

Classifying Altered States of Consciousness

[Comment on "Bringing Order to Disarray: A Consensus Taxonomy of Non-Ordinary (Altered) States of Consciousness" by E. [Cardeña et al.](#)]

John F. Kihlstrom

University of California, Berkeley

Abstract

Cardeña et al. (2025) have offered an intuitive taxonomy of various altered states of consciousness (ASCs). Although natural science prefers taxonomies based on proper sets, the prototype, exemplar, or theory views of categorization may be more appropriate for mental constructs like states of consciousness. Classification of altered states of consciousness begs the question of what features characterize ordinary, unaltered consciousness. An alternative basis for classification takes account of features besides subjective experience – namely, the procedure by which the altered state is induced, the behavioral consequences of subjective experience, the altered state consciousness, and psychophysiological signatures of mental states. Any taxonomic scheme depends crucially on the features being considered, as is illustrated by the case of hypnosis.