

Mystical Experiences and Self-Esteem:

A study of the Correlation between Personal Mystical Experiences
And the Demonstration of Positive Levels of Self-Esteem in an
Agricultural Population over the Age of 60

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The work reported in this thesis is original and carried out by me solely, except for the acknowledged direction and assistance gratefully received from colleagues and mentors.

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I once believed that a dissertation was a singular research, unique unto itself, and existing separate from the more generalized life of the person receiving the degree. My experience has proven this belief a falsehood on all counts. This document is more accurately a culmination of the ideas and energies of the many people who have taken part in my education over the past several years and throughout my life. This study represents a process of learning how to do research and my acknowledgments must begin with the many scholars who came before me. This study is built on their ideas and their names are listed in my bibliography. Without them this study would not exist.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout time, individuals have described experiencing states of consciousness that go far beyond their ordinary perception. Such experiences can change the individual's view of the world forever. These experiences tend to be ineffable, intense, and deeply moving. This study was designed to examine whether individuals over the age of sixty, who have been involved in farming or agriculture, have experienced a significant mystical event and whether this event is correlated with positive self-esteem. The 60 subjects included in this study were drawn from a population in rural Kansas. The Rosenberg Scale was administered to establish levels of self-esteem. Questions used to ascertain the occurrence of a significant mystical experience were taken from the 1974 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) survey of 1,500 American adults. In addition to completing the Rosenberg Scale and the mysticism scale from the NORC, participants were given the opportunity to talk about a mystical or significant experience in their lives. These interviews served as anecdotal evidence of the way participants are interpreting a mystical event and the type of mystical events experienced. Results indicate that 43% of the participants in this study experienced a mystical event as defined by the NORC question. There was no significant correlation between reporting a mystical experience and having positive self-esteem. However, there were several significant correlations between reporting a mystical experience, evidencing positive self-esteem, and experiencing descriptor items related to classical descriptions of mystical experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Research and discussion of mysticism and mystical experience tends to open with a statement about the importance of such experience. Ralph Hood begins his chapter on mysticism by mentioning, “the central role that mystical experience has occupied in conceptual discussions of religion in the 20th century.”¹ Thomas Sandberg opens his dissertation on the Implications of Spontaneous Mystical Experience with the statement, “Mysticism and mystical experience have generated a great deal of scholarly interest over the last ninety years.”² Steven Katz opens his anthology on mysticism by saying that, “Mysticism is a subject with a special fascination. It derives this fascination from its subject matter as well as from its forms of expression which seem to promise something for everybody if not everything to everybody.”³

Mystical experience is certainly a subject worthy of study, yet this research neither attempts nor claims to plumb the depths of mystical or spiritual experience. Instead, this study was performed in the tradition of Andrew Greeley who claims that, “It is the fashion among social scientists to begin a paper with an attempt to persuade the reader that the research reported began either with deep and weighty reflections on the theoretical works of the old masters or with a burning passion to correct some particularly vile social abuse.... In any case, the research reported in this paper began with nothing more lofty and nothing more relevant than curiosity.”⁴ William James is claimed to have originated his enduring work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, based on his own personal experience and curiosity.⁵

In the tradition of Greeley and James, I entered this research driven by my own curiosity. Available literature makes it clear that there is a wealth of information

available on mystical experience. However, most of the literature is theoretical or conceptual in nature. It is common to talk about the mystical experiences of saints or religious figures. There were far fewer studies that talked about the experiences of “everyday people.” The studies that did look at more common mystical experiences tended to report on randomized general surveys such as those done by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC),⁶⁷ or to deal with academic groups such as high school or university students.⁸ I happen to live in rural Kansas, in one of many small farming communities where there exists a large population of older farmers. As I read the available research and literature on mystical experience, I couldn’t help but wonder in what ways this was relevant to my neighbors and to “middle America” as a whole.

Greeley’s sociological data suggests that those most likely to have a mystical experience are more likely to be, “over forty, male, college educated, and making over \$10,000 a year. They are, however more likely to be black and to be Protestant.”⁹ I wondered how likely it was for people who were over sixty, high school educated, and involved in agriculture to have a mystical experience. What’s more, having read the literature on nature mysticism, I wondered whether the experiences described by such a population would differ from the experiences described by a more diverse population. This study seeks to answer those questions.

In order to provide a functional look at mystical experience, this study is divided into several chapters. The first chapter deals with the subject of definition. Whether or not a particular subject can be defined as having had a mystical experience rests on several things, the first of which is the definition of mystical experience. This question of definition has multiple layers and ultimately becomes quite complex. The first layer is

the way in which the study defines a mystical experience. In this case a subject is defined as having had a mystical experience if the subject responds in the affirmative to the Greeley question, "Have you ever felt as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself,"¹⁰ or alternatively if the subject answers in the affirmative when asked if they believe they have ever had a mystical experience. Thus, the definition of having a mystical experience, for the purpose of this study, simply becomes an affirmative response to a specific question. However, while functional for specific research, this belies the complexity of the issue and Chapter One of this dissertation focuses on the specific issues and complexities of definition.

Chapter Two consists of a discussion of how this dissertation fits into the current field of research. All research builds on the work of others and this chapter demonstrates how this particular research exists within the field. According to Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, and Gorsuch, there are three major ways in which mystical experience has been operationalized and measured in empirical research. These include open-ended responses to questions, which may then be coded or categorized, questions devised for use in surveys, and specific scales to measure mysticism.¹¹ This study uses all three of these methods in order to check and cross check results. This research has chosen to deal with a very specific and limited population and to use several methods in order to look at both the empirical findings and also to cross-check what these findings suggest to the population being studied.

Chapter Three discusses the methods used in this project and is provided primarily for the purpose of aiding other researchers who might want to build upon this research. It provides specific information regarding techniques, subject population,

methods of data gathering, and other research choices that were employed. While it is impossible to undergo research of this type without bias, it is the researcher's hope to clarify the choices involved such that the biases inherent in the research are clearly defined and demonstrated. The researcher claims only that the results of this research are the results for this particular population when asked these specific questions at this particular time in their lives and in the world. To this end, Chapter Three provides specific methodology, population statistics, and other relevant information.

Finally, Chapter Four discusses the findings of this study. It looks at the fact that fifty percent of farmers over the age of sixty are likely to report having either a mystical or numinous experience. These experiences do not appear to be correlated with measures of self-esteem. However, there are several descriptors of classic mystical experience that correlate with measures of self-esteem, while other descriptors correlate with whether or not a person reports a mystical experience. This chapter discusses these findings in detail and looks specifically at the descriptors of classic mystical experience that are reported as well as specific categories of experience as demonstrated in the interviews.

¹ Ralph Hood, Bernard Spilka, Bruce Hunsberger, and Richard Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996) p.224

² Thomas Alfred Sandberg, *Implications of Spontaneous Mystical Experience* (University of Northern Iowa: Unpublished Dissertation, 1993) p.1

³ Steven Katz, "Editors Introduction," *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) p.1

⁴ Andrew Greeley, *The Sociology of the Paranormal: A Reconnaissance* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975) p.5

⁵ Richard Lowry, "Forward to Abraham Maslow's," *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998) p.xx-xxii

⁶ Andrew Greeley, *The Sociology of the Paranormal: A Reconnaissance* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975)

⁷ Jeff Levin, "Age Differences in Mystical Experience," *The Gerontologist* Vol. 33 No. 4, 507-513

⁸ Ralph Hood, "Eliciting Mystical States of Consciousness with Semistructured Nature Experiences," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1977, 16 (2): 155-163

⁹ Andrew Greeley, *The Sociology of the Paranormal: A Reconnaissance* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975) p.59

¹⁰ Andrew Greeley, *The Sociology of the Paranormal: A Reconnaissance* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975) p.58

¹¹ Ralph Hood, Bernard Spilka, Bruce Hunsberger, and Richard Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996) p.233

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Section 1: The Challenge of Definition

A review of the literature surrounding mystical experience quickly leads to the conclusion that this is a term that lacks consistent definition. Many of the studies on mystical experience refer to “classic religious mysticism,”¹ or provide religious examples for what is meant by a mystical experience. However, what is meant varies with the beliefs and orientation of the person using the term. As Katz says, “ The relationship between mysticism and religious traditions is a much discussed issue.”²

The great spiritual traditions equate mystical experience with the direct experience of God or the Divine. Thus, the great mystics are often elevated to the level of saints in the Christian tradition and to the highest levels of acclaim in all the world’s traditions. Classic religious mysticism stems directly from classic religious mystical traditions. Christian writers tend to focus on notable mystics such as Saint Teresa de Avila³ or Saint John of the Cross.⁴ Other authors or anthologies attempt to have a more diverse view of mysticism and include, or focus on, the Eastern traditions. An example of a more diverse and complete grouping of exemplars from the world’s religious traditions is Harvey’s *The Essential Mystics*. This book includes chapters with in-depth quotations and examples based on the traditions of “The First World”, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Ancient Greece, Islam, and Christianity.⁵ Wade is referencing classic religious mysticism when she uses the renowned figures of Buddha

and Jesus as examples of Unity Consciousness,⁶ as is Smart when she says, "First, then, I would propose that the following folk typify the mystical life: St. John of the Cross, Tauler, Eckhart, al-Hallaj, Shankara, the Buddha, Lao-Tzu (if he existed!) and many yogis."⁷

There are several significant differences between the definition of "mystical experience" used in this study and the traditional definition of "classic religious mysticism." The first difference is that "classic religious mysticism" is defined after the fact, through the reports of the experiences and the lives of the great mystics. Classic religious mysticism is defined as the traits and characteristics demonstrated by a select group. As James says, "The classic religious mysticism, it now must be confessed, is only a 'privileged case.' It is an extract, kept true to type by the selection of the fittest specimens and their preservation in schools."⁸

The purpose of this study is to examine self-reported mystical experiences among a group of people who are selected based on age and environment rather than for any special propensity for religious or mystical attainments. In fact, this study has deliberately focused on a population that is statistically less likely to report mystical experiences than a general sampling of the population. The purpose of this study is to ask questions, which would elicit responses regarding whether the subjects feel they have had a mystical experience and to ask the subjects about their experiences and the effects of these experiences on their lives. It is then possible to compare the responses of the subjects to classic religious literature to see if there are any correlations between the experiences reported and mystical experiences as described in the classic religious literature.

