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PEAK EXPERIENCE, EPIPHANY, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

This dissertation examined two critical experiences: peak experience and epiphany and their relationship with psychological well-being (general well-being and life satisfaction). Survey data from 217 college students was collected and a mixed method was used in the study. Results revealed four types of peak experience (need/dream/fantasy/goal being fulfilled as a peak experience, a shared moment that involves recognition of being in relation to the world, tragedy/separation/misfortune followed by a peak experience and an experience that involves nature or a high power) and six types of epiphany (epiphany after the death of others, illness, or danger of others or self, epiphany associated with a change in relationship, epiphany associated with environmental changes, epiphany after a mastery experience, epiphany that involves higher power, and epiphany from full awareness). The constructs of peak experience and epiphany overlapped. Peak experience was not associated with one's psychological well-being, while epiphany was found to be associated with one's life satisfaction.

# Chapter I: Introduction

Counseling Psychology has historically emphasized positive aspects of human functioning as well as promoting changes using one's assets and strengths since the 1950s (Gelso & Fretz, 2001; Super, 1955). The field has transitioned from vocational guidance to counseling psychology (Super, 1955; Watkins, 1983), from treating the less disturbed with an emphasis on one's strengths, values, and problem-solving skills to " focus[ing] on people's assets and strengths, and positive mental health, regardless of the degree of disturbance (Gelso & Fretz, 2001, p.6)." When it comes to multiculturalism, Counseling Psychology has successfully led the field of psychology as a whole (American Psychological Association, 2003).

It is clear that counseling psychology has two major tasks: (a) exploring and developing positive constructs; and (b) promoting changes through psychotherapy that emphasize human strengths. The following researchers/theorists have developed constructs of positive human functioning. Abraham H. Maslow (1964, 1968, 1971) introduced the concepts of peak experience and self-actualization. He emphasized psychological growth, motivation, and values. He also encouraged the field of psychology to move toward a "positive psychology." Carl Rogers (1961a; 1961b) defined and emphasized the concept of empathy in therapy rooms, relationships, and even with the world at large. His vision was to build a better world by emphasizing the precious human strength of empathy. Bandura (1992, 2002) brought in the concept of self-efficacy and studied how one builds his or her self-efficacy and how self-efficacy influences one's performance. Rollo May (1975) introduced the importance of creativity in one's well-being and was one of the major forces to integrate existentialism into

psychology. More recently, Csikszentmihalyi (1991) explored the concept of flow and Seligman (1991, 2002) studied optimism and authentic happiness. Together they have redefined Positive Psychology and laid a foundation for the field of psychology to shift to another philosophical paradigm that Maslow was trying to initiate 40 years ago (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Still, over the past 40 years only 29% of publications in major professional counseling psychology journals were related to positive constructs/process topics (Lopez, Magyar-Moe, Peterson, Ryder, Krieshok, O'Byrne, Lichtenberg, & Fry, 2006).

Counseling psychology has undertaken the task of promoting psychological growth, not simply alleviating neurosis. Franz Alexander (1964) introduced the concept of corrective emotional experience, which involves using transference in relation to a small and manageable number of emotional tensions stemming from past experiences. Vicktor E. Frankl's survival experiences in a concentration camp helped him to create logotherapy (Frankl, 1963). He believed that when one finds the meaning of life, he or she begins to flourish. He made the qualification, "What matters…is not the meaning of life in general, but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment (Frankl, 1963, p. 171)." Leslie Greenberg (2006) emphasized the use of emotions as the most important vehicle to change. Naming the emotions and working through what the emotions represent are the main therapeutic tasks in her Emotion-Focused Therapy. Frank and Frank (1991) argued that when one's assumptive world was challenged, whether pleasant or unpleasant, uncertainty, surprise, and emotional arousal emerge. While this initial phase is crucial, they claimed that simply having an emotional reaction is not enough for one to modify her or his assumptive world. They researched different

therapeutic approaches and other healing practices and found (a) an emotionally-charged, positive healing relationship, (b) a healing setting, (c) a rationale for changes, and (d) rituals believed by both the healer and helpee that worked to restore the helpee's health. Strength-based counseling uses psychological constructs of positive human functioning as a language and new paradigm in therapy, emphasizing clients' strengths and promoting psychological growth (Smith, 2006).

The study is conducted in the spirit of positive psychology. It entails examining and comparing two kinds of critical experiences: peak experience and epiphany, which represent positive aspects of life and transformation. Peak experience is generally defined as a positive moment with highest happiness, which was introduced by Maslow half of a century ago (Maslow, 1968, 1970; Privette, 1983, 1984, 2001). Epiphany is defined as a moment characterized by sudden, profound changes in one's perception of his or herself and/or the world (Jarvis, 1996; Miller & C'de Baca, 1994, 2001), which has also been described in different terminology, including enlightenment (Keutzer, 1984), personality change (Miller & C'de Baca, 1994), and transformation (Mintz, 2004; Pretat, 1994). It is suspected that the transformation resulting from either a peak experience or an epiphany out of therapy would be as valuable as changes that occur as a result of therapy and that they may even occur in therapy.

The first goal was to further delineate the two constructs and examine whether they overlap. Existing research and theories in both areas were used to provide foundations for studying peak experience and epiphany. The second goal was to examine whether peak experience or epiphany are related to one's psychological well-being. Past research has shown that critical experiences are likely to have long-lasting impacts on

one's life (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001; Jarvis, 1996). Further the study intends to use both qualitative and quantitative approaches to get a better understanding of both critical experiences. The study can enrich the literature in counseling psychology by providing information about the circumstances in which people are more likely to experience an enduring change in their lives. Due to the influence of the managed care systems, psychotherapy nowadays tends to be time-limited. Understanding how an epiphany occurs may provide insights about how a clinician can support change in a timely manner.

## Overview of Following Chapters

The present chapter describes the context and rationale for the research reported. Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature on peak experience, epiphany, and its relationship with psychological well-being. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study, from subject recruitment, procedure, to data analysis. Chapter 4 presents both qualitative and quantitative results. Chapter 5 presents a general discussion of the findings and a conclusion.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This section is divided into three subsections. The first subsection focuses on the historical perspective of mystical experience. The second subsection focuses on peak experience and presents its historical background and relevant conceptual and empirical findings. Special attention is paid to whether previous research on peak experience suggests a relationship with psychological well-being. The third subsection focuses on epiphany in regard to its historical perspective, definition, empirical findings, and its relationship with psychological well-being.

### Historical Perspective of Mystical Experience

Society and cultures for as far back as history can take us have had members who have described experiencing what we refer to as epiphanies and peak experiences. Descriptions of transcending average-everydayness and attaining a higher consciousness take on the costumes of whatever systems of thought the person may find him or herself to be a part, whether it be Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Sufi, Judaism, Hinduism, American Indian Sweat, or modern art. Buddha is described as having experienced enlightenment. Rumi found moments in which he saw through appearances to the hidden reality within (Bakahtiar, 1979). Kabbalists speak of moments when they see through nature to an eternal reality underlying mundane reality (Blumenthal, 1978). Saint Teresa wrote about strange conditions of awareness that changed her life (Underhill, 1974). Black Elk described many experiences when his ignorance or ego died and he realized what he called the "center of the universe" (Brown, 1953). James Joyce described many sudden moments when chaos dissolved and hidden meanings emerged with sudden moments of insight (Joyce, 1916). John Coltrane repeated notes

and rifts hundreds of times when suddenly a spiritual breakthrough occurred and he was able to express creative and original musical forms (Kofsky, 1998).

It is important to note that the people mentioned above would consider a peak experience or an epiphany as only as a small part of their growth. They learned how to purge themselves in order to create conditions where they might be open to further ecstatic experiences and some even developed models of development that emerged after the first ecstatic experiences. For instance, the Sufis twirled their bodies (Bakhtiar, 1979), American Indians fast and endure great physical discomfort, and Christian mystics may deny themselves basic substances in order to create the conditions where they may be receptacles for ecstatic experiences, which are clearly related to epiphanies. Saint Teresa educated others in ways to prepare for ecstatic experiences. Her outline includes: (1) meditations; (2) quiet (stilling of the senses); (3) union (leaving all voluntary activities of the mind); and (4) passive contemplation (being in the great life of the all) (Underhill, 1974). American Indians often engage in purification rites, which involve suffering in sweat lodges, offering skin sacrifices and fasting (Brown, 1953). The understanding of the oneness of all things entails sacrifices. Artists describe rigorous training in techniques and then making breakthroughs into an awareness which allows them to be channels for new experiences that provide new ways of perceiving new realities. James Joyce described his epiphany as follows: “The esthetic image is first luminosity apprehended as self bounded and self contained upon the background of space or time which is not it. You apprehend it as one thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend it wholeness” (Joyce, 1916, p. 212).

Paul Tillich (1957) discusses the experience of the "eternal now" and "eternal here" when and where a person transcends "estrangement," "the beside each other" and desire for "endlessness" mentalities in order to experience the "power of being" (p. 69). Zen Buddhism also offers spiritual disciplines to attain enlightenment or epiphenous realizations. Naranjo (1972) writes, "The way out is not anything he can 'do,' but rather it is the nature of realization, a shift in part of view. It lies in the discovery that from the very beginning he has not done anything, and there is nothing he can do, however much he tries (p.145)." The Zen Buddhists use koans as devices to help practitioners reach sudden realizations. In one Zen story a pilgrim searches for months for a famous roshi to ask him how to find true enlightenment. Once found the roshi said nothing. After hours of silence the roshi looked at the pilgrim and asked him why he did not ask for a horse instead of enlightenment. The pilgrim said he already had a horse. The roshi smiled and retreated into his cave (Cox, 1977). The desire for and experiences of epiphanies and peak experience are dated from time immemorial.

## Peak Experience

### *Historical Perspective*

The concept of peak experience took birth during the humanistic movement in the 1950s, which was often referred to as "the third force of psychology." Psychoanalysis had been the major approach for several decades before behaviorism became the dominant approach in psychology (Frager & Fadiman, 2005). However, there was a group of people who felt something was missing in the psychology literature and wanted to bring another perspective into the field, namely the value of personal experiences (May, 1961). Abraham H. Maslow was the leader of this movement and eventually

became the president of American Psychological Association. Although Maslow was most remembered through his theory of hierarchy of need, which has been used in other fields, such as business, education, and politics, one of his most important contributions was to bring new life to the field of psychology by introducing the approach of focusing on one's own experiences (Frager & Fadiman, 2005).

In the third force of psychology, personal experience is highly respected and valued (Rogers, 1961b). One's reported experience is also believed to be the real data that should be gathered for research. For a long period of time, psychology had been focusing on pathology, (e.g. psychoanalysis), and trying to study human beings from a perspective of "what is missing that results in one's dysfunctions." Instead of understanding human beings from such a negativity-driven approach, the humanistic movement, as a counterbalance, focused on positive aspects of human experiences in order to help human beings better themselves (Wertz, 1998). Thus, the concept of peak experience was born because of the desire to understand aspects of positive human experiences from a more positive, phenomenological, humanistic perspective.

Maslow (1964) was the first one who introduced the concept of peak experience. He observed that there were many transcendent experiences; however, most were embedded in religious, cultural, or historical contexts. The experiences took place in different forms. Because transcendent experiences are culturally bounded, he suggested a more interscholastic structure to interpret the data collected from one's personal experience in order to extract the essence of a transcendent experience. Maslow paid attention to the common elements of transcendent experiences generated from diverse backgrounds.

The original study conducted by Maslow (1968) consisted of eighty personal interviews and one hundred and ninety written descriptions of peak experience. The subjects were all college students and were given the following instructions:

> I would like you to think of the most wonderful experience or experiences of your life; happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, perhaps from being in love, or from listening to music or suddenly "being hit" by a book or a painting, or from some great creative moment. First list these. And then try to tell me how you feel in such acute moments, how you are at the moment a different person in some ways. (p. 71)

After being given the instructions, individuals were asked to respond either verbally or in written form. A qualitative analysis approach was utilized to examine the triggers, the experiences, and the aftereffects. A careful reading of the introductions reveals that Maslow regarded a peak experience as sudden, unexpected, positive, creative, or any combination of the above. He even presented some common situations in which people usually reported peak experiences to make sure he measured peak experiences under his definition.

The original study is briefly described here to serve as a basis of understanding for Maslow's research design and how the original concept of peak experience was defined. It will influence how this current study is constructed, which will be discussed later in the methodology section. The next section will further clarify how peak experience is defined and what are characteristics of these experiences.

*What is Peak Experience?*

Maslow (1971) defined peak experiences as "the most joyous, happiest, most blissful moments" (p. 175) in life. Furthermore, he used "transcendent ecstasy" (p. 174) and "peak experience" interchangeably in several of his writings (1964, 1968, 1971) and essentially equated these two concepts (Mathes, Zevon, Roter, & Joerger, 1982). Very similar to Maslow's definition, Laski (1962) defined transcendent ecstasy as "joyful, transitory, unexpected, rare, valued, and extraordinary to the point of often seeming as if derived from a praeternatural source" (p. 5). Another researcher, Leach (1962), defined the peak experience as a "highly valued experience which is characterized by such intensity of perception, depth of feeling, or sense of profound significance as to cause it to stand out, in the subjects' mind, in more or less permanent contrast to the experiences that surround it in time and space" (p. 11). In terms of relatively recent definitions, Panzarella (1980) defined peak experiences as "intense joyous experiences," while Privette (1983, 2001) simply used "highest happiness" as the definition of peak experiences. To summarize, the Maslow school defined the essence of the peak experience as a unique experience of an individual characterized by surprise and joy derived from a praeternatural source, or at least as detaching one from time and space and associated with the highest perception and offering profound feeling and meaning.

The above definition, while rich with meaning, does not lend itself easily as a construct for psychological inquiry. Over the years, operational definitions of peak experience in research have been simplified and may not have reflected Maslow's original concept. For example, Mathes et al. (1982) observed that most of the research on peak experience only focused on the affective aspect of peak experience (e.g.,

participants were asked to report the most positive, joyful incident) and missed the cognitive aspects in these experiences, as well as the gestalt attainments of Cognition of Being. This lack of clarity and narrowness of definition is further convoluted by haphazard data collection. "Pseudo-peak experiences" might have been gathered and mixed with real peak experience data (Mathes et al, 1928).

One of the most researched areas regarding peak experiences are possible triggers. Maslow (1971) indicated that classical music and sex were the most reported triggers in his research. Whittaker (reported in Arkoff, 1975) reported that he observed nine categories of triggers: academic, social, artistic, athletic, nature, altruistic, sexual, drug, and political. Laski (1961) found that from her interviews with participants the top three common triggers were art, nature, and sexual love. Comparing her research findings on literary texts and religious books, nature became the most prominent trigger. Lanier, Privette, Vodanovich, and Bundrick (1996) found that four categories of triggers are common: education/work, relationships, death/crisis/spiritual, or miscellaneous/other. It is interesting to note that in the study a quarter of the participants reported peak experiences that involved death, crisis, or spiritual confusion. These findings do not suit the concept of peak experience as it is typically defined, yet it may indicate the possibility that the concepts of peak experience and epiphany overlap. Although types of triggers have been studied broadly, Maslow (1971) was adamant in his belief that anything can be a trigger to a peak experience. Maslow argued that what was most important was a person's state of receptivity to the experience.

Maslow believed that healthy and creative persons were more likely to have peak experiences. Persons struggling with "lower needs" such as, physiological, safety,

belongingness, love and self-esteem may be too preoccupied to yield to peak experience (Maslow, 1956). When a person is overly self-conscious about whether they fit or don't fit into convention, they are not likely to have peak experiences. When persons are in a state of being characterized by spontaneity, freedom, and naturalness, they are more likely to loosen themselves up in the moments, be absorbed and spellbound with the experience of the immediate surround (Maslow, 1964). He linked it to a "Taoistic letting being," that is, an appreciation of objects without attempting to control them (Maslow, 1968). He argues poignantly that those who have peak experiences do so when life seems to flow and come without striving (Maslow, 1968).

Let's now turn to what has been reported during peak experiences. This may help in the understanding of what makes up the peak experience. In peak experiences, one sees the universe as integrated and unified (Maslow, 1964; 1968; 1971). Usually one reports feeling detached from others and experiences a sense of calmness and rightness. During the experience, everything seems "non-comparing" and "human-irrelevant." In other words, one perceives the world from unselfish and transcendent perspectives. The world may even be perceived from a perspective that is not human- centric, but utterly interrelated. During the peak experience, the world is seen as positive and beautiful and at the same time one feels disoriented and absorbed in that moment. The peak experience has its own intrinsic value. Maslow's (1968) metaphor for peak experience was "a visit to a personally defined heaven from which the person then returns to earth" (p. 66). "The dichotomy between humility and pride (Maslow, 1968, p. 68)" can be resolved in the peak experience. People reported that they were lucky and fortunate to have such

experiences. As described earlier, peak experiences are similar to mystical religious experiences.

Maslow's most important finding in peak experiences is the Cognition of Being, which is also called B-Cognition. He found out that people in peak experience reported elements of their realization of being in the world. One experiences awe and wonder in the place and time they find themselves in. The experience with B-Cognition deepens one's perception and helps one move away from ethnocentric points of view. There is no judgment, feelings of deficiency, approval, or anything that involves comparison with another human being (Maslow, 1968). The following B-values were found in peak experiences: (1) wholeness; (2) perfection; (3) completion; (4) justice; (5) aliveness; (6) richness; (7) simplicity; (8) beauty; (9) goodness; (10) uniqueness; (11) effortlessness; (12) playfulness; (13) truth; (14) self-sufficiency. One experiences the wholeness in the peak experience and sees the experience as a perfect event. One can also see both richness and simplicity within their experience. Everything seems to come together and the experience has its own intrinsic values. Most of Maslow's participants reported that their peak experiences were characterized by more than one of the elements of B-values. However, not each peak experience has all the elements (Maslow, 1971).

Maslow (1968) discussed several aftereffects of peak experience generated from his research. First, peak experience can be therapeutic. Maslow gave several examples of how an ecstatic experience changed one's character and removed anxiety symptoms. Second, people can change their view of themselves, others, and the world in a positive direction. Third, people would remember the experience and seek to have more peak experiences. Fourth, "greater spontaneity, expressiveness, and idiosyncrasy (p. 101)"

would take place within a person after having a peak experience. Fifth, people will tend to believe "life is worthwhile" because they have seen "heaven" before. Again, not everyone who had peak experience reported all the aftereffects.

In summary, peak experience is a special moment in life that usually takes people by surprise and opens up one's senses and perception, and as a result, a decrease in psychological symptoms and openness to greater spontaneity might take place. The experience is extremely positive and the Cognition of Being experienced in peak experiences is different from typical experiences. The aftereffect can be profound and lasting.

*Empirical Findings*

Around the same time Maslow (1964) was developing the concept of peak experience, Laski (1961), an English novelist, conducted a study on ecstasy, the results of which were cited quite frequently in Maslow's writing. In her research, three types of data were used and analyzed: (1) brief personal interviews; (2) reviews of books from literary sources; and (3) reviews of books about religious experience.

In the first part of Laski's study, 63 people (26 males and 27 females) were asked a list of questions (i.e., Do you know a sensation of transcendent ecstasy? How would you describe it? What has induced it in you?). In the second part of the study, Laski utilized an eclectic range of published English literature. No exact number of books was reported. In the third part of the study, 24 religious books were located and reviewed. She recognized the differences between the language used in the books (literature and religious books) and that reported from interviewees. Content analysis was utilized and the results were converged and integrated through three types of data.

Laski (1961) concluded that ecstatic experience can be described in the following terms:

> Feelings of a new life, another world, satisfaction, joy, salvation, glory; of new and/or mystical knowledge; of loss of words, images, sense; of unity, eternity, heaven; of up-feelings; of contact; of loss of worldliness, desire, sorrow, sin; of enlargement and improvement; of loss of self; of inside-feelings; of loss of feelings of difference, time, place, of ineffability; of release; of pain. (p. 294)

Laski's study revealed two interesting findings. The first one was the "over-beliefs" associated with the report of ecstatic experiences. The concept of over-beliefs in psychology was made known by William James (1902) who described it as an overall subjective interpretation of individuals regarding their experiences. Laski argued that the definition of over-belief might carry deeper meaning than James' definition, such as, "belief in more than is warranted by the evident" according to *Oxford English Dictionary*. She discovered, in all three types of data, overbeliefs exist when ecstasy was reported. For example, people reported that it felt like they were in touch with higher power or they knew everything in that moment. The second interesting finding is the common anti-triggers that prohibit the occurrence of ecstasy. The presence of other people has been found to be an anti-trigger. The majority of the data revealed that people tend to have ecstatic experiences when they are alone. Another less common anti-trigger that might reduce the chance of having an ecstatic experience is the exercise of reason. In other words, when one rigidly defines possibilities according to logical causal relations they are less likely to have ecstatic experiences. Maslow conducted a study similar to Laski's study, except that he did not include data analysis from literature and religious books.

However, Maslow's research was criticized as too informal and only involved qualitative analysis (Smith, 1973). It was argued that his theory of transcendent experience was too freely interwoven into his research data.

After Maslow's death, some researchers have conducted studies to further study peak experience as a phenomenon, while some studied peak experiences associated with specific triggers. Peak experiences were associated with the following triggers: music (Bakker, 2005; Gangi, 1999; Lowis, 2002; Walsh, 2001), performance (Gyllenpalm, 1995; Lavaysse, 2003; Ratelle, 1996), sport (Alessi, 1995; Fredrick, 1999; Hollander & Acevedo, 2000; Kimiecik & Jackson, 2002; Privette, & Bundrick, 1997), nature (Hill, 2004; Zequeira-Russell, 2003), wild animals (DeMares, 1999; DeMares & Krycka, 1998), and physical practice, such as Aikido (Heery, 2003) and Tai Chi (Kiehne, 2003).

In examining the characteristics of the people who reported peak experiences, whom are often referred to as "peakers," McCain and Andrews (1969) found that they were less authoritarian, less dogmatic, more assertive, expedient, tender-minded, imaginative, forthright, placid, experimenting, self-sufficient, and relaxed than nonpeakers. The authors concluded that peakers who possessed the characteristics above were seen as more self-actualizing than non-peakers. Wuthnow (1978) also found that peakers were more spontaneous than nonpeakers. However, some researchers found that peak experience was not related to any type of personality (Ebersole, 1972; Gordon, 1985). Mathes et al. (1982) contradicted the previous results on the link between self-actualization and peak experiences, finding only a weak relationship between the tendency to report peak experiences and self-actualization.

With regard to what distinguishes a peaker from a non-peaker, Mathes et al. (1982) found a positive relationship between the tendency to report having a peak experience and the susceptibility to an altered state of consciousness of a transcendent and mystical nature. In other words, if one allowed him or her-self to be receptive of the transcendent and mystical elements in life, he or she was more than likely to report a peak experience. Mathes et al. (1982) also discovered a positive relationship between the tendency to report having a peak experience and the achievement of B-values. That is, people who reported a peak experience were more likely to embrace B-values in life in general than people without peak experiences.

In terms of whether peak experiences differ among specific groups, Yeagle, Privette, and Dunham (1989) discovered no significant differences in triggers, peak experiences, and the aftereffects between a sample of college students and a sample of artists. No difference was observed among groups of realtors, artists, and college students either (Lanier, Privette, Vodanovich, & Bundrick, 1996). This study implies that one's occupation does not impact whether one has peak experiences. Although Maslow (1968) argued that older people are more than likely to experience plateau experiences (less intensity) instead of peak experiences, research has shown that the frequency of peak experience remains stable after age fifty (Heery, 2003).

Not everyone has a peak experience. Although in Maslow's research (1971), every participant reported having a peak experience, only 79% of the participants in Davis, Lockwood, and Wright's (1991) study reported having a peak experience. Some researchers argue that not everyone can reach the altered state of consciousness, or B-Cognition (Allen, Haupt, & Jones, 1964; Thomas, & Copper, 1978). While the majority

of people in the study had peak experiences (Davis et al., 1991), some choose not to share their intensive personal experiences because (1) it was a special personal experience that they did not want to discuss; (2) they felt that it might be devalued; and (3) the experience was beyond words

Not everyone experiences the ecstasy that Maslow described as being part of the peak experience. Although it is generally believed that peak experiences are not specifically associated with certain triggers, it is observed that people who engaged in some spiritual discipline, such as Yoga, were more likely to experience Malsow's "Perfect Peak Syndrome" (Wilson, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1990; Wilson, & Spencer, 1990). Few outsides of those special groups reported ideal-type peak experience. It has been recommended that research should focus on studying those specific groups in which peak experiences are more common (Wilson, & Spencer, 1990).

Research on the practice of Aikido is one example. Heery (2003) found that being in a respectful relationship with nature is prerequisite to any possible peak experience. He also discovered the combination of intense mental pressure and extended physical practices invites a shift or change that allows peak experience to occur. A major theme emphasized in the study is the relationship of being/doing. That is, when both elements of being and doing take place at the same time, they bring out a higher level of peak experience. Heery (2003) concluded that both stressful activity and play offer transformational opportunities to invite the spirit to awaken and to participate in more creative and relational processes.

Privette and others (Privette, 1983, 2001; Privette, & Bundrick, 1987, 1991, 1997; Privette, Hwang, & Bundrick, 1997; Privette, & Sherry, 1986) contributed to this body of

literature related to peak experience and optimal functioning in three ways: (1) the development of the Experience Questionnaires (Privette, 1984; Privette, & Sherry, 1986); (2) distinguishing the differences among the concepts of peak experience, peak performance, and flow and developing a model of experience (Privette, & Bundrick, 1987, 1991); and (3) the exploration of peak experience, peak performance, and flow outside of the Western culture (Privette, Hwang, & Bundrick, 1997). Relatively detailed information will be provided here because the Experience Questionnaire will be one of the measurements used in this current study and the method of distinguishing the three concepts above will be utilized as the framework for distinguishing the concepts of peak experience and epiphany.

