
This two volume set delves into a topic that has long needed a thorough and systematic inquiry. To begin with, it should be noted that this topic has had several names: altered states of consciousness (ASC), alternative states of consciousness, and now altering consciousness. Etzel Cardena and Michal Winkelman deserve credit for the hard work of mobilizing an in-depth treatment of altering consciousness, the resulting state changes that occur, and their effects. The concept of consciousness composed of states was popularized by Charles T. Tart's pioneering volumes *Altered States of Consciousness* (1969/1972) and *States of Consciousness* (1975). (Arnold Ludwig actually coined the ASC phrase, as Tart points out.) These books and the theory and research that have been accumulated since then have at least earned a place in introductory texts of psychology, which at this writing usually include a chapter that names various consciousness states, such as sleep, dreams, meditation, hypnosis, psychedelics, and addictive drugs. Instead of one chapter, these two volumes have 32 chapters of text along with insightful orientations by the editors. Volume 1 addresses altered states in history, cultures, and the humanities. Volume 2 covers biological dimensions, neuroscience, and psychology. The chapters go far beyond the listing of a few states of consciousness. They range widely from ancient divination, cultural rites, and ceremonies, to ASC’s role in expressive and performance arts, spirituality, religion, emotions, somatics, and biological, chemical, and neuroscience correlates, which appear to be the present cutting edge of altered state research. As one would expect, psychedelic substances receive attention, including LSD, DMT, and peyote. These two volumes will be standard references for many years.

The chapters provide references to many research studies with altered state relevance and reveal that there is a substantial literature in this area, albeit not necessarily pulled together, but at least available. Much of it is documented in these two volumes. The chapters are balanced, including first hand reports (qualitative) of experiences, as well as experimental (quantitative) studies. The authors have respect for the positive values that have been and are being served by various altered states, with such purposes as social organization, mental and physical healing, guidance, inner exploration, decision-making, spiritual and religious development, and conviviality. Considerations of addiction and pathology are addressed as well, with a consideration of dependence as an altered state and mental disorders as negative ASCs.

These are not flippant do-it-yourself books, but ones that take alternate states and their many potentials seriously.

The volumes build a case that many of these alterations of consciousness can be considered as stable states of subjective reality that are often correlated with psychological and biological systems. Consciousness alterations may be explained as constructions by our brains, doors to other realities, conditioned social patterns, non-conscious thinking, useful hypothetical entities, or creative illusions. They have parameters, repeatability, properties, and inherent rules. As William James (1929/1902) noted after experiencing an altered state (from nitrous oxide), "our waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted by the
filmiest of screens, there lie potential kinds of consciousness entirely different, . . .
definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their application and adaptation” (p. 378–379). These books create a case for a science—subjective and objective—that goes behind the curtain to learn more about the creations of alternate consciousness and their uses. My opinion is that we have not recognized the multiple states that surround and permeate us in everyday life, with or without drugs or overt facilitation, some intentional, others unconscious: this might include driving a car, childbirth, playing basketball, depression, intense emotion, sexual activity, peak experiences, falling in love, knitting, absorbed in a movie, focused learning, electronic dance music, walks in nature, schizophrenia, phobias, reverie, and many others. Knowing these to be states based on alterations of consciousness, one may possibly influence the nature and intensity of the effect using what we know about altered states. Some alterations of consciousness result in states that have non-ordinary or exceptional properties that reside in them, properties that are not normally accessed, such as the peyote songs of Native Americans, deep meditation, shamanic flights, imagery in dreams, spirit possession, absorption, changed perception of music and creative artistic work. Further, some of these conditions and experiences can be transferred into everyday settings and be facilitated in one's “normal” consciousness.

Of particular interest to readers of this journal are implications for the roles of consciousness alterations in transpersonal experience. Yulia Ustinova vividly presents the ASC religious practices from prehistory, through Greek and Roman cultures. Moshe Sluhovsky discusses spirit possession (such as channeling). The use of altered states in yoga and Hinduism is presented by Jonathan Shear. Visionary spiritual experiences and issues of mental health are addressed by David Lukoff. Mystical experiences are discussed by Antoon Geels, and shamanism shows up multiple times in chapters by Fred Previc, Michael Winkelman, and others. Contemporary electronic dance events (raves) include encounters with spiritual experience, discussed by Graham St. John. A chapter by David Luke reviews the effects of various altered states on tests of PSI (ESP), on paranormal phenomena, and on meditation, hypnosis, and other interventions. A preface by eminent transpersonal psychologist Charles T. Tart shows the story behind his innovative conceptualization of states of consciousness, a personal journey of a true scientist.

Contemporary issues of terminology and research are lucidly addressed by Julie Beischel, Adam J. Rock, and Stanley Krippner. This fits with chapters on neuroscience, psychedelic substances, and the biological processes. However, there could be more review of the psychological work of Tart (systems theory), Ronald Pekala (with ASC assessment instruments), Ernest Hilgard, (hypnosis oriented), and others who have attempted to spell out criteria for terminology, maps of ASC cartography, and the dynamics of alteration. Future research can perhaps correlate the neuroscience with the phenomenology. While these books show increasing research studies, there is limited attention given to the methodology and problems of doing research on these experiences, which can have fuzzy boundaries, shifts in perception, effects on the sense of self, and changes in apparent reality or perhaps real reality. The conventional
experimental and qualitative methods may need to access creative and innovative approaches. However, this can be for future studies. The volumes are more than ample in providing a wealth of data and a wide scope of coverage. They give us an excellent foundation for further research and theory.

REFERENCES


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