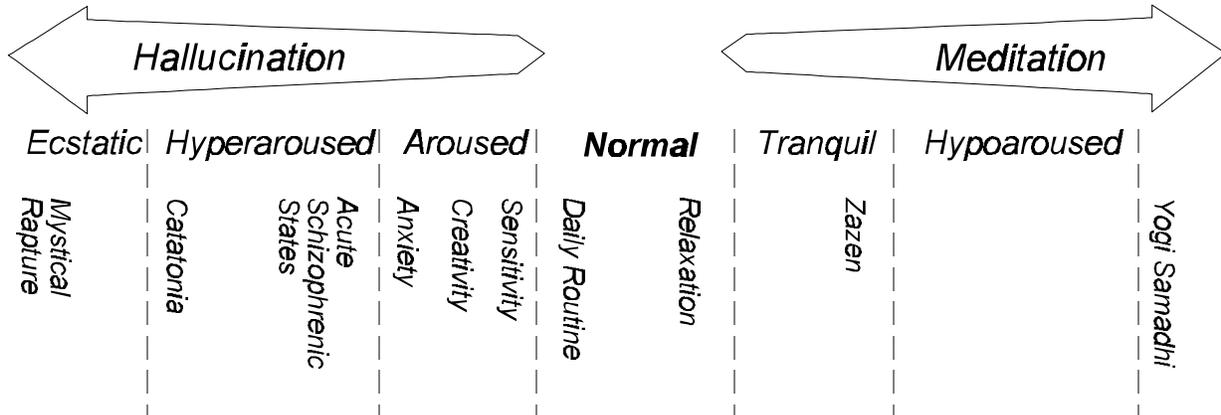


## Possessive States

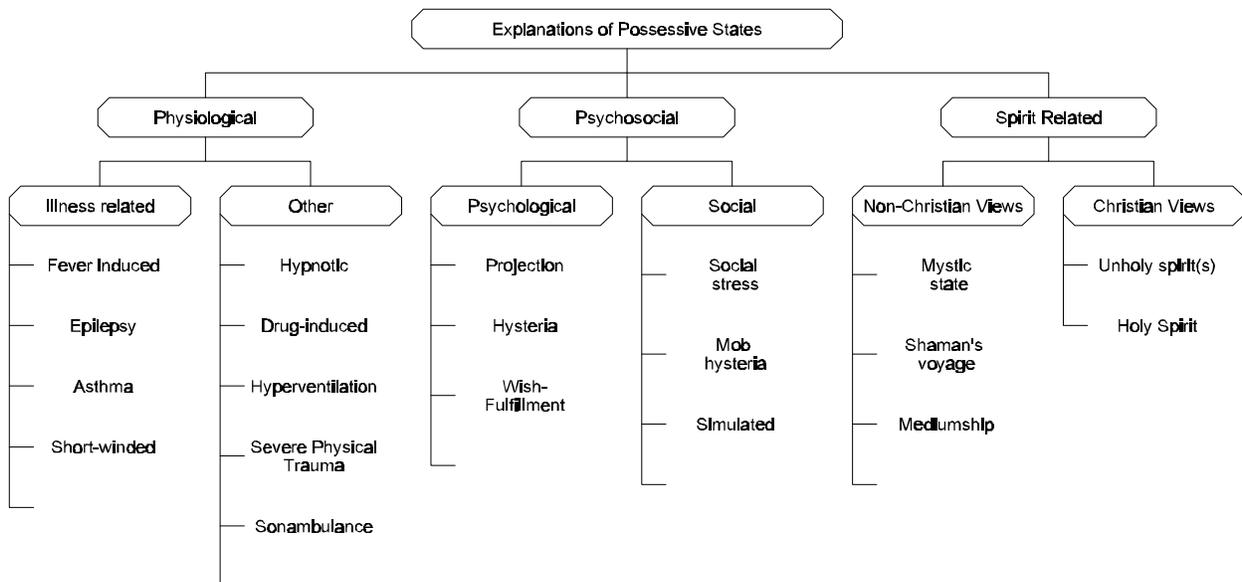
- States of human experience (source: Fischer, "A Cartography of Ecstatic and Meditative States"):



- Nature of possession: What are the possible explanations of possession?

