

# Ways of Seeing Ecstasy in Modern Society: Experiential-Expressive and Cultural-Linguistic Views\*

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Religious experience is an important but understudied aspect of religion. Sociologists need a theoretical approach that appreciates the existence of and variation in the social distribution of religious experiences. Recognizing that theories are interpretive frameworks through which we view the world, and understanding that "every way of seeing is a way of not seeing," we examine two potential "ways of seeing" religious experience in modern society and explore their ability to shed light upon recent surveys which suggest that as much as half the United States adult population has had what can be called "religious experiences." As the dominant views in sociology largely exclude from consideration the experiential dimension of religion, we turn to perspectives that take religious experience more seriously, what Lindbeck (1984) calls the "experiential-expressive" and "cultural-linguistic" views. While the former is an advance over the dominant views, it too has liabilities. We advocate the cultural-linguistic theory as the most sophisticated way of seeing religion. As a preliminary test of this view, we examine the relationship between "ecstatic" religious experience and "conventional" religiosity, predicting that the most conventional worshipers will have ecstatic experiences most frequently. Logistic regression analysis of General Social Survey data supports this prediction.

In both sociology and psychology, the years between World War I and the Korean War were comparatively desolate as far as the study of religion is concerned (Glock and Stark 1965; Gorsuch 1988). This despite the fact that the "founding fathers" of sociology — Marx, Durkheim, and Weber — and the

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“founding parents” of American psychology — G. Stanley Hall and William James — were themselves also concerned with religion.

In the 1960s, there was a resurgence of interest in the social scientific study of religion, including an aspect that Stark and Glock (1968) call the *experiential dimension*. This still comparatively understudied dimension (Neitz and Spickard 1990) involves “a direct, subjective knowledge of ultimate reality . . . some sense of contact, however fleeting, with a supernatural agency” (Stark and Glock 1968:15; see also Smart 1969:10-12; McGuire 1987:15-17). This variety of direct, subjective experiences of ultimate reality and supernatural agency constitutes the working definition of “ecstatic” or “mystical” religious experience we adopt in this article.<sup>1</sup>

As the experiential dimension has made its resurgence in studies of religion, quantitative efforts to understand its distribution and characteristics, causes and consequences, have led the way. To summarize briefly, between 1962 and 1992, some 20 studies have used closed-ended survey questions to measure direct personal experience of the ultimate. The core findings of these surveys on the prevalence of religious experience are summarized in Table 1. We can see that the proportion of positive responses — indicating that the respondent has had at least one religious experience — range from 20.5 percent in 1962 to an amazing 53 percent in 1990. Overall, the average positive response rate to these types of questions has been estimated at around 35 percent (Spilka *et al.* 1985:182). That is, across all the surveys, about 35 percent of respondents report having had at least one religious experience, variously defined.<sup>2</sup> Such findings are not easily explained within the principal frameworks guiding sociology.<sup>3</sup> The extensive operation of magical, mysterious, supernatural forces to which these data point necessitate some reevaluation of the dominant approaches to understanding religion in the modern world.

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<sup>1</sup> Smart (1973:49-73, see also 1958, 1964) distinguishes between “numinous” and “mystical” experiences in his criticism of “experiential core” theories of religion. While in the final analysis this distinction may be useful, for the purposes of this article, we think it fruitful to consider the different varieties of religious experience — ecstatic, numinous, mystical — under the general category. Throughout the article we will use these terms in this way.

<sup>2</sup> For a consideration of variation in the operational definition of religious experience in these surveys, see Hay (1988) and Yamane (1992).

<sup>3</sup> Two related characteristics of the sociological enterprise may account for this: (1) sociology, in general, has tended to ignore subjective or “lived” experience (Ellis and Flaherty 1992); and (2) sociology, in general, has tended to relegate the irrational to the status of a residual, unknowable category (Sica 1988). The first author, engaging the theoretical work of Neitz and Spickard (1990; also Neitz 1987; Spickard 1991), is considering more fully the first point in a separate project, “Further Steps Toward a Sociology of Religious Experience: Methodological Considerations.”

TABLE 1

Review of Survey Research Findings on Religious Experience, 1962-1990

<i>Source</i>	<i>Year of Survey</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>% Positive Responses</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Stark (1965)	1963	2,871	71.6 <sup>a</sup>	Question: "Have you ever as an adult had the feeling that you were somehow in the presence of God?" <sup>a</sup> Respondent "sure" or "think" had experience.
Back & Bourque (1970)	1962	3,232	20.5	Question: "Would you say that you have ever had a 'religious or mystical experience' — that is a moment of sudden religious awakening or insight?"
Bourque (1969)	1966	3,518	31.8	Question: Same as Back and Bourque (1970)
Back & Bourque (1970)	1967	3,168	41.2	Question: Same as Back and Bourque (1970)
Vernon (1968)	1966-1967	85 <sup>a</sup>	25.9 <sup>b</sup>	Question: Same as Stark (1965) <sup>a</sup> Represents the 4.78% of total sample who responded "no religious preference." <sup>b</sup> Respondent "sure" or "think" had experience.
Greeley (1974)	1972	1,468	35.0	Question: "How often have you had one of the following experiences? Felt as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?"
Wuthnow (1978)	1973	1,000	39.0	Question: "During your lifetime, have you ever had the feeling that you were in harmony with the universe?"
Wuthnow (1978)	1973	1,000	50.0	Question: "During your lifetime, have you ever had the feeling that you were in close contact with something holy or sacred?"
Gallup (1978)	1976	1,500 <sup>a</sup>	31.0	Question: Same as Back and Bourque (1970) <sup>a</sup> Apx. sample size; actual sample size not reported.