Privette (1981, 19821 1984) has done extensive research to understand positive, optimal personal experience, such as peak intellectual performance, peak sport performance, and peak experience. She developed the Experience Questionnaire to study the essences of experiences from a humanistic perspective (Privette, 1994). The items on the Experience Questionnaire were first developed through a content analysis of literature on peak performance (Privette, 1981, 1982), peak experience (Malsow, 1954, 1964, 1968, 1971), and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975a, 1975b). These three concepts were observed to have common qualities. The questionnaire was constructed from an experiential approach and first-person descriptions were used in her research. The Experience Questionnaire helps quantify aspects of experiences and provides indicators of degree of the experience (Privette & Sherry, 1986).

In examining the differences among peak performance, peak experience, and flow, Privette and Bundrick (1991) asked 123 college students to fill out three Experience

Questionnaires (Privette, 1984) with three separate stimulus questions. Each questionnaire came with a stimulus question that tapped into peak experience, peak performance, and flow. Each participant was asked to write out a description of the experience and fill out 47 items to rate the importance of the reported event. Written descriptions of the experiences were used also.

Three out of eight qualities, or factors, were found to distinguish peak experience from flow and peak performance: (1) fulfillment; (2) significance; and (3) spirituality. In fulfillment, participants reported feelings of ecstasy at the moment and positive feelings afterward. Participants also indicated that the peak experience is intrinsically rewarding. In the factor of significance, a significant number of participants called their peak experiences turning points. Peak experience implied meaning and was spontaneous. In the factor of spirituality, participants felt a sense of unity of self with the environment and loss of time and space, which resonated with Maslow's previous findings. However, participants reported a clear sense of self in the peak experiences, which contradicted Maslow's description of peak experiences. Besides these three factors, other features were also found associated with peak experiences: absorption and intensity. What was unexpected was that participants denied nonmotivation, reported no receptive and perceptual attributes of peak experience, and endorsed fun and action more strongly than predicted. The role of others was also reported as important in the peak experience. The author explained that maybe lay people have a different understanding of what peak experience means than how Maslow defined it.

It is worth distinguishing flow from peak experience. Flow is described as a moment in which one gives his or her full focus on one activity. One loses their sense of

time and is totally absorbed and involved (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). In flow, concentration, intention, and absorption are the key components. Participants who experienced flow received intrinsic rewards during the process and usually reported a loss of sense of time. An example would be a mother falling into a trance watching her baby sleeping. The concept of flow is very similar to peak experience when it involves absorption in an activity, such as listening to music or reading a book. However, peak experience does not necessarily come from the involvement of an activity, while flow usually refers to the experience where one is completely involved in an activity for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Privette, & Bundrick, 1991).

With regard to how positive experiences, including peak experience, peak performance, and flow, manifest in another culture, Privette, Hwang, and Bundrick (1997) conducted a causal-comparative study with samples of American and Taiwanese college students. One hundred and thirty one Taiwanese (66 males, 63 females, and 2 unidentified) were recruited in a large public university, while 123 Americans (42 males and 81 females) were recruited in a southeastern public university. Age of participants in both groups ranged from 20 to 50. Generally, Americans and Taiwanese both endorsed items highly in the three key dimensions: significance, fulfillment, and spirituality, although the degree of each dimension was higher in the group of Americans than the group of Taiwanese. However, there were some interesting findings: (a) Americans but not Taiwanese endorsed sociability in peak experience, specifically interpersonal aspects of the experience; and (b) Taiwanese but not Americans endorsed "outer structure" in peak experience, which is to say, Taiwanese reported nonmotivation, feelings of reception and passivity, and unique perception in peak experience. Therefore, overall

Taiwanese's peak experience is closer to Maslow's construct of peak experience, while Americans reported higher intensities of the peak experiences in significance, fulfillment, and spirituality.

In examining the differences between peak (or positive) experiences and nadir (or negative) experiences, Wilson and Spencer (1990) found that when people described positive experiences, the event itself was more likely to be a daily, normal event and the language they used was less inspiring, while when people reported negative experiences, events were usually extraordinary and their languages showed more involvement and affect. However, they found more similarities than differences between these two experiences. The findings suggested that the personality changes generated from both positive and negative experiences were alike. Moreover, negative experience has lasting effect more often than positive experience. Positive relationships between peak experiences and nadir experiences were found in the following areas: perceptual change, new reality, personality change, intense emotion, body awareness, changes in life, and being in touch with divine or spiritual figures. Other studies (see Janoff-Bulman, & Berger, 2000; Morgan, & Janoff-Bulman, 1994) have also suggested that negative experiences have similar positive aftereffects on how one sees his or her life.

In examining the process of peak experience that involved visual-art and music, Panzarella (1980) found three stages that people went through in such experiences. Participants first had cognitive responses to the stimulus (either visual art or music), and later they proceeded to experience loss of self and motor responses. They became immersed in the experience for a while and their personal feelings subsided.

With regard to the aftereffects of peak experience, Lanier et al. (1996) reported that 93% of their respondents regarded the peak experience reported as significant or a turning point of their lives. In terms of how long the impact of a peak experience lasts, Panzarella (1980) found that 90% of his participants reported that the impact of a peak experience was long-lasting. However, Ebersole (1972) found that over half of those who reported peak experiences did not report long-lasting impacts on their lives. Moreover, he concluded that nadir experiences have more positive and lasting effects than peak experience. Wilson and Spencer (1990) found that the changes that resulted from peak experiences and nadir experiences were very similar. Therefore, regardless of whether critical experiences were positive or negative, the aftereffects can be profound in a positive direction, as long as such experiences have been regarded as significant or as turning point.

It may be counter-intuitive to some that both peak experiences and nadir experiences lead to positive changes in life. However, it has been argued that people can learn from critical, extreme experiences and give meanings to those experiences (Logan, 1985; McKenzie, 1965). Weil (1972) argued that altering one's consciousness can be learned. It has been found that people who identify either peak experience or negative experience as life-changing are more inner-directed than people who did not report those experiences as critical (Wilson & Spencer, 1990). In addition, self-actualizing people are more likely to find meanings from all experiences (Rizzo & Vinacke, 1975). Davis et al. (1991) indicated that a critical experience has its potential for people who attach meanings to it, no matter whether the experience is negative or positive.

What meanings have people found during peak experiences? Walsh (2001) found that participants who had peak experiences which involved listening to or performing music felt an overwhelming sense of being known by another. That is, they felt that their most profound feelings were shared by others at their deepest emotional level. They also reported that peak experience provided a striking path to a separate state of consciousness. The experience is seen not only as awe-inspiring but also leading to a spiritual awakening. In Demares' research (1999) with people who interacted with cetaceans (whales and dolphins), he found five common themes in peak experiences: harmony, connectedness, intention, aliveness, and reciprocity of process. Krohn (2000) discovered that people construct meanings of peak experiences based upon critical personal events and relationships.

## Epiphany

> Pause, J. J. O'Molloy took out his cigarette case. False lull. Something quite ordinary. Messenger took out his matchbox thoughtfully and lit his cigar. I have often thought since on looking back over that strange time that it was that small act, trivial in itsef, that striking of that match, that determined the whole aftercourse of both our lives. (Ulysses, p. 760-765, in Rice, p. 41)
>
> Her image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, and envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory. On and on and on and on and on! (Joyce, 1916, p. 172)

Epiphany has been depicted beautifully and elegantly in several of James Joyce's works, such as *Ulysses*, and *A Portrait Of the Artist as a Young Man* (Joyce, 1916). In literature, Joyce was the first one who illustrated sudden moments of insight through the "stream-of-consciousness" writing (Jones, 1952). The first quotation from *Ulysses* demonstrates the existence of epiphanic experiences, which usually occurs in a split second. But the impact on one's life after epiphany is profound and indisputable.

The second quotation, from *A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man*, illustrates epiphany as a sudden spiritual manifestation where the artist, Stephen Hero, was surrounded by beauty through his anticipation of a new adventure at that very moment. Before his epiphany, Stephen Hero was in a state of confusion for a long period of time where he wondered if he should pursue " a grave and ordered and passionless life that awaited him" (p. 160). He later on experienced the epiphany through an accidental eye exchange with a girl on the beach. It is almost like the epiphany was waiting there to be experienced through a seemingly unrelated person, thing, or environment (Jones, 1952). It is illustrated that the contemplation of one's inner world is more important than external events. Other epiphanic stories can be found in literature and autobiographies (see Bidney, 1997; Dyja, 2001).

*Historical Perspective*

The phenomenon of transformational change, such as epiphany, has rarely been studied in psychological literature (Miller, 2004; Miller, & C'de Baca, 1994; 2001). In this past century, psychology has been interested in gradual changes, such as learning, or at least as a field we tend to believe that changes do not happen in a short period of time (Jarvis, 1996). Some attention has been paid to the concepts of "insight" or "aha" in

psychology, which is referred to as "a small leap of changes" on ideas or thoughts. However, compared to epiphany, changes that result from insight or aha occur on a much smaller scale, and/or in limited contexts. No researchers have studied the phenomenon of sudden, profound changes on one's perception of oneself and the world.

William James was the first one and also one of the few psychologists who recognized this type of change that can occur in one's life. He wrote *The Variety Of Religious Experience* (James, 1902) and established the primacy of the transcendent experiences in personality transformation (Frager & Fadiman, 2005). Psychology was then a new field influenced by and also emerging from biology, theology, and philosophy. James' interest in spiritual experiences stemmed from his study of several of the disciplines. He argued that there are two kinds of changes: the volitional, or educational, variety, and sudden transformation (James, 1902). The first type of change, volitional change, usually involves education and the reasoning process. The process is gradual with a little bit of change at a time. The second type of changes involves relatively dramatic changes. The change happens before you know it, and you find yourself in a different place (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001). Personality was considered a function of the occurrence of transformational changes. Specifically, from James' perspective, those who have easy access to their subconscious activities are more likely to undergo transformational changes. However, he speculated that transformational change could be sweeping, but some might be domain-specific.

Although theology has extensive studies on religious conversion and the philosopher psychologist William James wrote *The Variety Of Religious Experiences* at the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century, the idea of transformational change in psychology has

been buried for almost a hundred years, until the last decade of the twentieth century. Now, it is time to turn to modern psychology for the basic question: what is epiphany?

*What is epiphany?*

Jarvis (1996) defined epiphany as "an experience of profound personal transformation resulting in the reconfiguration of an individuals' world assumptions" (p. 61). In other words, epiphany is an experience characterized by sudden and profound changes in one's perception of oneself and/or reality. To put it in a simpler way, epiphany is a moment of transformation, or a moment of recognition (Denzin, 1989). Epiphany usually follows a period of internal conflict, emotional turbulence, and feelings of depression and anxiety (James, 1902; White, 2004), and is also followed by productive activity and heightened energy (Jarvis, 1996). The changes that result from epiphany are usually enduring (Miller & C'de Baca, 1994; 2001). Epiphany is considered as one type of discontinuous psychological change experiences (DPCEs), similar to insight, religious conversion, and transpersonal experiences, due to the nature of changes that are usually dramatic and enduring, and the degree of changes that are discontinuous (Jarvis, 1996).

Miller and C'de Baca (1994; 2001), instead of using the word epiphany, use "quantum change" to describe the phenomenon. Quantum change is defined as "a vivid, surprising, benevolent, and enduring personal transformation" (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001, p. 4). They discovered two types of quantum changes from their interviews with people who experienced quantum change: the insightful type and mystical type. The insightful type involves one's sudden realization of something new about themselves, or a new way of thinking or understanding. They argued that the insight type of quantum change has a sense of continuity. That is, most of the time the changes follow from one's

development, rather than being an intrusion into it (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001). The mystical type, or what they called "epiphany," involves more mystical components. Usually those who experience the mystical type of quantum change know something happened to them, and things will never be the same afterward. The story of Scrooge is an example. However, although the mystical type of quantum change seems more dramatic, it was found that the impact of the insightful type is not less profound than that of the mystical type. Miller and C'de Baca (2001) recognized that the two types were not completely exclusive and have overlapped.

In this study, the definition of epiphany was drawn from the definitions above, with an exception that all the quantum changes under the definition of Miller and his colleagues, including the insightful and mystical types, were considered as epiphanies and, thus, included. Using the word epiphany to capture such phenomenon is to be inclusive of all the experiences that involve sudden life transformational changes, as described in literature and psychology. The definition used in the present study is: "Epiphany is an experience characterized by sudden and profound changes in one's perception of oneself and/or reality."

*Empirical Findings*

The body of literature on epiphany is relatively small. Most of the studies are still in the phase of exploring the characteristics of an epiphany and the impact an epiphany has on one's perception of oneself or the world. The following studies were conducted through long interviews (C'de Baca, & Willbourne, 2004; Miller, 2004; Miller, & C'de Baca, 1994; 2001), narrative analysis of epiphanic stories (Gasker, 2001), and content analysis of autobiographies (White, 2004).

Studies conducted by Miller and his colleagues (C'de Baca & Wilbourne, 2004; Miller, 2004; Miller & C'de Baca, 1994; 2001) are important contributions to this body of literature for the following two reasons: (1) their studies are comprehensive in terms of explaining what happened in one's life before a quantum change experience occurred, and what changes occurred after the experience; and (2) their studies examined what residual effects the experience had over a long period. Miller and C'de Baca (1994) began with a curiosity regarding whether people really undergo transformational changes in a short period of time. They interested a writer in the *Albuquerque Journal* who later wrote a quantum change story in the Sunday edition, with a note at the end saying that if anyone had similar experiences, they were encouraged to contact the researchers. They received nearly one hundred phone calls, and 55 people (31 females and 24 males) ended up participating in the research without any incentives. Participant age ranged from 30 to 78 and the average level of education was 16 years. The occurrence of the quantum change was 11 years on average prior to the research. The study focused on the context of the experience, the experience itself, the effects, and explanations of the event.

Miller and C'de Baca (2001) discovered four distinguishing characteristics of quantum change: (1) vividness; (2) surprise; (3) benevolence; and (4) permanence. Most of the quantum changers can clearly recall the date, time, and vivid details of their experiences. They also experienced profound emotion, and the experience involved a release from persistent negative emotions before the quantum change. Over 80% of the participants reported that the experience was not expected and took them by surprise. Fifty-three out of 55 reported that the aftereffect of the experience was extremely positive and beneficial. A number of people reported that their emotions were intensified through

the experience. They developed less a façade of happiness, but true and clearer understanding of things. A sense of "being wiser" was also reported. Most of the participants reported that the impact of the quantum change experience still continued.

Miller and C'de Baca (1994; 2001) found several common changes among the quantum changers, even though at first most of their answers to the question "What changed?" were "everything." People who experienced quantum changes expressed a sense of relief from depression, fear, or anger, as well reported a release from destructive behaviors, such as drinking. They experienced an affirmation of a sense of self through the experience. Spirituality, not necessarily associated with any dogma, became a big part of their lives. They reported being more self-actualized, and reported a sense of trust in the future.

After ten years of the original study, C'de Baca and Wilbourne (2004) tracked down the fifty-five volunteers and 30 out of 55 were willing to attend the follow-up study. Four inventories were used, including the Quantum Experiences Retrospective Interview (QUERI; Miller, 1991), the Value Card Sort (adapted from Rokeach, 1983), the Religious Background and Behavior (RBB; Connors, Tonigan, & Miller, 1996), and the Short Symptom Check-List-51 (SSCL-51). The most important values selected by the participants after the quantum change experiences were spirituality and compassion, in comparison with the values (wealth, adventure, pleasure, career, fitting in, happiness, and being attractive) endorsed before the experiences. Forty-four percent of the participants reported that they were "spiritual, believing in God, but not religious," while thirty-eight percent of the participants reported that they "believe in God and also participate in religious activities." The distress level measured on the SSCL indicated that no one was

distressed. The changes resulting from the quantum change experiences were found to be maintained ten years later. No one reported going back to the old way of living. Limitations of the studies were as follows: (1) All the data were retrospective (the research in this area is retrospective in nature); and (2) Yhrough retelling their stories, their understanding of the experience might have been reshaped to fit into their current way of thinking.

Under what kinds of circumstances is a person likely to experience an epiphany? McAdams (1993) believed that it is important to research what factors influence one's selection of a transformational moment in order to identify those who can be empowered to change in their lives after traumatic events happen. White (2004) discovered that introspection under an isolated situation is a common pre-condition for epiphany. Most of the people were in despair before they had epiphanic experience (James, 1902), or were experiencing emotional discomforts, or feeling physical pain (Gasker, 2001), although transformation still occurred in those who believed that they were not distressed at that moment (Miller, 2004). Some authors argue that epiphanies may not be perceived as significant or important at the time they occur (Rhodes, & Rhodes, 1996). One of the explanations is that experience, especially trauma, needs to be remembered, discussed, and processed, prior to recovery (Bass, 1994; Herman, 1992). It has been confirmed that epiphany can occur in therapy (Gasker, 2001; Miller, 2004), for instance, during poetry therapy (Edgar, 1994). Several circumstances have been found as possible opportunities for epiphanies to occur (Miller, & C'de Baca, 2001): (1) when one feels like he or she is hitting bottom; (2) when one has experienced extreme unhappiness from childhood trauma; (3) when one is feeling trapped by the reality; (4) when one has been wandering

aimlessly for a period of time; and (5) when religion or prayer is involved. Jarvis (1996) also found that epiphany usually occurs in one's late adolescence or early adulthood. The concept of self-determination has also been identified in terms of mediating one's choice of a life event as his or her epiphany, or transformational moment. It is argued that relationships in one's life and one's cultural beliefs can influence one's identification of an epiphany (Denzin, 1989; Gasker, 2001).

What changed the most, resulting from the epiphany, was one's "identity," or fundamental perception of self and reality (Miller, 2004). In other words, personality undergoes a change after epiphany. Most of the epiphanic stories were reported as if the person who experienced the epiphany had decided this was one of the turning points of his or her life (Jarvis, 1996; Miller, & C'de Baca, 2001). They became less self-centered and had more concern for others and the world. The experience of an extended self brought those who had epiphanies to another level where they embraced others who were different from them. At the same time, they did not need approval from others. They expressed that they were more open to experiences and reported a more satisfying life than they used to have (C'de Baca & Wilbourne, 2004). Overall, they became more complete, secure, and settled. Their descriptions were close to what Rogers (1961a) would describe as "a fully functioning person" and what Maslow (1971) would describe as "a self-actualizer."

Other aspects of the lives of the persons who have epiphanic experiences change as well (Miller, & C'de Baca, 2001). People tended to develop fewer but closer relationships. Their relationships were described as more intimate and less superficial. They reported that they re-prioritized their values and were no longer preoccupied with

physical possessions. They approached every new day with a sense of gratitude and an understanding that they were not exempted from suffering. Epiphany provided a direction or purpose in their lives.

Does epiphany always induce positive changes in people who experience it? In Jarvis's (1996) study, all the interviewees reported positive changes in their lives. In Miller et al's studies (Miller & C'de Baca, 1994; 2001), only two out of 55 reported negative impacts on their lives (e.g., the avoidance of opportunities to get hurt; not believing in the future). Although the majority of reported transformational changes have been positive (White, 2004), Salzman (1954) argued that epiphany, particularly those in religious conversion, can be either "progressive" or "regressive." To be progressive involved expressing sincerity, tolerance, and kindness, while people who were regressive were more likely to show rigidity of belief, intolerance, or tendencies for aggression. C'de Baca and Wilbourne (2004) pointed out that one participant who did not have a positive response to an epiphanic experience might have suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder. Other persons experienced only partial or incomplete transformation (Tiebout, 1953), which had a potential to provoke confusion and/or negative changes.

Taoism speaks to just these dual potentials of epiphany. For instance, one might consider the Chinese characters for "crisis 危機." The combination of these two characters mean crisis. 危 means danger, while 機 means opportunity. When a crisis presents itself, it is a danger but also an opportunity. An individual who encounters an event that shatters her or his previous belief or understanding is given a task where he or she needs to undergo a new configuration of self-concept or worldview in order to live

fully in life. Those who fail to see crisis as an opportunity for growth might be "regressive," and, as a result, cannot move toward a positive direction.

Researchers have proposed stages of transformational change to encapsulate the essence of the process. Loder (1989) described the five steps of the "logic of transformation": inner conflict, search for a resolution, intuitive insight, release and openness for new patterns of thinking and being, and interpretation and verification. White (2004) proposed another five stages of transformational change similar to Loder's logic of transformation through his content analysis of seven historical figures' stories of transformation: isolation and traumatic dissatisfaction, exposure to a message of hope through word or relationship, a breakthrough experience (e.g., a reconciliation of conflicting ideas or emotions), validation of the experience through "hanging on" to the experience, and entrance into a social context where the previous experience is validated.

Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992) proposed a transtheoretical model of change that interprets how people intentionally change their behaviors with and without therapy. The stages of change are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination (Prochaska, Norcorss, DiClemente, 1994). This model was developed through work with people who have addictive behaviors. People at the beginning are unaware of their problems, and then move to contemplate and accept responsibility for their own problems. Once they accept the responsibility, they prepare themselves for making changes. In the action stage, they actually commit to making changes and take action. In the maintenance stage, they manage to strengthen what they have changed and deal with relapses. In the termination stages, the problems no longer return. Proschaska and his colleagues argued that this is a spiral model of changes, rather

than a linear model. Stages of discovery from trauma proposed by Herman (2002) are safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. She believes that one who goes through trauma often goes through the first stage during which she or he regains a sense of safety. Through remembrance and mourning, one can move away from isolation and reconnect with others. Although these models can provide some insight into process of change, one has to be aware that epiphany may not arise from intentional effort and change.

One may also look at epiphany through a biopsychosocial lens. As one matures, "the stability of the state of mind is achieved by the movement toward maximizing complexity (pp. 219, Siegel, 1999)." In other words, through interactions with others and the environment, one integrates complex information into one's state of mind to achieve a sense of stability. Nonlinearity is observed in how one small change leads to large changes in one's organism (Chamberlain, 1995; Fogel, Lyra, & Valsiner, 1997). This evidence echoes the phenomenon of epiphany, which entails life transformation that can take place suddenly and profoundly. Through epiphany, one achieves a new stable state and maximize complexity in his or her behaviors, emotions, and/or cognition.

Epiphany has been associated with having enduring effects on one's life (James, 1902; Jarvis, 1996; Miller, & C'de Baca, 1994; 2001). The next question regards the quantity of epiphany experiences. C'de Baca and Wilbourne (2004) examined whether epiphany is a single event or a process. Slightly less than 50% of the participants reported that their quantum change experiences were a once in a lifetime experience. The rest of the participants reported that their previous quantum change was either one of

many huge transformational changes, a single big transformational change followed by smaller changes, or seen as part of a larger transformation.

Several theories have been used to interpret the phenomenon of epiphany. Miller and C'de Baca (2001) used Roy Baumeister's concept of crystallization of discontent (1994) to explain quantum changes. The process of crystallization of discontent starts with one's dissatisfaction with several parts of his or her life, which is experienced as fragmented and disconnected. The crystallizing process brings every element together and suddenly it makes sense to the person. Jarvis (1996) used chaos theory to interpret how one small incident can result in profound changes. Nonlinear relationships among a group of variables is the most important feature of chaos theory. Epiphany can result from the interactions among diverse situations in life that might be seen as unrelated from the perspective of the logical mind, but in fact they consist of nonlinear relationships that can be understood from a more associative perspective. When one makes sense of the broader picture, changes take place (Jarvis, 1996).

It is worth mentioning trauma research and theory, in comparison to epiphany. Trauma is understood as an event that "shatters" one's "inner schemata" (Herman, 2002; Horowitz, 1986). It is very difficult to assimilate traumatic experience into the existing schema of one's consciousness (Horowitz, 1986). Symptoms like hyperarousal and repetition compulsion are often observed in people who struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (Herman, 2002). Events that are often identified as traumatic experiences include, but not limited to, war, child abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

The similarity between traumatic experience and epiphanic experience is that both involve critical events that challenge one's world assumption. Literature in trauma

emphasizes how traumatic experience "shatters" one's pre-existing belief, while literature in epiphany emphasizes how after a critical event one undergoes a reconfiguration of his or her world assumption. It is suspected that the magnitude of inner shattering of world assumption that occurred during the events that trigger one's epiphany will not be as high as that which occurs during traumatic events. It is also plausible that traumatic events are triggers to epiphany, such as childhood trauma (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001) and war (Frankl, 1963).

Trauma research on resiliency provides evidence that people have different thresholds as to whether they develop post-traumatic stress disorder (Herman, 2002; Russell, 1990). Internal locus of control, sociability, task-oriented coping strategies are shown as protective factors when it comes to dealing with trauma (Bart & O'Brien, 1985; Brownmiller, 1975). Feeling lucky, or thinking that things could have been worse, was often reported by survivors who did not develop PTSD (Frankel & Smith, 1978). Long-lasting alteration in the regulation of endogenous opioids is found in those patients who developed PTSD (Pitman, van der Kolk, Orr, & Greenberg, 1990).

With regard to clinical implications of the understanding of epiphany, Bien (2004) suggested that therapists help clients live with ambiguity and paradox without feeling pressure to look for answers immediately. He argued that therapists are likely to observe a series of small changes and that it is rare to observe an epiphany in sessions with clients. However, therapists can help facilitate the process of transformational change by guiding clients to experience life fully and completely. White (2004) suggested that therapists not prematurely and carelessly terminate a client's opportunity to grow by providing interventions that target symptom relief. Instead, therapists should create an

environment where self-evaluation is encouraged, and, as a result, changes evolve or occur in relative to particular experiences.

