

ADAPTIVE REGRESSION AND INTENSE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

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Despite a flurry of interest in the study of religious phenomena around the turn of the century (9, 26, 48, 49), the study of religious conversion experiences is still in its infancy. Even efforts to arrive at an adequate definition of the essential characteristics of a conversion experience have not proceeded beyond earlier attempts. Most often, conversion experiences have been classified according to two types: one "mild and gradual," progressive in development, the result of conscious volitional efforts and a "reasoned search"; the other more "dramatic and sudden," in which there occurs an abrupt eruption of non-conscious forces which the person feels to be located outside of himself. Some writers, however, in an attempt to circumvent any distinction among types of conversions, have defined conversion simply as a change in one's way of life (23). But since conversion experiences have been said to have different characteristics, depending on whether they are mild and gradual or sudden and dramatic, it may make most sense at this point to treat the two types separately. Whereas there is general agreement that mild and gradual conversion experiences tend to be progressive and maturing, there has been considerable controversy regarding the nature of the more sudden and dramatic experiences and centering around their progressive or regressive characteristics. This paper, therefore, will be concerned with the more intense conversion

experiences, defined here as sudden and dramatic incidents which are subjectively characterized as spiritual awakenings; have a special intensity often involving strong emotional arousal, are at times accompanied by hallucinatory-like phenomena, and lead to changes in subsequent behavior.

Several lines of recent theoretical investigation suggest that a fuller understanding of such conversion experiences may aid in clarifying some salient issues confronting the psychology of human behavior. On the one hand, certain similarities have been noted (18, 45) among the diverse processes of religious healing, religious revivalism (the aim of which is to produce conversions), thought reform and psychotherapy—processes which aim to promote changes in one's "highly structured, complex, interacting sets of values, expectations and images of oneself and others..." (18, p. 21). These seemingly disparate processes are similar in that they involve emotional crises, upheaval and initial disorganization which lead ultimately to personality reorganization. The significance of "crises" in facilitating personality development has also been given special consideration in Erikson's (14) work and in Dabrowski's (11) recent theory of "positive disintegration," which states that the most accelerated personality growth takes place during states of apparent disintegration and acute crisis.

Concurrently, there has been an increased concern within psychoanalytic theory with the adaptive, integrative and maturing facets of behavior (22, 40) and with the importance of hitherto neglected patterns of religious, political and ethnic orientation (13). This development has led

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to a revision of an earlier treatment of religious experiences solely along libidinal and pathological lines that neglected the progressive, adaptive aspects of the experiences. One tendency reflecting the earlier approach has been to emphasize the essentially pathological, destructive and disintegrating features of sudden and dramatic conversion experiences, their close resemblance to psychosis, and their likelihood of occurrence in authoritarian, totalistic religious frameworks (43, 44). Increasingly, however, an alternate view has emphasized that conversion (as one type of mystical or "peak" [32] experience) is generally a "phenomenon functioning to reintegrate the ego" (8, p. 216) that can result in the "loss of a certain kind of anxiety generated self-consciousness . . . and thereby serve a creative rather than regressive movement" (17, p. 33). As in creativity (29, 46), empathy (47) and hypnotic states (21), the religious conversion experience may tap more primitive or unconscious modes of thought, affect and action in order to achieve a new and more advanced level of personality integration and organization (6, 35, 38).

A major consequence of the recent psychoanalytic interest in adaptive, maturing facets of behavior and of the shift away from a sole emphasis on disturbance of function has been an increased clarity in the differentiation between pathological regressive states (like most psychotic regression) and states of regression which serve personality integration and adaptation. One of the hallmarks of the difference between creative activity, for example, and pathological regression is the degree to which the ego is overwhelmed and inundated by primitive, nonlogical ideas or the degree to which the ego more flexibly allows itself access to such ideation. In psychosis, of course, the experience is one of inundation. Although mystical experiences and states of religious fervor and exaltation may exist in psychosis, they are more likely to give way rapidly to terror (20). In

creativity, however, access to primitive, nonlogical content and modes of thought serves the purpose of productive, enriching activity. Furthermore, some writers agree that the duration, reversibility and effects of a seemingly regressive experience are the dominant aspects by which one can differentiate pathological regression (*i.e.*, psychotic states) from the more beneficial regressive experiences like creativity (commonly labeled regression in the service of the ego [3, 19, 21, 46]). Adaptive regressive experiences are more circumscribed in time; they have a definite beginning and end and tend to be transitory. They also are reversible—the usual organization of the psyche is reinstated suddenly and totally, not slowly and gradually, and sober reality and everyday life activities are returned to. They increase self-esteem and the sense of being a worthwhile and active individual, and they sometimes have direct constructive influences on the lives of others.