TABLE 1 (continued)

Review of Survey Research Findings on Religious Experience, 1962-1990

Source	Year of Survey	N	% Positive Responses	Notes
Hay & Morisy (1978)	1976	1,865	36.4	Question: "Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?"
Hay & Morisy (1978)	1976	1,865	30.4	Question: Same as Greeley (1974)
Thomas & Cooper (1978)	1976-1977	302	34.0	Question: Same as Greeley (1974)
Hay (1979)	1977-1978	100	65.0	Question: Same as Hay and Morisy (1978)
McClenon (1984)	1981	339	20.0	Question: Same as Greeley (1974)
Hay & Morisy (1985)	1982	172	62.0	Question: Same as Hay and Morisy (1978)
GSS (1991)	1983-1984	3,072	39.3 <sup>a</sup>	Question: Same as Greeley (1974) <sup>a</sup> Cumulative statistic for years given.
GSS (1991)	1988	1,481	30.9	Question: Same as Greeley (1974)
GSS (1991)	1989	936	31.3	Question: Same as Greeley (1974)
Gallup & Newport (1990)	1990 June	1,236	53.0	Question: Same as Back and Bourque (1970)
Gallup & Castelli (1990)	1990 Sept.	1,236	53.0	Question: Same as Back and Bourque (1970)

In this article, we want to argue against prevalent misconceptions about religion, notably among secular social scientists, which see it at best as formally organized dogma — churches and their structures — or, worse, as merely the symbolic expression of society (e.g., Durkheim 1965:389), or as a hallucinogen

that serves to appease the oppressed and thereby reinforce the domination of a ruling class (e.g., Marx 1978:54), or, similar in its reductionism, as unconscious ego-attachments resulting from traumatic experiences during child-rearing (e.g., Freud 1961:30). In particular, we want to go beyond those perspectives that see the "fate of our times" as being characterized by the "disenchantment [*Entzauberung*, literally 'demagification'] of the world" (Weber 1958:155, 139; see also Habermas 1987:77; Schluchter 1979, 1989).

In contrast to these dominant sociological views, we explore more sensitive understandings of religion that take as central the enduring direct human experience of the supernatural. This project entails serious consideration of what we call an *experience-centered* understanding of religion. Fortunately, there is an entire tradition of scholarship — the phenomenological approach, broadly conceived (Rothberg 1986:241n) — which sees the experiential dimension as vital to religion. As we will argue, this tradition in Western thought can be traced back to the turn of the nineteenth century and the work of Schleiermacher. It has a remarkably continuous history to the present among some of the major students of religion in the West. Following George Lindbeck (1984), we will refer to this tradition as the "experiential-expressive" (EE) view of religion.

In the interest of space, we give only a cursory overview of the development and deployment of this EE view before pointing out its shortcomings and advocating instead a reconstruction that builds upon the phenomenological tradition, what Lindbeck calls the "cultural-linguistic" (CL) view. Using the CL perspective as a framework, we investigate the relationship between "conventional" (Greer and Roof 1992) religious behavior and religious experience using a survey question from the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey that taps one possible dimension of "ecstatic" experience as our dependent variable.

### WAYS OF SEEING THE EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION OF RELIGION

Before beginning our exposition, we should explain the conception of theories as "interpretive frameworks" and "ways of seeing" that guides this article. Kenneth Burke has famously argued that "every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing" (1935:70); that "every insight contains its own special kind of blindness" (1984:41). That is to say, social scientific analysis involves not simply an uncovering of objective truths that inhere in the phenomena of interest, but a creative act of interpretation of those phenomena based on an *a priori* perspective that structures not only the scientist's vision, but the data themselves, allowing the investigator to see some things, but also filtering out the polysemy of other possible objects and interpretations.

Following Burke, we recognize that there are multiple and competing interpretive frameworks through which scholars see religion. As Paden (1992:4) has recently argued,

Acknowledging the spectrum of interpretive lenses is a starting point for understanding [an] important principle: that there is an intimate relationship between the *way* we look at the world and *what* it is we see going on there. As the axiom has it, "the scale creates the

phenomenon." . . . Theories are like complex conceptual lenses or scales. They show us how to see the world from a certain angle.

Conceptual schemes (theories, perspectives, views) are, by this argument, "ways of seeing" (see also Gusfield's [1989:11-12, 26] discussion of Burke's concept of "terministic screens").<sup>4</sup>

With this understanding, we now turn to the first of two "ways of seeing" the experiential dimension of religion in the modern world.

### *The Experiential-Expressive View*

According to Rothberg (1986:241n), the phenomenology of religion is "that approach to the study of religion which takes the experiential dimension of religion as most important for the understanding of religion and its claims." We take the phenomenology of religion — what we are calling, following Lindbeck, the *experiential-expressive* (EE) view — to be the first "way of seeing" in this article.

Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1988) can be seen now as an early work in the development of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion (Bellah 1970:3-19; Berger 1979; Williams 1978). Schleiermacher sought to place subjective experience at the center of religion; that is, to ground religion "in a moment of experience that is intrinsically religious, so it need not be justified by metaphysical argument" (Proudfoot 1985:xiii). According to this view, the core of religion is understood as a "feeling of absolute dependence," as Schleiermacher characterized it in his other major work, *The Christian Faith* (1960). This perspective opened the floodgates for the further development of conceptual and methodological schemes for phenomenologically understanding religious experience as central to religion.

The notion of *Verstehen* — roughly translated as interpretive or inner understanding — was a contribution to the phenomenological tradition of Schleiermacher by his follower and biographer, Wilhelm Dilthey (1985). Applied to religion, this approach involves an inner understanding of the experience of the sacred. According to Bellah (1970:6), this German tradition of phenomenology reached a

certain formal culmination in the work of Rudolf Otto [1958]. In his important book, *The Idea of the Holy*, he richly developed the basic intuition of Schleiermacher by spelling out the phenomenology of the holy in terms of the numinous — the notion of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*. Here more clearly than ever was the assertion of the *sui generis* nature of religion and its "geometrical location" in a certain kind of immediate experience.

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<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, this position can easily lead to a relativism where all ways of seeing are equally valid or insightful. Reacting to the "constructivist" literature that emerged in the wake of his seminal work with Luckmann (1967) on *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger (1992:2) has commented: "It is one thing to say that all social reality is interpreted reality (which is what Luckmann and I said in all our various propositions); it is an altogether different thing either to say that there are privileged interpreters or, on the contrary, to say that all interpretations are equally valid." Following Berger, we take this "constructivist" perspective more as a warning, a reminder to keep our interpretive *hubris* in check.

Not surprisingly, the 1958 English edition of Schleiermacher's *On Religion* is introduced by Rudolf Otto.