Some modern philosophers and theoreticians equate mystical consciousness with achievement of the highest levels of noetic development. Interestingly, examples of individuals considered to be at the highest levels of noetic development include such renowned figures as Buddha and Jesus, according to Jenny Wade.⁹ Ken Wilber divides those at the highest levels of transcended consciousness into further levels of cognitive development and includes figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Saint Theresa of Avilla, Meister Eckhart, and Saint John of the Cross, among his list of those at higher states.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that many of the individuals named by the cognitive-developmentalists are the same individuals the religious traditions honor as the spokespersons of God.

Abraham Maslow believes that many of the revelations that are at the core of the religious and spiritual traditions can “be subsumed under the head of the ‘peak experiences’ or ‘ecstasies’ or ‘transcendent’ experiences which are now being investigated by many psychologists.”¹¹ He believes that these older reports were “perfectly natural, human peak-experiences of the kind that can easily be examined today, which, however, were phrased in terms of whatever conceptual, cultural, and linguistic framework the particular seer had available in his time.”¹²

Our concepts and understanding of mystical experience are inextricably intertwined with spirituality and religion. As such, any attempt to define and study such experience is a potential affront to religious dogma. In addition, any study of these experiences must account for the variations in perception and language created by the socio-religious background of the people involved in the discussion.

It is impossible to look directly at mystical experience. As a subjective, or inner experience, we can only see mystical experience as related by the person who had the experience. Ken Wilber explains the accessing of these inner experiences saying, "the interior dimensions can only be accessed by communication and interpretation, by "dialogue" and "dialogical" approaches, which are not staring at exteriors but sharing of interiors."¹³ Thus, our understanding of mystical experience comes either from our personal experience of the event, or from someone else's communication of the event. In both cases, the initial experience is colored by instantaneous or later interpretations of the experience. As Maslow suggests, our understanding of a mystical event is necessarily colored by the "conceptual, cultural, and linguistic framework" of the person having the experience, as well as the framework of the person listening to what is related. Given this, it is necessary to look carefully at both the language and intent of any study of mystical experience to determine consistencies and universalities among the experiences related, recognizing that universal truths are sometimes concealed by surface variations in language or interpretation.

Mystical experience is by its very nature personal and subjective. As discussed above, this personal and subjective event is then interpreted through our individual conceptual, cultural, and linguistic frameworks before it is related. When we add inconsistent definition to these subjective factors, we create a situation where the subject becomes amorphous and difficult to work with. As Walter Houston Clark says, "One of the characteristics of mysticism, universally recognized, is the difficulty one has in describing it. For this reason most people look on it as foggy, dubious, and even esoteric."¹⁴

In order to study mystical experience, it is necessary to define it in a way that provides boundaries such that there is some agreement as to what is being discussed. Hood points out that mysticism has been greatly neglected empirically.¹⁵ Part of the reason for this neglect is that it is very difficult, if not altogether impossible, to measure something empirically until it is defined in a way that allows for clear delineation and thereby becomes measurable.

The difficulty lies in defining what constitutes a “mystical experience” in a way that provides meaningful results. There are several subparts to this problem. The first is lack of cultural agreement about what constitutes a “true” mystical experience. This lack of agreement stems from disagreements over both the lexical definition of mystical experience and the intensity of experience necessary for inclusion of a religious or cognitive event to this category. Which experiences are included under the category of “mystical experience” vary based on the theoretical basis of the definition.

No researcher has yet solved the problem of definition in a way that provides for agreement. The question of mystical experience is a topic with important implications for the way we view the world. As such, discussions and research on the topic are often loaded with arguments about the religious, social, and spiritual significance of the event. Most discussions of mystical experience have been written in the context of religion or spirituality. As Ralph Hood points out, “Reviews of the literature generally place mysticism under a brief section on intense religious experience and then go to indicate that little if any legitimate empirical research exists.”¹⁶

Traditionally, mystical experience is defined as the direct experience of the divine, or, as Norman Shealy says, “Mysticism is the experience of the sacred.”¹⁷

Stephen Phillips describes is, "A mystical experience is a psychological event of indefinite duration that the mystic herself takes to be a direct awareness of such "spiritual objects" as God, Brahman, or Emptiness, or of a "spiritual realm" that is not a matter of people's everyday acquaintance."¹⁸ Others speak of mystical experience in terms of unity or non-dual consciousness, or in the language of spiritual marriage. Jenny Wade references the Christian mystic Evelyn Underhill as she explains, "The person's real – his Absolute-Self is Unity Consciousness, no different from the Ground of All Being or Void. This perfect union is spoken of in the language of deification or spiritual marriage, as the individual grasps his inseparability – and that of everything else – from the Ground of All Being."¹⁹ Since mystical experience has traditionally been under the domain of religion, the language used to describe it is often tied to a specific religious context. Mystical experience is known through individual testimony and, as Andrew Harvey says, "Each revelation, however personal, is always partly conditioned by the time and tradition it occurs in."²⁰

Religion is one of the most controversial topics in the history of humanity. Many have purported that in the truly significant aspects, all religions are the same. In this case, it could be argued that the language and cultural specifics used to describe the ineffable mystical experience are insignificant and that it should, at least in theory, be possible to create a theologically consistent definition of mystical experience based on religious tradition. However, as the religious scholar Huston Smith points out, "The religions of man may fit together, but they do not do so easily."²¹ Moreover, Smith also says, "It is one of the illusions of rationalism that the universal principles of religion are more important than the rites and rituals from which they grow."²² Mystical experience

may be the same for all people, but reaching agreement on a contextual definition that will be acceptable to all has not proven possible thus far in the history of the world.

With the advent of modern psychology, beginning primarily with the work of Sigmund Freud, mysticism began to be viewed apart from the language of religion. However, this did not necessarily improve the status of mystical experience, nor did it create any more clarity of definition. In the Freudian tradition transpersonal or mystical experiences were generally seen as regressions to the oceanic feeling of primary narcissism.²³ The Jungian tradition offered more acceptance of the transpersonal or the mystical but tended to focus on the collective unconscious versus superconscious layers of the human psyche. It was only with Abraham Maslow and the birth of transpersonal psychology that there came a real focus on the advent and importance of “peak experiences.” Abraham Maslow says:

“In some reports, particularly of the mystic experience or the religious experience or philosophical experience, the whole of the world is seen as unity, as a single rich live entity. In other of the peak experiences, most particularly the love experience and the aesthetic experience, one small part of the world is perceived as if it were for the moment all of the world. In both cases the perception is of unity.”²⁴

Maslow is looking at peak experiences as existing along a continuum. Thus, he observes that mystical or peak experiences, “can come to anyone; and when they do come, those who have them take on, at least momentarily, some portion of the characteristics that he had described under the heading of self actualization.”²⁵ The experience of unity, or mystical experience, is no longer relegated to a specific few but is considered part of the experience of mankind in general. What’s more as E.I.F. Williams points out, “Dr. Maslow considers these revelations valid psychological events worthy of

scientific, rather than metaphysical, study – keys to a better understanding of a peculiarly ‘human’ aspect of man’s existence.”²⁶

With the advent of psychology, mystical experience was brought into not only the realm of social science, but also of science and thus of scientific study. Many of the early studies involved examining altered states of consciousness associated with psychiatric disorders or with the use of psychoactive drugs. Notable research regarding mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs includes the work of Walter Pahnke at Harvard, and the work of Walter Houston Clark who replicated Pahnke’s experiments and concluded that, “at the very least, the conservative statement is justified as follows: In some situations and with some people, and especially when both subject and guide intend it, the psychedelic drugs release very profound religious experiences of a mystical nature.”²⁷ William James found that his ‘anesthetic revelations’ while inhaling nitrous oxide were ‘closely akin to what others had reported about spontaneous mystical experiences (religious and otherwise) down through the ages.”²⁸

Stanislov Grof is another researcher who discovered that his personal experience with psychotropic drugs was, “close to the experiences of ‘cosmic consciousness’ I had read about in the great mystical scriptures of the world.”²⁹ Grof used the drug with numerous clients and observed that there was a pattern in the experiences reported:

“In sessions of LSD-assisted psychotherapy, we witnessed a rather peculiar pattern. With low to medium dosages, subjects usually limited their experiences to reliving scenes from infancy and childhood. However, when the doses were increased or the sessions were repeated, each client sooner or later moved far beyond the realms described by Freud. Many of the experiences reported were remarkably like those described in ancient spiritual texts from Eastern traditions. I found this particularly interesting because most people reporting these experiences had no previous knowledge of the Eastern spiritual philosophies, and I

certainly had not anticipated that such extraordinary experiential domains would become accessible in this way.³⁰

Grof believed that he was witnessing the “normal and natural manifestations of the deepest domains of the human psyche” and found the therapeutic results exceeded anything he had previously known.³¹ These studies hold some important implications for the study of consciousness and of mystical experience. However, there are differences between the drug research and the sort of research being done in this study, most notably that research using psychoactive drugs involves the use of external substances and deliberately induced states, while this research is based on a survey that questions subjects about their experiences rather than deliberately attempting to trigger or create such experiences.