When we turn from anecdotal reports and theoretical statements to empirical studies in order to assess the relative destructive or progressive nature of intense religious conversion experiences, we are confronted with a paucity of such studies. One study found that 1st year divinity students who had one rather dramatic religious experience which markedly affected the course of their lives (28) had lower intelligence scores (on the ACE) and scored higher on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) hysteria scale than did a control group. However, their hysteria scores were within the normal range and no differences were found in authoritarianism, repression, humanitarianism or religious conservatism. In a study of members of the Pentecostal Holiness religion, for whom conversion is a regular experience, Wood found some evidence that Pentecostalism can help people reach a state of satisfactory interpersonal relatedness (53). Although these two studies seem to offer some

tentative support for viewing conversion phenomena as a means of promoting personality integration, both are limited in that the authors do not fully use their test findings, especially by not exploring qualitative aspects of their subjects' thought processes to determine more closely the type and degree of any regressive modes of thought.

The purpose of this study is, by its focus on the thought processes of people who have had conversion experiences, to explore the degree to which intense conversion experiences are either destructive and disintegrating or constructive and integrating. If conversion experiences tend to be destructive and pathological, we might expect people who have had intense conversions to show a less adaptive use of primitive, nonlogical ideation and be more inundated by it than would people with weak or no conversion experience. On the other hand, if conversion experiences serve as integrative, adaptive experiences, people who have such experiences should demonstrate a significant adaptive use of nonlogical ideation.²

Recent work with the Rorschach test reflects the conceptual differentiation made by psychoanalytic ego psychologists between pathological regression and adaptive regressive experience. A system recently derived for scoring the Rorschach in terms of the capacity for adaptive regressive experiences (24, 25) can help clarify the extent

to which people vary in their capacity to employ more primitive or unconscious modes of thinking in the service of the ego and adaptation. This scoring system could tell us something about the relative intactness of the ego functioning of people who have religious conversion experiences, particularly the degree of their adaptive and maladaptive thought processes.

METHOD

SUBJECTS

The subjects were 20 male students working toward a Bachelor of Divinity degree in a northern university who were selected on the basis of an autobiographical statement made when applying to divinity school and also in terms of whether they had indicated "unusual or mystical" experiences on a routinely administered paper and pencil questionnaire of their religious motivations. Ten were selected who had reported sudden identifiable religious experiences. Ten control subjects were selected who were matched in age, religious denomination, geographical background and marital status, but who did not report religious conversion or religious mystical experiences; therefore, their religious development was probably more gradual and less eventful. The selection criteria did not differentiate between subjects whom the conversion experience had led to the decision to enter the ministry and those for whom it was an important experience which facilitated religious growth but had not directly resulted in a decision for the ministry. Subjects were selected by two assistants so that the experimenter would not know whether the student was a "conversion" or "nonconversion" subject until after testing. When the subjects were contacted by phone and asked to participate in a study of the psychological characteristics of divinity students, no mention was made of an interest in conversion. All but two subjects

²The assumption underlying this focus on the characteristics of thought processes is, of course, basic to all clinical psychological testing, namely that patterns of cognition are an important index of an individual's more general thought processes, affective experience and behavior. Moreover, there has been increasing interest in basic thought processes in conceptualizing psychopathology rather than in overt symptomatology alone. Witness the significant recent research on schizophrenia which concentrates on patterns of verbal communication among families which have a schizophrenic child and demonstrates similar, illogical modes of thinking and communicating in family members who show no overt schizophrenic symptomatology (31, 51, 52).