From Otto's work on the centrality of the experience of the holy sprang two more important phenomenological contributions to understanding religious experience, those of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1986) and Mircea Eliade (1959). They both saw experiences of the Holy or Sacred — for van der Leeuw, the *kretophany* (a confrontation with a manifestation of ultimate power), and for Eliade, the *hierophany* (a manifestation of the sacred) — as the definitional aspect of religion.

At least within phenomenological circles, then, the focus on experience has remained essential to understanding religion. This intellectual tradition can be traced to the present in the work of Luckmann (1967) and Berger (1979). Joseph Campbell is another leading contemporary exponent of this attitude. Campbell (1968, 1972, 1988) maintains that there are underlying psychological feelings or existential orientations that are essential to a "trans-theological" view of religion.

Of course, like all traditions, the evolution of this phenomenological perspective has involved a successive series of interpretations. However, while Schleiermacher's "feeling of utter dependence," Otto's *mysterium tremendum*, Leeuw's *kretophany*, and Eliade's *hierophany* do differ from one another, intellectual debts and resonances between them are not difficult to detect. These approaches share the fundamental tenet that the subjective aspect of individual experience is essential to, if not definitive of, religion.

Because of its overriding interest in immediate, subjective experiences, Lindbeck calls this perspective the "experiential-expressive" theory of religion. Lindbeck (1984:21) argues that, "whatever the variations, thinkers of this tradition all located ultimately significant contact with whatever is finally important to religion in the prereflective depths of the self and regard the public or outer features of religion as expressive and evocative objectifications (i.e., nondiscursive symbols) of internal experience." Essentially, this view sees religion as the outward manifestation of inner experiences. With scholars like Campbell, the phenomenological tradition in religious scholarship sees the inner experience of ultimate reality or supernatural agency as the transcultural "core" of religion.

This focus on the experiential aspect of religion is a useful corrective to the predominant theoretical concerns in sociology, which tend toward reductionism (Bellah 1970:237-59). The *EE* view as a way of seeing usefully turns our attention toward the experiential in a way the dominant sociological views do not. Experiential-expressivists would not be surprised by the findings presented in Table 1. As Burke warns, however, with this profound insight comes a special blindness. The weakness of this view is that it is too subjectivistic. Just as a conception of religion that sees only rationalized organizational structures and dogma is limited, so too is one that makes the particular myths, symbols, and practices of a religious tradition merely epiphenomenal. Aside from turning our interpretive lenses toward the experiential, the *EE* view leaves us wanting to explain this newly appreciated dimension. The goal, then, is to build upon the insights of the *EE* view while moving beyond its blindness. To do this, we turn to another "way of seeing" religion.

*The Cultural-Linguistic View*

Our present theoretical concern is to build upon the useful contributions of the phenomenological tradition explored above by elaborating what Lindbeck has called a "cultural-linguistic" (CL) understanding of religion. We take as a starting point the *EE* insight that the experiential dimension of religion is of enduring importance in modern society. We seek to go beyond this point, however, so as to provide a compelling explanation for what we understand to be a systematic variation in the distribution of ecstatic experiences in the American population. As will be made clear below, unlike the *EE* view, the *CL* view allows us to do this.

Studies that focus on the "cultural" dimension of human life have, of late, been increasingly advocated and pursued in a broad range of substantive areas in sociology (Wuthnow and Witten 1988). Within the sociology of religion, however, the acceptance and use of cultural approaches is somewhat older (Wuthnow 1987). For example, both Robert Bellah (1970:20-50) and Clifford Geertz (1973) — following their mentor, Talcott Parsons — see religion as a *cultural system*. Cultural systems, in this view, are fundamentally *symbol systems*. Thus, religions can be viewed as analogous to languages, which are also symbol systems; hence, Lindbeck's label, "cultural-linguistic."

Before exploring what the *CL* view entails, we want to be perfectly clear about what it does not entail. It would be unfortunate if Lindbeck's linguistic analogy caused readers to see the *CL* perspective as limited to understanding that the way people interpret their experiences is shaped by culturally-provided symbolic resources. Calling it "cultural source theory," Hufford (1982) and McClenon (1990) criticize this one-dimensional view of the relationship between culture and experience. In this limited conception, religions as cultural systems are reduced to providing the relevant symbols for defining or labeling certain objects and experiences as "religious" and others as not. While culture indeed plays this role, this subjective *part* should not be mistaken for the *whole*.

The view that culture exists only as part of a person's consciousness — culture as *mentalité* — is one of the chief "limiting assumptions" that Wuthnow and his colleagues sought to overcome in their pioneering book on *Cultural Analysis*. In the introduction to that work, the authors suggest that first among the limiting assumptions of the conventional wisdom on culture is "the assumption that culture consists primarily of thoughts, moods, feelings, beliefs, and values. This is a common view in contemporary social science. . . . What people actually do, how they behave, the institutions they construct, and the physical exchanges of money and power in which they engage, however, are not a part of culture" according to this conventional view, whereas in fact they are (Wuthnow *et al.* 1984:4). We hope the reader will keep both the subjective and behavioral aspects of culture in mind as we proceed to elaborate the *CL* view of religion.

Lindbeck (1984:18) argues that in the *CL* framework, "emphasis is placed on those respects in which religions resemble languages together with correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures (insofar as these are understood semiotically as reality and values systems — that is, as idioms for the construction of reality and living of life)." For most people, this definition in itself, cryp-

tic as it is, does little to illuminate the CL view. If we can come to an understanding of this passage, however, we will be on our way to a reorientation of our thinking about culture and about religions as cultural systems. The work of Geertz, among others, can help elucidate this passage and move us beyond the limited view of culture that focuses solely on "the construction of reality" to the exclusion of "the living of life." An adequate CL view encompasses both.

In his classic essay "Religion as a Cultural System," Geertz (1973:92-93) argues that symbol systems are "culture patterns," and that culture patterns can be understood as "models of reality" and "models for reality." Through models of reality we render the world apprehensible, while models for reality provide us with guidelines according to which we act in the world. These "two senses" of culture patterns-*qua*-models in Geertz's work correspond in Lindbeck's CL view to "the construction of reality" and "the living of life," respectively. This understanding of culture moves us beyond the one-dimensional view noted above.