Researchers such as Andrew Greeley point out that there may be differences in research based on drug induced states or “mental illness” and the states described in studies such as Greeley’s by stating, “Artificially induced ecstatic experiences produced by drugs or contemplative exercises or the various kinds of hypnotism or ‘mysticism machines’ now being used in some laboratories are not necessarily the same things as the spontaneous experiences our respondents report.”³² Nor are they necessarily different. One of the difficulties with measuring mystical experience is that there are many and varying lines surrounding events considered acceptable for inclusion in this category. Moreover, these lines are based on dogmas and traditions whose criteria have developed over time and are not likely to reach any sort of agreement in the near future.

Following the influx of research on altered states influenced by drugs or mental illness, which took place in the late 1950’s and 1960’s, came a period where a number of

researchers focused on measuring mystical experience from the point of view of social, rather than physical, science. Among the researchers who attempted to measure mystical experience through surveys or interviews are Marghanita Laski,³³ Andrew Greeley,³⁴ Robert Wurthnow,³⁵ Ralph Hood,³⁶ Harry Hunt,³⁷ Eugene Thomas and Pamela Cooper.³⁸ Once again, the difficulty with these studies lies in the lack of agreement on a definition of mystical experience. In fact, the studies and survey questions purport to study such diverse topics as ecstasy, mystical experience, peak experiences, transpersonal experiences, and cosmic consciousness. It is only by reading the questions themselves, and the reviews of literature that include the type of experiences the surveys hope to illicit, that it is possible to confirm that all of these authors are, in fact, studying a similar range of experiences. It is also noteworthy that, despite superficial variance in the form and language of the questions, a large percentage of respondents consistently report having a mystical or transpersonal experience.

More recently, scientists have attempted to study mystical experiences by looking at brain activity associated with mystical or transpersonal states. Newberg, A'Quili, and Rause believe that mystical experiences are triggered when the orientation association area of the brain becomes deafferented.³⁹ Basically, they claim that a person experiences a mystical event when the area of the brain associated with distinguishing the self from the rest of the world becomes overloaded and no longer functions properly. It is interesting to note that this idea of deafferentation, or loss of the ability to differentiate the self from the rest of the world, is echoed by Laski in her description of the mystical state, "It is clear that there is an ultimate, a than-which-no-further state attainable in these experiences; and that this state is one in which all human perceptions, all ability to make

differentiations, are lost.”⁴⁰ This event is experienced as a feeling of oneness. Newberg et al say, “This softening of self, we believe, is responsible for the unitary experience practitioners of rituals often describe.”⁴¹ In addition, they see this deafferentation as occurring to varying degrees and thus, “Transcendent states, as we’ve seen, exist along a continuum of progressively higher levels of unitary being that ultimately leads to the point at which unity becomes absolute.”⁴²

If the findings of Newberg et al are correct, this continuum may explain why it is so difficult to create a clear quantification of mystical experience. If something exists continuously, rather than in discrete quanta, it is difficult to measure. Every attempt to quantify mystical experience is therefore questioned based on the arbitrary placement of an event into a specific category. As Ninian Smart points out, “It is rare that a binary theory applies properly to a continuum.”⁴³

Also, if mystical experience is tied to the deafferentation of particular sections of the brain, this could suggest how the effects of certain drugs, repetitive rituals, and states of mind could all induce similar experiences. In fact, Newberg et al claim, “What fascinates us, as scientific observers, is that virtually all of these mystical techniques seem to have been intuitively devised to trigger the process of deafferentation, in addition to other related brain functions, and push it far beyond the levels made possible by ritual.”⁴⁴ Critics of these studies will argue that evidence of activity in certain parts of the brain may simply be correlative, rather than causative or predictive, of mystical experience. However, it is possible that through considering evidence produced by all the accounts and studies of mystical experience, we may be able to shed some light on those experiences that form our perception of universal connection or God.

Because of the significance and implications of reports of mystical experience, questions are often raised about the validity of the studies. Reviews of literature often choose to focus on the classic literature on mystical experience and to discount those studies that define mystical experience outside the cultural or socio-religious acceptability of the researcher. Dogma, whether it is religious or academic, plays a large part in deciding what is a legitimate area of study and what are legitimate means for conducting the examination. Using statistical terminology, defining mystical experience in a way that is meaningful and measurable is to determine whether the definition produces research that is both reliable and valid.

In terms of research, reliability and validity are very specific terms. Reliability comes from the base root reliable, which Webster's dictionary defines as "that may be relied on; trustworthy; dependable in achievement, accuracy, honest, etc. . . . Reliable suggests consistent dependability of judgment, character, performance, or result."⁴⁵ Thus, the reliability of a measure refers to the measure's ability to successfully and consistently measure a given variable. On the other hand validity is, "the state or quality of being valid," where valid is defined as "1) sound; just; well-founded or 2) producing the desired result; effective."⁴⁶ When we examine the validity of a measure, we are actually looking at whether what is measured provides a truthful and realistic assessment of what the measure claims to evaluate.

In the case of research on mystical experience, reliability turns out to be less dependent on a universally accepted definition and therefore a far more straightforward issue than validity. Surveys on mystical experience have produced surprisingly reliable results. Specifically, Andrew Greeley's 1974 study has been administered to thousands

of people and it is therefore possible to determine that Greeley's question, "Have you ever felt as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself"⁴⁷ has produced consistent results when used across significant populations. In his initial survey, Greeley found that thirty-five percent of Americans report the experience of "a powerful spiritual force which seemed to lift them out of themselves."⁴⁸ Fifteen years later, the NORC repeated the same question involving spirituality and mystical experiences. Jeff Levin analyzed the data and found that in the fifteen years between the 1973 and 1988 studies "numinous experience declined from 35% to 31.5%."⁴⁹ While this is a significant deviation, the fact remains that somewhere around a third of the approximately 1,500 people surveyed report experiencing, "a powerful spiritual force which seemed to lift them out of themselves."

A British study on "Reports of Ecstatic, Paranormal, or Religious Experience in Great Britain and the United States – A Comparison of Trends" also used Greeley's question and found that, "The positive response rate of 36.4% for our British sample falls well within the range reported for comparable American studies."⁵⁰ There is a consistency of result with this question that argues for at least some degree of reliability.

For statistical purposes, reliability is often checked in relation to other questions. Generally, the person creating a statistical measure is interested not just in how consistently people will respond to their question, but how well the measure serves as a predictor of other variables. Statistical tests that are used consistently over time are chosen because they evidence significant internal reliability. Thus, the tests are beneficial because they are reliable predictors. Subjects reporting mystical experience as defined by the Greeley question have been shown to report a high level of psychological

well being as measured by the Bradburn Balanced Affect Scale.⁵¹⁵² Hay and Morisy had the same finding with subjects in Great Britain. They say, "As can be seen, people reporting religious experience are significantly more likely to report a high level of psychological well-being than those who do not."⁵³ This finding held both for Hardy's question which asked people if they had been "aware of, or influenced by a presence or power, whether referred to as God or not, which is different from their everyday selves"⁵⁴ and for the Greeley question, with "there being a stronger link between positive response to Greeley's question and high psychological well-being."⁵⁵ This consistency in response between the Greeley question and the Hardy question further suggests a degree of reliability.

Greeley used follow up descriptors to further analyze the functionality of his initial question. Those subjects who claimed to have experienced a powerful spiritual force, which seemed to lift them out of themselves, were then asked to respond to a number of triggers and descriptors of mystical experience. The descriptors tap into classical descriptions of mystical experiences. Descriptor statements include:

"A feeling of deep and profound peace

A certainty that all things would work out for the good

Sense of my own need to contribute to others

A conviction that love is at the center of everything

Sense of joy and laughter

An experience of great emotional intensity

A great increase in my understanding and knowledge

A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it

A sense of a new life or living in a new world

A confidence in my own personal survival

A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me

The sense that all the universe is alive

The sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am

A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical

A sensation of warmth or fire

A sense of being alone

A loss of concern about worldly problems

A sense that I was being bathed in light

A feeling of desolation

Something else."⁵⁶

Andrew Greeley claims that, "One of the purposes of spreading out the "cafeteria" of mystical descriptor items was to determine whether there might be a configuration of experiences which seemed to fit the classic descriptions of ecstasy."⁵⁷ In order to discover if this was the case he performed a factor analysis of the descriptor items and found that several factors did emerge which seemed to include "the principal components of the classical experience." These factors included, "passivity (factor loading .9), ineffability (loading of .61), and a sense of new life (loading .52). In addition, there was a factor loading of .65 on the experience of being bathed in light, a phenomenon which Mircea Eliade finds typical of mystical experience in all the world's

religions.”⁵⁸ Greeley found that certain configurations of these “descriptor items” were statistically meaningful relative to his initial question and the Bradburn inventory. By linking these results with the idea of “classic descriptions of ecstasy,” Greeley was attempting to establish greater validity for his measure.