Epiphany is like metamorphosis (Miller, 2004), similar to what James (1902) described as "organic ripening." It is like fast-forwarded self-actualization. Another metaphor for epiphany is water reaching the boiling point (Bien, 2004). He explained that it is like when bubbles suddenly break the surface. No matter how the phenomenon of epiphany is explained, epiphany is considered one type of maturation, the type that makes people grow profoundly in a short period of time. Miller (2004) wondered if "quantum change is an evolution in consciousness that all of us are meant to undergo as the human race matures (p. 459)."

## Literature Review Summary

Peak experience is a moment of highest happiness in life, characterized by intense perception, deep feelings, and profound significance. Research has indicated that no particular triggers are associated with the occurrence of peak experience, although it is believed that some spiritual practices might lead to greater degrees, or intensities, of peak experience. Typical inner experiences reported are joy, fulfillment, and spirituality, and they are intrinsically rewarding. People report a higher level of psychological well-being after peak experience.

Epiphany is an experience in which personal transformation occurs. Usually people go through a long period of emotional despair before epiphany. One's self-concept and reality are challenged by a sudden, unexpected event that shatters one's understanding of the world. One is thrown into a state of confusion. As a result, one's personality, or identity, has been changed. The impact of an epiphany is enduring and

profound. It is believed that one reconfigures his or her own architecture of personality. Epiphany usually increases the level of openness to experience and self-centeredness. Positive results are often observed; however, negative impacts on one's life have also been reported. Studies also suggest that a series of epiphanies may characterize person's lives. Epiphany can vary in intensity and in personal significance.

Before the method section, I would like to define and operationalize the terms used for this present study. Peak experience is a moment or incident characterized by highest happiness in one's life. The operationlized definition used is "an incident in one's life characterized by highest happiness." Epiphany is a brief moment or incident that changes one's perception of oneself or the world in a sudden, profound way. The operationalized definition is "an incident in one's life characterized by sudden and profound changes in one's perception of oneself and/or reality." Previous research suggests a distinction between these constructs. Peak experiences are primarily characterized by emotional elation; whereas the primary elements of an epiphany are sudden and profound changes regarding self-awareness and worldview. These two definitions were used as stimulus questions in the Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1984) for participants to respond to in written form. Psychological well-being is one's subjective evaluation of happiness that includes one's affect level and overall life satisfaction. (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The Friedman Well-Being Scale (Friedman, 1992) and The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) were used to examine the affective component of psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction, respectively.

## The Present Study

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the present study was to revisit the concept of peak experience as well as explore further the concept of epiphany. In both concepts, special attention was paid to what are the triggers, what was experienced, what meanings a person draw from the experience, and what impact the experience has on a person. Peak experiences and epiphanies were also compared in order to find their similarities and differences. Furthermore, this study described the relationship between epiphany, peak experience, and psychological well-being.

### *Research Objectives*

The study consists of two sub-studies. In the primary study, a qualitative approach, particularly phenomenological methodology, was used in order to broadly capture each aspect of the experiences. In the secondary study, a quantitative approach was used in order to fill in aspects that had not been captured through the qualitative method, and to provide statistical comparisons between these constructs and data on the relationships between the experiences, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being.

In the primary study, I explored the subjective perspectives of people who reported peak experience or epiphany. More specifically, the following questions were posed: What were the transitory characteristics being experienced in a peak experience and epiphany? Under what setting or environment did a person experience peak experience and epiphany? What meanings were assigned to peak experience and epiphany? What were the aftereffects of peak experiences and epiphany? What differentiated epiphany from peak experience in the above questions?

In the secondary study, I explored the intensities of the eight aspects of peak experience and epiphany as presented in the Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1984), including self in clear process, full focus, significance, fulfillment, spirituality, sociability, play, and outer structure. These eight factors were also compared to examine the different intensities between peak experience and epiphany. Peak experience and epiphany were also compared on the item level. No directional research hypotheses were given due to the exploratory nature of the study. Another set of the research questions was the relationships among the critical experience (including peak experiences and epiphany), psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. Specific directions were hypothesized: (1) there would be a positive relationship between peak experience and psychological well-being as well as between peak experience and life satisfaction; (2) there would be a positive relationship between epiphany and psychological well-being as well as between epiphany and life satisfaction.

# Chapter III: Method

A mixed method design, including both qualitative and quantitative paradigms, was used in the present study. A mixed method design is appropriate in this study for two reasons. First, subjective experiences are usually studied through qualitative approaches, due to the nature of the subjects. Phenomena themselves are usually the target of these studies. With qualitative approaches, aspects of phenomenon can be more fully captured and studied. Second, the present study was not only interested in exploring peak experiences and epiphanies phenomenologically, but also intended to distinguish the two constructs. A quantitative approach is the best method for providing statistical comparison between these two constructs and examining the relationships among experiences, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were complementary to each other in this research because they provided a more complete picture of the phenomena of peak experience and epiphany.

The primary study focused on understanding the essence of the phenomena of peak experience and epiphany and, thus, was qualitative, specifically phenomenological in nature. According to Creswell (1994), a phenomenology study attempts to understand the essence of how people experience some phenomenon. Participants' words are the most important vehicle to achieve understanding. In the primary study, the goal of understanding the phenomenon was achieved through participants' written descriptions of their experiences. Therefore, a phenomenological study was the most suitable approach in this qualitative inquiry.

The secondary study focused on exploring further specific components of peak experience and epiphany, as well as depicted the relationships between critical

experience, psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Therefore, the secondary study was causal-comparative and correlational in nature. The causal comparative study included a comparison between the components of peak experience and that of epiphany. A correlational approach was used to examine the association between variables and to predict participants' scores from predictor variables to criterion variables. In this study, the components of peak experience and epiphany were used to predict one's psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction.

The present study is considered a parallel/simultaneous study with mixed methods design (Creswell, 1994). That is, both qualitative and quantitative phases were conducted at the same time. Specifically, each participant participated in both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study by writing down their description of the experience (either peak experience or epiphany) and rating their experience by using the Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1984), along with completing inventories associated with psychological well-being and life satisfaction. The following section describes aspects that apply to both the primary and secondary studies. The analysis was divided into two sub-studies.

## Participants

Both undergraduate and graduate students were recruited to participate as the research population for this study for two reasons: (1) there is evidence suggesting that no difference in peak experiences reported by different age and occupational groups has been detected (e.g., Lanier et al., 1996; Yeagle et al., 1989); and (2) late adolescence or early adulthood is the period that one is more likely to experience epiphany (Jarvis, 1996). The sample for this study consisted of undergraduate and graduate students attending a

public university in a southwestern state. They were recruited through several lower-level introductory courses. Undergraduate participants received extra credit for participation, while graduate students volunteered to participate without any incentive. This method implies non-random sampling and all the participants were self-selected. All participation was anonymous. Each participant was at least 18 years of age and no more than 65 years of age. A power analysis indicated that a minimum of 120 participants for each group (peak experience group or epiphany group) were needed for a desired power of .8 for the quantitative sub-study (Cohen, 1985; Murphy & Myors, 2004). The experiences reported in the present study were analyzed through written descriptions instead of personal interviews. It was anticipated that each written description would be shorter than interview materials. Therefore, it was reasonable to include all the written description in the qualitative analysis.

Data collection took place over a 2-year period (2004-2006) and throughout the school year from early in the fall semester to late in the spring semester. Two hundred seventeen students (141 [65%] women and 76 [35%] men) participated in the study. Of 217 students, 133 [61.3%] were at the age of 18-20, 80 [36.9%] were at the age of 21-30, 1 [0.5%] was at the age of 31-40, and 3 [1.4%] were at the age of 41-50. In terms of ethnicity, 9.7% were self-identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 6.0% were African American, 3.2% were Asian American or Pacific Islander, 3.7% were Hispanic American, 75.1% were Caucasian, 1.4% were multiracial, 0.5% were foreign, and 0.5% did not disclose his or her ethnicity. Two hundred and five participants [94.9%] were single, while 11 [5.1%] were married. One hundred seventy participants [78.3%] had

received a high school diploma, 28 [12.9%] had received an associate degree, and 19 [8.8%] had received a bachelor's degree or higher.

## Procedure

This study was submitted to the University of Oklahoma—Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval (See Appendix A for approval letters). Following approval by the IRB, the researcher recruited participants from several introductory level courses. Participants were asked to go to a designated place where they were given a brief description of the research and a consent form. They were informed that the study was about critical experience and psychological well-being. If any of the individuals asked what kinds of critical experience, the researcher responded by saying that a question with a more detailed direction/definition would be provided in the research booklet. However, no one raised any question in this regard. The reason the question would have been handled this way was because some of the individuals were asked to respond to the epiphany question and some to the peak experience question. This procedure was to ensure responses would not be contaminated by any unnecessary direction. Participants were also reminded that they could withdraw at any time during the process.

After informed consents had been obtained from all individuals who were willing to participate in this study, they were given a research booklet that included the Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1984; see Appendix B), the Friedman Well-being Scale (Friedman, 1992; see Appendix C), Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; see Appendix D), and a demographic information sheet (see Appendix E). The Experience Questionnaire contains two parts. In the first part, they

received a stimulus question (either about peak experience or epiphany) and they were asked to write about their experience. They could choose whether to give permission to the researcher to quote their written responses in any part of the final report. In the second part, they answered Likert scaled items based on the experience they reported in the first part. Four sets of the research booklets (two different orders for peak experience booklets and two different orders for epiphany booklets) were prepared and randomly distributed to the participants. Participants received either a research booklet for epiphany or a research booklet for peak experience in two possible orders. There were two different orders of inventories under each group (peak experience or epiphany). One was Experience Questionnaire, Friedman Well-Being Scale, Satisfactions with Life Scale, and then the demographic information sheet, while the other order was Friedman Well-Being Scale, and Satisfactions with Life Scale, Experience Questionnaire, and then the demographic information sheet. The reason for counterbalancing the order of two inventories that tap into psychological well-being (Friedman Well-Being Scale and Satisfactions with Life Scale) and the Experience Questionnaire was that research has found significant improvement in one's mental health after writing about emotional experiences (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Order effect can be counterbalanced with this method.

Data collection occurred in the presence of the researcher who answered participants' questions or concerns promptly. Special attention was paid to any participant who had a hard time responding to the stimulus questions, especially the question about epiphany. Research has shown that not everyone has an epiphanic experience (Jarvis, 1996), although some researchers were surprised by the numbers of

the participants who reported peak experiences (Maslow, 1971) and epiphany (Miller, & C'de Baca, 2001). It is assumed that people would not have problems with finding an experience of highest happiness in their life. Thus, if there had been any participant who reported having no epiphany, he or she would have been given the peak experience research booklet to complete for their participation for course credit. The data would have been discarded because it would not qualify as randomly assigned. However, no one reported having difficulty during the participations.

## Instruments

*Experience Questionnaire* (Privette, 1984)

The Experience Questionnaire consists of one open-ended question that asks participants to report a critical experience. The open-ended question was adjusted to examine different experiences, such as peak experience, peak performance, misery, failure, sport, and average events (Lanier et al., 1996; Privette, & Bundrick, 1991, 1997; Privette et al, 1997; Yeagle et al., 1989). The researcher consulted with the questionnaire developer, Gayle Privette, Ph.D., regarding using a stimulus question for epiphany and confirmed that it was appropriate to create a stimulus question for epiphany based on the researcher's definition (Privette, personal communication, October 6, 2003). The stimulus question for peak experience is the same as has been used in the previous research, which is, "Will you describe one incident in your life characterized by highest happiness?" The stimulus question for epiphany is based on the definition of epiphany for this study, and is, "Will you describe an incident in your life characterized by sudden and profound changes in your perception of yourself and/or reality?" The stimulus

question is followed by 47 statements in Likert format and five scaled descriptions of the peak experience.

The Experience Questionnaire was developed from literature on peak experience (Maslow, 1962, 1971) and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975a, 1975b) and was constructed from the perspective of an experiential approach. Psychometric methods for developing the questionnaire included open-ended self-reports of retrospective data, from which descriptions from first-person accounts of peak experience were incorporated and developed into the questionnaire. The items in the questionnaire were developed from a humanistic framework, emphasizing inner retrospective experiences (Privette, 1984).

Items were factored into eight conceptually clear dimensions, using an oblique rotation (Privette & Bundrick, 1987). The eight factors found included: self in clear process, full focus, significance, fulfillment, spirituality, sociality, play, and outer structure. Dominant items from the Experience Questionnaire are shown in abbreviated form and item number under their respective factors in Table 1.

Test-retest reliability of the questionnaire was .70, and readibility was estimated at the ninth to tenth grade level (Privette & Sherry, 1986). Construct validity of experiential data has been supported by discriminant analysis, with a correct group classfication of 97.7 % of construct events. Item and factor content showed strong correspondence to theoretical constructs (Privette & Bundrick, 1991). The questionnaire has been used in a number of studies (e.g., Atkins, 1990; Lanier et al., 1996; Privettet et al., 1997; Walter, 1988, Yeagle et al.; 1989)

*Friedman Well-Being Scale* (Friedman, 1992)

Friedman Well-Being Scale (FWBS) consists of a series of 20 bipolar adjectives with a Likert-like scale from 0 to 10. A total score can be obtained by adding up all the scores on the 20 items and dividing by 2. Subscales scores, including emotional stability (10 items), jovial (3 items), self-esteem/self-confidence (3 items), sociability (3 items), and happiness (1 item), can also be obtained (See Friedman, 1994). The internal reliabilities across subscales ranged from .72 to .89, and the Spearman-Brown Split Half Reliabilities ranged from .91 to .93. The test-retest reliability ranged from .81 to .85. All the reliabilities were in a very respectable range. Convergent and construct validities between the FWBS and several subjective well-being scales, including the Positive Thought Scale (Kendall, 1992), a quality of life scale (Andrews, & Withey, 1976), a measure of dispositional optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1992), and The Generalized Expectancy of Success Scale (Fibel & Hale, 1978), ranged from .47 to .71 in college student samples.

*Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Diener et al., 1985)

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) assesses global life satisfaction with 5 Likert type scale items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A single total score is calculated by adding up the scores on these 5 items. It has been tested with a wide range of population, including college students and the elderly (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991). The item-total correlations ranged from .57 to .75, which indicated the scale captured a single construct and had good internal consistency. The two month test-retest correlation coefficient was .82, which indicates a high temporal reliability. Correlation coefficients on concurrent validity and predictive

validity range from .50 to .75 with a wide range of subjective psychological well-being scales, which indicates the scale demonstrates adequate validity.

*Demographic Form*

Information on gender, age, cultural background, marital status, level of education were gathered, along with a question that taps into one's top three values.

## Analysis

*Qualitative Analysis*

The method used in the study was based on Creswell's (1994) and Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003) guidelines on conducting a phenomenological psychological study. Phenomenological analysis was conducted before the quantitative analysis in order to avoid the development of bias from the result of the quantitative data. The material qualitatively analyzed was the written descriptions in the first part of the Experience Questionnaire. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the analysis was to further explore the phenomenon of peak experience and epiphany, with the focus on the transitory characteristics of such experiences, settings where they occur, meanings assigned to such experiences, and the aftereffects.

Several steps were taken to decide whether written descriptions should be discarded, if not fitting under the definitions of peak experience or epiphany. First, question 47 "How do you characterize the aftereffects?" was used as a filter for the written descriptions for epiphany. Given the definition of epiphany, it is believed that the aftereffects of an epiphany are profound, enduring, and significant. Any data where participants rated the epiphany as of "little, or none" importance on this item would have been discarded, and those rating the epiphany as "turning point," "significant," or "some

importance" were kept. This did not apply to peak experience because the experience does not have to be seen as a significant or a turning point to be considered as a peak experience. No data was discarded from this criterion. Second, the researcher went over each written description to ensure that participants responded to the stimulus questions. Those written descriptions that were considered not to fit the definition of peak experience or epiphany would be brought to the researcher's major advisor for a second opinion. If he agreed with the researcher's judgment, the data, including both qualitative and quantitative parts, would have been discarded. No written description was found not fitting the definition of either epiphany or peak experience.

Twenty written descriptions for each group were chosen for the first step of the analysis, if either the number of words is longer than 50 or over 7 sentences are used in the descriptions. The researcher and her advisor, Dr. Rockey Robbins, were the main coders throughout the study. Open coding was used at the beginning stage to find themes or core ideas across descriptions. These same two sets of written descriptions were read and coded separately by the two coders. Two coders met and triangulated the themes they found separately. The meeting focused on the negotiation and clarification of the themes and efforts to reach agreements about categories. Axial coding was used to group similar or related themes into domains. This start list was used as a coding guideline for the remaining descriptions. The coders reviewed the rest of the descriptions and coded the data separately. As the coding process continued, other themes emerged as well. Both coders took notes on their own.

Discussion was held after the coding of each written description to exchange perceptions about the coding process and its contents. Two coders worked together to

rename, combine, eliminate, remove, or divide categories. They discussed their judgment until a consensus was reached regarding the best representation of the material. Codes were reviewed again by the coders together to ensure the consistency of the coding across all the data. Major or minor themes were discussed and notes were taken throughout the analysis process. A final organized framework with categories under domains were put together, along with major themes. A graduate student in a related area also served as an auditor to check if the coding fit major categories. Discussion was held between the graduate student and the researcher. No major change in categories was made.

It is acknowledged that the coders' worldviews and theoretical orientations, along with the expectations of the study, might bring bias in the process of analysis. The researcher grew up in Taiwan and her perspective is influenced by Chinese philosophies, such as Taoism (Lao-Tzu) and Confucius' thinking. Her theoretical orientation is humanistic, and person-centered, along with the emphasis on a way of being and living with ambiguity. Dr. Rockey Robbins is an American Indian and is influenced by American Indian perspectives concerning spiritual awareness as well as his postmodern psychological perspective.

*Quantitative Analysis*

The quantitative analysis was comparative and correlational in nature. The quantitative data used was the second part of the Experience Questionnaires, the Friedman Well-Being Scale, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the quantitative analysis was to find out the difference between peak experience and epiphany, as well as to explore the interrelationships among the critical

experiences (including peak experience and epiphany), psychological well-being, and life satisfactions.

Demographic data for participants were reported through descriptive statistics, including the numbers of gender, ages, cultural background, marital status, and educational level of the participants, along with their ratings on their top three values.

MANOVAs were conducted to examine the differences in the structure of the peak experience and epiphany versions of the Experience Questionnaire. Specific differences on the eight factors between peak experience and epiphany were examined. Regression analysis was utilized in order to see if it could be predicted by one's psychological well-being and life satisfaction through the self-reported peak experience and epiphany. Specifically, both the eight factors and 47 items in the Experience Questionnaire were used as predictor variables, while the scores on the Friedman Well-being Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale were used as criterion variables. Additional quantitative analysis was conducted after qualitative analysis.

# Chapter IV: Results

## Qualitative Results

Qualitative data were screened for possible deviance before conducting qualitative analysis. Two written descriptions were discarded before starting the analysis due to the fact that they were too short to be categorized. Two hundred and fifteen written descriptions of peak experience and epiphany were entered for further analysis. One hundred ten peak experience stories were categorized, 7 of which were too short to be used in the analysis. One hundred and five epiphany stories were categorized, 5 of which were too short to be used in the analysis.

Qualitative results are divided into three sections: Peak experience, epiphany, and comparison of peak experience and epiphany. The first two sections focus on major categories within peak experience and epiphany, respectively. The third section focuses on the overlapping constructs of peak experience and epiphany as well as the differences that distinguish these two critical experiences.

### *Peak Experience*

Peak experience is a moment or incident characterized by highest happiness in one's life. Participants in the study responded to the following stimulus question: "Will you describe one incident in your life characterized by highest happiness?" Four major categories emerged from the qualitative analysis of the written descriptions of peak experience: (a) Need/dream/fantasy/goal being fulfilled as a peak experience ($n$ = 45, 40.91%); (b) a shared moment that involves recognition of being in relation to the world ($n$ = 53, 48.18%); (c) peak experience associated with insight regarding after

tragedy/separation/misfortune ($n$ = 8, 7.27%); and (d) an experience that involves nature or a high power ($n$ = 4, 3.64%).

*Need/dream/fantasy/goal being fulfilled as a peak experience.* The majority of these "dreams-come-true" stories are concerned with some form of mastery. Participants themselves play an important role in fulfilling their dreams, for both personal dreams (e.g., being accepted by their dream university) and shared dreams (e.g., won a state championship with their teammates). Hard work, or a sense of determination as well as patient waiting is often involved in the stories. Sometimes there are unexpected positive outcomes. Interestingly, some of the outcomes achieved in these stories had not been their ultimate goals. Nevertheless, mastery is often associated with and is associated to contribute to peak experiences. Typical emotional reactions to peak experiences in these stories are excitement, happiness, awe, joy, and luck. Participants also report a sense of accomplishment associated with the experience.

A sense of "I-ness" and/or "we-ness" are categories that may distinguish types of peak experience. Participants sometimes described their stories as if they were the most important person in the experiences. In the other words, they take individual credit for achieving peak experiences. Participant 012 assumed ownership of her graduation from high school and claimed it as an experience characterized by highest happiness:

> I had set several goals for myself, and in that incident I fulfilled many of them. These included being valedictorian, winning a National Merit Scholarship, and generally completing a successful high school education.

Another participant described her trip to visit one of her relatives in another state as a happily individualistic act that resulted in peak experience. She stated, "I planned it by

myself and paid my own travel expenses. I had to get a job to do it but I got to do it. It was a great trip! (Participant 117)." The trip became the happiness time in her life because she was the one making it happen. Participant 216's story began with her parents' disapproval, an obstacle that she surmounted. However, she had made her dream come true through arduous effort.

> An incident in my life that made me really happy was when my parent told me I could go to [the name of the university]…. My parent wanted me to stay close to home and go to a smaller college. This frustrated me to no end. I knew I would have the time of my life if I went to [the name of the university]. I just had to convince my parents.

Other participants emphasized shared effort and peak experiences that were inextricably bound up with others, yet the self was not absorbed into the other. These stories shared both I-ness and we-ness. Many stories involve playing for sport teams or marching bands that ended up winning important competitions. They often emphasize the importance of the participants' involvement and contribution to the teams. Sometimes they assumed leadership roles that contributed to their heightened feelings of happiness when their group succeeded.

> One incident… was when I made head drum major of the marching band at my high school…. When I joined the band, I watched the drum majors we went through and thought that they were good, but improvements could be made…. Over the course of my times as drum major I worked diligently on improving many aspects of the band. The program was very strong when I graduated and I am so happy I got to be a part of that (Participant 143, female).

….Freshman year of high school I started my first game pitching on the varsity baseball team… I felt good about my performance and was content having to leave the game when I did. I had done my part to the best of my ability and had seen good results because of it (Participant 217, male).

Other stories fall further on the "we-ness" side of the spectrum. Participant 146 described his team's winning in the semi-final of the state baseball tournament:

…. Well we made it. We made history that year in making it to the championship game. Even though we lost in the final game, we gave ourselves a chance and were excited to have been in that position.

One incident in my life characterized by highest happiness was when my high school basketball team went to the state tournament. The girls program had never had a team qualify, so we were the first…. my dream had always been to play in the "Big House"…. My team was treated like queens. We were showered with gifts, and younger kids asked for our autographs. All of this was great… (Participant 027, female).

In this example, as well as in others, the joy experience is described only in terms of the shared experience. There is no mention of individual accomplishment or happiness except as it is shared with others.

Hard work, or a sense of determination, usually precedes this type of peak experience. Hard work seems to bring greater joy. For example, Participant 128 who did not consent for the researcher to quote her description reported that she was determined to pass her graduation test after failing the test three times. She wasn't able to receive her diploma in the graduation ceremony, which had made her even more determined to get

what she deserved. Participant 128's determination has made the experience unforgettable, according to her description.

As illustrated in earlier examples, whether the peak experience is I or We centered, hard work often precedes the peak experience. Participant 210 wrote, "It took insane amounts of hard work, dedication, and time" to win a cheerleading state championship. Participant 121 was told that, with her being a freshman, she had a slim chance to be selected in a marching band. She wrote, "I did my audition after practicing all summer and being so nervous about it…. I had wanted it so bad and I got in the band." Participant 212 had a similar experience. She wrote, "Finally getting accepted into [the name of a university] after a lot of work. I couldn't get into [the name of the university] straight after high school because of my ACT score." Participant 017 shared a story where she had failed many times before she achieved her goal:

> When I was a junior in high school I ran for junior class president. When I was in middle school and in high school I had run for different offices at school and always lost…. Finally, I was junior class president. I ran against some hard people to beat and still won the office.

This type of peak experiences seems to taste even sweeter, especially after several unsuccessful trials.

In addition to hard work, another common trigger for this type of peak experience is a long wait. In another words, for many participants delayed gratification contributes to their peak experiences. The attainment of the dream begets a peak experience. Here are some examples:

> I graduated from [the name of the university] in 2001. I have gone to [the name of the university] since 1979 off and on. I had to discontinue many times due to low finance or lack of transportation. After about 22 years of going a year or earn a semester at a time, I finally finished my goal I set for myself (Participant 018, male).
>
> I asked for a sister for 3 years. I prayed and prayed. When my mother conceived and brought my little sister into the world, that was one of the happiest incidents in my life. She was absolutely perfect and I sang to her every day (Participant 138, female).

Unique first-time experiences predominate this type of peak experiences rather than everyday experiences. The specialness out of the ordinary of the first-time experiences left a significant mark in several participants' memories:

> When I was younger I traveled to Vietnam where I saw my grandparents for the first time (Participant 016, male).
>
> There had not been a team to do this at my school since the 50s, so it was huge (Participant 105, male).
>
> After all the interviews and dancing they finally posted the officers for our dance team, and I was captain! I won with a complete consensus-directors and teammates (Participant 135, female).

A significant amount of the first-time experience as peak experience are transitions to another phase of one's life. Getting accepted into their dream schools (i.e., stories from Participant 148, 205, 131) and graduation from high school (i.e., stories from

Participants 115, 139, 012) are typical stories, not unexpected, given the life experiences of the population of college students.