(1 conversion; 1 nonconversion) volunteered to participate, and these were replaced. All were seen for a total of 7 hours in three separate sessions. The first two sessions were taken up with a battery of psychological tests—the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, the Thematic Apperception Test and the Rorschach—and the final session consisted entirely of a loosely structured interview. Only the Rorschach and adaptive regression findings are presented here.

RORSCHACH TEST

Rorschachs were administered and scored according to the procedure described by Rapaport *et al.* (41). In addition, scoring also followed Holt's criteria (24, 25) for assessing Rorschach responses in terms of how much, if any, primitive drive content or nonlogical thinking they involve (*i.e.*, their primary process aspects) and what degree of adaptive control the subject has over such thinking.

Drive content: Responses are scored according to whether they contain content with libidinal or aggressive characteristics. More specifically, responses are classified in terms of whether the drive content is oral, anal, sexual, exhibitionistic and voyeuristic, homosexual or aggressive.

Formal aspects: The formal characteristics of responses include the "perceptual organization of the response," "the thought process that underlies responding" and "the language in which the response is verbalized" (24, p. 5). In large part, the scoring for formal aspects includes indications on the Rorschach of syncretic thought mechanisms, such as condensations, displacement, substitution and symbolization, as well as on the relative absence of "conjunctions and causal, temporal and other relationships" (39, p. 229).

Defense demand ($\Sigma DD/R$): This is what Holt refers to as the "shock value" of the response. This score essentially indicates the strength, directness, primitiveness and

deviance from conventional logical considerations both of the drive content and of the formal aspects. Defense demand is scored on a five-point scale (1 to 5), ranging from more "socialized" communications (*e.g.*, food, an angry look, a man with wings—Icarus) to more blatant expressions of drive content (*e.g.*, mutilative and cannibalistic imagery) and of formal features (*e.g.*, the unrealistic combination of a crab with bat's wings; the contaminatory response of a lion egg because it is the shape of an egg and is the color of a lion). Several scores for defense demand are derived: one is based on the combined content and formal features (defense demand total); one is based solely on the content features (defense demand content); and the third is based on the formal features (defense demand formal). An additional way of scoring defense demand, other than by the five-point scale, is to consider only extreme and mild instances of primitive, nonlogical thinking. Level 1 makes up the more extreme examples and level 2 the milder, more socialized ones.

Defense effectiveness ($\Sigma DE/\text{No. of primitive responses}$): The success of control over drive-infused, nonlogical ideation. Adequate control over the expression of drive and formal aspects consists of supplying a relatively good match between the response and the properties of the card (good form level), of supplying an appropriate intellectual, esthetic or cultural context for the images, and also of demonstrating affective pleasure in the responses. This latter characteristic—the attitude of the subject toward his responses—is crucial. A way out idea accompanied by a playful relaxation of ego controls will be sharply distinct from a similar idea blandly expressed or accompanied by signs of discomfort and disturbance, such as fear, terror or forced gaiety.

Adaptive regression ($\Sigma DD \times DE/R$): A measure of the degree of meaningful integration both of drive content and of non-

logical thinking; it is obtained by multiplying the defense demand of each response containing drive content and/or nonrealistic thinking by its defense effectiveness, summing the products, and dividing them by the total number of Rorschach responses. This procedure places subjects with great amounts of primitive, unrealistic thinking coupled with poor control at the maladaptive end of a continuum and subjects with great amounts of primitive, unrealistic thinking accompanied by good control at the adaptive end.

RESULTS

Although at the outset this study was intended to analyze the results in terms of the two groups of 10 subjects each (conversion and nonconversion), it was discovered during the interviews conducted after the testing that the two groups were not as distinct as was thought. Four subjects selected as controls who did not report conversion experiences in their autobiographical statements in their application to divinity school or the presence of religious mystical experience in an inventory of religious motivations, turned out to have had some sort of very mild conversion experience, the religious significance of which they were now unsure or else rejected as of minor importance. Therefore, an alternate procedure was devised for analyzing the findings. All 20 subjects were divided into three separate groups varying in intensity of conversion experiences (none, $N = 6$; weak, $N = 7$; or strong, $N = 7$) and these groups were compared on the relevant dimensions. Both the author and another psychologist independently placed the subjects into the groups; the two raters agreed on the placement of 19 of the 20 subjects (95 per cent) according to the intensity of the emotional arousal and degree of hallucinatory-like phenomena involved in the conversion experience. Since the variation in intensity of experience merely extended the initial

classification of two groups with and without conversion experiences, the original matching procedure still ensured little relationship of intensity of experience with marital status, religious denomination or geographical location.