While a consistency of results between various studies as well as between a given item and subsequent descriptors, is suggestive of some reliability of the measure, validity is a far more difficult problem. Linking a measure to descriptor items associated with classic mystical experience suggests a link between the two, but is insufficient to establish validity. Laski compared reports of mystical experience from people she sampled, literary texts describing mystical experiences, and religious texts describing mystical experience to ascertain whether there was a consistency of description sufficient to suggest a validity of comparison. After doing an analysis of all the texts she concluded, “It is however striking to what a large extent the images produced spontaneously by the people in the questionnaire group are similar to the more considered images of the people in the literary and religious groups.”⁵⁹ She also points out that this is even more striking when one considers that the religious group was familiar with the vocabulary for such experiences, while the other groups were using spontaneous images and metaphors to describe the event.

Laski has been criticized for her methodological inadequacies, but even her detractors are impressed with her “perceptive analysis of language.”⁶⁰ Her work has set the stage for modern phenomenological research and her examples suggest that mystical experience will ring true to many person’s experiences.⁶¹ Laski showed that there is a similarity between all types of ecstasy, whether it is religious, literary, or elicited through

a survey. What Laski showed is that there is a commonality in the language of ecstasy, no matter who is reporting the experience.

Another significant difference between mystical experiences as defined in this study and classic religious mysticism is hinted at by Laski's reference to the religious group being familiar with the vocabulary for their experiences. Classic religious mysticism follows a tradition. It includes both a language for describing the mystical experience and specific practices for developing the abilities to achieve such states.

There is a sense of tradition, of injunctions passed from master to student. Ken Wilber describes this process:

"The contemplative traditions, on the other hand, have always come first and foremost with a set of injunctions in hand. They are, above all else, a set of practices, practices that require years to master (much longer than the training of the average scientist). These injunctions (zazen, shi-kan-taza, vipassana, contemplative introspection, satsang, darshan...)—these are not things to think, they are things to do.

Once one masters the exemplar or the paradigmatic practice (strand one), then one is ushered into a worldspace in which new data disclose themselves (strand two). These are direct apprehensions or illuminations – in a word, direct spiritual experiences (unio mystica, satori, kensho, shaktipat, nada, shabd, etc.). These data are rigorously checked (strand three) in the community of those who have also completed the first two strands (injunction and illumination). Bad data are rebuffed by the community (the sangha) of those whose cognitive eyes are adequate to the addressed domain."⁶²

As discussed earlier, the greatest difficulty in research of this type is defining what is meant by the term "mystical experience". Mystical experiences are by definition "ineffable." Given this, how do we know that what we are looking at is truly a mystical experience?

Greeley and McCready write, "The toughest problem was to figure out how to ask the question?"⁶³ In fact, they experimented with several different questions including, "Have you ever had a 'religio-mystical experience?" and Have you ever felt as if you had become completely one with God or the universe? Fifty percent of respondents answered in the affirmative to the first question, while forty-five percent of respondents provided a positive response to the second question.⁶⁴ They finally decided on the specific wording of their question based on their instincts and their feeling that it seemed to reflect what the mysticism literature described as the core of the experience.

Hay and Morisy state, "The precise wording of the filter question no doubt has an important influence on response rates."⁶⁵ Their study, done in Great Britain, utilized several different filter questions, including the Greeley statement. They also asked subjects if that had been "aware of, or influenced by a presence or power, whether referred to as God or not, which is different from their everyday selves."⁶⁶ Their findings show that more than a third of all adults give a positive response to this question.⁶⁷ They also note that the correlations for the two questions on different variables are similar, with the exception of "psychological well being" where there is a stronger link between positive response to Greeley's question and high psychological well being as measured using the Bradburn scale.⁶⁸

Greeley and McCready never attempt to claim that their filter question measures classical mysticism. In fact, Greeley claims that, "The most serious weakness in the whole research enterprise reported here is that our question designed to determine whether a respondent had an 'ecstatic' experience may not in fact measure real ecstasy but only heightened emotion."⁶⁹ Critics of the Greeley study claim, "It is clear from

these data that a high incidence of affirmative responses to the structured question used by Greeley does not prove that mystical experiences are common in our society. Rather affirmative responses were found to cover a wide variety of experiences, ranging from the trivial to the profound."⁷⁰

Entire articles have been written which attempt to create a functional definition for mystical experience.⁷¹ William James' classic text *The Varieties of Religious Experience*⁷² is considered the best-known study of ecstasy according to Greeley and McCready.⁷³ Their descriptors and definitions are drawn directly from the work of James, as are many of the definitions used by Hay and Morisy. James allows the mystic to define his own experience. James says, "Mystical truth exists for the individual who has had the transport, but for no one else."⁷⁴ The literature seems only to agree that there is little agreement about what constitutes a truly mystical experience.

As discussed earlier, the heart of the discrepancy lies in whether an experience can only be interpreted as mystical if the person having the experience has achieved an elevated level of noetic development that would allow them to achieve mystical consciousness as a state of being, or whether a peak experience at any level of development can be considered mystical. Along these lines, Susan Cook-Greuter claims that less than one-half of one percent of the general population rise to a stage bordering on the transpersonal. Even fewer obtain the level of true transpersonal consciousness.⁷⁵ Jenny Wade claims that, "Unity consciousness – even for renowned figures, such as the Buddha and Jesus – comes from arduous psychological and spiritual preparation, which ultimately abolishes all forms of dualism."⁷⁶ It is evident that if a mystical experience is defined as achieving a sustained state of being at the level of the non-dual as understood

from the perspective of a cognitive developmental achievement of the state of unity consciousness, the Greeley question is not a valid measurement.

It is also apparent that the Greeley question is measuring something other than attainment of the highest states of noetic development. In many ways the Greeley measurement may be closer to Abraham Maslow's description of "peak experiences." Maslow says, "The peak-experience is felt as a self-validating, self-justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it."⁷⁷ This definition of mystical experience allows for spontaneous experiences that can be interpreted and responded to anywhere along a continuum of development. When interpreted in this way, the measurement can be assumed to have what statisticians call "face validity." Hence, a positive response to the question means exactly what it says at face value – that subjects responding in the affirmative feel that they have felt as though they were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift them out of themselves. Whatever the question is measuring, it has been shown that there is a relative consistency in the percentage of people who claim to have had such an experience. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that the subjective reporting of mystical experiences is positively and significantly correlated with measures of psychological well-being.

Given the sparse population at the highest levels of noetic development, it would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to design a study that examines the frequency of mystical experience, if it is defined as existing only at the highest levels of development. For a researcher to look at those who exist in a state approaching constant unity with the nondual, that researcher would necessarily work with a very small sample. The results of this would look more like the texts of the major religions than like a

generalized scientific study. Yet if having a spontaneous “unity” or mystical experience is assumed to exist along a continuum of development, as is suggested by the work of people like Maslow and Newberg, it is possible to examine the face value experiences of a larger population.

This differentiation between having a spontaneous mystical or non-dual experience at any level of noetic development and the achievement of a noetic state of development that includes relatively extended or consistent unity with the divine is part of the confusion that exists in the definition of mystical experience. Thus, even though the modern philosopher, Ken Wilber, chose to define a “genuine mystical encounter” as a direct experience of the Nondual, completely transcending all worlds, and therefore claimed this experience to be “probably the rarest and least common experience of humanity,”⁷⁸ he was also able to say that, “individuals at virtually any stage of development can have an altered state or peak experience, including those that are called spiritual experiences, and that this can have a profound effect on their consciousness and its development.”⁷⁹ When looked at this way, the question of what percentage of a given population has experienced a spontaneous peak or mystical experience, and what affect this experience had on their consciousness development, becomes viable. Still, the issue remains how to clarify the experience to be measured.

Peter Moore points out that, “It often seems to be forgotten that the immediate data of the philosophical analysis of mysticism are not mystical experiences themselves, but the mystics’ accounts of these experiences.”⁸⁰ Whenever a researcher uses a survey or interview on the subject of mystical experience the researcher is taking the mystic’s word about the experience. Moreover, the fact that “mystical experiences” are not always

culturally accepted raises questions about the number of subjects who are able and willing to report their experience. In their article, *Are We A Nation of Mystics?* Greeley and McCready report that, "Virtually all of the respondents have never spoken about their experiences to anyone – spouse, friends, family, clergyman. When a discussion of statistical research on the subject 'legitimizes' talk about it, the revelation comes as something utterly astonishing..."⁸¹ In this situation, some people are willing to come forward and talk about their experiences. There is no way of accounting for people who may have experienced a mystical event, but do not choose to report it, or do not find it relevant based on the wording of the questions being used. Even more difficult to account for is the possibility of subjects having a mystical experience and discounting it, or failing to remember it, because the experience did not fit their worldview. Once again we are back to the debate of whether a mystical experience is something that can be usefully defined in any way that is "real" and measurable.