Many participants attribute symbolic meanings to their peak experiences. Participant 131 reported a peak experience when she opened an acceptance letter to her dream university. She wrote, "I felt a sense of achievement, and like I could do anything I put my heart to." The incident symbolizes promising future. Another participant reported a similar symbolic meaning: "I was the most happy in my life when my senior year of high school I got a 34 on my ACT. A 34 meant I got a full ride scholarship to any school in [the name of a state]." Her ACT score represents a better future for her. Their final success was not reported as peak experiences. Instead, knowing that they could succeed in the future was their highest happiness.

Here are some examples of the ecstasy that characterizes peak experience for participants:

…. just surreal (Participant 011, male)

… all I could do was drive around non-stop. I felt like the luckiest person ever. (Participant 005, female).

… I was extremely happy! (Participant 022, female)

…. My heart was racing and I felt like screaming!...(Participant 032, female)

…. I yelled out of excitement and hugged my mom forever….I was floating on a cloud the rest of the day… (Participant 121, female)

… I felt proud, joyful, elated, and happy. It was bittersweet because I knew it was over…(Participant 210, female)

…. I was so overjoyed that there were times throughout the day that I could not speak. (Participant 205)

The catalogue of ecstasy is related to participants' sense of achievement or victory. A sense of pride also permeates many of these stories. Some reported feeling a sense of approval and pride from their family. For example, Participant 131 reported a sense of approval after she informed her friends and family. Participant 212 wrote, "…Going to community college was a big pride issue for me. I felt like I had let down my mom. Being at [the name of the university], I know my family is proud."

Only a few participants specifically described the aftereffect of the approval and pride experience. Participant 115 wrote, "…if I get discouraged I think back to that day." The peak experience reminds her of a time when she felt triumph, a sense of mastery, and acceptance.

*A shared moment that involves recognition of being in relation to the world.* A sense of "connection" permeates many stories that describe peak experience. Most of the stories speak about a shared moment where one is connected to another human being or to a group of people. Moments reported in this category include birthday parties, surprise engagements, weddings, special trips, and special moments (e.g., experiencing unborn baby's kicking, from Participant 126, male). All these moments were shared with loved ones, including girlfriend or boyfriend, wife or husband, family, close friends, and animals. These stories may represent the love and connection that they long for in the world. This type of peak experience also captures one' realization of being in relation to other human beings and/or to the world. Ritual activities (i.e., wedding and engagement) are especially symbolic of one's connected existence with another human being, and thus,

become common triggers to this type of peak experience. A special quality of these peak experiences is that highest happiness comes from the accumulation of several events. In other words, every single component or step that contributes to this peak experience counts (as will be examplified in quotations below), not just the moment of highest happiness. Within the peak experiences, enjoyment is frequently reported. The aftereffect of this type of experience was rarely mentioned in this type of peak experience.

The recognition of connection that one has had with another human being for a long time makes the moment stand out as a peak experience. The moment of the peak experience crystallizes the feelings that have been accumulating. Participant 136 described, "My mom is my best friend and when we're together I can relax." She continued to write about a day she and her mother shared together as her peak experience:

> …. Mom's day was fun because both of us are members of the same sorority and we got to hang around our sorority house. It's so special to have that bond. It was a day that we smiled all day.

Participant 142 shared her connected moment with her "true love":

> …. As I turned around, he grabbed me close and softly gave me a kiss on the lips. My heart flipped over and a shiver ran down my spine. We stared into each other's eyes for a minute and a slight, small tear ran down my cheek.

Participant 202's happiest day of her life was her brother's wedding. She wrote, "….He is my only sibling, so we grew up very close to one another. His wife and I really share a special connection so that really helped to make the day incredible. It was truly a perfect

day." The connections she had with more than one person in the wedding made this experience special. Participant 008 described her trip to visit her best friend who lived in a country in the Middle East, "….When I got off the plane in [the name of the country] my best friend was waiting for me I was so happy to see her. She is like a part of me. That whole trip was highest happiness." The pre-existing connection between her and her best friend was brought up to the surface again. The experience of being able to re-connect was her peak experience.

Connection stories as peak experience also include those stories that capture the moment of knowing one's importance in relation to others' lives. Participant 204 described an unforgettable moment when his parents came back from a business trip when he was 15 years old:

> …. It was the first time I had actually stayed home while my parents were out of town…. Sunday afternoon they came back, I was at the fields working the concession stands for a fundraiser. My parents came to the fields as soon as they got into town. I saw them pull up and quickly ran out there to greet them with drinks. To see the look on their faces as I ran out there made me happy, but being with them again made me happier.

From Participant 204's observation, his parents conveyed their love toward him through nonverbal communication. It seems to confirm his importance in their lives. Another participant wrote about a highest happiness that involved knowing his importance in his parents' lives after an unexpected, temporary separation from family. Participant 206 lived through a hurricane that swept an island she was in at that time:

…. I lived that week in filth with no water or electricity….The worst part was being cut off from my parents. I talked to them just before the hurricane hit and they were worried sick. Six days later a friend's phone worked and I got to call my dad to tell him everything was okay. He started crying….

A distinct characteristic of some peak experiences is its resonance extends beyond the initial few seconds. Participant 134 described a week long spring break shared with her best friends at a beach in Florida as her peak experience. Participant 020 reported the day of her surprise engagement as her peak experience, rather than that moment of being proposed. Participant 001 described an ordinary day spending time with her boyfriend as her peak experience. She wrote, "…One day we spent all day together and it just hit me….We were just sitting around my house watching TV and all that normal boring stuff, but that feeling of knowing and just feeling complete will make that day stand out forever." Her heightened emotion lasted an entire day. Participant 213 claimed her the whole freshman year of college as her peak experience.

Unlike the peak experience that sprang primarily from relations with people, other's peak experiences came from an accumulation of interactions that also included nature and/or a higher power. An interesting finding in this type of peak experience is that water is mentioned in a significant number of the stories. Beaches are the most common, especially in special trips. Participant 020 was proposed to on a beach in Florida, and Participant 104 went to a beach in California with a group of friends in a summer vacation. Participant 010 wrote, "On spring break, me and my friends drank cold beer and fished off over balconies in our hotel. The hotel was on a pier over the

ocean." Participant 003's peak experience comes from all the relations she had at one time with friends, nature, and a higher power:

> I was hiking the mountains in [the name of a state] with my best friends and [a Christian organization]'s leader. It was the hardest hike I have ever made. We came to a peak in the hike and peered over. It was called Ruby Lake. A lake at the top of a mountain where only about 100 people have seen it. I was in God's beauty, surrounded by best friend and had just accomplished a difficult climb.

In Eastern cultures, four basic elements, or fire, air, earth, and water, are essential to one's life. Water means serenity. Other three basic elements—fire, air, and earth—were not even mentioned in any of the stories. It seems that peak experience that involves water possesses a relaxing, peaceful quality.

Some participants' stories suggest that they may be conditioned in such a way as to have peak experiences at social rituals that have been given associating with love, connection, celebration, and happiness, such as engagements, weddings, and birthdays. As Participant 006 wrote, "Last [the date of his birthday] was my [birthday], so of course I was pretty happy…." The setting for highest happiness had been staged for him. Still, he noted that he was especially pleased by a surprise party thrown for him. Participant 113 started her story by writing, "My wedding was the happiest day of my life, just like we all hope it will be." A sense of expectation of highest happiness that the day would turn out "perfect" is formed here as well as in other participants' stories. Planned highest happiness are often peak experiences. Participants feel a sense of connectedness toward others, especially loved ones. Ecstatic love is associated with surprises and social rituals. Participants also describe vivid memories of surprises occurring within the situations of

planned out activities (i.e., Participant 125 described details how her boyfriend planned to "pop the question"). Participant 113 gave details about how her wedding came off perfect, including not having a pimple on her face.

The accumulation of events may bring highest happiness, rather than just one single event. Participant 118 described this sense of "everything-comes-together":

> I remember when I was ten years old and I just had my tenth birthday. My sister was past due on her pregnancy, so anytime she could have given birth. Four days later, on July 11th, my nephew was born. It was so incredible, I was ten, just had a birthday, my sister just had a baby, and that makes me an uncle. I thought that was just the greatest thing ever!

Every single event contributes to achieving highest happiness in this story. Participant 213 described her freshman year of college as her peak experience. A combination of independence, friendship, family, and romantic relationship brings her joy. She expressed a sense of completeness from accumulation of the love she received from others:

> I believe the point in my life characterized by highest happiness was last year, my freshman year of college. I was finally on my own and was making tons of new friends. Being the social and outgoing person I am I loved getting to know new people, it made me happy when I was surrounded by my friends. I had a close relationship with my family and felt their love even at a distance. I also met my boyfriend and my heart felt true love. I enjoyed all the time I could spend with him and felt secure. My highest happiness is when I am around those that love me and are there to lift me up!

What was frequently reported in the stories is enjoyment. Their happiness comes from enjoying the moment. Most of the participants convey their enjoyment in these experiences through their descriptions. What was absent in this type of peak experience is one's intent, pursuit, or goal. Participant 109 described an incident where she was given a box of newborn, abandoned kittens. She wrote, "….we had to take complete care of them, feeding, washing, etc. I was excited because I love cats and now had several to love." What she wanted to do was to take good care of these kittens. She enjoyed their company and felt a sense of connection. Participant 102 reported pure joy from one of his birthday party when he was twelve: "…. The dressed-up animal sung to me and I got a bucket of coins to spend on all the games. I felt like I was the luckiest kid on earth." Another participant stated that she and her friends "lay out on the beach and had no cares or worries (Participant 134)." In these stories, simply being/doing in the moment brings joy.

Some participants recognized the transitory or short-lived nature of highest happiness. Participants' recognition of the briefness of the happiness seems to facilitate their ability to cherish the moment even more. Participant 116 wrote, "… One of my friends had all of us over because it was our last night before school started. We stayed up all night swimming and talking about our lives and time spent with each other." Gatherings before departure appeared to lend themselves to the experience of highest happiness. Participant 104 also described the last time she and her high school friends got together as her peak experience. Re-connecting with friends caused Participant 221 to realize the importance of cherishing the moment. She went to see her friends, which

she referred to as "family," after she was displaced due to Hurricane Katrina's destruction in New Orleans:

> …. It was so good to see everyone. I was OVERfilled with happiness. I didn't want my weekend to end. I was able to be myself—no stress, laughing, having a good time, enjoying myself with those I hold close to me. I felt complete and at ease. Nothing could make me sad at this point.

Besides the feeling of happiness, mixed feelings are frequently reported when participants recognize that the happiness would not last forever. Participant 134 reported, "I could not have been happier…. I was sad when I had to leave to come back to school and to reality."

*Peak Experiences associated with insight regarding after tragedy/separation/misfortune*. Some stories began with tragedy, separation, or misfortune that may have initially been experienced as devastating but were followed by an awareness that is associated with highest happiness. The misfortunate event is the common trigger in these types of peak experiences. They make peace with the occurrence of the misfortune. The positive, long-term aftereffect—a sense of relief and a sense of peace—were reported. Some reported new realizations because of the experience.

Different kinds of tragedies were described in this type of story. Some of the tragedies happened to loved ones. For example, Participant 033's brother was diagnosed with a kind of brain disease. Participant 137's mother got into an accident and broke her back. Other tragedies occurred to the participants and others while together. Participants 002 and 034 both encountered tragedy on a trip with loved ones. Participants 144 and

224 experienced their parents' divorce. These tragedies threw their lives out of order, and they experienced a sense of disequilibrium.

Worries about oneself, loved ones, or one's future after the misfortune seem to precede their peak experiences. Participant 033 reported that his brother was not given any hope by the doctors at the beginning of the treatment. Participant 137 reported a similar kind of despair when his mother started rehabilitation. He wrote, "…. The doctor said she was not going to be well for one to two years and she had to be in a wheelchair. Well she proved them wrong and was walking within seven months of rehab…." Participants commonly reported that they did not have much hope for their loved ones to bounce back to their previous equilibrium. Positive outcomes brought happiness to these participants and, as a result, they reported their stories as peak experiences.

Other participants reported that they found themselves in situations which were out of their control. Nothing could be done to make things better. Participant 224 reported his highest happiness occurred after his parents' divorce for 6-8 months when he was thirteen years old. He wrote, "…. my Mom was supposed to pick me up at summer camp…. but I'll never forget when my Mom and Dad arrived together to pick me up. I think I will always remember that feeling that I had that day." Participant 224 had longed for his parents to get back together for a long time. That brief moment where his fantasy became reality became unforgettable.

Participant 144's parents were separated when she was ten years old. She could not alter her misfortune. The pain associated with her parents' separation seemed to be alleviated after she had a fun holiday with her mother without accidents:

> My parents were separated when I was ten years old. I decided to live with my mom. My mom didn't want me to feel bad. She decided to take me and my sister to our grandma house. Won Song Glan (water fight day) occurred every summer. It was Thai holiday. I forgot what was the whole purpose of this day. All I can remember was I had fun with the whole experience. First we went to the Temple to pray to Buddha and spirits for the respect and the protection from any accident during our trip to the city…. [Details of how people in Thailand celebrated Won Song Glan]…. Everybody in the city was nice and friendly. No accident occurred on that day. I felt "much better" about my parents' separation. I knew that instant that I would be happy living with my mom.

Her mother's intent to ease her pain from the separation seems to make a difference in how she foresees her life. Asking for a protection from a higher power to prevent any accident from happening in Won Song Glan is paralleled with her hoping that she would be fine living with her mother only. She feels a sense of relief. A new kind of realization is achieved from a seemingly unrelated holiday. The symbolic association between having fun with her mother and nothing bad happening that is associated with a future where she can be safe. The happenings of that day appear to have helped her accept her parents' divorce.

Some participants reflected upon the meaning of their lives in the larger scheme of things. Participant 033 described her trip to a desert vividly especially after she broke her tooth, car breakdowns, and the tailgate metal tore from the weight of their bicycles. She wrote, "Our hearts were set for the journey. We continued on." Instead of writing about her misfortune, she wrote more about what she experienced afterwards:

> …. The day I touched a starfish in a tidal pool it seemed like the smell of salt water was the exhalation of the breath of God. The same day in the same area we hiked among redwood trees that were rooted in the earth before Jesus went to the Cross or Buddha renounced his riches. When I smelled the fecundity of that ancient forest, it was as if the Life of Life was there. When I stood inside a tree that could have held every generation of my family back to the time it was a seedling. I realized a lifelong yearning. Even remembering this experience, just closing my eyes and visualizing the depth of green, touching the soft back, feeling the mutedness of my footsteps on the redwood needles can bring me peace….

Without letting unpleasant misfortunes impact her too much, Participant 033 instead experiences her life in a profound, deep way. She did not specify whom she traveled with in this trip. She seems to have a special ability to transcend everyday normalness and achieve a higher level of awareness. Her willingness to open her heart up to something bigger than what she can see, touch, and feel has made the experience possible. At the end of her story, she wrote, "I view that month long experience as a microcosm of my life. Despite all of the unplanned trials, detours and disappointments, the journey itself always brings joy, if we only have eyes, ears, and hearts to sense it." She is a non-traditional student with more life experience than most college students. She seemed to want to convey the message that fully experiencing each moment, even the unpleasant and painful, can bring joy in life.

A slightly different kind of realization was gained after Participant 222's separation from her father. She wrote, "…. He is getting old and it helped me realize I need to spend more time with him." Although no details were given about how she came

to this realization, it seems evident that this type of peak experience after experiencing misfortune/tragedy/separation brings new realization.

*An experience that involves nature or high power.* Some of these stories are distinguished from other stories due to one's solitary experience with nature or higher power. The stories with higher power are reported as life-changing experiences. Solitary experience in a natural setting usually brings a profound sense of peace to participants who experienced it. Participant 024 described her highest happiness when "sitting in a riverbed in the bottom of the Grand Canyon." In her solitude, she reported, "God was looking down on me in the most powerful sense." Participant 122 wrote, "Walking alone on the beaches of Maui I felt at peace with myself, and I can picture it today, just the same as when it happened." To these participants, the highest happiness comes from being content and at peace with nature.

Peak experiences that involved a higher power are often described as turning points in their lives. Interestingly, both Participants 031 and 223 reported their experiences of accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior when they were 12 years old. It would be too much of a stretch to say that being at the age of 12 triggered their peak experiences. However, adolescence years might be a trigger given adolescents' developmental task of autonomy. Participant 031 mentioned that she was going through a difficult time before the peak experience occurred. Participant 223 wrote, "…. It is hard to describe the excitement, but my life changed that day." These feelings are not easily made sense of with words. "Joy", "excitement," and "overjoyed" were mentioned in these two stories. In addition, it is clear to the ones who experienced it that they are better off with accepting the higher power into their lives. Participant 031 described

letting go of her control of her life: "…. I wasn't burdened about my future because I knew that God had my heart and He was in control of my life." Participant 031 wrote that she found a sense of peace and a sense of relief by having a "daily relationship with God." Participant 223 also mentioned that the experience was not just the highest happiness for her but also was "the best choice" she has made in her life. Participant 031 wrote, "…. For several weeks, I knew that I needed a purpose in my life and I knew that I needed to become a Christian."

*Epiphany*

Epiphany is a sudden, profound transformation that changes one's perspective of his or herself and/or the world. Participants in the study responded to the following stimulus question: " Will you describe one incident in your life characterized by sudden and profound changes in your perception of yourself and/or reality?" Six major categories emerged from the qualitative analysis of the written descriptions of epiphany: (a) Epiphany after the death of others, illness, or danger of others or self ($n$ = 36, 34.29%); (b) epiphany as a result of changes in relationships with others ($n$ = 22, 20.95%); (c) epiphany resulting from environmental changes ($n$ = 24, 22.86%); (d) epiphany after a mastery experience ($n$ = 13, 12.38%); (e) epiphany that involves higher power ($n$ = 5, 4.76%); and (f) epiphany from full awareness ($n$ = 5, 4.76%).

*Epiphany after death of others, illness, or danger of others or self.* Epiphany in this category is associated with experiences with the death of loved ones (e.g., many participants lost their grandparents, parents, friends, and animals from illness and accidents), or life-threatening incidents that endanger self (e.g., being in a car accident, being diagnosed with chronic illness, and experiencing a robbery) and loved ones (e.g.,

friends in a car accidents, and parents being diagnosed with cancer). Some participants reported vivid memories of how the incidents had happened, but descriptions of emotions associated with the incidents were often omitted. These stories appeared to precipitate participants' thinking about their own mortality, and, as a result, they re-evaluated and re-prioritized their lives. A realization of the importance of living fully in every moment permeates these stories. When participants confronted life-and-death issues, other problems or issues in their lives did not seem to be so important. Participants also realized the vulnerability of life and many made conscious decisions to take action instead of waiting passively for a better life. Behavioral changes, or coping strategies, were reported in their stories. All the participants experienced sadness in their experiences, but the majority of the participants viewed their experiences as significant and as turning points.

Mortality is a common realization associated with experiencing a death, illness, or danger to others or self. Death of a loved one was a "reality check" for a lot of the participants in this category. For example, Participant 163 wrote, "Death became very real to me" after her grandmother died suddenly. Although Participant 189 knew superficially she would one day die her friend's death shocked her into a confrontation with her own mortality. Her irrational assumptions were challenged and she had to find ways to "come to reality." Participant 189 wrote her thoughts after knowing one of her good friends' death:

> …. Like many young people I think I am immortal. I constantly put myself into situations that could be dangerous and/or traumatizing and always think "it will never happen to me." I now realize that I'm not going to live forever….

Some participants found they could not escape from their own existential fear of death when a loved one died. Yalom (1980) suspected that we are confronted by existential despair—mortality twice or three times in our lives.

Participant 070, who did not consent for the researcher to quote his description, reported his best friend's death was a reality check for him because he and his best friend had a similar lifestyle. With his self-identification with his friend, he was able to re-examine his lifestyle and stop engaging in self-destructive behaviors. The ultimate possible consequence of his behaviors might be death.

Emotional turmoil and despair was often described when participants had special bonds with the loved one who passed away. Participant 253 wrote, "About a year ago, my grandfather, who was also my best friend, passed away…. I felt like I couldn't handle it when he passed away…." Participant 268 was devastated by her dog drowning to death in her parents' swimming pool. She wrote:

> …. My sister was the one who found him, and once I saw her discovery, my life changed. I suddenly went from being the most happy, outgoing, preppy, Christian girl in school to a very sad, anti-social, non-religious person. I changed my wardrobe from bright to all black. I was constantly sad and was always on the verge of tears everywhere I went. I often blamed myself for not being home to save him. My life was gloomy for about 4 months and no one in my family has ever been the same since the incident….

Her report suggested that outlook of life changed after the accident, emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively.

Profound reactions in the face of death can occur whether experienced vicariously or personally. When asked to write an incident that has changed her perception of herself and/or the world, Participant 165 wrote, "When my friend died in high school and I saw it happen. I was forever a different person…." Her story is indicative of the long-lasting impact of this vicarious death experience and the epiphany that often accompanies it.

Personal life-threatening experiences also have a long-lasting impact on one's outlook on life. Participant 158 experienced a tragedy where all of her family members, except her mother, were injured in a car accident. She wrote:

> …. I don't know anything else that could give me more of a reality check. I realized that you have to live your life to the fullest everyday because you never know when it will end or change dramatically. It made me realize how lucky I am to be alive and have such great family and friends.

She realized that her life could end without warning and it caused her to want to live more abundantly and appreciate people she loved. Participant 190 reported a similar reaction: "…. I realized I could have died. This made me love life more."

Those who went through a tragic event and survived often reported feeling lucky. Participant 159 shared her story of being robbed at the bank she worked at and specifically described what went through her mind at that moment. She wrote, "…. During the robbery I kept thinking about the important people and things in my life and it made me really give some thought to my priorities…." For some participants life-threatening events resulted in reviewing their lives as to whether they lived the life they wanted to live. A search for the meaning of life was associated with life threatening experiences:

…. I also realized how important life is and how precious it is, and how easy it can be taken…. (Participant 158, male)

…. Life took a turn for the worst however we somehow managed to look past all the small stuff and look at the big picture (Participant 084, female).

…. I almost seemed to change as I looked at myself. I was thirteen but something inside of me made me realize I had changed and I looked at myself as more grown-up…. (Participant 264, male)

…. We survived. Ever since then, I have made a point to appreciate every little positive thing. So many of life's gifts are disguised as what we see as trivial…. (Participant 265, female)

…. It was pretty crazy and being my first close experience with death. It brought a different thought pattern to me…. (Participant 197, male)

Sudden, profound realizations, or significant cognitive changes, take place after tragedies. These realizations are examples of participants seeing their own lives differently and becoming aware of new aspects of their lives after encounter with death. Elements of epiphany included seeing life from a broader perspective, having a more mature perspective, having a sense of appreciation of being alive, and experiencing a reconfiguration of one's attitudes and outlooks on life.

Many participants reported not only altered worldviews but also behavioral changes as a result of their epiphanies:

…. I've been living a life more free, more for the now, and less for the future…. (Participant 084, male)

…. All of the other problems and things I was dealing with that I thought were such a big deal, didn't mean anything to me anymore, and all I cared about was being with my mom and family and that nothing comes before them…. (Participant 059, female)

…. I began to cherish every moment (Participant 163, female).

…. but now that I am getting better, I am learning about myself and my strengths. I am a lot stronger than I thought I was and going through a situation like this it really tests you to make you think about yourself and who you are and what you believe in (Participant 159, female).

…. I won't live forever so I must take the most out of my experiences…. (Participant 189, female)

After her friend died from drunk driving, Participant 258 wrote, "[the death of her friend] really opened my eyes to reality because now I think before I drink." Participant 196 reported a sense of responsibility to cherish life for her friend who passed away because he had always fought for life before he died. She reported living not only for herself but for her friend, as well.

Only two participants expressed clearly negative impacts resulting from tragic events. Participant 061 wrote that she is still afraid of driving due to a car accident that occurred a month prior to her participating in this research project. Participant 169 was traumatized by her father's sudden death. She wrote, "…. It is something that I think about every day and still bothers me even though it was two years ago. I don't feel at fault for his death but I would give anything to go back and change the past because I

think that if this never would have happened, I would be a lot more stable and happy today."

Epiphanies often changed participants' perceptions about life and effected how they should live their lives. Participants also realized that life can be short and that it should be cherished and celebrated. Many after re-examining the meaning of their lives after a tragic event, seem to report less fear about life. They also report a sense of determination to live fully in every moment. Also, specific behavioral changes related to previous tragedies often took place.

*Epiphany as a result of changes in relationships with others*. Common triggers in this category are relationship fallouts (including divorce of parents and an ending of a relationship), ending an abusive relationship, and negative feedback from friends. Participants in this study reported only negative relationship triggers and there were more negative aftereffects were reported than positive. In general the epiphanies might be categorized as realizations concerning: redefinitions of relationships, alteration in levels of trust and new expectations for friends or romantic partners.

Some participants reported having their perspectives altered dramatically when their parents divorced. Participant 074 described herself as "innocent to the ways of the world" before she found out her father cheated on her mother. She continued:

> …. I also had thought, up until this point, that my dad was the best. I had held him with such high regard and then I came to reality. No person will ever meet <u>all</u> your expectations. At some point in time you will be let down and hurt, even by the people you love the most. It was a horribly real and truthful time.

To Participant 074, the assumption that her parents would always love each other was undermined and replaced by a painful realization. She generalized the experience to believe that one may not be able to count on even the ones you love most. She feels one can expect to be disappointed. Another participant reported vivid details of what happened the day she found out that her parents were separating:

> …. I remember exactly when it was that my mom told me they were separating. I was in the passenger seat of my mom's car and was on my way to dance class. We were driving down 89th street on the south side of [the name of the city]…. I was wearing my black leotard and pink tights and [the name of a singer] was playing on a cassette. Then she said, " Your dad and I aren't going to live together anymore." In retrospect my reaction seems very strange. I consider myself somewhat of an emotional person and tend to cry somewhat easily, but in this incident I don't recall really having any reaction except hopping out of the car and proceeding to my dance lesson. . But in reality I did have a profound reaction to this incident…. (Participant 080, female)

Her vivid memory of what had happened that day subtly implies the significance of her parents' divorce to her. Her inability to express emotions at that moment reflects the level of difficulty she probably had in making sense out of it. The epiphany could not be put in words.