Some details about the entire sample show that their mean IQ is 124, and their mean age 23; 13 are Methodists, 2 are Presbyterian, 1 is Congregational, 1 is Southern Baptist, 1 is of the United Church of Christ, and 2 others are from small revivalistic denominations. Nine are from the south, 6 from the Midwest, 4 from the Northeast and 1 from the Southwest.

All Rorschachs were scored by the experimenter and then independently by another psychologist. Reliability for defense demand scores ($\Sigma DD/R$) was .99; for defense effectiveness scores ($\Sigma DE/\text{No. of primitive responses}$) .81; and for the combined adaptive regression score ($\Sigma DD \times DE/R$) .67. In instances in which a disagreement in scoring existed, a composite score based on the average of the two raters' scores was used.

Table 1 presents mean scores for each group on three measures of primitive, non-logical thinking: defense demand ($\Sigma DD/R$), defense effectiveness ($\Sigma DE/\text{No. of primitive responses}$) and adaptive regression ($\Sigma DD \times DE/R$). Table 1 also presents the means for drive content and formal scores separately. Statistical analysis consisted of analyses of variance among the three groups. Moreover, in order to assess the source of variation among the groups, separate tests of the trend of the data were carried out to determine whether results with the F tests reflected a difference among the groups based on a step-wise linear increase in intensity of conversion or whether some other type of relationship existed.

Table 1 shows significant F test results and significant linear trends for defense demand total and adaptive regression total scores. Therefore, an increase in intensity

TABLE 1
*Mean Rorschach Scores of Primitive Ideation and Its Integration
 for Religious Conversion Groups*

	Total			Content			Formal		
	Defense Demand $\Sigma DD/R$	Defense Effectiveness $\Sigma DE/\text{No. of Primitive Responses}$	Adaptive Regression $\Sigma DD \times DE/R$	$\Sigma DD/R$	$\Sigma DE/\text{No. of Primitive Responses}$	$\Sigma DD \times DE/R$	$\Sigma DD/R$	$\Sigma DE/\text{No. of Primitive Responses}$	$\Sigma DD \times DE/R$
None $N = 6$	1.08	.58	.54	.83	.58	.41	.38	.51	.18
Weak $N = 7$	1.13	.60	.63	.85	.58	.46	.51	.48	.26
Strong, $N = 7$	1.56	.65	.95	1.09	.66	.69	.95	.60	.53
F	5.11*	0.33	3.66*	2.00	0.33	3.00	8.43†	0.50	4.02*
Linear trend.....	8.22*	0.33	6.40*	3.14	0.67	5.20*	14.71†	0.50	6.96*
Residual trend.....	2.11	0.33	0.93	0.86	0.00	1.00	2.28	0.50	1.07

* $p < .05$.
 † $p < .01$.

of conversion experience from none to weak to strong is related to corresponding increases both in the extent of primitive nonlogical thinking and in the degree of successful integration of this more primitive thinking. Thus, subjects with increasingly intense conversion experiences also show a correspondingly increasing capacity for adaptively controlled regressive thinking. Table 1 also shows that defense effectiveness total scores by themselves do not discriminate the groups. Inasmuch as the accuracy of form of Rorschach responses is one important facet of what constitutes effective control over primitive content and modes of thought, a supplemental assessment was also made of the degree to which the form level of the response by itself (determined by the Mayman [34] scoring system) is a sufficient indication of control. Scores similar to the defense effectiveness and adaptive regression scores were computed, using only form level as the index of control. Although Cohen (10) and Feirstein (15) found that form level by itself can be significantly discriminative as an indication of control over primitive, nonlogical thinking, this study found no significant relationships (F tests or trend analyses) between intensity of the conversion experience and either defense effectiveness or

TABLE 2
*Mean Rorschach Scores of Extreme (Level 1)
 and Mild (Level 2) Primitive Ideation for
 Religious Conversion Groups*

	Level 1		Level 2	
	Drive Content/ R	Formal/ R	Drive Content/ R	Formal/ R
None.....	.04	.07	.55	.12
Weak.....	.03	.08	.58	.19
Strong.....	.08	.18	.73	.27
F	1.00	3.12	1.25	3.50
Linear trend.....	1.00	5.06*	2.02	6.00*
Residual trend....	1.00	1.17	.048	1.00

* $p < .05$.

adaptive regression when determined by form level alone.