Having recognized that cultural systems have this "double aspect" (Geertz 1973:93), Talal Asad (1983:240) argues that "[we] are not confined now to the view that 'symbols' must only be concerned with knowledge *about* and attitudes *towards* (as though symbols were one thing and life quite another) — there are *practices* involved . . . for symbols as *representations* are both the constituents and the products of social practice (and so of 'life')." <sup>5</sup> The importance of understanding *practices* as culture has not been lost on many of those concerned with the cultural dimension of human life, as the passage from Wuthnow *et als'* *Cultural Analysis* cited above makes clear. Indeed, Ortner (1984:144) observes in her overview of theory in anthropology since the 1960s that in recent years "there has been growing interest in analysis focused on one or another of a bundle of interrelated terms: practice, praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, performance." Thus, in this multidimensional view, cultural systems are understood as "including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life" (Swidler 1986:273). The "strategies of action" we pursue, the experiences which result from our actions, and the interpretations we give of those experiences should all be seen as "cultural."

Armed with this understanding, we can now begin to look more closely at the experiential dimension of religion from a CL perspective. Understanding that religions are cultural systems and that cultural systems are "idioms for the construction of reality and living of life," we contend that religious traditions construct *alternative, transcendent realities* and provide the *symbolic vehicles*, both meanings and practices, for living in those alternative realities. By providing models of and models for the world that are oriented toward transcendence, religious traditions facilitate ecstatic experiences.

Whatever else they are, ecstatic experiences are *not* part of the "world of everyday life," as the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz (1962) has de-

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<sup>5</sup> Though Geertz presents us with the insight of a double sense of culture as consciousness and practices, he is by no means of a single mind on this point. As Asad (1983:240) notes, immediately after explaining models of and models for reality, Geertz "regresses to his earlier position" of culture as knowledge, attitudes, consciousness, mental states. That Geertz is confused, however, does not disallow our benefitting from his insight.

defined it. Central to the world of everyday life — for which we use the apt acronym “WOE” — is that primacy is given to the “here and now,” defined in terms of standard time and space; our attitude in everyday life is highly pragmatic and “wide-awake” (Wuthnow 1992:13-15). Fortunately, though it is the paramount reality for most people, WOE is but one of what Schutz calls “multiple realities.” In addition to WOE, there is the world of science, the world of dreams, the world of art, and the world of religion (Bellah 1970:242).

The world of religion differs from and is fundamentally opposed to WOE because in it action is directed toward the transcendence of the mundane world. According to Neitz (1987:189), “Participation in a religious reality places one outside of the dominant culture at least for the period during which one occupies the religious reality. In their experience at . . . worship believers are attending to a different reality from ‘the business world’ or from ‘normal science’. For the period of worship they are taken outside of their everyday reality, whatever that might be.” Bellah (1970:209) similarly observes, “The first thing about worship, if we define it as a human activity that attempts to relate to the sacred or holy, is that it tries to break through the straight or profane world of everyday pragmatic common sense.” Indeed, upon entering most religious sanctuaries, one will be greeted by a variety of extraordinary percepts: candles, lights, colors, perhaps incense, and often music. The actions associated with worship, prayer, and other ritual practices are also extraordinary.

These extraordinary percepts and practices and the dispositions they induce facilitate transcendence. So, for example, because music is in a sense atemporal — i.e., it does not unfold in standard time — it has the capacity to break that “fatal imminence” which is WOE. It is not surprising that music has been found to be a common trigger of ecstasy (Laski 1962). Neitz and Spickard (1990:22) have argued that religious rituals function to facilitate ecstatic experiences because they “manipulate sensory stimuli to focus their participants’ concentration: Zen tightly controls the body; Eastern Orthodoxy uses music, incense, special clothing, and so on to fill the senses and evoke a sacred realm” (see also Cheal 1992:367; Spickard 1991:197). For these same reasons, prayer is an important vehicle as well. According to Spickard (1991:200), “Where theology is meant to convince, ritual prayer is meant to be experienced.”

If we understand the dual nature of cultural systems — that they are models of and models for reality — we can see that the symbol systems of particular religions are *not simply expressive or descriptive* but are *evocative* of ecstatic experiences. As Proudfoot (1985:39-40) argues in his book *Religious Experience*, religious symbolism is “*formative* and shapes emotions and experiences. It can be *highly evocative* and prepare the conditions under which a person will attend to a particular moment and identify that moment as an experience of a certain kind” (emphasis added). Though it is not well-developed, this point is alluded to by Bellah (1970:252-53) when he argues that “religion [is] that symbol system that *serves to evoke* what Herbert Richardson calls the ‘felt-whole’, that is, the totality that includes subject and object and provides the context in which life and action finally have meaning” (emphasis added).

Thus, from the CL perspective, religion is not the outward expression of inner experiences; it is religion (conceived as a cultural system), rather, that facili-

tates or evokes certain inner experiences. Because religious traditions provide symbolic resources for the construction of alternative realities and promote actions directed at breaking through to those realities, we believe that those more involved in religious traditions should have ecstatic experiences more often. In what follows, this latter statement will be expressed in the form of a hypothesis and tested using data from the General Social Survey.

### EXPECTED FINDINGS

A reviewer of this article suggests, and we suspect that he is correct, that profound epistemological differences separate the experiential-expressive and cultural-linguistic views of religion.<sup>6</sup> We, however, are wary of dealing with differences at this level as it is not entirely clear that such consideration would shed much light on the question at hand. Since no amount of data will help to adjudicate fundamental epistemological differences, what we propose to investigate here is a difference on the mundane, empirical level. Regardless of the different epistemological assumptions of the two views, the empirical findings that follow suggest why the *CL* view is *analytically* more useful than the *EE* view. Of the two approaches to understanding the experiential dimension of religion explored above, only the *CL* can adequately account not only for the *existence* of religious experiences, but *variations* in the distribution of religious experiences according to various sociodemographic and behavioral variables as well.