Participants who described feelings related to the divorces of their parents consistently reported epiphanies that suggested that life for them entails suffering. Participant 259's parents were divorced when she was 14 years old. She stated, "…. I began to notice changes on myself…. On the outside I seemed to be a happy person, but I

was keeping every other negative emotion inside and to myself." Another example is that after her parents divorced, "…. Things were very different, and definitely harder for us, financially and emotionally," according to Participant 082.

Epiphanies are sometimes referred to by participants as "devastations" or "falling apart," what psychologists may refer to as decomposition. Participant 192 wrote, "…. I know how that it was just high school love, but at the time I was devastated." Participant 081 wrote, "…. My very best friend called me up out of the blue and told me how she thought I was an awful person and a terrible friend, that she couldn't care less if we were never friends again. Of course I was devastated. I was a freshman in high school and this was my closest friend…." She was devastated and shocked from the sudden loss of all connections with a dear friend.

Some participants reported epiphanies in response to comments others made to them or others. Participant 257 was given feedback that he was "too rude and disrespectful to someone" in his fraternity. He wrote:

> …. I guess when I spoke about the situation to him, I didn't think I was doing/saying anything wrong. When, my other friend heard and saw the conversation, he said, "In your voice, and the way you said things, it came out really bad." I thought, well, I didn't think I said anything wrong because I'm a nice guy, and try to resolve arguments, rather than creating them. But, I guess right then and there, I had a change, on my perspective, over my attitude. People know me as not being rude, and therefore, I knew! I had to change the way I said things. That was one thing I was confused about. I thought I handled the situation well, but obviously not. Makes me wonder.

An important aspect of this epiphany is this participant's ability to take into consideration others' feedback. The sudden change in his attitude comes from his willingness to be confused about what he knew about himself and how others viewed his behaviors.

Some participants had experiences that caused them to question whether they could trust others. After her best friend said negative things about her behind her back, Participant 073 wrote, "…. It really made me change my way of thinking about who my real friends are and who I wanted them to be." Participant 075 reported his girlfriend's cheating on him as well as how he has changed: "…. I really changed…what I thought about love, and how much I could really trust other people." For these participants, a naiveté and romantic outlook was undermined.

Some participants had epiphanies that went beyond look of first in others to feelings and another characterized by despair for meaning and a realization of existential isolation. After the breakup with her boyfriend who cheated on her, Participant 192 wrote:

> …. This made me feel worthless and not wanted. I felt ugly and thought I would be alone forever. I lost 15 pounds in less than a month and wasn't my usual self. It was a horrible experience that still follows me to this day. My relationships now are fearful and stressful. I feel like every guy will cheat and will not be faithful to me.

After a shocking fallout with her best friend, Participant 252 said, "…. I then began to believe that I didn't deserve a new friend…." Participant 254 reported, "…. I was depressed and scared because I felt very alone…." These participants adopted a depressing and cynical outlook concerning future relationships.

On the other hand, other participants' epiphanies were more optimistic. In the following stories, aftereffects are positive. Having been called "an awful person and a terrible friend," Participant 081 emerged a stranger person after the fallout with her friend. She wrote, "…. Of course I was devastated…. Looking back on this though, I realize it made me a much stronger person and much more independent, and I'm much happier with my life post-[the name of her friend] anyway." Participant 187 had a similar reaction to her breakup with her boyfriend. She wrote:

> …. He met a girl there and dumped me. This really changed my life. Since then I realized how smart and capable I am…. I am also trying to do something every day to better myself and those around me. Thank God we broke up. He helped me realize how great and independent I am. I now know so much about myself, this experience taught me a lot about myself, others, and life.

Overcoming the devastation from relationship fallouts has opened these participants up to opportunities for self-examination as well as psychological growth. The above examples exemplify how a person's ego strength and self-confidence may transform and evolve in the course of surviving a break up.

*Epiphany resulting from environmental changes.* Many participants wrote about epiphanies triggered by their finding themselves in new environments. Some emphasized that leaving a safety net helped them grow as a person, while some stressed that interacting with different people and things in a new environment helped them gain a new perspective of themselves and the world. Most of the participants reported a sense of feeling "out of place" at the beginning. The phrase "cultural shock" was often used to describe their overall impression of what they experienced. Feelings of loneliness,

homesickness, and depression were often used to describe their feelings as they tried to adjust to their new environments. They often claimed that their new experiences helped them realize that the world is "bigger" than they used to think and at times more "dangerous." They also described feeling a sense of responsibility for their own lives which they hadn't felt before. They claimed to have achieved a confidence that they could survive "the bigger world" after their epiphanies. The physical changes in the environment and the discontinuation of financial support from some parents resulted in some participants' considering their existential aloneness in the world.

For many of the participants, going to college was a trigger for epiphanies:

> I would say when I moved out of my parents' house and they stopped helping me with money…. (Participant 155, male)
>
> …. I experienced a number of changes in myself and also I had to realize that college is my reality. College for me was very overwhelming. I live about 2 hours away which is not that far but far enough when I was like the only person to come from my school to go to [the name of the university]…. (Participant 191, female)
>
> …. my whole life, I guess, I was sheltered and "babied." I had things done for me…. (Participant 267, female)
>
> …. being apart from my mom, dad, and little sister was a huge change in my life. I had to grow up that instant…. (Participant 060, female)

Feeling unsupported and estranged was overwhelming for some, but at the same time, the condition provided an opportunity for them to grow and reflect. For some, being exposed to a new culture was a catalyst for self realization:

…. I moved to Malibu California to be a water sports instructor for a camp…. I experienced so much diversity and had so many different things to do. So when I moved back to [the town of the university] to continue school I was completely different. I had a whole new view on life and no longer was a part of the bubble that [the town of the university] tends to have (Participant 064, female).

…. I'm from Dallas and moving to such a tiny town with different people was a culture shock…. (Participant 077, female)

Meeting people who are different from oneself provides an opportunity to broaden one's perspective of the world. Participant 266, as an African American female, began to experience and recognize racial differences in her new environment.

…. Growing up as an African American I attended an all White school. I never really had problems with racism or even discrimination. If they took place I was not aware of them. Before I came to [the name of the university], generally I was never around a lot of Black people except when I was with select friends and family. Once I arrived at [the name of the university] I was thrown into the Black social scene. I was always with Black people. The only Whites that I really just talked to were the people that went to my high school and the people that stayed on my floor in the dorms. I also started realizing that there really was a big difference between White and Black people. I found myself becoming more and more anti-White. I personally never dealt with anything but I know that my close friends have had incidents with racism and discrimination. At the end of my first semester I would too make racist remarks about White people, the same people that I grew up with….

Participant 266 experienced cognitive dissonance. The comments she heard about "White" contradicted what she felt she experienced with "Whites" as they was growing up. The new environment had unspoken constraints in how African Americans and Caucasians interact with each other. New perspectives were emerging for her.

After resolving her internal conflicts on race relations, Participant 266's thinking was less black-and-white. She was determined to make changes after her epiphany. …. I came to realize that yes we are different and yes both races have ignorant people and I shouldn't let my dislike for Whites based on the attitudes of a few people. Second semester I made it a point to befriend more White people.

For some participants, feelings of loneliness, homesickness, and depression can coincide with cognitive dissonance:

> …. I was pretty depressed. I just felt like I was alone in this world, even though I had a ton of friends in my sorority that I had made, it still wasn't good enough…. (Participant 191, female)
>
> …when I first attended [the name of the university], I had a hard time making friends. I was really homesick and I missed my boyfriend a LOT. I mostly just stayed in my dorm room alone and talked on the phone to my boyfriend and friends back home…. (Participant 255, female)

Preceding new realizations these participants clung tightly to habitual and comforting interactional patterns. Meeting new people and going into a new environment may cause some people to feel that they are different from others. Yet, cognitive dissonance may stimulate one to make sense out of it and change. But one has to persist

and make effort to resolve confusions. These conditions resulted in epiphanies for some participants.

> …. I was really unsure how I would handle making friends and living on my own 200 miles away from my family and at times it was hard. But now that I have been here for a while I have found out that I am capable of moving out on my own and taking care of myself and whatever situation I'm put into…. (Participant 077, female)
>
> …. when I first started college, I was the exact opposite. Now that I have been away from home for a while now, I am becoming more open…. (Participant 255, female)

Both of the participants persisted through these confusions and hardships and found a new equilibrium. Participant 191 was surprised she had survived the transition. She wrote, "…. I couldn't believe that I had gone through depression, that just isn't me. I've never been sad…."

Some epiphanies are characterized by self realizations. Participant 188 summarized how she has changed after her epiphany.

> I believe when I went to college it really changed me into a different person and not necessarily for the bad. I felt when I came to college my eyes were really opened to a lot of things and I became less judgmental of people. For the first time, I really had to make important decisions on my own and that gave me tremendous self-confidence. In addition, I met a few people that brought me to new experiences and organizations. I think this was really the starting point of profound changes in myself. I began to understand believing in yourself and

> enjoying and doing things I wanted to do, not what others wanted me to do. This was a huge shift in my life where I really felt I made the move into adulthood and took responsibility while gaining self-confidence along the way!

Participant 060 felt she became "more selfish and self-aware" of herself. After experiencing an environmental change, Participant 077 wrote, "…. I definitely found out that I was a lot more confident and honest with people because they didn't know much about me and so it was easier to say to people without feeling I was going to be judged because they were complete strangers." Participant 251 had a similar thought: "freedom to think, act, and do what I wanted to do."

Participants also had epiphanies that altered how they viewed the external world. Both participants below realized that the world is much bigger than they thought it was. They realized that they may not have as much of an intellectual grasp of life as they had through nor do they feel as much in control of their lives in such a complex world.

> …. I came to college and realized how many people have the same interests, goals, likes and dislikes, as me, but I also noticed how everyone is different…. Now that I am in college I see the world as a much larger, more competitive place than I did growing up. Coming to college was definitely a different, but eye-opening experience (Participant 260, female).
>
> …. some things have surprised me. It's scary with all of the situation with alcohol here on campus that have taken place, and how they're a bigger issue because I am personally affected by it. It makes reality much more real (Participant 174, female).

*Epiphany after a mastery experience.* This type of epiphany comes after accomplishing a difficult task or after learning to master a task in a new way. While some believed that they gained self-confidence in their abilities after their epiphanies, others found new ways to master tasks after their epiphanies. They reported uncertainty and nervousness before their epiphanies then sudden, profound self confidence after their epiphanies. Many believed the aftereffects of the epiphanies have been and will be long-lasting.

Completion of a difficult task is a common trigger to epiphany in this category. Many described completing impossible tasks and then, about immediately feeling profound self-confidence. Participant 194 shared his high school story:

> …. My junior year, I ran for student body president. In order to avoid a run off, I had to win by 50% plus one. I thought that this was impossible considering the size of my student body and the fact that three other people ran against me…. I won the election. That very moment when I heard the news, I felt like I was an important person. Before the elections, I struggled with my worth and to discover my place in life….

His self-doubt before the election dissolved after this event. He has found his place in the world. This has led to a change in how he views himself and his relations to others. Participant 083 wrote about his tennis playing triumphs in high school:

> …. I was just entering high school for the first time. I was really nervous and scared because I felt so young and puny. But I was trying out for the high school tennis team, so I was even more worried about what people were going to think of me. I had played tennis my whole life so I knew that I was good, but I would be

> playing guys four years older than I was. We had a tournament to determine the top six on varsity. I ended up winning the tournament and became the first freshman to be number one on varsity in [the name of the high school] High school history….

Although he had confidence in his tennis skills, he was uncertain whether he would succeed. Nervousness and uncertainty characterized his initial state of mind. He continued, "…. Ever since that time in my life, I have carried a mystique about myself and I feel that in everything I do I am on a higher level than everybody else. I just have a sense of confidence in everything I seek out to do."

Participant 198 had a slightly different story. He overcame his anger problems by following his friend's suggestions and experienced an "amazing" self-realization.

> …. The littlest thing could set me off. My friend was talking to me about it and suggested just to take a deep breath and listen to music. Music has always been a major part of my life. So I decided to try it out…. It is amazing how inspirational [the name of a singer] was and still is. Ever since figuring out a new way to calm down, my anger problems left me. After doing this method, for a while, I found new ways to chill out. This was such an amazing turn in life for me….

Each of the above examples represent epiphanies that result in a sense of achievement and the experiences have increased their self-confidence. Mastery experiences lead to epiphanies which give persons the perception that they might be able to overcome any difficulty that comes in the future.

Other participants added a unique twist to their linking epiphany to mastery. Their mastery had to have an unusual or new element in it. Participant 067 shared her story where she had a new realization about her ability in college:

> In high school, I was always doing my best at all that I could achieve and always making good grades. Now, as a sophomore in college…. there is one class that I can't seem to grasp and I'm not doing very well. So many changes have had to be made because of this….

Another participant (Participant 178) realized that he had to study harder than others to be able to compete with others. He stated that his hard work "paid off," which resulted in an epiphany.

These participants also expressed that they had changed "instantly and forever." Participant 054 reported his epiphany occurred after he completed a physically challenging task on a church trip:

> …. After climbing and standing there for a moment looking down at everyone below I jumped and caught the bar. The completion of the event rippled through my life from that point on….

The impact on his confidence was immediate and the effect has been lasting. He continued to process his epiphany. "…. I perceived life as chances that are taken and chances that are not. The acknowledgement of fears and pushing it aside to be conquered. I now go into any situation I am not sure about with a new sense of purpose and drive." He was able to extrapolate and expand his experience to apply it to different contexts in his life.

Participant 160 also expressed how upon on receiving a scholarship, his self-perception underwent a profound change. She wrote, "…. From that day forward I kept that feeling and have held my head high!" The change was immediate. She gained a sense of confidence that permeated her life, giving her a lasting sense of pride.

Participant 272 had a unique yet related epiphany. Out of an apparent experience of failure, she was "awakened" into a realization about the unpredictability of existence as well as a thankfulness for the transitory joy of life:

> My junior year I was on the pom squad at my high school. I tried out again my senior year and did not make it. This was somewhat of a taboo, but never the less, it happened. It both shocked and awakened me. At first, I thought I was worthless, but I came out a fighter and ultimately a stronger person. I realized I was human and that we will all have defeats that we can choose to rise above. As for reality, I came to understand that there are no guarantees. We have to appreciate our blessings while we have them.

After a period of self-doubts, she understands at a more realistic and mature level. Her epiphany was to cherish what she has at any given moment.

*Epiphany that involves a higher power.* All the epiphanic stories in this category involve a higher power. The particular costume the higher power assumed in the data collected in the study was that of the Christian religion, specifically Jesus Christ.

Few mentioned their lives before "accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior."

…. Before this point there were many areas of life that I kept compartmentalized. I had many faces and refused to be open and trust people…. (Participant 261, male)

…. I couldn't control everything that life threw at me…. many people turn to God when they are at the lowest point in life and when they feel there is no point in living (Participant 200, male)

It appears that they felt unsatisfied before accepting Christ. Some wrote of hitting bottom or experiencing despair about the meaning of life. Others felt a lack of holiness. Religion, in the form of a relationship with Christ came to answer their existential crisis.

Participant 154 shared her experience in a church camp. She wrote, "…. One night, there was a very moving message by a man that caused all of us to break down in tears. Here, I rededicated my life to Christ and was baptized." Here a cathartic emotion accompanies her epiphany as well as a feeling of decompensation.

Many described how their epiphanies changed them in a profound way. Participant 062 wrote, "Accepting Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior changed my life more than anything possibly would…" Participant 085 described the briefness of the experience as well as its profundity. He wrote, "…. But that right there changed everything about my life and views. Obviously my view on moral standard was changed but also views on death changed…." The epiphany resulted in a desire to be kinder and in a belief in afterlife.

People after this type of epiphany seem to be more at ease, more in touch with themselves, less fearful, to be more appreciative, and to desire to live more ethically:

….Through my relationship with Christ and as it has grown and changed I have noticed myself becoming more outgoing, sensitive, and open to people. I don't fear people getting to know me or sharing my whole life with others (Participant 261, male).

…. I look at things a lot different now. I think more when I make decisions, which allows me to make better ones. I also have a different sense of security…. (Participant 200, male)

…. my views on moral are basically this now. While in this world, and by its standard, I am a very decent person. I am doing something positive with my life and act in a way most people would call normal if not moral. Butmy reality is that I still sin (and sin not only being some 500 year old name for messing up, but a clear and responsible admission that I'm not perfect)…. it makes me appreciate the things done for me and this world by God…. (Participant 085, male)

Two participants described their epiphanies in terms that might be characterized as mystical. One is described a dissociative experience of hearing voices the other as mystery. There is the likelihood that others may not understand their experiences. He wrote, "…. I was at a summer camp and felt God rallying at my heart asking me to just follow him and trust in his love." Another participant did not think that people would understand his experience with higher power. He wrote, "…. Now, to someone who doesn't understand this, I probably sound like another fanatic, religious freak…."

*Epiphany from full awareness*. These epiphanies take place when one becomes fully aware of one's inner feelings, one's environment, the connections between all things, and the larger meaning of life. No specific triggers were repeatedly reported in

this type of epiphanies. These epiphanies seemingly were reported as "deep insights" that occurred to them. These experiences lead to re-examination of what was important in life. These sudden transformations take place spontaneously.

Some of these epiphanies were triggered by looking at ordinary things with a full awareness. They gained deep insight about their lives in an instant. For some reason their eyes and hearts were open to a larger vision of life. The smallest things resonated with them. The following story captures the essence of many of the stories, especially that ones related to nature acting as a trigger.

> One day in spring, my junior year, I walked past [the name of a statue] and noticed some dying tulips. I had been completely wrapped up in the future—thinking about all the things I had to do…& suddenly I realized these beautiful red tulips were dying—I hadn't even known they were there even though I passed by there twice a day each week. WOW! It was like a thunderbolt to me—my life was passing me by and I wasn't even noticing it. I was planning to live instead of actually living…. (Participant 161, female).

Aware of the parallel between her own life and the tulips' short life, she was able to reflect on herself and had an epiphany that she had been living for the future. It was shocking and overwhelming to her. It is apparent that within that moment she had gone through a sudden transformation in how she saw her life as well as how she was going to live her life.

Another participant also had an epiphany about the briefness of his life. He wrote:

> This incident is utterly unremarkable, but it brought about a great awareness and motivated me a lot. I was lying in bed, trying (and failing) to sleep, and I

considered my mortality. I realized I only have a short time on earth, so I'd better make good use of it…. (Participant 162, male)

He was confronted by his own mortality and suddenly he was changed. Instead of feeling down about it, he continued, "…. I decided to take life more seriously. I got up, finished the homework I'd neglected, then went to sleep." He suggested that the incident might sound insignificant to some people, another sleepless night for someone who procrastinated homework. However, it was a moment of self realization for him. His story implies that one does not need "a big event" to happen in order to gain epiphany about life. According to some of the participants, the smallest things in the world may have great meanings, if one is open to the mystically experience of full awareness.

Realizing one's difference from the majority of the people sometimes provides a unique predicament to re-examine the value of oneself. Participant 171 shared a story where he chose different things from most of his friends:

I went to college and I did not "rush" for a fraternity. People around me who were associated with them look at me in a different way. They basically excluded out of functions, hanging out. I look at myself and am glad for that because it gave me a new perspective.

Some of the stories in this category couple their feelings of estrangement with a sense of determination after their epiphanies. For example, Participant 157 stated that he made a decision to stop caring about what other people thought of him as being gay after his epiphany in high school. Participant 186 also shared her determination to change her priorities. She wrote, "….I had always been incredibly involved with academics and never really known great friends. I decided to change that my senior year…. It was one of

the best things I could have done because it gave me some of my greatest friends…. I guess you might not call it an event so much as a feeling that over took me." She made a point that her epiphany did not come from a specific event but a feeling that led to her sense of determination to change, to connect at deeper level with others.

For Participant 161, her epiphany changed her priorities, and her perception of herself and the world.

> …. It changed the rest of my college experience, it changed me to this day. I'll never forget it. A few months later I quit my sorority, got my own apartment, started writing a novel, and applied to the Peace Corps. I decided I needed to make myself more fun memories rather than focusing on fattening my resume. I needed to <u>experience</u> life. I try hard to do that everyday now.

She no longer feared being different or estranged. Being the same as others might have kept her from experiencing the bliss of life as she sets out to experience it.

*Peak Experience and Epiphany*

As explained in the method section, participants were to respond in writing not to the words epiphany and peak experience but to their definitions. The data that came in responses to the peak experience definitions was classified into four categories: Type 1 to 4 Peak Experiences (a) Need/dream/fantasy/goal being fulfilled as a peak experience (Type 1 Peak Experience); (b) a shared moment that involves recognition of being in relation to the world (Type 2 Peak Experience); (c) peak experience associated with insight regarding after tragedy/separation/misfortune (Type 3 Peak Experience); and (d) an experience that involves nature or a high power (Type 4 Peak Experience). Six types of epiphany are named as Type A to F: (a) Epiphany after the death of others, illness, or

danger of others or self (Type A Epiphany); (b) epiphany as a result of changes in relationships with others (Type B Epiphany); (c) epiphany resulting from environmental changes (Type C Epiphany); (d) epiphany after a mastery experience (Type D Epiphany); (e) epiphany that involves a higher power (Type E Epiphany); and (f) epiphany from full awareness (Type F epiphany). A summary of characteristics of all types of peak experience and epiphany are organized in Table 2.

*Overlapped Constructs of Peak Experience and Epiphany.* This section focuses on examining the similarities and differences between four types of peak experience and six types of epiphany. In other words, the overlap of constructs of peak experience and epiphany are explored.

It is clear that Type 1 Peak Experience (Need/dream/fantasy/goal being fulfilled as a peak experience) and Type D Epiphany (Epiphany after a mastery experience) are similar. Type 1 Peak Experience and Type D Epiphany are both associated with accomplishing difficult tasks. Participants in both groups reported a sense of accomplishment and believed that they gained self-confidence after the experiences. However, in terms of the feelings they associated with these experiences, participants in the group of Type 1 Peak Experience emphasized only their positive emotions after they accomplished difficult tasks, whereas participants in the group of Type D Epiphany reported more nervousness and uncertainty before the completion of a difficult task. Nevertheless, it is clear that these two types of experience overlapped.

The constructs in Type 3 Peak Experience (Peak experience associated with insight regarding after tragedy/separation/misfortune) and Type A Epiphany (Epiphany after the death of others, illness, or danger of others or self) are similar. Both are

associated with tragedies or misfortunes that happened to oneself or loved one. All the stories in Type A Epiphany involve life-threatening situations, such as death, deadly illness, or accidents, to oneself or a loved one, whereas Type 3 Peak Experiences were associated with dangers or misfortunes which were later alleviated. The death of a loved one would never be reported in relation to a peak experience. However, recovery from a severe accident or deadly illness were related to both peak experience and epiphany. These two types of experience overlapped in the area of recovery from a misfortune.

Type 4 Peak Experience (Experience that involve nature or a high powers) and Type E Epiphany (Epiphany that involves a higher power) are more similar than any other types of peak experience and epiphany. In addition to the fact that both types of experiences involve higher powers, participants in both groups reported the experiences as life-changing and bringing joy into their lives. Most of the participants omitted what had led to their accepting a higher power to guide their lives. Although it represents only a small part of peak experience and epiphany, it is clear that both types overlap. Experiences that involve higher powers can often be reported as highest happiness and sudden, profound transformation.

Type 2 Peak Experience (A shared moment that involves recognition of being in relation to the world) and Type B Epiphany (Epiphany as a result of changes in relationships with others) seem to be on the same spectrum but on different ends, so to speak. This is to say that the two types of experiences involve relationships and human connections but often it is the painful breakups that result in self realizations whereas it is relationships that bring about bliss. Type 2 Peak Experiences entailed celebrating moments of connection with loved ones and the world, whereas the stories in Type B

Epiphany are about relationship fallouts or conflict with loved ones. In this study, Type 2 Peak Experiences were not associated with epiphanic moments. Happy moments that involved celebration of relationship were not considered as epiphanic moments. Negative interpersonal experiences, some of which turned out to be positive in the end, often triggered sudden and profound transformations in how participants saw their world. Therefore, these two types of experience were associated with interpersonal relationships but do not seem to overlap in terms of the defining characteristics of the constructs.

Key elements of Type C Epiphany (Epiphany resulting from environmental changes) and Type F Epiphany (Epiphany from full awareness) were not mentioned in any of peak experience stories. These two types of epiphany possess special elements that seem to facilitate sudden and profound transformation but which might not be pleasant. Looking closely at Type C Epiphany, most of the stories involve being thrown out of one's safety net including the experience of cultural shock. Participants reported feeling confused about the new facets of the new environment they found themselves in. Mixed feelings, rather than absolute positive feelings, characterized the epiphanies they experienced in the new environment. Personal experience is broadened by encountering diversity, including people, events, and environments. Participant described their experiences as a process of maturation. In general, participants associated this maturation as developing a more complicated perspective, irrespective of happiness or sadness.

Only a few participants' epiphanies fell into the Type F Epiphany (Epiphany with full awareness). This type of epiphany relates to sudden and profound transformation through one's full awareness of him or herself and the environment without any specific triggers. Participants associated Type F Epiphany with their becoming aware of their

alienation from their environment and others, then attaining a previously unknown attainment with the environment or others. No particular triggers were mentioned but a full awareness of one's feelings associated with the distance appeared to be associated with the sudden and profound changes that came about. Many participants described their epiphanies as if they transformed from being the person who observed nature and others from the outside to experiencing a momentary union or/and heightened empathy.