Samuel Brainard examines this question by asking what constitutes a real versus a merely nominal definition of mysticism. Unlike William James, who is content with limiting the significance of the mystical state to its effect on the mystic, Samuel Brainard believes that mystical experience includes an explanatory commitment that is applicable to others. According to Brainard, "If, indeed, mystical states provide genuine insight into the nature of reality and truth, they imply authority for others as well as for the mystic, and such authority requires a measure for validity external to the experimenter's own isolated and possibly false judgment."⁸² He then goes on to argue that it is the profundity and non-ordinariness of the mystical experience that the community of discourse must

use to judge the experience as mystical. Mystical experiences speak to life's metaconcerns, and this is what gives mystical experiences their meaning.⁸³

Brainard's arguments relate to Ken Wilber's discussion of the interpretation of internal events, which insists that events can only be evaluated by a community of discourse that has developed the requisite depth. Wilber argues that contemplative knowledge can indeed be tested, that it is in fact ineffable only to those who lack a comprehension of the signifier. Thus, someone who has never had a mystical experience will be unable to access the veridicality of a mystical event because "the corresponding signified of the sign exists only in the interior perception of those who have developed the requisite depth."⁸⁴ According to this logic, only a community of sufficient depth can verify the mystical experience. However, following this logic brings us back to the necessity of locating and identifying individuals with sufficient noetic development to describe or assess the event. Given the rarity of people who have attained the highest levels of noetic development, finding a community to substantiate the veracity of claims will be quite difficult. Thus, the argument that a mystical experience can be defined in a verifiable manner by a community of discourse with the requisite experience and knowledge does not provide a practical definition or application for the purposes of general study.

Ellen Kappy Suckiel provides a very different argument for the validity of mystical experience. She argues that:

"The mystic has the right to be sure of veridicality of her experience because any evidence on the basis of which a third person might challenge the veridicality of that experience would, from the point of view of the mystic, have less strength, stability, and credibility than the experience it was being used to evaluate. This is meant not just as a psychological fact, but as an epistemic one. Mystical experiences are

immense, transformative, and uniquely personal in nature. They lead the mystic to see the universe in a new light. Given this, it is foolhardy to expect a non-mystic –with a detached and disengaged point of view – to be in a proper position to assess the mystic’s claims.”⁸⁵

In this case, the mystical experience is taken to be real because of its reality to the person experiencing the event. This example could be compared with the revelation of a dream. An outside observer would not discount the reality of the dream to the dreamer, since in our experience dreams have a subjective reality that exists outside the rules experienced in waking consciousness. However, there are several pragmatic differences between the altered state of dreaming and the altered state of a mystical experience. First, since the altered state designated as “dreaming” is familiar for most people, it doesn’t raise the question of veracity in the same way as the altered state of “mystical experience,” which is unfamiliar to the majority of people. More to the point, we are not endowing the normal dream state with profundity – it is rare to hear someone claim that the content of a particular dream state represents a truth so profound that it alters the sense of reality forever. In fact, should someone claim this, we would designate the particular dream a mystical experience.

Given the generally accepted philosophical, lexical, and religious definitions of a “mystical experience,” there is no uniform criterion by which all people would agree whether a given experience should be included in the overall category. Available research suggests that some sort of heightened or mystical experience occurs at all levels of consciousness development. In an anthropological analysis of the components of religion, based on studies in widely divergent societies an alternate reality, Felicitas Goodman concludes that all religions include altered states of consciousness.⁸⁶ As Ann

Nunley says, "Our experiences of Spirit and our experience of oneness are concurrent phenomena. Spiritual experiences tend to take us out of and beyond ourselves to become pure creative energy and one with the larger picture, with our sense of "God," with every other human, and all life. As such, our spiritual experiences are expansive and beyond finite definition."⁸⁷

Abraham Maslow has looked extensively at what he calls "peak experiences" and their relationship to self-actualization. Maslow describes a peak-experience as "a self-validating, self-justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it."⁸⁸

William James describes mystical experiences as, "They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time."⁸⁹ The mystical experience is ineffable, noetic, transient, and marked by passivity. Something beyond the person's conscious will is operating.⁹⁰ What that something is will be defined within the context of the worldview of the person undergoing the experience.

One of the significant marks of a mystical experience is its lasting effect. Ken Wilber says, "In order for altered states to become permanent traits, they need to enter the stream of enduring development."⁹¹ Ann Nunley's personality integration chart⁹² provides a useful description of this developmental stream. Mystical experiences have been correlated with positive scores on scales of psychological well-being.⁹³ Bruce Lipton espouses a theory that our "beliefs control biology."⁹⁴ To the extent that a mystical experience alters our perceptions, it alters our stream of enduring development, and changes who we are. Maslow suggests, "Peak-experiences sometimes have

immediate effects or after effects upon the person. Sometimes their after effects are so profound and so great as to remind us of the profound religious conversions which forever after changed the person. Lesser effects could be called therapeutic.”⁹⁵ Changes that result from mystical experiences often have lasting repercussions. These repercussions alone are sufficient to make the study of mystical experience worthwhile. Every study on mystical experience adds to our understanding of these events, increasing our understanding of both the mystical event and the repercussions of mystical experience on the human psyche.

The significance of mystical experience makes its study worthwhile. This study uses the initial Greeley question as well as Greeley’s descriptors of “classical mysticism” to define a mystical experience. There is no claim that this definition is accurate, nor does the study purport to differentiate between mystical experience and heightened emotions or experience. Greeley’s questions have been used repeatedly with reliable results. Studies have consistently shown that self-reported mystical experience using the Greeley scale is highly correlated with measures of psychological well-being. Using individual interviews along with the survey allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how the subjects are defining mystical experience and can thereby clarify what is meant by the term.

This study is defined by the population selected and the questions asked. In the tradition of Greeley, this study has not specifically sought to eliminate, or categorize, subjects based on having a mystical experience related to either drugs or contemplative exercises. Instead, all subjects are asked to describe their experience, including the triggers of the experience, and the results of the experience on their lives. Patterns

suggesting specific causes of mystical or transcendent experiences among this population are noted in the results section of the dissertation. Because the subject population selected for this study was defined as over the age of sixty and living in rural Kansas, the vast majority of experiences reported fit easily into the category of spontaneous mystical experience. This is similar to Greeley's finding that in his initial study of over 1,400 people, none of the sample reported that the experience was drug induced.⁹⁶

Research to date suggests that even though mystical experiences tend to exist on a scale, which includes experiences that vary in both type and degree, the people that report mystical experiences are changed by the event. James argues that, "Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else."⁹⁷ A single mystical experience holds the power to change a person's life. As such, defining mystical experience as a self-reported response to questions that have been designed and shown to measure experience of this type is both meaningful and measurable. There are articles written about the relationship between various traditions and their effects on mystical beliefs and practices.⁹⁸ A person does not necessarily have to experience the raptures of Saint Theresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, or even Walt Whitman, to have an experience that is meaningful and life changing for them. Therefore, this study does not attempt to validate, or even to assess, mystical experience within any religious tradition. Instead, it is designed to assess mystical experience among a population who, in general, question what the term means and tell their individual stories simply, relating their experiences as something that happened to them – no more and no less.

Section 2: Related Research

There have been a number of studies that have attempted to operationalize and measure mystical experience. Every study in this field necessarily defines mystical experience and then proceeds to measure or analyze this experience in ways that are relevant to the hypotheses and goals of the study. Studies of mystical experience tend to fall into several categories based on the way mystical experience is defined and measured.

The first type of research stems directly from the classic religious mystical traditions. In this type of study mystical experience is defined as the experience of the great religious mystics. As a consequence, there is a body of research that consists of analyzing the writings or lives of the great religious mystics. While of interest, this genre tends to be more along the lines of literary analysis or philosophical study.

The second type of study is similar to the first in that it focuses on a select group of individuals. In this type of study mystical experience is defined as the experience of those individuals who have attained the highest levels of consciousness development or have proven themselves capable of obtaining altered states of consciousness or specific abilities related to healing. Many of the developmental theorists, such as Wade,⁹⁹ Wilber,¹⁰⁰ and Maslow¹⁰¹ consider mystical, or peak experience, to be hallmarks or precursors to the higher levels of noetic development. Notable examples of this type of research are based on the conceptual work of the developmental theorists or research into the attributes of successful healers. Several studies have been done using Tibetan

meditators,¹⁰² Indian Swamis,¹⁰³ known sensitives and healers,¹⁰⁴ and senior members of various contemplative or mystical groups.¹⁰⁵ However, these studies are limited by the number of people who have achieved a sufficient level of noetic development to be included in the study. Thus samples tend to be small and studies often consist of an analysis of a few select individuals. Even when appropriate subjects are found, theorists continue to disagree about the traits or requirements for inclusion. Thus, when discussing mystical experience as a form of religious or personal development, each theorist begins by defining the level of development under consideration.

