

# Can Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness be Accessed at Will Through Sexual Activity?

## Introduction

Non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC) sometimes occur during sex. In her study regarding spontaneously occurring altered states during sex, Wade (2000b) found that NOSC were experienced by individuals who had no prior knowledge about the possibility of this happening. In Wade's (2002) "people said they had been overcome by *spontaneous* 'nonordinary,' 'altered,' or 'transcendent,' states of consciousness when they were making love" (p. 37). She refers to this phenomenon as transcendent sex. Wade (2004) added "probably about one in twenty people has had a spontaneous, involuntary transcendent episode during sex" (p. 10).

For all of the participants in Wade's study, these experiences of NOSC occurred accidentally. This study will explore the possibility of experiencing transcendence during sexual activity *at will*, irrespective of any ideological framework (ie. Tantra).

## Research Questions

1. Can non-ordinary states of consciousness be accessed through sexual activity at will?
2. Do self-reported experiences align with the STER framework of NOSC as outlined by Kotler & Wheel (2017):
  - Selflessness – internal dialogue is suspended.
  - Timeliness – past and future collapse into the present.
  - Effortlessness – personal identity is no longer directing the experience.
  - Richness – beyond normal experience; receiving novel input.

## Research Implications

This study explores the possibility of accessing the NOSC state at will through sexual activity.

Non-ordinary states of consciousness (via psychedelic drugs) represent a unique healing tool. These applications include but are not limited to:

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Drug Addiction / Substance Abuse
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Social Anxiety
- Depression
- End of Life Anxiety

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has granted approval for clinical trials to test psilocybin therapy in patients with treatment-resistant depression.

This study is motivated by these questions: Is it possible to generate these healing effects without drugs? What critical factors can lead to triggering an individual's innate ability to generate non-ordinary states of consciousness through sexual activity?

This is important because although psychedelic drugs can produce NOSC at will and thereby provide therapeutic benefit, they lack the love and connection that are possible by achieving NOSC through moments of profound human intimacy.

## **Research Design**

### *Recruiting Research Participants*

The following methods will be used to recruit participants:

- Direct recruitment of potential study participants through researcher's network.
- *Snowball sampling will also be used so that participants* recruit additional participants from among their acquaintances.

Initial pilot sample size is anticipated at between 10 and 20 participants and an effort will be made to interview a minimum of 20 individuals. Semi-structured, in depth interviews (see Appendix) will be conducted with participants to determine the range of varieties of experiences of transcendent sex. Each participant will have had experienced nonordinary states of consciousness (NOSC) while making love with another person. Using qualitative content analysis, the themes that arose in the interviews will be explored with regard to the STER framework as noted above both pre and post study.

Participants are individuals who have had an unusual, nonordinary or transcendent experience during sex with a partner, when not using mind-altering drugs or alcohol or using techniques such as Tantra or Taoism when these experiences happened.

The main qualification for becoming involved in this project was that each participant reports that she had had at least one transcendent sexual experience that met the criteria of an altered state while having sex with another person, subject to the limitations outlined below. There is no restriction on sexual orientation of participants.

Limitations:

- Minimum age of 21 due to the legal age of consent and there was no upper age limit.
- Excludes those who had an experience of this type due to the use of mind-altering drugs or alcohol.
- Individuals who had these nonordinary experiences because they were practicing Tantric, Taoist or other esoteric sexual practices were also excluded from the study since, as Wade (2004) put it, these are “designed to bring about altered states or create expectations that might shape either the state or its interpretation” (p. 263).
- Individuals from all ethnic backgrounds will be included, however only individuals who are both highly articulate and also able to speak and write English fluently will be included due to their ability to articulate highly subjective experiences.

All potential candidates receive a phone call from the researcher during which all candidates were screened for qualifications concerning drugs, alcohol and altered-state practices including the practice of Tantric or Taoist techniques. Potential participants are asked to briefly describe their transcendent sexual experience in a paragraph or less over the phone. All appropriate candidates receive an e-mail from the researcher expressing interest in their participation and inviting them to participate in the study. Potential participants who do not meet the required qualifications received a letter thanking them for their offer to participate and briefly describing the reasons why they did not qualify.

### ***Treatment of Data***

For the sake of confidentiality, all participants will be invited to create code names and are given code numbers. Demographic questionnaires, audiotapes, and transcriptions of interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home. The key to participants’ identity will be stored separately in a locked filing cabinet.

### **Protocol**

Prior to beginning the study, couples will participate in virtual educational sessions to learn and practice the following:

#### **1.Heart Focused Intention**

Quick Coherence Technique

#### **2. Present Moment Awareness**

Holographic Breathing Technique

## **Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Participant Selection**

1. Please tell me about the nonordinary, altered state or transcendent experiences you have had in the course of making love.

Probes: How does it/these happen?

Did you do anything special to get to that state?

2. How would you characterize that/these experience/s as different from ordinary lovemaking?

Probes: How was your sense of time when this was happening? Compared to your ordinary sense of time during sex?

What was your awareness of your position in space? Of the spatial environment around you?

What was your sense of your self boundaries? Was it in any way different from normal?

What were you seeing? Were you aware of any unusual sensations or perceptions in your hearing, touch, taste or smell? If so, what were they like?

How would you characterize your emotions while this was going on?

Did you seem to be inside your body? If not, where were you?

What was the content of your mind during this time? What were you thinking?

3. Did you have a sense of being able to enter the state you were in deliberately or leave it at will? Could you control your ability to participate in this unusual event?

Probes: How would you characterize your awareness of your environment? How would you characterize your ability to communicate?

Were you able to concentrate on objects or did your attention wander?

4. Do you have these experiences with all partners? If not, what factors do you think enable you to have them with some partners?
5. What happens after sex is over? How did you come back from that state to "ordinary reality?"
6. What impact, if any, did this/these experience/s have on you in general?
7. Is there anything else about this you would like to tell me?

## **Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire**

The following information will be collected from participants that qualify for the study.

1. Name (pseudonym for the study, not your real name).
2. Mailing address
3. Telephone
4. E-mail
5. Race / Ethnicity
6. Age
7. Sex (at birth)
8. Sex now (if different)
9. Sexual preference/orientation
10. Highest level of education completed
11. Occupation