*Overarching Similarities and Differences between Peak Experience and Epiphany*. Although the constructs of peak experience and epiphany overlapped, large areas of content as well as the routes to achieve them are markedly different. There are many ways to achieve highest happiness in one's life. However, it appears that the achievement of sudden, profound transformation is linked to a fairly coherent limited pattern.

Participants reported attaining highest happiness in many ways. In Type 1 Peak Experience participants reported feelings of excitement and joy because they conquered difficult tasks (i.e., have won state champion) or because their dreams have come true (i.e., have come to their dream universities). The stories in Type 2 Peak Experience, participants felt ecstasy resulting from love (i.e., love stories, relationships). Types 3 Peak Experience participants reported joy from learning that a seeming misfortune had be surmounted (i.e., recovering from an illness quicker than it was expected). Highest happiness was achieved through these means as well as countless others.

However, most of the epiphanies involved basic assumptions being challenged, experiencing cognitive dissonance, finding ways to resolve the tension or anxiety, and then being transformed into a new person. No matter what contents were involved in the

story of an epiphany, similar processes took place. Type A Epiphany stories usually started with a loved one's death, challenging participants' assumptions about immortality. Cognitive dissonance then occurred due to the discrepancy between the stark realization of the reality and inevitability of deaths (i.e., every human being is mortal) and the participants' typical avoidance. Then the participants found ways to resolve inner conflict. As a result, a new way of thinking emerges (i.e., accepting the fact that death is inevitable). New attitudes and behaviors emerge (i.e., live every moment to its fullest). Participants reporting Type B, C, and F Epiphanies experienced a similar process. In some instances cognitive dissonance occurred when abandoned by loved one (i.e., Type B Epiphany), or when one found themselves in an unfamiliar environment (i.e., Type C Epiphany). New behaviors and cognitions (i.e., being more careful about forming an intimate relationship, appreciating diversity, or changing one's priorities) emerge to decrease the level of cognitive dissonance and open the way for higher awareness.

In general, participant stories of peak experience were associated with more emotional aspects than cognitive aspects; whereas stories of epiphanies included more cognitive aspects of the experience than emotional aspects. This was true even with similar conditions of peak experiences and epiphanies described above. It is likely that the stimulus questions had influenced the descriptions of peak experience and epiphany. This issue will be further explored in the discussion section.

*Additional Hypotheses after Qualitative Analysis*

The researcher was not able to discern different levels of psychological well-being between different types of peak experience through analyzing the qualitative data. Different types of peak experiences might bring different kinds of happiness along with

other feelings but there was no evidence that suggested that types of peak experience would influence participants overall psychological well-being. The researcher also conjectures that the types of epiphany would not differ in their impacts on participants' psychological well-being, while they may bring changes into participants' lives, it was not evident that types of epiphany would necessarily influence participants' overall well-being differently.

Qualitative analysis revealed peak experience and epiphany as two different constructs with overlapping elements. The above analysis outlined different types of peak experiences that overlapped with different types of epiphanies. The following hypotheses stemmed from the qualitative data and will be tested with quantitative analysis.

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in participants' psychological well-being as related to different types of peak experience.

Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in participants' psychological well-being as related to different types of epiphany.

Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in participants' psychological well-being between Type 2 peak experience and Type B epiphany.

Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in the constructs of experience between Type 4 peak experience and Type E epiphany.

Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in the constructs of experience between Type 1 peak experience and Type D epiphany.

Hypothesis 6: There is a difference in the construct of experience between Type 1 peak experience and Type 2 peak experience.

Hypothesis 7: There is a difference in the construct of experience between Type A epiphany and Type 2 epiphany.

Hypothesis 8: There is a difference in the construct of experience between Type A epiphany and Type C epiphany.

Hypothesis 9: There is no difference in the construct of experience between Type 3 peak experience and Type A epiphany.

## Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were screened for possible deviance before conducting statistical procedures to answer research questions. First of all, data were screened for careless answering patterns. Two cases were excluded from the quantitative analysis due to their homogeneous answers in one of the entire inventories (e.g., answering all 0s or 10s on each item in Friedman Well-being Scales). Seventeen cases had either one or two missing items on one of the inventories. An average score in its corresponding subscale was entered to replace each missing value. Univariate outliers were checked for in each variable. No outliers were found.

Second, the assumption of unidimensionality in each factor was tested in the Experience Questionnaire, Friedman Well-being Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale. The most commonly used method, or Cronbach's alpha, was used. In the Experience Questionnaire, items in Factors 1, 2, and 4 were found to consistently measure constructs under both Peak Experience condition and Epiphany condition (with standardized item alpha above .60). Items in Factors 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8 failed to show consistency in measuring its intended constructs (with standardized item alpha below .60) under both Peak Experience condition and Epiphany condition. This implied that the factor structure

of Experience Questionnaire was not statistically consistent due to the inventory itself rather than being due to the differences between experimental groups. In the Friedman Well-being Scale, items were consistent in measuring the same construct under both Peak Experience and Epiphany groups (with standardized item alpha above .90). In the Satisfaction with Life Scale, items were consistent in measuring the same construct under both Peak Experience and Epiphany groups (with standardized item alpha above .85).

Third, data were checked for normality in each variable (each factor in Experience Questionnaire, Friedman Well-being Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale). Both graphical method and statistics for skewness and kurtosis were used. Results indicated univariate normality for all the variables except Factor 4 Fulfillment under the condition of Peak Experience (skew $z$=-11.49; kurtosis $z$=27.56). This was expected given the nature of the peak experiences as reported in the research which suggested that peak experiences tend to be fulfilling for participants. Root square data transformation was conducted to decrease the degree of skewness in Factor 4. However, the data transformation had made other Factors in the Experience Questionnaire more skewed and peaked. The decision was made to keep the original data without data transformation in order to avoid possibly unnecessary changes in the integrity of the data in the Experience Questionnaire.

Fourth, data were screened for multivariate outliers in the relations between factors in the Experience Questionnaire and psychological well-being (FWBS and SWLS) for both Peak Experience and Epiphany conditions. Mahalanobis distance was in the acceptable range, except for two cases that were taken out of the quantitative analysis.

*Descriptive Statistics*

After examining outliers as well as whether assumptions were violated, 213 participants' quantitative responses were used and analyzed. 107 and 106 of all participants responded to peak experience and epiphany questions, respectively. Of 213 participants, 139 were females and 74 were males.

To determine whether there were differences in psychological well-being within gender, conditions, and stimulus questions and its interactions, the researcher conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) using: gender (female and male), conditions (two different orders of administrating inventories), and stimulus questions (peak experience and epiphany) as independent variables, and the total score on Satisfactions with Life Scale, overall score in Friedman Well-being Scale, and subscores in sociability, self-esteem/self-confidence, jovial, emotional stability, and happiness in the Friedman Well-being Scale as dependent variables. None of the main effects and interactive effects was statistically significant. There were no significant main effect in stimulus questions, conditions, and gender with Wilk's Lambda= .947, .928, and .954, $F$ (7, 198) =1.578, $F$ (14, 396)= 1.071, and $F$ (7, 198) =1.532, $p$>.05, respectively. Specifically, female and male participants did not differ in their psychological well-being in the study. There is also no order effect on how participants responded to items on psychological well-being. There was no difference in psychological well-being between participants who responded to peak experience and epiphany questions. There were no significant effect of interactions in stimulus questions and conditions, stimulus question and gender, gender and conditions, and the combination of stimulus question, gender, and conditions, with Wilk's Lambda=.936, .941, .953, and .942, $F$ (7, 198) = 1.926, $F$ (7,

198) = 1.774, $F$ (7, 198)=1.388, and $F$ (7, 198)= 1.757, $p$>.05. In other words, any interactive effect of gender, conditions, and stimulus questions did not differ on psychological well-being.

Since the FWBS is a standardized and diagnostic test, overall score and subscores can be interpreted. The mean of overall well-being among the participants in the study is in the average range. The means of the subscores on sociability, self-esteem/self-confidence, jovial, and emotional stability are in the average range, while the means of the subscores on happiness are in the high range, in comparison to general adult population.

The mean and standard deviation of the overall score in Friedman Well-being Scale is 53.52 and 9.22, respectively. Specifically, the means of the subscores in sociability (FSOC), self-esteem/self-confidence (FSES), jovial (FJOV), emotional stability (FES), and happiness (FHAPP) in the Friedman Well-being Scale are 54.89, 50.40, 54.56, 52.35, and 56.71, with standard deviation 9.61, 10.02, 9.00, 8.46, and 10.30, respectively. Means and standard deviations in overall well-being and subscores in the Friedman Well-being Scale and overall score on Satisfactions with Life Scale in Peak Experience group and Epiphany group are presented in Table 3. Means and standard deviations in overall well-being and subscores in the Friedman Well-being Scale and overall score on Satisfactions with Life Scale based on conditions are presented in Table 4. Means and standard deviations in overall well-being and subscores in the Friedman Well-being Scale and overall score on Satisfactions with Life Scale based on gender are presented in Table 5. The zero-order correlations among these variables are presented in Table 6.

Each participant was asked how long ago his or her critical experience took place. In the Peak Experience group, the average of 32.4 months, with a standard error of 3.51 month, had passed when they reported their peak experiences. In the Epiphany group, the average of 40.12 months, with a standard error of 3.86 months, had passed when they reported their epiphanies. Combined, participants' critical experiences happened 36.25 months ago.

When asked about their top three values, 92.2% of participants endorsed family as one of their top three values, followed by intimate relationships (45.1%), religion (37.8%), self-actualization (34.6%), work/school (33.2%), spirituality (32.2%), interpersonal relationship (19%), and others (5.9%).

*Peak Experience and Epiphany*

To examine the differences in the construct of peak experience and epiphany, two MANOVAs were conducted. One was conducted on the item level, in other words, using stimulus questions (peak experience and epiphany) as the independent variable and 47 items in the Experience Questionnaire as dependent variables. One was conducted on the factor level, in other words, using stimulus questions (peak experience and epiphany) as the independent variable and 8 factors in the Experience Questionnaire as dependent variables. The results on the item level will be given more attention than the one on the factor level. Interpretations should draw from the analysis on the item level due to the inconsistency found previously in the factor analysis of the Experience Questionnaire.

On the item level, the overall F test was significant with Wilka's Lambda= .292, $F$ (47, 165) = 8.53, $p$< .001, observed power 1.000, partial eta square .708. In other words, the overall constructs of peak experience and of epiphany were different from

each other on the item level. Item description, means of each item in two groups, F value and significant value are presented in Table 7. Scores on 35 items were statistically significant, while 12 items failed to be significant.

The following components are more significant/important for peak experience than for epiphany. Peak experience involves more action or behavior than epiphany (item #1). Participants had more prior related involvement in peak experience than epiphany (item #2) and more peak experiences were reported as practiced than epiphanies (item #6). People experienced clearer focus (item # 9) as well as feeling more absorbed (item # 11) in peak experience than epiphany. Peak experiences were associated with more personal values than epiphany (item # 10). Peak experiences were associated with persons wanting to continue until completion (item # 12) and with interaction (item # 13) than was epiphany. Persons reported a strong sense of self in peak experience, as compared with epiphany (item # 14). Participants felt less outer restrictions (item #16) and reported a clearer inner process (item #17) in peak experience than in epiphany. They reported feeling "all together" (item #21) during peak experiences. They were more aware of their own power (item #18) and had a sense of intention (item #19) in peak experience. They reported that peak experiences were more playful than epiphanies (items #27 and #30) and usually involved unity of self with the environment (item #25). People reported that they enjoyed another person's company more (item #34) and that the outcome was influenced by other people (item #38) in peak experience more than epiphany. Peak experiences brought more joy, fulfillment, and meanings than epiphany (items # 42 and # 37). Peak experiences had more spiritual or mystical qualities than epiphanies (item #31). They felt that peak experiences were more indescribable than

epiphanies (item #40). Peak experiences were their own reward (item #41). People reported higher level of performance in peak experiences than in epiphanies (item #43). People reported feeling happier during the peak experience itself as well as afterwards than they did with epiphanies (items #44 and #46).

The following items were endorsed higher in the Epiphany group than the Peak Experience group. Epiphanies were reported as more spontaneous and less planned or structured than peak experiences (item #3). More epiphanies were experienced as an emergency than peak experiences (item #8). People reported having more new thoughts and actions in epiphanies than peak experiences (item #7). People felt loss of self more often in epiphanies than in peak experiences (item #28). People who experienced epiphanies reported that differences were resolved in the experiences (item #28). The role of others in epiphanies was viewed as "interfering" more than that in peak experiences (item #45). Epiphanies were seen as more significant than peak experiences in terms of how the experiences changed their lives (item #47).

On the factor level, the overall F test was significant with Wilka's Lambda= .442, $F$ (8, 204) = 32.145, $p$< .001, observed power 1.000, partial eta square .558. In other words, the overall constructs of peak experience and epiphany were different from each other on the factor level. Factor descriptions, means of each factors in two groups, F value and significant value are presented in Table 8. Factor 1 Self in Clear Process, Factor 4 Fulfillment, Factor 6 Other People, and Factor 7 Play were statistically significant, while Factor 2 Full Focus, Factor 3 Significance, Factor 5 Spirituality, and Factor 8 Outer Structure failed to be significant.

The score on Factor 1 Self in Clear Process was significantly higher in the Peak Experience group than in the Epiphany group, with $F$ (1, 211)= 63.952, $p$<.001. This indicates that people who experienced peak experiences reported a clearer, stronger sense of self, having a sense of power, feeling all together than those who experienced epiphanies. The score on Factor 4 Fulfillment was significantly higher in the Peak Experience group than in the Epiphany group, with $F$ (1, 211)= 197.800, $p$<.001. This indicated that people reported feeling more fulfilled and having more positive feelings within the experience itself and afterwards when they experienced peak experiences than epiphanies. The score on Factor 6 Other People was significantly higher in the Peak Experience group than in the Epiphany group, with $F$ (1, 211)= 47.139, $p$<.001. This indicates that in peak experiences people have more interactions with others who also have more positive influence on the outcome of the experience than in epiphanies. The score on Factor 7 Play was significantly higher in the Peak Experience group than in the Epiphany group, with $F$ (1, 211)= 139.905, $p$<.001. This indicates that peak experiences involve more playful, fun aspects, and prior related involvement than epiphanies do.

*Peak Experience and Psychological Well-being*

To examine whether peak experience is related to one's psychological well-being, four multiple regression analyses were conducted. Two were conducted using eight factors as predictor variables and the total score on the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWFS) and the overall score on the Friedman Well-being Scale (FWBS) as criterion variables, respectively. The other two were conducted using 47 item scores as predictor variables and the total score on the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the overall score on the Friedman Well-being Scale (FWBS) as criterion variables, respectively. It

was recognized that, due to a large number of predictor variables, statistical power might be lower.

Using the eight factors in the Experience Questionnaire as predictor variables, the overall multiple regression analysis for peak experience and life satisfaction (SWLS) failed to be significant with $F$ (8,98)= 1.566, sig. value .145, and $R^2$ .113. This indicates that one's life satisfaction is not statistically related to his or her reported peak experience in the factor level. In other words, no prediction on one's life satisfaction can be made from the incident that involves highest happiness in his or her life.

Using the eight factors in the Experience Questionnaire as predictor variables, the overall multiple regression analysis for peak experience and overall psychological well-being (FWBS) failed to be significant with $F$ (8,98)= 1.037, sig. value .414, and $R^2$ .078. This indicates that one's psychological well-being is not statistically related to his or her reported peak experience on the factor level. In other words, no prediction on one's current psychological well-being can be made from the incident that involves highest happiness in his or her life.

Using the 47 individual items in the Experience Questionnaire as predictor variables, the overall multiple regression analysis for peak experience and life satisfaction (SWLS) failed to be significant with $F$ (47,59)= .917, sig. value .618, and $R^2$ .422. This indicates that one's life satisfaction is not statistically related to his or her reported peak experience on the items level. In other words, no prediction about one's life satisfaction can be made from the critical incident that involves highest happiness in his or her life.

Using the 47 individual items in the Experience Questionnaire as predictor variables, the overall multiple regression analysis for peak experience and overall

psychological well-being (FWBS) failed to be significant with $F$ (47,59)= .522, sig. value .989, and $R^2$ .294. This indicates that one's psychological well-being is not statistically related to his or her reported peak experience on the item level. In other words, no prediction on one's current psychological well-being can be made from the incident that involves highest happiness in his or her life.

*Epiphany and Psychological Well-being*

To examine whether epiphany is related to one's psychological well-being, four multiple regression analyses were conducted. Two were conducted using eight factors as predictor variables and the total score on the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the overall score on the Friedman Well-being Scale (FWBS) as criterion variables, respectively. The other two was conducted using 47 item scores as predictor variables and the total score on the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the overall score on the Friedman Well-being Scale (FWBS) as criterion variables, respectively.

Using the eight factors in the Experience Questionnaire as predictor variables, the overall multiple regression analysis for epiphany and life satisfaction (SWLS) failed to be significant with $F$ (8,97)= 1.178, sig. value .320, and $R^2$ .089. This indicates that one's life satisfaction is not statistically related to his or her reported epiphany on the factor level. In other words, no prediction on one's life satisfaction can be made from the critical incident characterized by sudden, profound transformation in one's life.

Using the eight factors in the Experience Questionnaire as predictor variables, the overall multiple regression analysis for epiphany and overall psychological well-being (FWBS) failed to be significant with $F$ (8,97)= 1.418, sig. value .199, and $R^2$ .105. This indicates that one's psychological well-being is not statistically related to his or her

reported epiphany on the factor level. In other words, no prediction on one's current psychological well-being can be made from the incident that involves sudden and profound transformation in one's life.

Using the 47 individual items in the Experience Questionnaire as predictor variables, the overall multiple regression analysis for epiphany and life satisfaction (SWLS) was significant with $F$ (47,58)= 1.590, sig. value .047, and $R^2$ .563. This indicates that one's life satisfaction is significantly related to his or her epiphany on the items level. In other words, how epiphany was experienced and one's overall life satisfaction is highly related.

Looking into each individual item, statistical significances were found in six items, which means that mainly the significances of the six items contributed to the significance of the overall multiple regression model. Item 6 (The event was practiced) was negatively associated with SWLS with standardized coefficient $\beta$ -.321, $t$ = -2.464, and $p$ =.017. This indicates that the more an epiphany is unexpected the more one is likely to find life satisfying in general. Item 17 (My inner process was clear) was negatively associated with SWLS with standardized coefficient $\beta$ -.391, $t$ = -2.164, and $p$= .0035. This indicates that the less clear one's inner process was in an epiphany the more he or she is likely to find life satisfying in general. Item 24 (The experience overwhelmed other senses and thoughts) was negatively associated with SWLS with standardized coefficient $\beta$ -.378, $t$ = -2.683, and $p$= .010. This indicates that the less overwhelming an epiphany was the more one is likely to experience life satisfying. Item 26 (The experience involved loss of self) was negatively associated with SWLS with standardized coefficient $\beta$ -.403, $t$ = -2.733, and $p$= .008. This indicates that the more one

feels a sense of self in an epiphany the more he or she is likely to find life satisfying in general. Item 33 (I was receptive and passive) was negatively associated with SWLS with standardized coefficient $\beta$ -.219, $t$ = -2.005, and $p$= .050. This indicates that the less passive and receptive one was in an epiphany the more one experiences life as satisfying. Item 42 (I experienced joy and fulfillment) was positively associated with SWLS with standardized coefficient $\beta$ .583, $t$ = 1.995, and $p$= .050. This indicates that the more one experienced joy and fulfillment in an epiphany the more one is likely to find life satisfying.

Using the 47 individual items in the Experience Questionnaire as predictor variables, the overall multiple regression analysis for epiphany and overall psychological well-being (FWBS) failed to be significant with $F$ (47,59)= .522, $p$= .989, and $R^2$ .294. This indicates that one's psychological well-being is not statistically related to his or her reported epiphany on the item level. In other words, no prediction on one's current psychological well-being can be made from the incident that involves highest happiness in his or her life.

*Exploratory Analysis after Qualitative Analysis*

Additional quantitative analyses were conducted in order to answer the eight generated research questions after the qualitative analysis. To determine whether psychological well-being differs among four types of peak experience (Hypothesis 1), MANCOVA was conducted, using types of peak experience as the independent variable and five subcales in the Friedman Well-being Scale as dependent variables, including sociability (FSOC), self-esteem/self-confidence (FSES), jovial (FJOV), emotional stability (FES), and happiness (FHAPP). The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was

used as covariate due to the fact that SWLS is highly correlated with the overall Friedman Well-being Scale (FWBS) and subscales. Because the subscales were highly intercorrelated, multicollinearity might be a concern. The overall MANCOVA model was not statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .872, $F$ (15, 270.936)= .916, $p$= .546, partial eta square .045, and observed power .555. This indicates that there is no difference in psychological well-being among four different types of peak experience. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

To determine whether psychological well-being differs among six types of epiphany (Hypothesis 2), MANCOVA was conducted, using types of epiphany as the independent variable and five subcales in the Friedman Well-being Scale as dependent variables, including sociability (FSOC), self-esteem/self-confidence (FSES), jovial (FJOV), emotional stability (FES), and happiness (FHAPP). The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used as covariate due to the fact that SWLS is highly correlated with the overall Friedman Well-being Scale (FWBS) and subscales. Because the subscales were highly intercorrelated, multicollinearity might be a concern. The overall MANCOVA model was not statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .807, $F$ (25, 346.982)= .824, $p$=.711, partial eta square .042, and observed power .536. This indicates that there is no difference in psychological well-being among six different types of epiphany. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

To determine whether there was difference in psychological well-being between Type 2 peak experience and Type B epiphany (Hypothesis 3), MANCOVA was conducted, using types of experience (Type 2 peak experience and Type B epiphany) as the independent variable and five subcales in the Friedman Well-being Scale as

dependent variables, including sociability (FSOC), self-esteem/self-confidence (FSES), jovial (FJOV), emotional stability (FES), and happiness (FHAPP). Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were used as covariate due to the fact that SWLS is highly correlated with the overall Friedman Well-being Scale (FWBS) and subscales. Because the subscales were highly intercorrelated, multicollinearity might be a concern. The overall MANCOVA model was not statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .841, $F$ (5, 20)= .759, $p$=.590, partial eta square .159, and observed power .218. This indicates that there is no difference in psychological well-being between Type 2 peak experience and Type B epiphany. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

To determine whether the constructs of Type 4 peak experience and Type E epiphany were similar (Hypothesis 4), MANOVA was conducted, using types of experience (Type 4 peak experience and Type E epiphany) as the independent variable and 47 items in the Experience Questionnaires as dependent variables. The overall MANOVA model was not statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .098, $F$ (7, 1)=1.318, $p$= .598, partial eta square .902, and observed power .077. This indicates that there is no difference in the constructs of experiences between Type 4 peak experience and Type E epiphany. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

To determine whether the constructs of Type 1 peak experience and Type D epiphany were similar (Hypothesis 5), MANOVA was conducted, using types of experience (Type 1 peak experience and Type D epiphany) as the independent variable and 47 items in the Experience Questionnaires as dependent variables. The overall MANOVA model was not statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .116, $F$ (47, 9)=1.453, $p$=.284, partial eta square .884, and observed power .447. This indicates that

there is no difference in the constructs of experiences between Type 1 peak experience and Type D epiphany. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

To determine whether the constructs of Type 1 peak experience and Type 2 peak experience were different (Hypothesis 6), MANOVA was conducted, using types of experience (Type 1 peak experience and Type 2 peak experience) as the independent variable and 47 items in the Experience Questionnaires as dependent variables. The overall MANOVA model was statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .273, $F$ (47, 48)=2.718, $p$<.001, partial eta square .727, and observed power 1.000. This indicates that there is significant difference in the constructs of experiences between Type 1 peak experience and Type 2 peak experience. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was supported.

To determine whether the constructs of Type A epiphany and Type B epiphany were different (Hypothesis 7), MANOVA was conducted, using types of experience (Type A epiphany and Type B epiphany) as the independent variable and 47 items in the Experience Questionnaires as dependent variables. The overall MANOVA model was not statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .101, $F$ (47, 9)=1.708, $p$=.198, partial eta square .899, and observed power .524. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the constructs of experiences between Type A epiphany and Type B epiphany. Therefore, the result failed to support Hypothesis 7.

To determine whether the constructs of Type A epiphany and Type C epiphany were different (Hypothesis 8), MANOVA was conducted, using types of experience (Type A epiphany and Type C epiphany) as the independent variable and 47 items in the Experience Questionnaires as dependent variables. The overall MANOVA model was statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .082, $F$ (47, 11)=2.631, $p$= .042, partial eta

square .918, and observed power .835. This indicates that there is significant difference in the constructs of experiences between Type A epiphany and Type C epiphany. Therefore, Hypothesis 8 was supported.

To determine whether the constructs of Type 3 peak experience and Type A epiphany were different (Hypothesis 9), MANOVA was conducted, using types of experience (Type 3 peak experience and Type A epiphany) as the independent variable and 47 items in the Experience Questionnaires as dependent variables. The overall MANOVA model was statistically significant with Wilks' Lambda = .017, $F$ (40, 1) = 1.442, $p$= .590, partial eta square .983, and observed power .078. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the constructs of experiences between Type 3 peak experience and Type A epiphany. Therefore, Hypothesis 9 was supported.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

The following discussion is divided into the following sections: (a) Peak Experience and psychological well-being; (b) epiphany and psychological well-being; (c) comparison of peak experience and epiphany; (d) implication for clinical practice in Counseling Psychology; (e) limitations of the present study; (f) direction for future research; and (g) conclusion.