Most sociological studies seek to examine larger populations, thereby achieving more general applicability as well as greater levels of statistical significance for their findings. The literature on personal development and mystical experience provides a wonderful framework for study. However, it does not provide a useful model for examining a group of people who have not expressly devoted themselves to personal, religious, or spiritual development.

A hypothesis of the current study is that the subject population is at a somewhat average level of spiritual development. The population being studied is a group of people over the age of sixty who live in a rural area, many of whom have spent their lives involved in agriculture. Given this population, a developmental focus is not likely to provide the most useful information for analysis. Therefore, studies of mystical experience designed for populations with a more general knowledge and experience of spiritual or religious states were considered.

Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, and Gorsuch, theorize that there are three major ways in which mystical experience has been operationalized and measured in empirical research of general populations. These are:

1. "Open-ended responses to specific questions intuitively assumed to tap mystical or numinous experiences. These responses may then be variously coded or categorized.

2. Questions devised for use in survey research. Of necessity, these questions are brief, limited in number, and worded in language easily understandable for use in random surveys of the general population.

3. Specific scales to measure mysticism, including (a) a numinous sense of presence, and (b) a mystical experience of unity."¹⁰⁶

This study is designed to combine all three means of measurement. By using all three techniques, it is possible to crosscheck results and to see patterns that would be missed by any one of the techniques. Lukoff and Lu suggest that in the area of transpersonal psychology, and specifically in the area of mystical experience, "Quantitative and qualitative approaches (each with a number of subtypes) are complementary and lead to results and discoveries that are not captured by other approaches."¹⁰⁷

This study begins by asking subjects to respond to Andrew Greeley's survey question, "Have you ever had the feeling of being very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?"¹⁰⁸ This specific question was chosen because it represents one of the major exceptions to a lack of shared instrumentation among studies of mystical and religious experience. Greeley's question has been used repeatedly in

survey research by Greeley and by the Gallup Poll organization over an extended period and across cultures.¹⁰⁹

The Greeley measurement, which was chosen for this study, has been used with a large number of people and has been correlated with a number of factors that provide relevant background for this study. One of the ways that the Greeley measurement has been used is to examine the relationship between mystical experience and self-esteem. Greeley administered the brief Psychological Well-Being scale developed by Norman Bradburn and found that the correlation between his mysticism measurement and the Bradburn scale was, "the highest correlation, according to Bradburn, he has ever observed with his scale."¹¹⁰ Greeley's measurements were replicated in Hay and Morisy's study in Great Britain, which utilized both the Greeley and Bradburn measures. They also found a strong link between positive response to Greeley's question and high psychological well-being.¹¹¹

The only other survey instrument that has been used in quite a number of studies is the Mysticism Scale developed by Hood. Hood developed the scale based on Stace's work¹¹² and according to Lukoff and Lu it is currently the most widely used empirical measure of mysticism.¹¹³ The Mysticism or M Scale developed by Hood is designed to identify and distinguish between introvertive and extrovertive mysticism.¹¹⁴ Additional debate has been generated around this distinction and the meaning and value associated with the two types of mystical experience delineated by the scale.

This study utilizes the Greeley scale because of its simplicity, as well as its consistency of usage and results. Since this study works with the survey question, a specific scale for examining descriptors of mysticism, a scale measuring self-esteem, and

a brief interview, simplicity and brevity were highly desirable attributes in selecting the initial question to be used.

Research utilizing the Greeley question has shown that around one third of the subjects surveyed report that they have had the feeling of being very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift them out of themselves. Greeley's initial study, done in 1974, suggests that approximately 36% of Americans have had at least one mystical experience.¹¹⁵ This finding is similar to Hay and Morisy's findings in Great Britain, where they found that 36.4% of the 1,865 people surveyed answered in the affirmative to Greeley's question. They also found that the Greeley question was a better predictor of psychological well being as measured by the Bradburn Balanced Affect Scale¹¹⁶ than was Hardy's question had they "ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether referred to as God or not, which was different from their everyday selves."¹¹⁷

Hay and Morisy also examined the work of Wuthnow and observe that while Wuthnow¹¹⁸ did not utilize a specific measure of psychological well being, he did find that "people claiming contact with the sacred were significantly more likely than others to find life meaningful, to have a purpose, and to be self-assured."¹¹⁹

Wuthnow bases his research on Maslow's concept of peak experience.¹²⁰ His questions focused on three areas of peak experience – contact with the sacred, the beauty of nature, and harmony with the universe. Wuthnow surveyed a systematic random sample of 1,000 persons in the San Francisco-Oakland area.¹²¹ Each of his subjects were asked to respond to the three categories of peak experience, which were then correlated against personal correlates, including – life very meaningful, think about purpose a lot, meditate, know purpose of life, and self-assured.¹²² His findings show that, "One person

in two has experienced contact with the holy or sacred, more than eight in ten have been moved deeply by the beauty of nature, and close to four in ten have experienced being in harmony with the universe. Of these, more than half in each case have had peak experiences which have had deep and lasting effects on their lives."¹²³

One of the lasting effects of the peak experiences is that those who report having a peak experience in a deep and lasting way are "more likely than the other categories of people to feel that their lives are very meaningful, to think a lot about the purpose of life and meditate about their lives, to feel they know what the purpose of life is, and to feel assured about their own capabilities."¹²⁴ Wuthnow goes on to conclude that, "It is important to observe that this data suggests that peak experiences are not just isolated phenomena but are part of a broader style of life. Whether people have had experiences of the sacred, of nature, or of harmony with the universe, these experiences seem to be part of a reflective, inner-directed, self-aware and self-confident style of life."¹²⁵ This finding is supported by Spilka, who examined the effects of seven dimensions of "religious mystical experience" among Christian seminary students, church members, and clergy. Spilka found that Christian mystical experience led to feelings of oneness and connection and to beneficial and lasting psychological change.¹²⁶

Thus, Wuthnow, Greeley, Maslow, Spilka, Hay and Morisy have all reached the conclusion that mystical or peak experiences are positively and significantly correlated with psychological well-being. This research has been conducted in broad social surveys and the conclusions have been reached based on analysis of thousands of subjects. Wuthnow suggests that those who have peak experiences are more likely to feel assured about their own capabilities.¹²⁷

Levin examines James Kennedy's research on transcendent, psychic, and paranormal experiences and concludes that all three areas were related to greater "meaning in life."¹²⁸ In a sample of 120 people, limited to those interested in parapsychology and believed to have had anomalous experiences Kennedy found that "63% noted an increase in their sense of connection to others, 59% experienced a greater sense of purpose or meaning, 55% reported greater happiness and well-being, 53% stated that they were more motivated to maintain their health, and 51% were more optimistic about the future. Likewise, many detrimental attitudes declined: 40% reported few feelings of isolation and loneliness, 45% had less worry and fewer fears about the future, 47% were less depressed or anxious, and 54% had less fear of death."¹²⁹ These characteristics seem to reflect many of the qualities measured by the Rosenberg Scale for self esteem, which is being used in the current study. Items on the Rosenberg Scale are:

1. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.
2. At times I think I am no good at all.
3. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
4. I feel I have a number of good qualities.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I certainly feel useless at times.
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.
10. I take a positive attitude towards myself.

While the items on the two scales are not the same, there are sufficient areas of related questioning to hypothesize that subjects who report the sort of peak experiences measured by Kennedy are likely to demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem than do subjects who do not report mystical or peak experiences.

Maslow suggests this when he claims, "But it has also been discovered that precisely those persons who have the clearest and strongest identity are exactly the ones who are most able to transcend the ego . . ." ¹³⁰ Thus, an experience of transcending the self in a "peak experience" is likely to correlate with clear identity, self-esteem, and positive feelings towards the self, as well as the world in general.

In opposition to this, it has been hypothesized that weak ego strength may be correlated with intense religious experiences. However, Hood argues that the relationship between weak ego development and religious experience is conceptually unwarranted and also lacking in empirical support. ¹³¹ In order to test his theory, Hood administered Barron's Ego Strength scale to a sample of 82 college students who also took the REEM. On first analysis, the results appeared to support the claim that intense religious experience is related to a weak ego. However, Barron's scale contains several religiously worded items, which are scored so that agreement indicates a weak ego. When the religiously worded items were removed, it also removed any significant relationship between weak ego and religious experience. ¹³² To further test his theory, Hood administered Stark's Index of Psychic Inadequacy to 114 college students and found that those with higher adequacy in psychological functioning as measured by this index had significantly higher scores on measurements of intense religious

experiences.¹³³ Thus Hood et al. conclude that, "Thus, not only is there little conceptual or empirical support for the claim that weak ego strength must characterize persons who have intense religious experiences; such persons may also be more psychologically adequate than those who do not report such experiences. This latter claim is consistent with the normality of the report of mystical and numinous experiences noted in survey studies and with those theorists who are more sympathetic to religion."¹³⁴

In addition to findings that support a relationship between mystical experience and self-esteem as a useful hypothesis for study, is the issue of being aware of what this study is actually measuring. In this case, the measure is based on the number of individuals who report ever having had the experience of feeling "as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself."¹³⁵ It is impossible to actually measure how many individuals have had this experience. Rather, as with any survey, all the researcher can know is what subjects choose to report. This can create a problem with the accuracy of the data. Hood et al. explain this issue, "Survey researchers have often worried about "false positives" and "false negatives" in their surveys. How do we know that persons who report experiences are telling the truth? Some may not have the experiences they report (false positives). On the other hand, how do we know that persons denying these experiences are telling the truth? Some may refuse to admit experiences they have had (false negatives)."¹³⁶

In the case of the Greeley question, Greeley's initial research found that in their general randomized sample, "Virtually all of the respondents have never spoken of their experiences to anyone – spouse, friends, family, clergyman."¹³⁷ This research takes this very private and controversial subject to a very private and conservative group. The

norms for this group allow for standard religion, but do not focus on the mystical or unusual. Thus, to report a mystical experience is to step outside the norms for the group. Positive self-esteem includes feelings of self-worth and self-respect that allow people to have additional confidence in their experiences. It was hypothesized that even if self-esteem had no relationship to having mystical experience, it might be correlated with the willingness to report such experience.