While the *EE* view does give us reason to expect the persistence of ecstatic experiences in the modern world, it gives us no reason to expect any variation in the social distribution of such experiences. Indeed, because for the experiential-expressivist these experiences exist in "the prereflective depths of the self" (Lindbeck 1984), there is no reason to expect, for example, that participation in a religious organization is related to an increased likelihood of having an experience. It is a signal weakness of the *EE* view that it gives us no basis on which to expect anything. This is not to say, however, that it necessarily precludes a so-

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<sup>6</sup> Most simply, the *EE* view assumes that the "raw" experiences they take to be central are empirically similar (if not identical), and are shaped only *post hoc* by culturally available symbols. Katz (1978:24) has nicely summarized the most sophisticated version of this epistemological position as follows: "Though the language used by mystics to describe their experience is culturally bound, their experience is not." The *CL* view, by contrast, at a *minimum* suggests that whether experiences can be captured "raw" is a nonissue since the empirical materials that we have to study are always culturally-bound accounts and descriptions of experiences. A stronger position on this issue from the *CL* perspective suggests that there is no such thing as a "raw" experience. All experiences are shot through with interpretation. Katz (1983:4) has been the most articulate spokesman for this position, arguing that "there are no pure (i.e., unmediated) experiences. Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience gives any indication, or any grounds for believing, that they are unmediated. That is to say, all experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways. . . . [We] must recognize that a right understanding of mysticism is not just a question of studying the reports of the mystic after the experiential event but also of acknowledging that the experience itself, as well as the form in which it is reported, is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience." Katz and his colleagues (e.g., Gimello 1983; Owen 1983) provide a wealth of scholarship on mysticism in Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity to support this epistemological position.

cially or culturally-based, nonrandom distribution of religious experiences. We just don't know.

By contrast, based on the *CL* view, one could predict that the *more immersed* people are in their religious traditions, the more likely they will be to have ecstatic experiences. It is this simple hypothesis to which we have been building in this article. We turn now to the empirical portion of this project, where we specify a series of models that seek to test the usefulness of the *CL* theory in understanding the distribution of ecstatic experience in a sample of American adults.

## DATA AND METHODS

In 1972, Andrew Greeley and William McCready collected data at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) on "paranormal" experiences (Greeley 1974, 1975). In one question they asked, "How often have you felt as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?" (hereafter, ECSTASY). This question was designed to tap one variety of religious experience, the "ecstatic" experience (from the Greek *ekstasis*, to be placed outside, and the Latin *exstare*, to lift out). This same question was subsequently asked on the annual General Social Survey (GSS) of NORC in 1983, 1984, 1988, and 1989. It is the dependent variable in this study.

While the original response categories to ECSTASY were ordinal (see Table 2), we do not treat the dependent variable, ECSTASY, according to the assumptions of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis. Instead, we dichotomize the dependent variable: after eliminating those who selected the "cannot answer" category, we recode the remaining responses into the categories YES (had ecstatic experience "once or twice," "several times," or "often") or NO ("never" had ecstatic experience).

In addition to the ecstasy question, the GSS asks respondents about their religious affiliation, behaviors, and views, in addition to providing standard demographic background information. Using these questions as independent variables, we construct models predicting ecstatic experiences based on the *CL* view delineated above. We proceed by successively introducing three sets of regressors. These *explanans* tap three distinct but related categories of existence: background demographics (baseline model), religious affiliation, and religious behavior and views (see Table 2). The latter two categories we understand as indicators of an individual's involvement in a religious tradition. High scores on these variables are indicative of what Greer and Roof (1992) call "conventional religiosity."

TABLE 2

## Variables Included in the Study

(From the General Social Survey of the National Opinion Research Center; in all cases, "don't know" and "no answer" were recoded as missing values and excluded from the analysis)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Coding*</i>
ECSTASY	0.79	0.89	"How often have you . . . Felt as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself"? Response categories were 0 (never in my life); 1 (once or twice); 2 (several times); and 3 (often)	Dichotomous Variable: EVER (2-4)=2 NEVER=1
PRESTIGE	43.90	14.18	Occupational prestige according to 2 digit Hodge, Siegel, Rossi score	Continuous Variable: Range: 10-89
EDUCATION	12.48	5.28	Highest year of schooling completed	Continuous Variable: Range: 0-20 years
AGE	44.75	18.12	Respondent's age	Continuous Variable: Range: 18-89
RACE	1.11	0.46	Respondent's race	Dummy Variable: BLACK=2, WHITE=1
GENDER	1.58	0.49	Respondent's gender	Dummy Variable: FEMALE=2, MALE=1
REGION	Pacific: 1.13 South: 1.15	0.47  0.45	Region in which interview was conducted (proxy for region of residence)	Two Dummy Variables: Region 1: PACIFIC=2 (Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii); ELSE=1 Region 2: SOUTH=2 (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas); ELSE=1
MARITAL	1.56	0.57	Respondent's current marital status	Dummy Variable: MARRIED=1, ELSE=0

TABLE 2 (continued)

## Variables Included in the Study

(From the General Social Survey of the National Opinion Research Center; in all case, "don't know" and "no answer" were recoded as missing values and excluded from the analysis)

Variables	Mean	SD	Description	Coding*
SIZE OF PLACE	1.15	0.49	Population size of place of interview according to 1980 U.S. Census population figures	Dummy Variable: RURAL=2 (an incorporated area <2,500 or an unincorporated area of 1,000 to 2,499, or open country within larger civil division); ELSE = 1
RELIGION			"What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?" Protestants were asked follow-up question about denomination	Series of dummy variables, each with CATHOLIC as excluded category (=1): NONE=2; BAPTIST=2; METHODIST=2; LUTHERAN=2; PRESBYTERIAN=2; EPISCOPALIAN=2; OTHER PROTESTANT=2**
ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES	4.00	2.72	"How often do you attend religious services?" Response categories ranged from 1 (never, less than once a year) to 8 (several times a week)	Continuous Variable: Range:1-8
PRAY	2.84	1.68	"How often to you pray?" Response categories ranged from: 1 (several times a day) to 6 (never)	Continuous Variable: Range:1-6
RELIGIOUS VIEWS	Liberal: 1.24 Fund: 1.37	0.41  0.38	"In your religious views, would you consider yourself . . . fundamentalist, moderate, liberal?"	Two Dummy Variables: LIBERAL=2 FUNDAMENTALIST=2 MODERATE=1

\* Glim requires that dummy variables be recoded "2" or "1." The means for dichotomized variables reflect this necessity.