## Peak Experience and Psychological Well-being

In this study the construct of peak experience was revisited from a phenomenological perspective. Peak experience was also examined in its relationship with one's psychological well-being. The results provide additional support to Maslow's (1971) assertion that anything can be a trigger to a peak experience.

Previous studies (Arkoff, 1975; Laski, 1961; Malsow, 1971; Privett, et al, 1996) focused on what categories of triggers led to peak experiences. For example, Privette et al. (1996) categorized four kinds of triggers to peak experiences: education/work, relationships, death/crisis/spiritual, and miscellaneous/other. Previous studies offered limited delineation concerning the nature of the triggers. This was due largely to the post priori nature of their studies. In this study, which employed a phenomenological approach, the meanings of the experience as well as the triggers were explored. Peak experience and their triggers acquired meanings that were more delineated and possibly more profound. For example, a trigger to Type 1 Peak Experience is any incident in which an individual fulfills his or her dream, or masters an unthinkable task. Type 2 Peak Experience triggers were associated with experiences with loved ones, animals, and/or the world. Type 3 Peak Experience triggers were associated with its experiences

of foregrounding the positive in the midst of feeling disappointed or let down. Type 4 Peak Experience triggers are related to when one accepts a higher power. Four major types of peak experience emerged: Mastery, connectedness, after misfortune, and the acceptance of higher powers.

It is worth mentioning that no classical music or art were reported as triggers to peak experience in this current study. The finding contradicted previous studies where music and art were believed to be two of the major triggers to peak experiences (Maslow, 1971; Laski, 1961; Panzarella, 1980). The fact is, with the exception of the studies which specifically asked particularly whether music (Bakker, 2005; Gangi, 1999; Lowis, 2002; Walsh, 2001) or art (Panzarella, 1980) triggered peak experiences, such a relationship has not been reported in studies in the last 30 years. Two reasons that may explain the findings are: the phenomenon of peak experience might have changed over the years due to societal change. Music and art may not possess the same value they possessed 50 years ago, or the definition of peak experience has changed over the years since Maslow (1968; 1971) defined in the 1960s, as suggested in Mathes et al.'s study (1982).

The present study also adds to the information accumulated about the center of peak experience, such as David et al. (1991), Lanier, et al. (1996), Laski (1961), Maslow (1954, 1964, 1968, 1971), Privette, (1981, 1982, 1984), Privette & Bundrick (1991), Privette, et al. (1996), Privette, et al (1997), Wilson & Spencer (1990), and Yeagle, et al, (1989). The combination of both qualitative and quantitative inquiries in this study is unique in this area of research. In the quantitative analysis of the present study, factors such as Self in Clear Process, Fulfillment, Other People, and Play helped to distinguish the construct of peak experience from the construct of epiphany. The quantitative results

enriched the meanings of the qualitative results and vice versa. For example, Type 1 Peak Experience "dream-come-true" and mastery reflected the self in clear process. "I-ness" and "we-ness" were strongly expressed in these stories, which also reflect the factors of Other People. The majority of the Type 1 Peak Experience stories were about winning difficult contests, which also reflects the factor of Play. Type 2 Peak Experience consists of stories of connectedness, which strongly reflects the factor of Other People. These findings echo Demares' finding (1999) that connectedness was one of the major themes in peak experience. In Type 2 Peak Experience, the factor of Other People and the factor of Play emerged, as described by participants who "have fun with friends." Type 2 Peak Experience resembles the concept of flow that involves concentration, intention, and absorption (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). The factor of Fulfillment permeated each type of the peak experiences. In short, the results from both qualitative and quantitative analysis were consistent and provided a more comprehensive construct of peak experience.

The findings on the significance of the factors Other and Play in peak experience contradicted Laski's assertion on the presence of other people as an anti-trigger (Laski, 1961). Except Type 3 and Type 4 Peak Experiences, the presence of others was found to be essential in the majority of peak experiences described in this study. This finding coincides with the findings from a study conducted by Privette and Bundrick (1991). Especially for Type 2 Peak Experience, connectedness shared with other people is the trigger. Research (Laski, 1961) suggested that peak experiences were categorized by an inner ecstasy associated with solitude but appears to be to be achieved solitarily but the present study links it with shared experiences.

Past researchers often linked peak experience with altered state of consciousness (Allen, Haupt, & Jones, 1964; Thomas, & Copper, 1978). Maslow himself believed it to be essential to peak experience (Maslow, 1971). There probably needs to be a close examination of the studies of peak experience that focus on individual ecstasy (i.e., individual physical practice, see Kiehne, 2003), to those focusing on connectedness, (i.e., working with animals; see DeMares, 1999; DeMares & Krycka, 1998) to make clear distinctions. One might also consider cultural background as one of the moderating variables since different cultures have different emphasis on spiritual pursuit, individually or collectively.

The quantitative analysis on the item level in the Experience Questionnaire and the qualitative analysis provide rich data on what is usually experienced in a peak experience. Both approaches are complimentary to each other. In quantitative analysis, the scores on 35 out of 47 items were significantly different in between peak experience and epiphany. The results do not mean that the descriptions on each item are as equally important as to each other in peak experience. The results only indicate that people endorsed higher scores on these 28 items in peak experience, compared with people who responded to the epiphany questions. Therefore, in order to ensure a more rigorous comparison, items that were significant from the comparison with the ones in epiphany and also scored above 4 or below 2 (on the scale of 1-5, 4 means much importance, 2 means less importance) were used. Twenty items were statistically significant from the ones in epiphany as well as scored above 4 or below 2.

The following is a brief summary of what typically occurs in peak experiences from the finding in the present study: Peak experience involves action or behaviors (item

#1). People experienced clearer focus (item # 9) as well as were more absorbed (item # 11). Peak experiences did not seem to be as much of an emergency (item #8). Peak experiences involved personal values (item # 10). One was interactive with other people (items # 13, #34). One reports a strong sense of self (item # 14). One's inner process is clear (item #17). One was aware of his or her own power (item #18) and had a sense of intention (item #19). One felt "all together" (item #21) in peak experience. Peak experience involved fun (item #30) and did not involve loss of self (item #26). Outcome of a peak experience was influenced by other people (item #38). Peak experiences bring joy, fulfillment, and great meanings (items # 42 and # 37). Peak experience is usually indescribable (item #40) and has its own intrinsic reward (item #41). People reported higher levels of performance in peak experience than in epiphany (item #43). People reported that they were happier in the experience itself as well as afterwards in their peak experiences than epiphanies (items #44 and #46). In addition to the quantitative results, qualitative results reveal that a sense of determination was essential and that a sense of accomplishment was reported (Type 1 Peak Experience). Type 2 Peak Experience consisted of a sense of connectedness associated with social rituals, such as weddings or trips. Qualitative results also suggested that the peak experience was associated with an accumulation of experiences more often than single events. Qualitative results in the study revealed that few participants associated peak experience with solitary experience. The predominant emotions associated with peak experiences were happiness, enjoyment, excitement, and luck.

Like in Maslow's finding (1971), self-absorption and intrinsic values were found to be associated with peak experience. Several B-values (Maslow 1971) were also

reported during peak experiences: perfection, completion, uniqueness, playfulness, and self-sufficiency. However, the result on mastery experience as peak experiences contradicted Maslow's finding on "non-comparing and human-irrelevance," and a sense of detachment during a peak experience.

It may be fruitful to compare this study's results, including peak experience and epiphany, with Privette and Bundrick's (1991) findings on peak experience, flow, and peak performance. In particular, factors of Fulfillment, Significance, and Spirituality were found to be different in peak experiences from the ones in the constructs of flow and peak performance (Privette & Bundrick, 1991), as opposed to factors of Self in Clear Process, Fulfillment, Other People, and Play to be significant in peak experience from epiphany in the present study. It implied that from both studies peak experience has been proved to be more fulfilling than epiphany, flow, and peak performance. In other words, people find peak experience having more intrinsic reward and they also experience more positive feelings within the peak experience as well as afterwards than any epiphany, flow, or peak performance. Since these two studies were casual- comparative studies, it might not be accurate to draw any more conclusions from the above results, except for the factor of Fulfillment, among these four kinds of experiences.

Past research indicated that people who experienced peak experiences were more self-actualized (McCain &Andrews, 1969) and spontaneous (Wuthnow, 1978) than "nonpeakers." No previous research examined whether the degree of peak experience is related to one's psychological well-being. The current study found no correlations between peak experience and psychological well-being, including both life satisfaction and overall well-being. It was hypothesized that, due to the fact that peak experiences

have long-lasting effect on one's life (Lanier et al, 1996; Panzarella, 1980), one's psychological well-being would be elevated if one experienced a higher level of peak experience. The results failed to support the hypothesis, implying that one's overall life satisfaction and psychological well-being cannot be predicted from a single event characterized by her or his highest happiness. Furthermore, if one becomes more self-actualized after a peak experience, the degree of the self-actualization might not be reflected on scales of psychological well-being.

The current study is the first study to examine psychological well-being among people who reported different types of peak experiences. The hypothesis was confirmed that people who experienced different types of peak experience do not differ in their psychological well-being. This suggests that no matter what kinds of peak experience were reported the experience does not correlate to one's psychological well-being.

### Epiphany and Psychological Well-Being

No previous research has distinguished different types of epiphany, with the exception that religious conversion experiences have been discussed and studied for quite a period of time (Rambo, 1993). Type E Epiphany involves accepting higher powers, which is similar to religious conversion experience (Rambo, 1993; Wendel, 1989). This type of epiphany also echoes the finding from Jarvis (1996) that religious conversion is one of the discontinuous psychological change experiences (DPCEs). However, religious conversion experience was considered a separate concept from epiphany in Jarvis' study. Nevertheless, this study's Type E Epiphany, or religious conversion experiences, appeared to share qualities and similar process with other types of epiphany in this

present study, consequently was not excluded, just as Miller (2004) and his colleges chose to do (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001).

Six types of epiphany emerged from qualitative analysis. Each type has distinguishing characteristics, though they sometimes overlap (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001). Additional quantitative analysis was conducted to distinguish the top three types of epiphanies. Type A (Epiphany after the death of others, illness, or danger of others or self) and Type C (Epiphany associated with environmental changes) Epiphanies were found to be very different. However, Type A (Epiphany after the death of others, illness, or danger of others or self) and Type B (Epiphany associated with a change in relationship) Epiphanies were not found to significantly as constructs. One might consider that a death of a loved one, which typified many of Type A Epiphanies is similar in many ways to Type B which deals with relationship fallout. A death of a loved one can be seen as the ultimate relationship fallout, or abandonment, suggested by the literature on grief (Herman, 2002). Future researcher might consider these two types of epiphanies as one.

It may enrich this study's meaning to compare it with Miller and C'de Baca's (2001) triggers, or circumstances, that led to epiphanies were compared with the results. They found possible opportunities for epiphanies to occur: (a) when one feels like he or she is hitting bottom; (b) when one has experienced extreme unhappiness from childhood trauma; (c) when one is feeling trapped by the reality; (d) when one has been wandering aimlessly for a period of time; and (e) when religion or prayer is involved. Participants who reported Type A and Type C Epiphany stories often described feeling trapped by the reality. In Type A Epiphany, a death of a loved one or experiences of danger were

accompanied with feelings of "no way out," which is similar to Miller and C'de Baca's descriptions of being trapped by reality which triggers epiphany. Type A and Type C Epiphanies also echo Miller and C'de Baca's "hitting bottom" or James' (1902) assertion that people experience despair before they have an epiphanic experience. In Type C Epiphany, many reported feeling trapped in a new environment where they needed to either accept it or change some of their environment, which is similar to Miller and C'de Baca's description, as well. Type E Epiphany stories involve religion, which is also described in their study. Part of the Type B Epiphany involves early unhappiness, such as parents' divorce, which is described as trigger for epiphany. The first and fourth circumstances they described are embedded in many types of epiphany and do not particularly correspond with one single type of epiphany. Interestingly, experiences similar to Type D Epiphany (Epiphany after a mastery experience) and Type F Epiphany (Epiphany from full awareness) were not found in Miller and his colleagues' studies (C'de Baca & Wilbourne, 2004; Miller, & C'de Baca, 1994, 2001). One might suspect that epiphanies associated with attaining mastery experience occur more when one is still in a learning environment. The participants in Miller's study aged from 30 to 78.

The following integration of qualitative and quantitative data provides a better understanding of epiphany. In quantitative analysis, the scores on 35 out of 47 items were significantly different for peak experience and epiphany. The results do not mean that the descriptions on each item are as equally important as to each other in epiphany. The results only indicate that people endorsed higher scores on these 6 items in epiphany, in comparison to people who responded to the peak experience question. Therefore, in order to ensure a more rigorous comparison, items that were significant and also scored

above 4 or below 2 (on the scale of 1-5, 4 means much importance, 2 means less importance) were used. Six items were statistically significant from the ones in epiphany as well as scored above 4 or below 2. People who experienced epiphany reported having new behaviors and thoughts in epiphany (item #7). Epiphany was not as playful as peak experience (item #27). The majority of the people who experienced epiphany saw the event as a turning point of their lives (item #47). The majority of the epiphanic stories involved emotional turmoil and distress (in particular Type A, B, and C Epiphanies). Substantial cognitive and behavioral changes take place after epiphanies. All the changes came from conscious decisions, after a sense of determination to live their lives differently. All of types of epiphanies appear to have long-lasting effects on one's outlook on life. The majority of the epiphanic experiences were seen as eye-opening events that resulted in maturation. Overall the findings substantiate Miller and C'de Baca's findings on characteristics of quantum change: (a) vividness; (b) surprise; (c) benevolence; and (d) permanence.

Similar to Salzman's (1954) findings of "regressive" reaction to epiphany, some participants in the study reported negative outcome after Type A, B, and D Epiphanies. Negative changes might be interpreted as partial transformation (Tiebout, 1953), posttraumatic stress disorder, or part of the process toward transformation (C'de Baca and Wilbourne, 2004). As the readers may recall, some of the similar stories, such as relationship breakup stories, have opposite results, as mentioned in Type B Epiphany. One might argue that ego strength, personality, resiliency, or attitude moderate the transformational process. Another interpretation is that people who experienced critical events failed to see the experience as an opportunity to grow, as suggested in Chinese

characters of crisis 危機. It does not imply the need to put a positive spin on every negative event. What is implied here is the importance of processing each event, no matter whether negative, positive, or neutral, through a broad perspective.

As with William James' (1902) speculation that transformational change could be sweeping or domain-specific, this study suggested that some realizations after epiphany appear to be domain-specific, while others are across the board. The types of realizations may be related to the types of triggers. For example, Type A Epiphanies tend to be related to existential crisis. Specifically, the realizations are often related to one's mortality. Type B Epiphanies lead to realization related to relationship. Type C Epiphanies often lead to realizations associated with one's understanding of his or her relationship with the world or environment. Type D Epiphanies usually involve a new realization about one's efficacy. Type E Epiphanies tend to change one's life in all areas. The realizations from Type F Epiphanies may be related to one area of a person's life but appears to generalize across all domains.

The study's findings on the process of epiphany is similar to the findings in previous research (Jarvis, 1996; Loder, 1989; White, 2004). In summary, sudden, profound transformation starts with one's world assumptions being challenged, creating inner conflict, or some called such as cognitive dissonance and emotional discomfort. One then undergoes a period of reconfiguration by sudden insight as well as "hanging on" to the experience. As a result, one seems to mature in a short period of time and the changes he or she has made through the epiphany become enduring and long-lasting. One finds a new level of equilibrium afterwards.

On the other hand, a few of the epiphanic stories in the present study suggest that one does not necessarily need to go through a period of emotional turmoil and cognitive discomfort in order to have an epiphany, which contradicts the previous research on transformational experiences. A future research question might be, is it possible that one can undergo a sudden, profound transformation without going through a period of dissonance?

One of the most significant findings in the present study was that the degree of epiphany is significantly associated with one's overall satisfaction with life. It is important to note that this is not a casual relationship but an association. Nonetheless, it appears from the study's correlation of qualitative and quantitative data that when participants maintained a sense of self when going through the often traumatic, and sometimes abrupt, and surprising experience sometimes associated with epiphany, he or she was likely to gain greater satisfaction for life. When one experiences a critical experience that creates inner confusion which does not overwhelm one's sense of control, one is more likely to make sense out of the confusion created by the critical experience and is more likely to grow as a person.

## Peak Experience and Epiphany

This present study examined the two constructs of peak experience and epiphany and has successfully distinguished these two through both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study contributes to the literature of critical experiences in life. Its greatest contribution is the information regarding epiphany. Existing research on critical experience has focused on peak experience, flow, peak performance, and quantum change. The present study provides evidence that the constructs of peak experience and

epiphany overlap but are not one and the same. In particular, Type 1 Peak Experience and Type D Epiphany, Type 3 Peak Experience and Type A Epiphany, and Type 4 Peak Experience and Type E Epiphany were found to be similar in both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Although these types of experience were found to be similar, stories reported for peak experience tended to contain more emotional aspects than stories reported for epiphany. Stories reported for epiphany tended to contain more cognitive aspects than stories reported for peak experience. One of the reasons might be that the definition of peak experience has more of emotional loading, whereas the definition of epiphany has more cognitive loading and an emphasis on change. The other reason would be that participants responded to the stimulus questions differently due to how the questions were worded. Nevertheless, it is argued that participants were asked to give details in all aspects of the experiences. Also, pseudo peak experience might have been gathered in the present study (Mathes et al., 1982). In future research, one might consider (a) providing detailed definitions of peak experience and epiphany and (b) asking specific details in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains.

The study suggests that there are many ways one experiences a peak experience. Nonetheless, in epiphanies people usually go through stages. First, a basic world assumption is challenged, then there inner confusion or conflict created, next a new way of thinking emerges, and finally transformation takes place. The study revealed that peak experiences result in a unique state of consciousness but may or may not have a positive impact on one's life; whereas epiphany is a process of change that brings profound changes in one's perception of life and/or the world.

While the present study did not set out to explore the relationship of positive or negative experiences with peak experience and epiphany, the qualitative analysis of both Type 2 Peak Experience and Type B Epiphany were seen as critical experiences that involved relationships representing positive experience and negative experiences, respectively. Additional quantitative analysis was conducted and the result indicated that people who went through positive and those who went through negative experiences did not differ in their reported psychological well-being. Although the finding did not suggest these types of experience with two opposite emotions involved have similar effects on their psychological well-being, it supported Wilson and Spencer's (1990) study that both positive and negative experiences can have similar positive aftereffects on how one sees her or his life.

## Implications for Clinical Practice in Counseling Psychology

The present study has potential implications for practice, particularly in the field of counseling psychology that historically and currently emphasizes positive aspects of human functioning (see the March 2006 edition of the *Counseling Psychologist*; R. T. Carter, 2006). First, positive and negative experiences have similar positive effects on one's psychological well-being as was reported in a few previous studies (Janoff-Bulman, & Berger, 2000; Morgan & Janoff-Bulman, 1994; Wilson & Spencer, 1990). Therefore, it would be important for counselors to put the same amount of emphasis on both positive and negative life events. One's highest happiness and events that involve sudden, profound changes in his or her life appear to be important data. One might even consider incorporating inquiries regarding them into the initial intake or interview. Counselors

should also follow up with what clients think these critical experiences mean in light of their psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

Second, Type A through D Epiphany consisted of stories that involved a death of a loved one, relationship fallouts, environmental changes, and mastery experiences. These categories parallel to the major presenting problems of most people who seek help, in particular in college counseling centers. An important implication here is that seeking therapy often coincides with the period in which one has had an epiphany or is in a state in which he or she has the possibility to have one. A counselor might explore what assumptions the client is questioning, feeling of confusion, disorientation, and emotional turmoil. The study suggests that it is a time when profound changes can occur.

Third, counselors should convey the notion to clients that it is okay to be confused sometimes in the process of counseling. Counselors should not "rush" to find clarity for clients who experienced a reasonable amount of confusion. The present study provides evidence that, while one is going through a critical time that may lead to a possible epiphany, the less clear his or her inner process is, the more likely he or she may have a higher level of life satisfaction afterwards; that is, under the following conditions: (a) the experience was not too overwhelming; (b) one did not experience a loss of self in the experience; (c) one was not passive and receptive; and (d) somehow one felt a sense of fulfillment. To help keep clients from being overwhelmed, counselors should emphasize clients' strengths (i.e., building a sense of self), help clients make meanings out of the experience (i.e., finding a sense of fulfillment), and encourage clients to take actions (i.e., decreasing the possibility of being passive and receptive).

Fourth, counselors should encourage clients to develop a sense of awareness about themselves so they are fully aware of their own emotions, cognitions, and behaviors as well as of how they react to the environment. Counselors might convey the message, "Don't to be afraid of and judgmental of your own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors." Type F Epiphanies suggested that participants had their epiphanies when they were fully aware of their own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors without any specific triggers. This type of "mindfulness" is practiced in Dialetical Behavioral Therapy (Linehan, 1993a; 1993b) and introduced to clients who struggle with eating disorders (Baer, 2003; Kristeller & Hallett, 1999; Wiser & Telch, 1999). It is a way of living fully and bravely as well as letting things be the way they are. Changes will emerge when one accepts themselves, as suggested in Taoism and Rogers' Person-Centered Therapy (Rogers, 1961a).

## Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited in terms of the generalizability of the sample included. First, the sample consisted of undergraduate and graduate students in one major university who voluntarily signed up to participate in psychological research. Some received course credits as incentive and some did not. Students attracted to such a study may not be representative of the general population of the college students. Second, the sample was predominately White undergraduate students. It has been argued that one's cultural beliefs can influence one's identification of an epiphany (Denzin, 1989; Gasker, 2001). Past research also found that the degree of peak experience reported was different in Americans' and Taiwanese samples (Privette et al., 1997). Given the limited number of non-Caucasian students included in the present study (about

24.9% across all ethnic groups), one might be cautious in generalizing the findings of this present study to non-Caucasian students. Third, although the previous research suggested that age and occupation are not associated with what kinds of peak experiences are reported (e.g., Lanier et al., 1996; Yeagle et al, 1989), it is still questionable that the results in the present study can be generalized to other populations.

Although this study utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches to better answer the research questions, a number of important limitations must be acknowledged. First, the written description of critical experiences might have limited the depth of the study in terms of fully understanding both phenomena of peak experience and epiphany. Although all the participants have earned their high school diploma, quality of writing still varied. The writing skills might have interfered with the expression of their critical experiences. Nonverbal information, when participants reflected on their experiences, was not gathered. Most of the time, emotions are expressed through nonverbal communication. Follow-up questions could not be asked in this study. More information could have been gathered if verbal communication had been utilized. Qualitative analysis through written descriptions might have been limited due to this reason.

Second, the wordings of the stimulus questions might have unintentionally elicited elaboration on a particular aspect of a critical experience. The stimulus for peak experience has elicited more description on feelings, whereas the stimulus for epiphany has elicited more description on changes. Therefore, possibly other aspects of the experiences were not fully expressed due to this reason. Third, due to the nature of this area of study, all the data were retrospective. Faulty memory may have impacted the results. Fourth, all the data were collected via self-report. However, it is important to

keep in mind that the phenomenological approach highly values one's own reported experience. Fifth, participants might have reconstructed their understanding of their critical experiences to fit their current way of thinking.

Sixth, the study was a correlational study in quantitative analysis. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn in terms of causal relationships. For instance it is not possible to conclude whether epiphany caused life satisfaction or the reverse. Seventh, the factor structure of the Experience Questionnaire is questionable due to the fact that it failed to pass the consistency tests for both peak experience and epiphany. Neither epiphany, the new construct never used in the Experience Questionnaire, confirmed the factors of the Experience Questionnaire nor did peak experience, which have been used in many past studies (Privette, 1983;Privette, & Bundrick, 1987, 1991, 1997; Privette, Hwang, & Bundrick, 1997). The factor structure of the Experience Questionnaire might not be stable enough over time and across different samples.

The final limitation is that the inventories on psychological well-being (Satisfactions with Life Scale and Friedman Well-Being Scale) could not detect the growth participants experienced due to their critical experiences. Past studies suggest that participants were more self-actualized, more mature, more spontaneous, less fearful of the future, more spiritual, though did not necessarily experience less sadness or more happiness after experiencing a critical experience. Most of the inventories that tap into psychological well-being treat sadness and happiness as two extremes of a continuum (e.g., serious verses outgoing, shy verses self-confident in Friedman Well-Being Scale). Also, the construction of the concept of psychological well-being reflects the culture in psychology as well as in the mainstream society. However, there may be other to truly

detect the effects of critical experience on one's wisdom and well-being, measurements on centeredness, flexibility, openness to experiences, wisdom, and meaning. The next question, also a challenge for the field of psychology is to explore and examine the unifying construct of well being (i.e., happiness or centeredness) and to explore and define dimensions of psychological well-being that can be measured (Lent, 2004).

## Directions for Future Research

In line with some of the limitations mentioned in the previous section, future research might consider the following directions. First, it is important to examine critical experiences in different cultural contexts. Critical experience is probably constructed differently across cultures due to values differences, cultural customs, and symbolic meanings. Second, future studies could also expand on the present findings by studying different ages, such as older people who have had more life experiences. Third, one might want to consider using personal interviews to gather more in-depth qualitative data for studying critical experiences. The process of how a peak experience or epiphany occurs could be illuminated extensive and reports including immediate clarifications. Fourth, different types of peak experience and epiphany are worth further exploration. The present study has suggested that there are some overlaps and there may be others that this study did not examine. Fifth, it may extend the knowledge about these areas if inventories that can tap into one's level of wisdom and centeredness were used (Lent, 2004). Existing psychological well-being inventories might not reflect mature, integrated wisdom generated through the experience of a peak experience or epiphany. For example, the newly developed and validated inventory, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006), might be used to examine whether

different types of critical experience or different degrees of critical experience being reported are associated with one's search for meaning in life. Sixth, further validation of the Experience Questionnaire needs to be done. Due to the inconsistency found within the structure of the questionnaire, further validation is needed. Seventh, future research could also look at whether the definition of peak experience has changed over the years since Maslow defined it in 1960s. Eighth, the construct of epiphany can be further explored and expanded by carefully examining similar phenomenon in the field of psychology and other cultures. Previous studies, the present study, and the prorated inquiries into critical experiences bring psychology back to the original question that the father of American Psychology William James asked himself more than a hundred year ago (1902), "What is psychological change?"