When we consider differences in defense demand for content and formal variables separately (Table 1), we see that it is primarily the defense demand of the formal variables which contributes to the overall difference between the groups, although significant linear trends appear in adaptive regression for content as well as for formal variables. Furthermore, when the content and formal variables are broken down in terms of their amount of level 1 (direct and blatant manifestations) and level 2 (more socialized manifestations) (Table 2), it appears that both level 1 and level 2 formal responses show sig-

nificant linear trends. This means that the overall difference among the groups in formal defense demand is not solely due to an abundance of more socialized primary process ideation which often has a defensive component built into it (level 2), but also that the increase in defense demand reflects an increase in both more and less primitive ideation.

DISCUSSION

The major findings presented here indicate that stronger, more intense conversion experiences of the sudden and dramatic type are associated with greater amounts of primitive, nonlogical thought manifestations and, particularly significant, that they are also associated with better integration of such ideation. Thus, persons with more intense experiences appear to demonstrate a more pronounced capacity for regressive experiences of an adaptive nature. If we also consider that several studies have demonstrated that the capacity for adaptive regression is positively related to greater tolerance for ambiguity (10, 15) and to better quality of imaginative productiveness (37) and is inversely related to dogmatism (10), it appears even more likely that intense conversion experiences do not of necessity occur within authoritarian, rigid or pathological contexts. These findings are at variance with the notion that abrupt, sudden conversion experiences are essentially pathological, destructive, and closely akin to psychosis.

From the point of view of recent efforts to differentiate pathological regression from more beneficial regressive experiences (regression in the service of the ego) in terms of the duration, reversibility and effects of seemingly regressive phenomena, the conversions of these subjects also appear to possess some characteristics of adaptive regressive experiences, since their experiences are transitory and appear to lead to increased self-esteem (at least

temporarily). What is less clear, however, is whether the mental organization of the subjects is reinstated suddenly and totally, whether it is the "usual" organization which is reinstated or whether some sort of mental reorganization has resulted, possibly at an even higher level than previously.

Thus, although the findings of this study reveal that at present subjects who have had conversion experiences are clearly able to employ more primitive or unconscious modes of thinking in the service of the ego and adaptation, they do not indicate the degree of intactness of ego functioning prior to the conversion experience. Various possibilities exist: the conversion experience helped to integrate subjects during a crisis and enabled them to reach a mental organization on a higher level than previously, or the capacity to employ regressive modes of thought adaptively reflects a predispositional, characterological openness to experiences of an unrealistic nature. In other words, are we confronted with a phenomenon that strengthens a weak ego or one that reflects a strong ego that could tolerate such experiences in the first place? On the one hand, Maslow's work (33) on "peak" experiences demonstrates that persons characterized by self-actualizing efforts and more advanced and richer states of psychological organization have a particular capacity to experience states of mystical union and ecstasy—states which reflect for his subjects an expansion of ego boundaries temporarily for the purpose of personality gain and enrichment. Research in attitude formation, in interpersonal communication and impression formation (16, 30, 42, 54) and in subthreshold stimulation (2, 12) also suggests that cognitive attitudes and beliefs which are organized into more flexible, open and complex systems are better able to assimilate new and disparate information than is a rigid, inflexible, simple and closed system. Accordingly, one would sur-

mise that systems which are initially more flexible and open should tend to make one more receptive to disparate and undifferentiated information from inner urges as well as from external reality.

