correlates data-collection and analysis methods according to research questions and participant groups.

Research Question	Participant Group	Data Collection	Data Analysis
RQ1	All	5D-ASC questionnaire, mailed in; Interview data, online; Focus Group data,online; Journal data, mailed in	Tabulation of responses to the questionnaire, Phenomenological Analysis and Representation, using one of the standard qualitative software tools.
RQ2	Interviews, Focus groups	Interview data, online; Focus Group data,online	Horizontalization and categorical encoding of the subjects' descriptions, Phenomenological Analysis and Representation
RQ3	Questionnaire respondents,	5D-ASC questionnaire, mailed in; Interview data, online; Journal data,	Tabulation of responses to the questionnaire, Horizontalization and categorical encoding of the

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	Interviews, Journals	mailed in	subjects' descriptions, encoding and tabulation of journal entries
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Data analysis techniques.

Following are the methods I intend to use for analyzing each type of data in the proposed research:

Identifying codes, themes, and patterns.

LeCompte and Schensul (1999a, pp. 57-60) provided the following characteristics of operational encodings:

- a) Codes point to some specific object or event, or even to a location on some scale, in a particular area of study.
- b) They are named with single words or with short phrases.
- c) Names are unique for each code.
- d) At least initially, code categories should be as free of inference as possible.
- e) Surveys and questionnaires should have separate codes for n/a or no response.
- f) Codes should reduce the amount of data to be processed.
- g) Code categories should be as hierarchical as possible so they can be summarized or elaborated as needed.
- h) Coding systems can be adapted from sources in the literature, or they may be deduced from the natural structure of the phenomenon under study.

My procedure will then be to use the codes to reduce the questionnaire data to units which can be represented either qualitatively or quantitatively, identify patterns and themes with respect for the perspectives of the participants, and then show how each

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category relates to the research questions. Using the qualitative software tool I will have selected, I will transcribe the categorized data into appropriate text and graphic representation, and then find points of agreement among the categories. In a hermeneutic fashion, I will extract patterns and themes and do member check, back and forth, to refine the results.

Questionnaire data.

In the case of the research being proposed here, Dichter's 5D-ASC provides a good set of preliminary categories and codes from which to begin. These include Experience of Unity, Spiritual Experience, Blissful State, Insightfulness, Disembodiment, Complex Imagery, Synesthesia, and Changed Meaning of Percepts. Instead of using the inventory's classifications of Anxiety, Impairment, and Elementary Imagery, I will initially encode these as Emotional State and Mental State, since I consider these to be peripheral to the more internal detail I am seeking.

Interview data.

The interviews will be my best opportunity to derive the perspectives of the participants as distinct from my own background. I plan to capture the dialogue on a digital voice recorder, and afterwards encode the remarks with the same encoding categories as the questionnaires, but adding new codes for participants' statements not represented there.

Observational data.

I will be observing the demeanor and gestures of participants in both the interviews and the focus group. Skype has the capability of videorecording the sessions,

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but using that capability could compromise confidentiality. Therefore I will make observational notes during the sessions and, afterwards, process these with the same encoding methods as above.

Focus-group data.

For the focus group the methods will be similar to those of the interview sessions except that the questions and themes will be somewhat different and, if enough volunteers participate from the local colleges, the meeting could be in-person, on a nearby campus, rather than by teleconference. The participants will be identified by their assigned pseudonyms, and I will record the session either on a video camera, if all the participants accede to that, or only on voice recorder. Then I will analyze the session data using the aforementioned procedures.

Journal data.

Participants will have been asked to maintain journals of their non-ordinary experiences and their after-effects, and they will be invited to voluntarily submit them to me for analysis. I will painstakingly examine those pages for items fitting the codifications I had already established, while being observant for additional themes or levels of detail. Then I will, again, use the above procedures for analysis of the new data.

Verification of trustworthiness and authenticity.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness can be broken into four criteria: internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity or, in qualitative research, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

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Credibility.

The credibility of my prospective research lies in the fact that philosophies and reports of various kinds of non-ordinary states exist worldwide and have been incorporated into religious texts and mythologies for thousands of years. Such states include religious and mystical experiences, miraculous apparitions, sightings of ghosts, spirits, elves, faeries, and extraterrestrials (these can be found even on 35,000-year-old cave paintings), and other supernatural phenomena. My case is that these reports all exist, regardless of whether one believes their contents, and I can assume that my volunteers will report their subjective experiences faithfully, to be confirmed by hermeneutics and member checking. In addition, my credibility methods are planned to include triangulation (due to variety of data-gathering methods), reflexive journaling, and member checks and peer debriefing, if available (Lincoln & Guba).

Dependability.

The hermeneutics and member checking I plan to use should suffice to make the data dependable. After I have completed my analysis, I plan to submit my findings to the participants and ask them for feedback as to how close I came to representing their experiences. My audit trail and reflexive journaling will help to support dependability.

Transferability.

Because I am basing my data-gathering and analysis methods on standard, validated instruments and practices, I expect that my findings will be seamlessly able to be added to the scholarly knowledge base on the subject of consciousness. My transferability checks will include thick description and reflexive journaling.

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Confirmability.

Triangulation and bias checking will be accomplished by the use of four primary data-gathering methods, plus the pre-screening and the final feedback from the participants. I also plan to ask my faculty supervisor to examine my methods and execution to see if I, as I have seen some peer-reviewed scholars do, have nudged my participants into telling me what I wanted to hear in the first place.

Other confirmability checks I plan to apply include the audit trail and reflexive journaling. In addition, my long personal experience with non-ordinary states prepares me to correctly interpret the data from this research. Altogether, the variety of methods I plan to use should ensure trustworthiness in my findings.

Data Interpretation.

Strategies for interpreting my data.

Using the coding categories I establish, I will hermeneutically find more and more inclusive classifications for the encoded data, comparing them to my research questions. Once I believe I have resolved the data into an optimal classification system, I will go back to the original data, or to the participants and possibly peers, to get their feedback on the descriptive accuracy of my conclusions.

How I will integrate the data from multiple sources.

My encoding system will be identifying the same categories of themes from each of the four sources itemized earlier, so it will be only a matter of merging the encodings to attain a comprehensive base of data for my subject.

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How I will use the data to answer my research questions.

The interview dialogues, the questionnaires, the focus group themes, and the journal entries will all be oriented toward answering the three research questions and, in addition, will be open to significant themes not account for by the RQs. I will report such themes in my conclusions as material for future research.

How I will use existing research and theory to interpret my findings.

The research methods I have proposed herein are based on a wealth of current knowledge, as I expressed in the Rationale sections of the Introduction. The way that I expect my research to extend current knowledge is that I intend my findings to actually map out non-ordinary states of consciousness by a finer level of detail than has been done previously, including paths to attaining particular states, and excluding material which may have only superficial content, such as hypnagogia, anxiety, paranoia, and ‘fuzziness.’

How I plan to involve participants and stakeholders in interpretation.

Because of the inherent subjectivity of the data, and the potential for bias in myself, the researcher, in terms of implicating my extensive personal experience in the research, it will be important to obtain feedback, hermeneutically, from the participants, and also to review my methods and findings with peers who are knowledgeable in this area of research.

Dissemination of Findings.

There is a substantial lay audience of people who are interested in states of consciousness, either from a spiritual or personal-growth perspective or from an interest

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in psychedelics. For such people I plan to release my findings on the MAPS, Lycaenum, and Erowid websites, and on a special page of FaceBook. I may also submit to Psychology Today and other popular magazines. For scholars and researchers, I will submit my results to scholarly journals and also to universities which have departments in consciousness studies or similar.

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