In all continents, there are groups in which particular persons at specific times undergo startling and dramatic changes of personality—trembling, sweating, groaning, speaking with strange voices or in unintelligible sounds, assuming a different identity, claiming to be a spirit and not a human being, asserting authoritative leadership with commands, or foretelling the future.

Augsberger, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, 291



3. What are immediate trigger factors in causing possession phenomena in cultures? Two major classes may be noted:
- a. Physiological:
    - i. Physical stress
      - (1) From exertion (dancing, drumming, running, cutting, etc.)
      - (2) From deprivation (fasting, meditating, lack of sleep)
    - ii. Rhythm related (drums, cymbals, bells, rattles)
    - iii. Biochemical (drugs)
    - iv. Spontaneous (i.e., no apparent physiological trigger)
  - b. Psychological:
    - i. Tension/stress
    - ii. Guilt over transgressions
    - iii. Need for attention
    - iv. Permission within the framework of the culture--available scripts of possession phenomena and appropriate social behavior (e.g., certain types of worship and/or prayer).
4. How is possession manifested in various cultures?

The forms that possession takes vary widely from culture to culture. People cut themselves with knives, walk on hot cinders, climb ladders or razor blades, bathe in boiling oil, or even enucleate eyes while in trance. Or possession may take highly verbal forms of speaking, singing, or prophesying to an audience; or there may be cursing, blaspheming, scatological language, and threatening hostile behavior.

The outward manifestations of spirit possession vary widely—from fainting, trances, glossolalia, rigid postures, violent dancing, acts of extreme agility such as climbing down tree trunks head first, chewing broken glass, gripping hot irons, walking over glowing coals. At the time of the trance state most people are amnesiac, recalling little or nothing.

*Augsburger, Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures, 292*

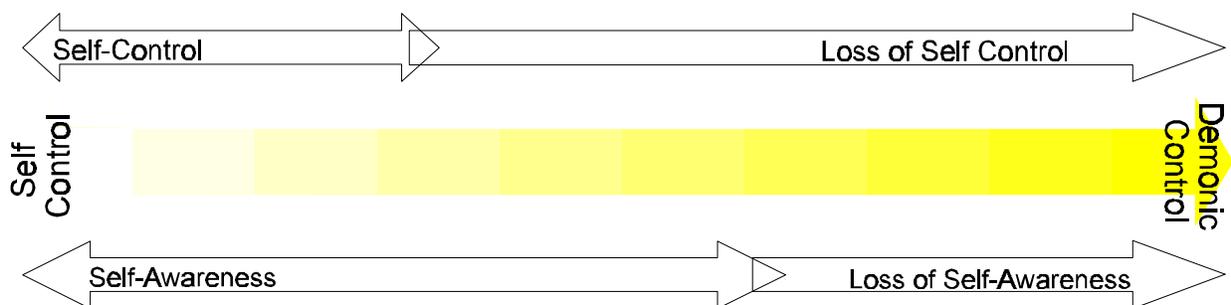
- a. Trance/dissociation
- b. Violence
- c. Strength

- d. Convulsions
- e. Glossolalia
- f. Voice change
- g. Personality change
- h. Knowledge

5. Functions of possession

- a. In meeting the daily needs of life, whether facing life`s dangers or striving for success (as culturally defined).
- b. It enables change within the community. This may range from change needed to alleviate social stress (removal of oppressive circumstances) to change in response to cultural collapse (e.g., from an "invasion" of an outside more powerful culture)
- c. It is used to sustain the life of the community, to keep in place the moral sanctions that make up the community.
- d. It is used as a communication channel with the powers.
- e. It affirms the faith of the local group as a genuine faith; it shows that spirit beings are real.

6. The spectrum of possession



7. David Augsburger proposes the following decision tree as an aid in diagnosing apparent demonised behavior. Note that several branches which he does not label as demonised could be such (e.g., shaman's voyage; *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, p. 307):