\*\* "Jewish" was excluded because of the small number of cases; "Some other religion" was excluded because of the small number of cases and its questionable sociological relevance as an explanatory category.

The total number of individuals responding to ECSTASY is 5,420. In order to preserve as many of these cases as possible, several indicator variables, which account for any missing data, have been included in each of the models we produce.<sup>7</sup>

As we indicated above, OLS regression was deemed inappropriate for this analysis given the nature of our *explanandum*. Instead, we perform a logistic (or logit) regression analysis on our dichotomized dependent variable. The logit model converts the dichotomy of the dependent variable (i.e., occurrence of an ecstatic experience: Yes = 1, No = 0) into a *probability* that a particular person will have an ecstatic experience (see Agresti 1990). The probability ( $p_i$ ) is determined using the following equation:

$$p_i = \exp(a + bX_1 + \dots + bX_n) / [1 + \exp(a + bX_1 + \dots + bX_n)]$$

The equation is derived from the actual computed logistic equation:

$$\log_n(p/1-p) = a + bX_1 + \dots + bX_n$$

In these analyses, we use a statistical package, Glim (Generalised Linear Interactive Modelling), which fits multivariate models to data with limited dependent variables (Healy 1988).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

With "ever had an ecstatic experience" (ECSTASY) as our dependent variable, we fit a model using only background demographic characteristics as our explanatory variables (Table 3, Model 1).<sup>8</sup>

We find that prestige, race, and region are statistically significant in this baseline model, with race and region having positive effects and prestige having a negative effect. Thus, blacks, individuals living in the South and West, and those individuals with occupations scoring low on the prestige scale have a higher probability of having had an ecstatic experience, not controlling for their religious affiliation, behavior, or views.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A negligible number of missing cases is not usually a problem in statistical analyses when the sample size is very large. However, at times the number of missing cases for a variable of interest is large enough to cause concern. *Indicator variables* are a way of addressing this concern. These variables indicate whether variable of interest has missing cases. In this way, the sample size is rescued from unnecessary elimination of cases that may be missing data only for a single, or a few, independent variable(s). Indicator variables are dichotomous variables coded 1 when the case is missing data for a particular independent variable, 0 when the case is not missing. They are included in our data analyses, but as they provide no substantive information we do not report them here. Full tables are available from the authors.

<sup>8</sup> We hasten to add that the primary relationships of concern here remain statistically significant when the dependent variable is "have had ecstatic experiences *often*" rather than "ever." These results are available from the authors upon request.

<sup>9</sup> For reasons examined at length in the Appendix below, we deliberately choose to say that certain individuals "have a higher probability of *having* had an ecstatic experience" rather than saying more moderately, that certain individuals "have a higher probability of *reporting* having had experiences similar to that described in the dependent variable."

TABLE 3

Models of Likelihood of Ever Having Had an Ecstatic Experience  
 (Logit regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses;  
 \*p < .05; N = 5,420 respondents to General Social Survey)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
<i>Demographics</i>			
Prestige	-.0157* (.0012)	.0026 (.0025)	.0019 (.0025)
Education	-.0005 (.0009)	.0141 (.0117)	.0019 (.0121)
Age	-.0013 (.0008)	.0043* (.0017)	-.0029 (.0018)
Race (Black=2)	.4151* (.0906)	.2090* (.0954)	-.0093 (.0989)
Gender (Female=2)	.1028 (.0578)	.0520 (.0584)	-.2120* (.0624)
Region 2 (South=2)	.2988* (.0784)	.1539 (.0805)	.0906 (.0830)
Region 1 (Pacific=2)	.2599* (.0867)	.2690* (.0876)	.3315* (.0913)
Marital (Married=2)	-.0351 (.0582)	-.0721 (.0583)	-.1398* (.0606)
Size of Place (Rural=2)	-.0134 (.0812)	-.0188 (.0814)	-.0450 (.0839)
<i>Religion</i>			
None		-.3271* (.1270)	.8121* (.1941)
Baptist		.6021* (.0902)	.8168* (.1426)
Methodist		.3108* (.1056)	.7901* (.1410)

TABLE 3 (continued)

Models of Likelihood of Ever Having Had an Ecstatic Experience  
 (Logit regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses;  
 \*p < .05; N = 5,420 respondents to General Social Survey)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Lutheran		.1446 (.1227)	.2948* (.1286)
Presbyterian		.2229 (.1445)	.7266* (.1822)
Episcopalian		.3303 (.1968)	1.013* (.2435)
Other Protestant		.6314* (.0861)	.7252* (.1141)
<i>Religious Behavior</i>			
Attend Religious Services			.0467* (.0132)
Pray			.3370* (.0251)
<i>Religious Views</i>			
Liberal			-.4743* (.1366)
Fundamentalist			-.1592 (.1132)
Constant	.4744* (.1080)	-1.213* (.1806)	-2.402* (.2010)

Building upon the baseline in Model 1, Model 2 controls for religious background, including dummy variables for each major Protestant denomination, "Other Protestants," and no religious preference, allowing Catholics to be the reference group. In this model, race and age, while still significant, have changed a great deal, with race having a considerably smaller coefficient and age having a higher coefficient, which changed from positive to negative. This indicates that much of the effect of race is mediated by religious preference, and that the true effect of age was suppressed by the unobserved variable, religious preference, in the first model. In addition, the effect of living in the South is lessened once religious preference is taken into consideration, which makes intuitive sense.

As we would expect based on the CL view, having no religious preference has a large negative effect on the likelihood of having had an ecstatic experi-

ence. All of the Protestant categories, by contrast, have positive relationships with the likelihood of ecstasy, and the more evangelical Protestant denominations — Baptist, Methodist, and Other — all have statistically significant relationships to ECSTASY, the Baptist and Other coefficients being quite large.