The National Opinion Research Center repeated the Greeley questions in the 1984 General Social Survey. Levin analyzed the data and found that of the 1,481 respondents, only 31.5% reported numinous experience as defined by the Greeley Question.¹³⁸ Levin also analyzed the data in terms of age differences in reporting mystical experiences and found that the percentage of people reporting numinous experience remained quite consistent for everyone over the age of thirty. Levin uses the term “numinous experience” to describe a positive response to Greeley’s mystical question, and he does this because he creates a scale, which he calls the “overall mystical experience scale” or “mysticism scale” by combining measurements of Déjà vu, ESP, Clairvoyance, Spiritualism, and Numinous Experience. Of these, the numinous experience measure corresponds to the work of this study. The other measures pertain to psi phenomena.

Levin makes some important and highly relevant comments regarding the results of his “Mysticism Scale.” While the percentage of subjects reporting numinous experience remained consistent across age, there was a decline in scales measuring déjà vu, clairvoyance, and overall mystical experience with increasing age. Levin points out that this, “may in fact point to an increase in these phenomena over time. Unfortunately, with only two cross-sectional surveys available, the disentangling of aging and cohort

effects is not possible using GSS data. Indeed, it could be that both aging and cohort effects are operating; that is, mystical experience may decline with age and simultaneously be increasing over the years.”¹³⁹ Another study that suggests that mystical experience may vary widely by cohort, as well as by education, is Keutzer’s study of 146 upper-division college students enrolled in psychology classes. Keutzer found that fully 65% of her sample reported feeling very close to a powerful, spiritual force.¹⁴⁰ Benjamin Hidalgo also surveyed university students. He asked a population of 104 Claremont College students how often they had a personal spiritual, mystical, or religious experience, and how significant these experiences were in their lives. His mean score for students reporting spiritual or mystical experiences was 61% and he found that these experiences were highly correlated with levels of self-actualization at a T-value of 1.21.¹⁴¹

The current study focuses on the highest age range included in the GSS data, those subjects sixty years old and older. The study took place during the initial months of 2004. This is a full twenty years from the time the data used by Levin was gathered by the GSS. One of the things that this study adds to the current research is that it revives the Greeley question and examines the responses of subjects thirty years after the initial survey. However, this is a small study, rather than a national survey. Hence, the data from this study with its specificity of population and narrow scope is not comparable to research based on the large populations and diversity of data collection organized by NORC in their GSS studies.

The purpose of this study is to examine a narrowly defined population. Hunt et al have suggested that it is possible that “childhood and late adulthood are the times of life

most open to nonconflicted, spontaneous expressions of spirituality.”¹⁴² This study focuses on a group of older adults that tends to be disenfranchised and that has not been specifically analyzed in any of the research on mystical experience. The GSS itself is designed to stress replication, “the literal replication of items and item sequences,”¹⁴³ and it is my expectation that the Greeley question will be included again within the next few years. When this occurs, it will be possible to see if reports involving what Levin titles numinous experience have continued to become less frequent among the general population and also to see how the response of this large scale random sampling compares to the responses of this current study’s small rural population.

The second subpart of the current research is to have the subjects respond to Greeley’s menu of descriptor items of mystical experience, as well as to a Rosenberg’s Self-esteem scale. This portion of the research corresponds with Hood’s category of specific scales of measurement. This category is similar to surveys, except that sample sizes are generally smaller and subjects are asked a series of questions or items, believed to describe, or correlate with, mystical experiences.

Hood constructed a Religious experience Episodes Measure (REEM), which used experiences selected from James’s, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Hood had respondents rate on a 5-point scale the degree to which they had ever had an experience similar to that described by James. Rosengrant revised the REEM by modernizing the language. However, as Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger and Gorsuch suggest, “Overall, the mixture of more numinous and mystical items, along with explicit or implicit religious language, suggest that the REEM is best used with religiously committed samples.”¹⁴⁴ Certainly, the REEM is more involved than the Greeley menu of descriptor items. It

consists of passages, rather than statements, and the actual descriptions have the potential of being confusing or overwhelming to some subjects.

The REEM has been used in several studies. In one, Hood and Hall selected several "culturally fair" REEM items in order to compare four groups: Native Americans, acculturated Mexican-Americans (English Speaking), Mexican-Americans (Spoke Spanish at least 25% of the time) and Caucasians. All subjects were matched for religion, education, gender, age, and social class. The two subcultures that encouraged intense experiences had higher REEM scores than the subcultures that did not. Thus, the Native-Americans and less acculturated Mexican-Americans scored significantly higher on the REEM.¹⁴⁵ It is pointed out that, "The matching on relevant variables suggests that differences in the REEM scores reflect genuine subcultural differences in either the experiences themselves or the reporting of such experiences."¹⁴⁶

Other studies involving the REEM have compared it to other measurements. Hood found a correlation between the REEM and the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility.¹⁴⁷ Hood also did a study that compared Barron's Ego Strength Scale and the REEM for a population of 82 college students. He found that after separating the religiously oriented items there was no significant relationship between weak ego and religious experience.¹⁴⁸ The current study, which compares the Greeley measurement with Rosenberg's measurement of Self-esteem may offer some significant support or disagreement to this finding by Hood. Another study comparing the REEM and Stark's Index of Psychic Inadequacy revealed that among a sample of 114 college students, those with higher adequacy in psychological functioning had significantly higher REEM scores.¹⁴⁹ This seems to support Greeley's research,¹⁵⁰ as well as the work of Hay and

Morisy,¹⁵¹ which found high degrees of correlation between mystical experience and scores on the Bradburn measure of psychological well-being.

There is far less research using the Greeley descriptor items than there is using either the REEM scale or Hood's M Scale, which was discussed under the heading of surveys rather than specific scales of measurement. In fact, the only available data on Greeley's descriptor items is in Greeley's own research, specifically published in his paper *The Sociology of the Paranormal*.¹⁵² Greeley did a follow-up on the initial subjects of the GSS who responded positively to his question regarding mystical experience. His follow up asked the subjects to mark off items that described their experience. One of his purposes in "spreading out this 'cafeteria' of mystical descriptor items was to determine whether there might be a configuration of experiences which seemed to fit the classic descriptions of ecstasy."¹⁵³ A factor did appear amongst the descriptor items that was highly correlated to scales on the Bradburn scale, with a correlation between positive affect and this factor being .52. It is important to recognize that this factor is being compared not with the whole population but only with other people who reported having mystical experiences but did not check the descriptors correlated with what Greeley calls the "twice born" factor.¹⁵⁴

Greeley only used his descriptor scale with those subjects who were considered to have had a mystical experience through their response to the initial survey question. The research described in this dissertation asks every subject to respond to the descriptor items, regardless of their response to the initial question. This creates an additional test of the initial questions. Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, and Gorsuch point out that, "Survey researchers have often worried about "false positives" and "false negatives" in their

surveys.”¹⁵⁵ Greeley himself experimented with several different wordings for his question.¹⁵⁶ Hay and Morisy use several different questions and compare the results. Their findings show that both questions generate a positive response in approximately one third of the subjects interviewed.¹⁵⁷ By asking all subjects involved in the current study to complete Greeley’s descriptor items, as well as the initial survey question, it is possible to examine which items correlate most closely to a positive response on the initial question. Through analysis, it is then possible to identify which items are most closely correlated with reporting a mystical experience. Responses to the descriptor items were analyzed for correlations with the initial question. Thus, one way the current study adds to the research in this field is by using a specific scale to correlate and refine the responses to a widely used survey question.