## Conclusion

The most unique contribution of this dissertation was its new way of looking at critical experiences. The current study utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the phenomena of peak experience and epiphany. As counseling psychology has again incorporated positive aspects of life experiences into the existing emphasis of process of change in recent years, this study has also focused on aspects of human experience which religion, art, and spirituality have long valued as integral to a healthy life but psychology has ignored. Results in this study suggest that positive life events are as important as negative events in terms of significance. The interpretation of critical experiences was more important in relation to life satisfaction than whether they were victories or loses. This dissertation has also made contributions in our understanding of the relations among peak experience, epiphany, and psychological well-

being. Future research is needed to further explore how people change through critical experience. Better defining the construct of psychological well-being will be important in order for this to be accomplished.

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Table 1

Eight Factors in the Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1984)

| Factor | Factor Item (item number) |
|---|---|
| Self in clear process | Clear inner process (#17), felt all together (#21), awareness of power (#18), clear focus (#9), strong sense of self (#14), free from outer restrictions (#16) |
| Full focus | Need to complete (#12), absorption (#11), intention (#19), personal responsibility (#23), overwhelmed other senses and thoughts (#24), event an emergency (#8), intensity (#4), process "clicked" on (#5) |
| Significance | Significance (#47), meaning (#37), personal understanding and expression (#22), personal value (#10), actions and thoughts spontaneous (#15), event was practiced (#6)(-) |
| Fulfillment | Afterfeelings (#46), feelings (#44), performance (#43), fulfillment (#42), intrinsic reward (#41) |
| Spirituality | Loss of self (#26), ineffable (#40), spiritual (#31), brief (#39), loss of time and space (#35), differences resolved (#28), unity of self and environment (#25) |
| Other people | Enjoyed others (#34), others influenced outcome (#38), other contributed (#45), interactive (#13), encounter with person or something (#36), spontaneous, not planned (#3)(-) |

Table 1 continued

Eight Factors in the Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1984)

| Factor | Factor Item (item number) |
|---|---|
| Play | Prior related involvement (#2), playful (#27), fun (#30), action or behavior (#1), action, thoughts new not habitual (#7) |
| Outer structure | Perceptual, not behavioral (#32), receptive and passive (#33), rules, motives, goals in structure (#29), event nonmotivated (#20) |

Note. (-) means negative loading on factor

Table 2

Characteristics of Different Types of Peak Experience and Epiphany

| Category | Type | Characteristics |
|---|---|---|
| Need/dream/fantasy/goal being fulfilled as a peak experience | Type 1 Peak Experience | • "Dreams-come-true" stories, majority is mastery experiences<br>• Importance of self in fulfilling their dreams (both personal dreams and collective dreams)<br>• Hard work, or a sense of determination<br>• Happiness results from long waits, the first experience, and unexpected positive outcomes.<br>• Emotional reactions: Excitement, happiness, awe, joy, and luck.<br>• A sense of accomplishment afterwards |
| A shared moment that involves recognition of being in relation to the world | Type 2 Peak Experience | • "Connection" stories, or shared moments<br>• Typical stories: birthday parties, surprise engagements, weddings, special trips, and special moments<br>• Involved with loved ones<br>• One' realization of being in the relation to other human beings and/or to the |

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| | | world.<br>• Ritual activities are common triggers<br>• Comes from the accumulation of several events<br>• Enjoyment is frequently reported<br>• Aftereffect: rarely mentioned |
| Peak experience associated with insight regarding after tragedy/separation/misfortune | Type 3 Peak Experience | • Stories began with tragedy, separation, or misfortune<br>• A better result out of the misfortune event becomes one's highest happiness<br>• Recovery from a misfortune event is the common trigger<br>• Descriptions of feelings associated with tragedy/separation/misfortune are absent from these stories.<br>• "Happy" is the only emotion being mentioned after recovery from previous negative events.<br>• The positive, long-term aftereffect—a sense of relief and a sense of peace—were reported. Some have new realizations during the experience. |
| An experience | Type 4 Peak | • Only a small number of stories |

| | | |
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| that involves nature or a high power | Experience | • One's solitary experience with nature or higher power<br>• Stories with higher power are reported as life-changing experiences<br>• A sense of peace afterwards |
| Epiphany after the death of others, illness, or danger of others or self | Type A Epiphany | • Results from the experiences with death of loved ones, and life-threatening incidents that endanger self and/or loved ones<br>• Reported vivid memory of how the incidents had happened, but descriptions of emotions associated with the incidents were often omitted<br>• Thought about their own mortality, and, as a result, they have re-evaluated and re-prioritized their lives<br>• A realization of the importance of living fully in every moment permeates this stories<br>• Many have made conscious decision to take action instead of waiting for a better life<br>• All the participants experienced |

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| | | sadness in their experiences, but majority of the participants view the experience as significant and turning points. |
| Epiphany as a result of changes in relationships with others | Type B Epiphany | • Common triggers in this category are relationship fallouts, ending an abusive relationship, and negative feedbacks from friends.<br>• All of the relationship triggers were experienced by participants as negative.<br>• More negative aftereffects were reported than positive after epiphanies.<br>• Re-examination of relationship took place as epiphanies.<br>• Participants came to realizations that made them redefine relationship, including how much one can trust others and what expectations one should hold in a friendship or romantic relationship. |
| Epiphany resulting from environmental | Type C Epiphany | • Comes from the experience of physically being in a different environment |

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| changes | | • Some emphasized that leaving a safety net has made them grow as a person, while some stressed that experiencing different people and things in a new environment helped to gain a new perspective of themselves and the world.<br>• Reported a sense of "out of place" at the beginning or "cultural shock"<br>• Feelings of loneliness, homesickness, and depression were often reported.<br>• "Eye-opening experiences"<br>• Came close to a "real world," as a result, they can "survive" the world<br>• A sense of independence, responsibility and self-confidence afterwards |
| Epiphany after a mastery experience | Type D Epiphany | • After accomplishing a difficult task or learning to master a task differently<br>• Gain self-confidence and found new ways to master tasks<br>• Uncertainty and nervousness are often reported<br>• Changes in how they perceived |

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| | | themselves.<br>• Aftereffects seen as long-lasting |
| Epiphany that involves a higher power | Type E Epiphany | • All involve higher power<br>• Few mystical components<br>• Significant changes in how they perceive their lives as well as how they react to the world around them |
| Epiphany from full awareness | Type F epiphany | • Took place when one becomes fully aware of one's inner feelings and his or her environment<br>• No specific triggers were reported<br>• Were reported as "deep insights" that just occurred to them<br>• Lead to re-examination of what's important in life<br>• Sudden transformations take place simultaneously |

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation in the subscales in Friedman Well-Being Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale by Peak Experience and Epiphany Groups

| | Mean | | Standard Deviation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Peak Experience | Epiphany | Peak Experience | Epiphany |
| Overall well-being (FWBC) | 54.6501 | 52.3753 | 8.42067 | 9.87854 |
| Sociability (FSOC) | 55.6205 | 54.1450 | 8.72969 | 10.41836 |
| Self-esteem/Self Confidence (FSES) | 50.3339 | 50.4610 | 9.94919 | 10.13388 |
| Joviality (FJOV) | 55.8019 | 53.3011 | 7.69836 | 10.03507 |
| Emotional Stability (FES) | 53.1957 | 51.4995 | 7.51186 | 9.28097 |
| Happiness (FHAPP) | 58.2617 | 55.1415 | 7.52648 | 12.33071 |
| Life Satisfactions (SWLS) | 25.5047 | 25.0755 | 6.62382 | 6.42865 |

Table 4

Mean and Standard Deviation in the subscales in Friedman Well-Being Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale by Conditions

| | Mean | | Standard Deviation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Condition 1 | Condition 2 | Condition 1 | Condition 2 |
| Overall well-being (FWBC) | 54.0210 | 53.3677 | 10.02567 | 8.99811 |
| Sociability (FSOC) | 52.9990 | 55.4501 | 9.67941 | 9.55033 |
| Self-esteem/Self Confidence (FSES) | 48.6186 | 50.9286 | 10.25907 | 9.91472 |
| Joviality (FJOV) | 54.5286 | 54.5660 | 7.82439 | 9.35010 |
| Emotional Stability (FES) | 53.5165 | 52.0035 | 8.42056 | 8.46829 |
| Happiness (FHAPP) | 57.1020 | 56.5915 | 8.44651 | 10.81173 |
| Life Satisfactions (SWLS) | 26.1020 | 25.0488 | 6.75230 | 6.44448 |

Note. Condition 1: n = 49; Condition 2: n = 164

Table 5

Mean and Standard Deviation in the subscales in Friedman Well-Being Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale by Gender

| | Mean | | Standard Deviation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| Overall well-being (FWBC) | 52.7402 | 54.9791 | 8.91709 | 9.66789 |
| Sociability (FSOC) | 54.9759 | 54.7177 | 9.92531 | 9.06068 |
| Self-esteem/Self Confidence (FSES) | 49.6624 | 51.7773 | 10.11726 | 9.74674 |
| Joviality (FJOV) | 54.4857 | 54.6920 | 8.72224 | 9.57172 |
| Emotional Stability (FES) | 51.5429 | 53.8707 | 8.57960 | 8.07422 |
| Happiness (FHAPP) | 57.1367 | 55.9054 | 9.31276 | 11.96246 |
| Life Satisfactions (SWLS) | 25.2158 | 25.4324 | 6.91853 | 5.72445 |

Note. Female n = 139; Male n= 74.

Table 6

Zero-Order Correlations Among Subscales in Friedman Well-Being Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale

| | FWBC | FSOC | FSES | FJOV | FES | FHAPP | SWLS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FWBC | | .710 | .753 | .738 | .879 | .697 | .413 |
| FSOC | | | .666 | .627 | .474 | .498 | .362 |
| FSES | | | | .574 | .617 | .547 | .334 |
| FJOV | | | | | .532 | .689 | .286 |
| FES | | | | | | .623 | .353 |
| FHAPP | | | | | | | .382 |
| SWLS | | | | | | | |

Note. All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7

MANOVA on the Item Level

| | Mean | | Std. Deviation | | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Peak Experience | Epiphany | Peak Experience | Epiphany | | |
| EQ1 | 4.3738 | 4.0377 | .92679 | 1.22610 | 5.099 | .025 |
| EQ2 | 3.6075 | 2.8774 | 1.52808 | 1.45211 | 12.773 | .000 |
| EQ3 | 3.1869 | 2.5000 | 1.57893 | 1.62861 | 9.768 | .002 |
| EQ4 | 4.0467 | 4.1038 | 1.21611 | 1.25682 | .113 | .737 |
| EQ5 | 3.2710 | 3.2170 | 1.37752 | 1.32381 | .085 | .771 |
| EQ6 | 3.6542 | 4.3302 | 1.67728 | 1.12734 | 11.894 | .001 |
| EQ7 | 2.3738 | 1.7830 | 1.34952 | .98566 | 13.292 | .000 |
| EQ8 | 1.8972 | 3.2075 | 1.33836 | 1.63717 | 40.932 | .000 |
| EQ9 | 3.9159 | 2.9057 | 1.25984 | 1.31314 | 32.827 | .000 |
| EQ10 | 4.4299 | 4.0849 | 1.06498 | 1.28817 | 4.542 | .034 |
| EQ11 | 4.3645 | 3.6604 | 1.13597 | 1.42686 | 15.890 | .000 |
| EQ12 | 3.7290 | 3.2358 | 1.53924 | 1.63621 | 5.133 | .024 |
| EQ13 | 4.1308 | 3.2170 | 1.25956 | 1.40750 | 24.944 | .000 |
| EQ14 | 4.3645 | 3.3491 | 1.03151 | 1.48672 | 33.592 | .000 |
| EQ15 | 3.7009 | 3.6981 | 1.33328 | 1.28856 | .000 | .987 |
| EQ16 | 3.8972 | 2.7547 | 1.30264 | 1.43302 | 37.081 | .000 |
| EQ17 | 4.0000 | 2.8396 | 1.13270 | 1.41513 | 43.689 | .000 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EQ18 | 3.7009 | 3.0283 | 1.35434 | 1.51474 | 11.677 | .001 |
| EQ19 | 4.1495 | 3.5377 | 1.27977 | 1.49395 | 10.308 | .002 |
| EQ20 | 2.0187 | 2.3585 | 1.24371 | 1.40196 | 3.503 | .063 |
| EQ21 | 4.1963 | 2.8208 | 1.04104 | 1.46578 | 62.436 | .000 |
| EQ22 | 4.3832 | 4.2736 | .97753 | 1.06488 | .612 | .435 |
| EQ23 | 4.1308 | 3.9340 | 1.24449 | 1.29665 | 1.278 | .260 |
| EQ24 | 4.1682 | 4.2075 | 1.15322 | 1.12730 | .063 | .802 |
| EQ25 | 3.7757 | 3.2830 | 1.35499 | 1.46551 | 6.492 | .012 |
| EQ26 | 1.9720 | 3.1792 | 1.31363 | 1.56629 | 37.175 | .000 |
| EQ27 | 3.2523 | 1.7547 | 1.52398 | 1.27101 | 60.604 | .000 |
| EQ28 | 2.0374 | 2.4245 | 1.40030 | 1.41386 | 4.031 | .046 |
| EQ29 | 3.3458 | 3.3491 | 1.54860 | 1.48030 | .000 | .987 |
| EQ30 | 4.4112 | 2.0943 | 1.03662 | 1.58281 | 159.992 | .000 |
| EQ31 | 3.5514 | 3.0189 | 1.57955 | 1.63288 | 5.853 | .016 |
| EQ32 | 2.6449 | 2.6132 | 1.31932 | 1.45779 | .028 | .868 |
| EQ33 | 2.6262 | 2.5849 | 1.40433 | 1.40657 | .046 | .831 |
| EQ34 | 4.3271 | 2.6132 | 1.17983 | 1.61876 | 78.079 | .000 |
| EQ35 | 3.0374 | 3.3679 | 1.66498 | 1.51391 | 2.297 | .131 |
| EQ36 | 3.7944 | 3.4528 | 1.50307 | 1.65116 | 2.493 | .116 |
| EQ37 | 4.8224 | 4.1792 | .47211 | 1.20946 | 26.227 | .000 |
| EQ38 | 4.0280 | 3.4811 | 1.39038 | 1.56285 | 7.284 | .008 |
| EQ39 | 2.3738 | 2.3491 | 1.41103 | 1.45434 | .016 | .900 |
| EQ40 | 4.2336 | 3.5849 | 1.16213 | 1.52358 | 12.222 | .001 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EQ41 | 4.5421 | 2.6321 | .86089 | 1.67517 | 109.823 | .000 |
| EQ42 | 4.7850 | 2.5189 | .45615 | 1.67464 | 182.298 | .000 |
| EQ43 | 6.1869 | 4.6604 | .80248 | 1.98991 | 54.092 | .000 |
| EQ44 | 6.5140 | 3.1887 | .63490 | 2.27246 | 212.394 | .000 |
| EQ45 | 1.7290 | 2.3113 | 1.05124 | 1.23723 | 13.713 | .000 |
| EQ46 | 4.8505 | 3.5094 | .35829 | 1.42925 | 88.583 | .000 |
| EQ47 | 4.1776 | 4.4057 | .71127 | .65869 | 5.893 | .016 |

Note. Item #3, 6, and 7 have been reverse-scored.

Table 8

MANOVA on the Factor Level

| | Mean | | Std. Deviation | | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Peak Experience | Epiphany | Peak Experience | Epiphany | | |
| EQ_F1 | 24.0748 | 17.6981 | 4.68579 | 6.77273 | 63.952 | .000 |
| EQ_F2 | 29.7570 | 29.1038 | 6.19775 | 6.00465 | .610 | .436 |
| EQ_F3 | 25.1682 | 24.9717 | 3.23742 | 3.79588 | .165 | .685 |
| EQ_F4 | 23.2497 | 14.2668 | 1.62777 | 6.40132 | 197.800 | .000 |
| EQ_F5 | 20.9813 | 21.2075 | 4.76224 | 4.63674 | .123 | .726 |
| EQ_F6 | 21.1963 | 17.5755 | 3.47346 | 4.19285 | 47.139 | .000 |
| EQ_F7 | 18.0187 | 12.5472 | 3.45860 | 3.28961 | 139.905 | .000 |
| EQ_F8 | 10.6355 | 10.9057 | 2.85628 | 3.05046 | .445 | .505 |

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letters

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

March 11, 2004

Ms Ya-Shu Liang
Educational Psychology
EC11 321
CAMPUS MAIL

Dear Ms. Liang:

The Institutional Review Board-Norman campus has reviewed your proposal, "Epiphany, Peak Experience and Psychological Well-Being," under the University's expedited review procedures. The Board found that this research would not constitute a risk to participants beyond those of normal, everyday life, except in the area of privacy, which is adequately protected by the confidentiality procedures. Therefore, the Board has approved the use of human subjects in this research.

This approval is for a period of twelve months from March 11, 2004, provided that the research procedures are not changed from those described in your approved protocol and attachments. Should you wish to deviate from the described subject protocol, you must notify this office, in writing, noting any changes or revisions in the protocol and/or informed consent document and obtain prior approval from the Board for the changes. A copy of the approved informed consent document(s) is attached for your use.

At the end of the research, you must submit a short report describing your use of human subjects in the research and the results obtained. Should the research extend beyond 12 months, a progress report must be submitted with the request for continuation, and a final report must be submitted at the end of the research.

If data are still being collected after five years, resubmission of the protocol is required.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair
Institutional Review Board-Norman Campus (FWA #00003191)

FY2004-242

Cc: Dr. Rockey Robbins, Educational Psychology

660 Parrington Oval, Suite 316, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-3065 PHONE: (405) 325-8110 FAX: (405) 325-2373

Appendix A (Continued)

IRB Approval Letters

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE FOR HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

March 9, 2005

Ms. Yu-Shu Liang
Educational Psychology
ECH 321
CAMPUS MAIL

SUBJECT: "Epiphany, Peak Experience and Psychological Well-Being"

Dear Ms Liang:

Thank you for returning your completed progress report for research conducted with human subjects under the above referenced protocol. The Board has reviewed and approved your report. Since you indicate the study is continuing, they have extended your approval to continue this research for an additional twelve-month period ending 3/8/2006.

Please note that this approval is for the protocol and informed consent form reviewed by the Board. If you wish to make any changes, you will need to submit a request for change to this office for review.

Sixty days before the expiration of this approval you will receive notice from the IRB secretary that your approval anniversary is approaching along with information you can use to complete your progress report and request an extension of the approval date.

If you have any questions about the approval given your protocol, please contact me at 325-8110.

Cordially,

Lynn Davenport, Ph.D.
Vice Chair
Institutional Review Board-Norman Campus (FWA #00003131)

FY2004-242

cc: Dr. Rockey Robbins, Educational Psychology

660 Parrington Oval, Suite 316, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-3075 PHONE: (405) 325-8110 FAX: (405) 325-6579

Appendix A (Continued)

IRB Approval Letters

*The University of Oklahoma*

OFFICE FOR HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

**IRB Number: 10519**
**Approval Date: March 02, 2006**

March 02, 2006

Ya-Shu Liang
Educational Psychology
820 Van Fleet Oval, ECH 321
Norman, OK 73019

**RE: Protocol No. FY2004-242: Epiphany, Peak Experience and Psychological Well-Being**

Dear Ms. Liang:

Thank you for completing and returning the IRB Application for Continuing Review (Progress Report) for the above-referenced study. You have indicated that the study is still active. I have reviewed and approved the Progress Report and determined that this study was appropriate for continuation.

This letter documents approval to conduct the research as described in:
Cont Review Form Dated: February 26, 2006
Consent form - Subject Dated: February 26, 2006

Please remember that any change in the protocol, consent document or other recruitment materials (advertisements, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to its incorporation into the study procedures. Submit a completed Protocol Modification form to the IRB office.

Approximately two months prior to the expiration date of this approval, you will be contacted by the IRB staff about procedures necessary to maintain this approval in an active status. Although every attempt will be made to notify you when a study is due for review, it is the responsibility of the investigator to assure that their studies receive review prior to expiration.

The approval of this study expires on March 01, 2007 and must be reviewed by the convened IRB prior to this time if you wish to remain in an active status. Federal regulations do not allow for extensions to be given on the expiration date.

If we can be of further assistance, please call the IRB office at (405) 325-8110 or send an email to irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Ltr_Prog_Appr_Active

660 Parrington Oval, Suite 316, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-3085 PHONE: (405) 325-8110 FAX: (405) 325-2373

Appendix B

Experience Questionnaire

EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please do not turn this page until you have finished your description.

**Will you describe one incident in your life characterized by highest happiness?**

**or**

**Will you describe one incident in your life characterized by sudden and profound changes in your perception of yourself and/or reality?**

How long ago did this incident happen to you? ___Year___Month

May your description be used in reports of this research?___Yes___No

Appendix B (continued)

## Experience Questionnaire

**5= great importance 4= much importance 3= some importance 2= little importance 1=no importance**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 1. The event involved action or behavior. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 22. The event involved understanding or expression that was personal. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 2. I had prior related involvement. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 23. I had a sense of personal responsibility. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 3. The event was spontaneous or triggered, not planned or structured. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 24. The experience overwhelmed other senses and thoughts. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 4. The event was intense. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 25. The experience involved unity or fusion of self with the environment. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 5. A process seemed to "click" on. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 26. The experience involved loss of self. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 6. The event was practiced. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 27. The event was playful. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 7. My actions and thoughts were new. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 28. Differences were resolved. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 8. The event seemed an emergency. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 29. Rules, motivation, and goals were built into the situation. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 9. I had clear focus. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 30. The event was fun. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 10. The event involved a personal value. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 31. The event had a spiritual or mystical quality. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 11. I was absorbed in what I was doing. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 32. The event was perceptual, rather than behavioral. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 12. I felt a need to continue until completion. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 33. I was receptive and passive. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 13. I was interactive. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 34. I enjoyed another person or persons during the event. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 14. I had a strong sense of self. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 35. I experienced a loss of time and space. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 15. Actions or thoughts just came out spontaneously. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 36. The event was an encounter with a person or something outside myself. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 16. I felt free from outer restrictions. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 37. The event had great meaning for me. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 17. My inner process was clear. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 38. Other people influenced the outcome. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 18. I was aware of my own power. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 39. The event was brief. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 19. My intentions were strong. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 40. The experience was beyond words. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 20. The event was nonmotivated. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 41. The experience was its own reward. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 21. I felt all together. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 42. I experienced joy and fulfillment. |

**Check the description that best fits your performance in this event:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| personal best | _____ | inefficiency | _____ |
| high performance | _____ | inadequacy | _____ |
| effectiveness | _____ | failure | _____ |
| mediocrity | _____ | | |

**Check the description that best fits your feeling in this event:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| highest happiness | _____ | boredom | _____ |
| joy | _____ | worry | _____ |
| enjoyment | _____ | misery | _____ |
| neutrality | _____ | | |

**What was the role of other people?**

| | |
|---|---|
| interfering | _____ |
| not present | _____ |
| present only | _____ |
| contributing | _____ |
| essential | _____ |

**How do you characterize your feeling afterwards?**

| | |
|---|---|
| extremely positive | _____ |
| positive | _____ |
| neutral | _____ |
| negative | _____ |
| extremely negative | _____ |

**How do you characterize the aftereffects?**

| | |
|---|---|
| turning point | _____ |
| significant | _____ |
| some | _____ |
| little | _____ |
| none | _____ |

Appendix C

Friedman Well-being Scale

**HOW ACCURATELY CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF?**
**(A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR HONEST SELF DESCRIPTIONS)**

Directions

Please use this list of common human traits to describe yourself as accurately as possible. Describe yourself as you see yourself *at the present time*, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you are typically, as compared with other persons you know of the same gender and roughly the same age. Please circle only *one* number in each line.

| | Very | | | Moderately | | Neither | | Moderately | | | Very | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| angry | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | calm |
| tense | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | relaxed |
| nervous | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | at ease |
| discontented | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | contented |
| insecure | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | secure |

Only five sample questions were shown here due to the copyright.

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Mind Garden, Inc. www.mindgarden.com

Appendix D

Satisfaction with Life Scale

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 below, indicate your agreement with each item by circling the appropriate number preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding. The 7-point scale is as follows:

1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=slightly disagree 4=neither agree nor disagree 5=slightly agree 6=agree 7=strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 The conditions of my life are excellent.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I am satisfied with my life.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Appendix E

Demographic Information Sheet

1. Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male

2. Age: ☐ 11-20 ☐ 21-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61-70 ☐ over 70

3. Racial/Cultural Background:
   - ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native ☐ African American
   - ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander ☐ Hispanic or Latino American
   - ☐ Caucasian, or White ☐ Non U.S. Resident
   - ☐ Other _____ (Please specify)

4. Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Remarried

5. Education (Highest Degree Earned so far):
   - ☐ Below High School ☐ High School ☐ Associate Degree
   - ☐ Bachelor Degree ☐ Master's Degree and above

6. Please mark THREE of the following items as the most valuable and meaningful things in your life by marking 1 to 3. 1 is the most valuable and meaningful one, and then 2 and 3.
   - ☐ Self-Actualization ☐ Family ☐ Intimate Relationship ☐ Work
   - ☐ Interpersonal Relationship ☐ Spirituality ☐ Religion ☐ Others (Please specify: )