It is important to note that these relationships are in comparison to the Catholic reference group; therefore, having no religious preference decreases an individual's odds of having had an ecstatic experience and being Protestant increases an individual's odds *as compared to* being Catholic, *ceteris paribus*. For example, several single, white males with equal education and occupational prestige, all the same age, and all living in the nonrural West Coast, but who vary in their religious affiliation, have the following probabilities of having had at least one ecstatic experience (probabilities are computed using the equation provided above):

<i>Religious Affiliation</i>	<i>Probability (pi)</i>
None	.35
Catholic	.42
Lutheran	.46
Methodist	.50
Episcopalian	.51
Presbyterian	.52
Baptist	.57
Other Protestant	.58

Thus, relative to having no religious background, being Catholic or Protestant is an advantage, if ecstasy is the goal.

To explore the effect of involvement in a religious tradition on ecstatic experiences further, variables that measure religious behavior and views were added to the analysis. Model 3 reports the findings. Model 3 includes the additional religion variables "attend religious services" and "pray" as continuous variables, as well as liberal and fundamentalist versus moderate religious views (see Table 2 for coding).

As we predicted based on the CL view, what Greer and Roof (1992) characterize as "conventional" religious practices (attending religious services and praying) make a positive contribution to the likelihood having had an ecstatic experience. Similarly having "liberal" religious views — which we interpret as meaning not being as closely tied to the CL system of a religious tradition — has a significant negative effect on the dependent variable.

Compared to Model 2, belonging to any Protestant denomination (*vis-à-vis* Catholic) has larger significant positive effects in this model. This indicates that part of the positive effect of being Protestant was suppressed by the unincluded religious participation variables, and suggests further lines of research (which we mention below).

The effect of having no religious preference has changed dramatically from Model 2 to Model 3. It has gone from significant and *negative* to significant and *positive* in its effect on the likelihood of ever having had a religious experience.

This suggests that it is not religious preference that is key to understanding religious experience as much as particular aspects of one's religious behavior and beliefs. Religious "nones" score low on the measures of conventional religiosity and high on the "liberal religious views" variables, which scores suppressed the true effect of being a religious "none" in Model 2.

Again, this no-religious-preference coefficient must be read as *compared to* being Catholic. A different excluded group in this series of dummy variables would have given different estimates. Nonetheless, it is important to note that simply claiming to belong to a religious tradition is not necessarily enough; one must be deeply involved in the practices of that tradition in order to maximize the likelihood of achieving ecstasy. To illustrate this, imagine two hypothetical single, white, male Presbyterians, both 36 years old with 20 years of schooling and an occupational prestige rating of 70, living in the nonrural West Coast. We can compare the difference in the probability of these two men having had an ecstatic experience if they vary only in their religious practices and views (where the possible range is  $0 < p_i < 1$ ):

Non-praying, nonattender, liberal religious views:	$p_i = .175$
Frequent-praying, frequent-attender, nonliberal views:	$p_i = .789$

Granted, the above comparison is an extreme case; however, the size of the difference in the probability of ecstasy based solely on religious views and practices is nonetheless startling.

Just as the *existence* of ecstasy in the modern world would not surprise the experiential-expressivist, neither would the above systematic variation in the social distribution of ecstasy surprise the cultural-linguistic theorist. We interpret these findings to be strong evidence for the efficacy of the CL perspective in making predictions about and explaining religious experience in modern society.

The one finding that would seem to argue against a CL understanding of religious experience is the consistent, significant, negative effect of being Catholic (compared to Protestants and nones). While it should be kept in mind that this disadvantage can be offset by other aspects of conventional religious behavior and views, the finding nonetheless calls for a modification in our deployment of the CL view of religion.

We now recognize what should have been obvious from the beginning: that involvement in a religious tradition, *per se*, is not *necessarily* conducive to ecstatic experiences. This involvement can have a variety of effects from completely negative to totally positive, depending on the nature of the CL system that is institutionalized in a given tradition and the way that symbol system is enacted in the organizational contexts that embody it. For example, if the liturgy to which an individual is exposed in an organization is fundamentally cognitive — focusing on conceptual knowledge of reified symbols, with very little active symbolization of transcendence and direct experience — then we would not expect many religious experiences, and vice-versa. Perhaps this modification helps to account for the "Catholic effect," and for the variation among different Protestant denominations as well.

Unfortunately, our data do not have sufficient information to answer this and many other qualitative questions. Indeed, the question of the *specific* impact of *particular* Catholic churches on an individual's religious experiences can never be studied using quantitative data. Nonetheless, the *pattern* of associations revealed in this analysis are suggestive of further lines of research utilizing the CL framework.

## CONCLUSION

It was a fundamental tenet of the empirical portion of this article, based on expectations from the CL theory, that the more immersed people are in their religion, the more likely they would be to have ecstatic experiences. We tested the usefulness of this theory as an interpretive framework using national representative survey data and found what seems to be strong support for it. Those persons most involved in their religious traditions — broadly conceived, but defined here as the most frequent attenders and prayers — have much higher probabilities of ever having had ecstatic experiences.

A study that takes as its starting point the premise that "every way of seeing is a way of not seeing" cannot help but apply that insight reflexively. What we have undertaken to do here is to offer a way of interpreting a systematic pattern of covariation in the responses to several questions in the General Social Survey. We harbor no illusions about the relationship between responses to the ECSTASY question and actual ecstatic experiences: the GSS is certainly not a mirror of nature (Rorty 1979; but see Appendix).

The nuanced reality underlying the systematic relationships between answers we saw is undoubtedly far more complex than its reification in statistics can capture. In fact, we have never been totally comfortable with the idea of studying religious experience using only survey data. This is a major reason we have spent so much time developing a theoretical apparatus with which to interpret the patterns we expected to see in the data. However, though we are critical of the *exclusive* reliance on traditional survey interviews to study religious experience (cf. Yamane 1992), we agree that a quantitative analysis is useful to tell us "a little bit about a lot of people."

