HONS 381: Altered States of Consciousness
Spring, 2016

Application Exercises (10% of grade each)

In order to more fully understand the prevalence and significance of ASC in our everyday lives—their role in our spiritual (and other mundane) practices, their physical and psychological benefits, etc.—it is important to do more than just read and talk about them in class. Therefore, we would like you to gain some more directly first-hand knowledge and experience with ASCs, both by talking with individuals who have experience with them and by engaging in practices that will allow you to experience them yourselves.

Application 1: Ethnographic exploration of ASC (Due March 2nd) Graded by Dr. Irwin

For this assignment, you will interview two different people who have had experiences with ASCs (whether intentionally induced or not; the more recent their experiences, the better). You may NOT interview other students in this class, or us. Ideally, your interviews should be with people whose experiences with ASCs have been different – either in the sense that:
1) they experienced similar kinds of ASCs, but engaged in different practices or participated in different events that generated them, or
2) they engaged in similar practices/participated in similar events, but these generated different kinds of ASCs or
3) they each had a unique experience which they may not have identified as ASC but which you, as a researcher, can identify as ASC, for example, non-ordinary dreams

Methodology: To successfully conduct an interview it is critical that you:
- Ask permission to write up the interview for this assignment; only submit interviews by those who willingly agree to be interviewed and recorded (no covert interviews!). Tell them that no interview will be made public.
- Ask the same questions to both persons; even though differences will arise, use standard questions for each interview (we will give you a short list of questions in advance to which you may add more). Be sure to have a brief definition of ASC for you interviewee.
- Take good notes (possibly record on digital or write up during interview) and directly after the interview, write up a narrative of each person’s experience.
  - Interview narratives should be fairly brief, roughly one to two paragraphs for each interview. Nonetheless, they must also be complete—well-written summations of people’s answers to all the questions you asked.
  - In your narratives and final write-up, avoid using personal names, list each as Interview One and Interview Two – assign the first letter of the person’s name for the narrative, for example, “M. said,” . . .

Analysis: You must then analyze your interviews by comparing the experiences the interviewee with what you’ve learned about ASCs through the course materials, including articles on OAKS.

Your final write-up should be between approximately 700-850 words (more if you need them) and should include both the edited narratives and then your analysis of them. Also include a summary statement at the end on what you learned by doing these interviews and from this assignment overall. Also attach the question sheet you used for interviews as the last page.
**Possible ASC:** lucid dreams, artistic productions, music (listening or playing), self-analysis, emotional interactions with others, anomalous experiences, dance or intense physical activity, running, mind altering drugs (no alcohol, please), illness, day-dreaming, reading (usually fiction), ghost encounter, supernatural event, meditation, relaxation, sexual experience, hypnosis, prayer, OBE, NDE, creative activities, accident, trauma, fasting, sleep deprivation, trance, ritual, group interactions, mysticism, etc.

**Sample Questions for Interview:** Be sure to note that you will not use any personal names or other information that might identify the person. Confidentiality is important, some such experiences are deeply personal, so be considerate and appreciative of the sharing.

1. Background: gender, age, ethnicity, religious orientation (including atheism, agnosticism)?
2. What is your definition or understanding of “altered states of consciousness” (ASC)?
3. What is your attitude toward altered states of consciousness? Are such states positive, neutral, or negative for you?
4. What types of experiences have you had that you might call an “altered state of consciousness”? [If the person gets stuck here, suggest a few types as listed above]
5. Which ASC experience would you choose as the most powerful, profound, or important ASC you have ever had? What caused this experience?
6. Can you describe your experience (it may be difficult to put into words)?
7. Did your ASC experience involve any other person or being?
8. Why do you think this is your most important example of ASC?
9. What was the consequence of your experience – the impact or enduring after effect?
10. Would you like to have similar experiences? Why or why not?

This is just a sample questionnaire. My advice is to print out your questions and have them in hand when you interview, with space between each question to make notes – unless you are recording the conversation. Even then, many researches make handwritten notes while recording as a double check – for example, noting emotions or facial expressions, gestures, and so on – or just keeping notes on key points. If you want, you can use the above questions, or modify them, or create another list.

Please add your question page to the end of your paper, so I can see exactly what you asked. Be sure to ask both persons interviewed the SAME questions. You will probably get additional information beyond the questions, but by asking identical questions, you will have a small sample based on core questions (not more than 10 questions, possibly less).

Do NOT do interviews without a question sheet in hand to guide the interview, even if the interview is over the phone. If the interview is by email, send the recipient the exact questions, ask them to answer each one and THEN add any additional comments.