However, we must also consider the equally strong likelihood that conversion experiences serve to a greater extent to help reorganize a weakened ego rather than to reflect a preexisting strength and capacity for unusual experiences. In fact, it is this likelihood which has been most prominently emphasized in the conversion literature. It has been noted, for example, that conversion experiences tend to occur during adolescence, that is, during a period of life marked by an upsurge of instinctual urges, by a weakened and sometimes fluid state of personality organization and by changeability and seeming disorder. Christensen, among others, has discussed the role of the conversion experience in reintegrating the weakened ego of the adolescent to solve "an acute confusional state" (8, p. 208). The body of research on attitude and personality change, however, although it has been concerned with initial states of cognitive organization, has tended to focus on flexible *vs.* rigid, complex *vs.* simple, or open *vs.* closed systems. This body of research has been less concerned with very unstructured initial personality organization like that emphasized in preconversion feelings of unsureness and inability to solve problems. Perhaps, however, the less structured initial personality organization of the preconvert suggests a state of organization which is more open and receptive to new attitudes that can serve to supply a sense of integration and unity to the personality. The appeal of ideologies to the alienated has been well documented (14), as has the greater persuasibility of persons with low self-esteem and general passivity (27); both reports highlight the search for structure, order and integration in those who feel themselves to be diffuse, deficient and unintegrated.

The degree to which unrealistic experiences, like conversion phenomena, are encouraged and have meaning within a particular cultural context supplies another crucial factor in assessing the adaptiveness, of an experience for any particular individual. Cultures which place a considerable premium on highly logical, realistic, conventional behavior will inevitably have a reduced tolerance for seemingly deviant forms of behavior. Some communities, however, provide a high valuation of conversion experiences by making church membership contingent on "conversion signalled by a vision." Several studies (1, 50, 53) have shown how glossolalia, trance and visions can be requisites for church membership and even how the content of the religious experience can reflect the culture's goal. Recent studies of shamans also tentatively suggest that shamans may, relative to other members of their societies, possess a more developed capacity to regress in the service of the ego (7). That most subjects in this study are Methodists indicates an identification with a tradition in which conversion experiences have long been emphasized. Nevertheless, there is a marked inconsistency in the emphasis placed on the importance of conversion experiences nowadays by their churches. Only two subjects were brought up in denominations that required a conversion experience for church membership. Most other subjects were familiar with conversions, but conversion was not expected or encouraged in their churches, especially in those of larger cities. Neither was the conversion experience necessarily linked with a specific decision ("call") to enter the ministry, although in most cases it supplied a sense of commitment and religious conviction that other subjects felt they lacked and, to some extent, wistfully yearned for. Nonetheless, conversion was not an unexpected or rare phenomenon in the life experience of these subjects; it had important historical and cultural roots, even

though it may not have been highly valued within their particular church group.

In order for us to look further into the differences obtained among subjects in amount of primitive, unconscious modes of thinking, separate analyses of formal and drive content ideation were conducted. Interestingly, it appears that greater amounts of primitive thinking of the formal type, both of levels 1 and 2, characterize subjects with intense conversion experiences. In order for us to understand this finding, it may be helpful to consider recent efforts to clarify different kinds of adaptive regressive experiences and also to examine the nature of the conversion experience itself. Schafer, for example, has suggested that in problem solving in the sciences and in mathematics, the capacity to regress in the service of the ego may involve primarily a capacity for primitivization of formal aspects of thought, that is, an ability to recombine elements in new, unusual ways "without obvious drive representation" (46, p. 132), whereas other creative activities may require more access to drive components of primary process thinking. Arlow and Brenner (3), also discussing the different senses in which the concept of regression is used, suggest a distinction between instinctual regression (to specific psychosexual phases of development and the content associated with each) and other forms of regression, including a regression of ego functions. Few studies, however, have attempted to assess differential effects for formal and drive content aspects of thinking. Feirstein (15) found that subjects who showed more tolerance for unrealistic experiences also demonstrated greater adaptive regression (total adaptive regression and also content and formal adaptive regression separately). However, the amount (defense demand) of neither content nor formal primitive, nonlogical ideation related to the tolerance for unrealistic experiences, demonstrating in his study the greater importance of control variables over in-

stances of amount of primitive thinking. A study of the relationship of primitive thinking to problem solving of a highly logical nature (5) also demonstrated that adaptive regression scores for both formal and drive content ideation significantly relate to efficient performance but that the amount (defense demand) of neither formal nor drive content thinking is related to problem solving efficiency. In another study of the capacity for adaptive regression (36), however, overall measures of the amount of primitive thinking were found to be important in a sample of unemployed actors, but control (adaptive regression) variables were not found to be significant, and no effort was made to treat formal and drive content variables separately. The difference between the present study of conversion experiences and adaptive regression and other studies of adaptive regression, then, is the demonstration that the amount (defense demand) of primitive, nonlogical ideation—of formal primitive ideation in particular—is a significant factor in addition to the control (adaptive regression) scores.