We would like, in closing, to step back from the theoretical and methodological trees and look at the forest of social life. In doing so, we would like to offer more explicitly normative reflections on the consequences of adopting a CL view of religion. The CL view forces us to take seriously traditions, institutions, and communities, instead of focusing on the solitary experiences of lone individuals. Drawing us back to an essential insight of Durkheim, CL theorist Robert Bellah (1970:201) reminds us that "it is only in and through society that [individuals] can be fully human." Bellah has reiterated this ideal more fully in recent years, especially in *Habits of the Heart*, where he and his four colleagues argue that the "great contribution that the church idea can make today is its emphasis on the fact that individuality and society are not opposites but require each other" (Bellah *et al.* 1985:246-47). Again, individuals can realize themselves *qua* individuals only in and through *community*. To the extent that religious experience is seen positively, the analyses presented above seem to us to

make a strong case not only for the inevitability but also for the potentiality of community in fostering individual self-realization.

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## APPENDIX

### "ECSTASY": A Tale of Two Interpretations

Our constructionist view that "all reality is interpreted reality" leaves us particularly open to the criticism that our particular construction, our interpretation, is flawed. Reviewers of this article have been uncomfortable with our interpretation of the ECSTASY variable which we use as the *explanandum* in this analysis. While we believe whole-heartedly in our interpretation, we recognize that it is only one story that can be told about the data we consider. Reviewers of our manuscript offer an alternative story. What we have, then, is a tale of two interpretations. Ultimately, it is up to readers of this article to decide which they find more convincing.

Reviewers of this essay have challenged the dependent variable in this analysis (ECSTASY), and by extension, our interpretation of the relationships shown in Table 3. ECSTASY, they contend, "does not tap 'raw' experiences." It is an indicator of people's interpretations of their experiences. As one reviewer put it, "What I call 'spiritual', others might call 'psychotic'." Thus, our conclusion that certain people *have* ecstatic experiences more frequently is unwarranted. At most, reviewers have suggested, we can say only that certain people are more likely to *report* having experiences similar to that described in the GSS question. Some might have similar experiences but not describe them in the terms given in the survey question, while others might not have similar experiences but feel normatively constrained to indicate that they did. By this argument, false negatives and false positives abound.

This criticism suggests that the statistically significant relationships reported in Table 3 are the produce of *response bias* leading to systematically correlated errors between the dependent variables and our measures of religion and religiosity. In effect, we are not modeling "true" relationships, but merely artifacts of the initial measurement. This is a serious charge that deserves an extended comment.

We believe — and we say "believe" here because this point is tied to epistemological and ontological questions that simply cannot be adjudicated by this or any other data — that people are not simply more willing to label experiences a certain way; rather, they actually *have* experiences of the sort described in the GSS question more frequently. There are empirical, methodological, and theoretical reasons for our holding this belief, which reasons we will consider in turn.

First, we fully agree that ECSTASY does not tap "raw" experiences. We do not believe that "raw" experiences can be studied social scientifically. At a minimum, for an experience to have any social significance, it must be *interpreted* (or else it remains completely private). More strongly, Katz (1978, 1983) suggests that there is no such thing as an unmediated ("raw") experience; all experience is shot through with interpretation (see note 6 above). According to the CL view, people do not simply interpret their fundamentally similar experiences differently, they have different experiences to interpret. The cultural system in which we participate affects the way we experience the world (Wuthnow 1992:13). As Neitz and Spickard (1990:25) put it, "experiences are transformed — before and after the fact." As Neitz (1987:99) has said of the charismatic Catholics she studied, "not only do they interpret the world in a different way than do non-charismatics, but *they experience the world differently as well*" (emphasis added).

Furthermore, we in no way intend to imply that ECSTASY corresponds to a single type of experience, the same experience for all persons with the same significance in their lives. We do believe that because the question as posed in the GSS is significantly generic, it is able to encompass a variety of experiences regardless of the religious tradition in which a respondent is involved. We therefore disagree with a reviewer who suggested that ECSTASY is biased because of its "extremely religious language." That ECSTASY is not simply the reflection of religious language or labels given out more frequently to certain persons in particular religious traditions is reflected in the higher likelihood of nones to report ecstatic experiences than Catholics, *ceteris paribus* (Table 3, Model 3).

Additionally, Fox (1992:427) has recently reported that other blatantly a-religious measures of "paranormal experiences" such as ESP, clairvoyance, and contact with the dead "share [with ECSTASY] a similar factor structure that is invariant across the 1984, 1988, and 1989 General Social Survey data." Unless there is some reason to believe that religious people are more likely to label certain experiences as ESP, clairvoyance, and contact with the dead, the charge of bias against ECSTASY seems to be reduced, if not nullified.

Second, while we allow that some of the responses to the question are "erroneous," we have no reason to believe that our dependent variable measure is totally invalid. While we do not doubt that there are certainly *some* false positives and *some* false negatives in the GSS totals we analyze, we expect that a large majority of the people fall into cells one and four of Table 4. We further believe that the false positives and false negatives are not systematically related to the explanatory variables, and thus they may substantially cancel each other out. The construct validity of measures such as ECSTASY are largely an article of faith for most survey researchers, notwithstanding techniques like factor analysis. Thus, while we harbor no illusions about the referentiality of the ECSTASY question (it is not a "mirror of nature"), we also do not believe that it refers to anything and everything (which is to say that it refers to nothing).

TABLE 4

Breakdown of Responses to Dependent Variable ECSTASY  
 (From the General Social Survey of the  
 National Opinion Research Center, 1983, 1984, 1988, 1989)\*

		Actually Had Experience		GSS Total
		Yes	No	
Report Ever Having	Yes	1. Good Measure	2. False Positive	N = 2,183
Had Experience	No	3. False Negative	4. Good Measure	N = 3,237
	Total	Unknown	Unknown	N = 5,420

\*We are indebted to Samuel R. Lucas for suggesting this table; however, he is in no way responsible for our use or misuse of it in this article.

Finally, because of the tenuousness of the entire enterprise of investigating "religious experience" through a survey, we spend a great deal of time developing a theoretical apparatus through which to grasp what might be going on in the world to produce the relationships our regression analyses produce. As most statisticians know, the operationalization of variables and the casual relationships between them can only be established *theoretically* (Hanushek and Jackson 1977). Based on the cultural-linguistic theory that we discuss at some length in the body of the article, we interpret the data to mean that certain people *actually have* ecstatic experiences more frequently than others.

As we said, this is our interpretation. An alternative interpretation is that response bias accounts for the observed relationships. We leave it up to the reader to decide which interpretation is more compelling.