In order to try to understand the importance of the amount of formal primitive thinking in subjects in this study, we should consider the nature of conversion experiences. We find that conversion typically involves a loss generally of usual ego intactness, including a loss of temporal boundaries, a fusion between self and God, and an inability to distinguish percept from wish. These characteristics tap essentially formal aspects of primitive (primary process) thinking. When one approaches conversion experiences in terms of their degree of drive content (oral, anal, sexual, exhibitionistic, homosexual and aggressive), the picture is somewhat changed. Although mystical experiences have often contained striking manifestations of drive content—witness the obvious sexual imagery of certain female mystics—conversion experiences have not been explored

systematically from this point of view. Subjects in this study report content that is mostly gratifying and positive in tone and relatively tame in terms of psychosexual content. Dominant themes include feelings of loss of a heavy burden, of sorrow, sin and desire, and an increase in feelings of joy, salvation, mystical knowledge, perfection, and a new life. One subject reported feeling heartwarmed, reunited and close to God; one saw through God's eyes and experienced a pattern of eternal beauty in which the generations of man merged in a procession before God; another experienced a hallucinatory-like, agonizing image of Christ on a crucifix, who seemed to call out "why are you running?"; still another student felt a chill up his spine as if a hand had removed all opposition to his becoming a minister. Therefore, despite many formal alterations of states of consciousness via mystical union, states of dedifferentiation and hallucinatory-like imagery in these subjects, drive content representations are relatively inconspicuous in conversion experiences. Similarly, in a content analysis of the religious visions of members of a Gulf State Negro community in which church membership is contingent on "conversion signalled by a vision" (50, p. 330), the content of the visions largely stresses the positive characteristics of attainment, aspiration, rebirth and purity. This content was relatively undramatic from a drive viewpoint; yet it occurred in the context of a dramatic formal alteration of usual experience via a vision. In sharp contrast to the visions of the members of this Negro community and of subjects in this study is Freud's discussion (20) of the Schreber case. Among other mystically toned psychotic manifestations, we find in Schreber's thinking a pervasive primitivization by drive content as well as by formal primitive components; *e.g.*, "rays of God not infrequently thought themselves entitled to mock at me by calling me 'Miss Schreber'" (20, p. 399).

Thus, it may be that primitivization by drives, particularly when accompanied by a disturbed affect, occurs in mystically toned religious contexts which more clearly approach psychotic proportions, whereas many conversion experiences may entail primarily a formal primitivization in the absence of a conspicuous alteration of drive content elements. Moreover, the greater importance of the amount of formal primitive thinking in subjects in this study, as compared with the studies of Feirstein (15) and Blatt and Allison (5), may stem from the greater degree of formal primitivization inherent in a conversion experience than in performance in a variety of perceptual tasks (such as the phi phenomenon, reversible figures, aniseikonic lenses and stimulus incongruity) or in problem solving of a highly logical, abstractive and synthetic nature.

The subjects of this study, although divergent in their background and religious training, make up a fairly homogeneous group—rather bright male divinity students in a university divinity school in which students are confronted with many liberal theological viewpoints. In such a school, unlike many denominational schools, less emphasis is often placed on the more enthusiastic forms of religious experience such as religious conversions. Contrary to the revivalistic preaching of Billy Sunday that "in a dispute between enthusiasm and scholarship, scholarship can go to hell" (4, p. 355) scholarship is instead rigorously emphasized. Thus, it may be that people with religious experiences which were seemingly more pathological were rejected by the school in the first place or did not choose to apply. Whereas a more inclusive study of the phenomenon of religious conversion and its potentially adaptive, integrative function would have to include other such subjects, this study nonetheless does demonstrate that conversion *can* occur in a setting of adaptive potential and realization.

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