The final form of research used in this study is that of open-ended questions or interviews. Perhaps the most famous open-ended research on mystical experience is Laski’s work on Ecstasy. Laski used a questionnaire, which was built by trail and error. However Laski explains that this questionnaire “was deliberately kept as unstructured and flexible as possible.” Laski remarked, “I wanted to know the circumstances in which ecstatic experiences took place in order to see whether these circumstances could be limited and defined. I wanted people to tell me what ecstasy felt like for them because it was largely from these answers that I hoped to make a systemization.”¹⁵⁸ Laski talked to people about their experiences and she compared the things that people said to the things that authors and religious mystics have written down. Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, and Gorsuch praise her work when they say, “Her examples ring true to many persons’ experiences, as we shall see. Furthermore, her interview procedures and willingness to

use the participants' own terms and language to analyze experiences have parallels in modern phenomenological research."¹⁵⁹

Pafford familiarized university and grammar school students with excerpts of Wordsworth's mystical poetry and then asked them to describe in writing any personal experience that was similar to those that Wordsworth described. Pafford then analyzed responses from 400 participants, and found that 40% of the grammar school boys, 56% of the university men, 61% of the grammar school girls, and 65% of the university women related mystical experiences.¹⁶⁰

Most studies use interviews or open-ended questions to supplement the more statistically oriented research. Thus, Greeley interviewed a number of the participants who reported having a mystical experience. These open-ended questions are generally used as examples of the phenomena, allowing the researcher to utilize the subject's own language and description of the events. James includes specific examples as the basis of his classic work.¹⁶¹ Both Atwater¹⁶² and Moody¹⁶³ use interviews and open-ended questions as the foundation for their groundbreaking research on near-death experience as a specific and related facet of mystical experience. In all these cases, the interviews are used to generate a pattern and categories of phenomena that appear to be inherent or common to the event.

Some researchers, such as Thomas and Cooper¹⁶⁴ followed up Greeley's question with an opportunity for the subjects to describe their experience in open-ended fashion. Thomas and Cooper's subject population was drawn from introductory college classes, from churches, and from civic organizations in Connecticut. Just over 300 young adults, with a mean age of slightly under 22 years, returned their questionnaires. Of these, 34%

reported that they had felt themselves in the presence of a spiritual force which lifted them outside of themselves. Thomas and Cooper note that, "It is interesting to note that this proportion is almost identical to the percentage Greeley found among persons of similar age in a national survey."¹⁶⁵ However, when the open ended responses were coded, using coding definitions similar to those used by Stace and Hood, it was found that the number of experiences that were coded as classical mystical experience represented less than 2% of the respondents.

Thomas and Cooper conclude that, "A number of studies have been performed with various populations which have used structured items to determine intense spiritual experiences – items similar to the one used in this study. In each of these studies it was found that about a third of the respondents had had intense experiences, which they interpreted as being of a spiritual nature, and this was the finding of the present investigation as well... The cumulative nature of these findings provides further support for belief that even experiences as subjective and "ineffable" as states of mystical consciousness are amenable to study by empirical social science methods."¹⁶⁶

By combining all three methods available for examining subjective reporting of mystical experience, the current study attempts to gain additional information about what is meant by mystical experience, as well as to provide measurable data that can be correlated and compared to the research extant. To the degree possible, this study replicates questions and methods currently in use in the field. It combines both quantitative and qualitative methods because as Lukoff and Lu so clearly state, "Empirical research offers one of the best hopes of influencing the perceptions of the

medical and religious professions regarding the recognition and validity of mystical experiences.”¹⁶⁷

In addition to adding to current research on mystical experience by adding another independent study on the topic, the current study makes a contribution to the field by definition of its subject population. Studies to date have either focused on large cross sections of the population, or have drawn research subjects from Universities where students provide a willing pool of subjects. The large random studies have shown that frequency of mystical experience is correlated with age and education, among other factors. Thus, it is useful to the field of study to draw on a population at the other end of the spectrum. This study uses a population of people over sixty living in a rural environment. This population tends to be less affluent, less educated, and therefore preselected to have fewer mystical experiences. Examining a population such as this adds an additional dimension to the field.

The rural elderly are a population that has been disenfranchised by our society. Many of them still work the land. In fact, many of them will work their farms until they are no longer physically capable of doing so. They are our elders and this research proposes to have their experiences included in what is known of mystical experience. The knowledge this group possesses and their experiences are valuable. Their voices provide greater dimension and depth to what we define and know as mystical experience.

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CHAPTER 2:METHODS & RESULTS

Part 1: Methods

Population

A total of sixty subjects were included in this study. Participation required that subjects be sixty years old or older, live in Kansas, have spent a portion of their life involved in farming or agriculture, and sign the voluntary informed consent form, which is included in Appendix A. The final sample consists of only those persons who met all demographic requirements and completed all assessment measures. The demographic portion of the questionnaire, included in Appendix A, asked how many years the subject had been involved in farming or agriculture, but did not define where in the life span these years fell. Therefore, some subjects grew up on a farm and spent their childhood and adolescent years involved in farming, while others retired into farming and spent the most recent portion of their lives in agriculture. There was a wide variance both in the number of years each subject had been involved in agriculture and in the placement of these years in the life cycle.

Several of the women hesitated about whether they had been involved in farming or agriculture since their husband was the farmer and they were just the "farmer's wife." When asked what was involved in being a "farmer's wife," it became apparent that these women were involved in agricultural sorts of chores such as growing the family garden, helping with aspects of the livestock, bringing meals out to the fields, and generally

supporting the work of farming. These subjects were told to include the years spent doing tasks of this sort as being involved in farming or agriculture.

No differentiation was made for the sort of farming done. Some of the population was primarily involved in raising livestock, others in raising grain or other sorts of produce. Many were involved with both. Some of the subjects owned their farms; others worked for their family or other agricultural establishments. No differentiation was made regarding either the tasks done or the relative ownership of the land.

Thus, for the purposes of this study being involved in agriculture simply means that the subject answered, "yes" to the question, "Have you been involved in farming or agriculture?" How many years is defined as the number of years the subject wrote in response to the question, "If yes, how many years?" There was no verification process and the knowledge of factors such as differences in the time of life spent involved in farming came solely from subjects asking questions such as, "Does it count if I grew up on a farm?" and "Does it matter what I did in agriculture?" There was no consistent questioning or recording of information around which years were spent in agriculture or what being involved in farming or agriculture meant to a given subject. All responses in this study are taken at face value.

The population for this study was drawn from several venues. There is a one-room schoolhouse that serves as a community-gathering place for rural residents of the Rock Creek section of Wellsville, a small town in Miami County, Kansas. The residents who attended the school when it was operational now meet at the schoolhouse for a monthly community supper. Many of the people in this community agreed to be interviewed and appointments were made to come to their homes. As the individual in-

home interviews were completed, subjects were asked if they knew of anyone else who met the population requirements for this study and might be willing to be interviewed. Several of the subjects called people they knew and asked them if they would be willing to participate in the study. All surveys and interviews were completed in the presence of the researcher.

Another group of subjects was drawn from the Community Senior Nutritional Site in Wellsville, Kansas. People who came for lunches and women who came inside to walk in the mornings were surveyed.

The Lawrence, Kansas Senior Center is a larger facility that provides services to people over sixty. Since Lawrence is a larger town, rather than a purely agricultural community, not all of the population served by the Lawrence center has been involved in farming or agriculture. However, many of those who did meet the criteria of the study were willing to participate in the research.

The final place subjects were recruited was the Ottawa, Kansas cattle auction. A good number of the people who attend the auction meet the demographic requirements of this study, regarding age and participation in farming and agriculture.

The sixty people interviewed for this study were approached at the Ottawa Cattle Auction, the Wellsville Nutritional Center, the Lawrence Senior Center, the Rock Creek School Group, or by phone based on a word of mouth recommendation from one of the people involved in the groups already listed. These venues were chosen as likely ways to find subjects over the age of sixty who had been involved in farming and agriculture and represent an attempt to define a very specific, rather than a random, population.

Privacy

Each subject was assigned an Identification number. In order to ensure confidentiality, the assigned consent forms were filed separately from the actual survey questionnaires. Subjects are identified only by number, which is written on each page of the questionnaires as well as on the interview notes.

Hand written notes were made of the most salient stories and examples during the interviews. A quick survey of people of similar age and cultural background to the population of this study suggested that this population would be less comfortable, and therefore less likely to share, if the researcher attempted to use any sort of mechanical recording device.

Several subjects chose to complete the questionnaires and the interview before signing the consent form, because they wanted to be sure that this was something they were comfortable being involved with. They were told that this was their prerogative and that if they chose not to participate in the study they could keep their questionnaire and dispose of it in whatever way they saw fit. Everyone who completed the questionnaire agreed to be involved in the study.

Demographic Data

Only the most salient demographic data was gathered. Average time to fill out the questionnaires and complete the interview was between fifteen minutes and half an hour. It would have been possible to spend more time and potentially gather more

data from people who were interviewed in their homes. However, fifteen to thirty minutes was the outside limit for surveys and interviews done at Senior Sites and cattle auctions.

Demographic data was limited to age, gender, years involved in farming or agriculture, and years of education. The National Opinion Research Center, otherwise known as NORC, studies are primarily demographic studies, which are able to correlate results from the mystical experience question against demographics such as age, sex, race, religion, education, income, and family relationships as well as personal information such as life satisfaction, psychological well-being, social values, and basic belief systems. The general purpose of the NORC is to provide a database designed to meet multiple purposes and to be of long-term value to the research community. The NORC undertakes large-scale data collection beyond the capacity of the independent researcher.¹ In order to take advantage of comparisons to large-scale national data, the initial question regarding mystical experience is drawn from the NORC. However, the overall methodology of this study involves choosing a demographically select group and then looking at a limited number of variables. This method was chosen both for its simplicity and specificity. By choosing a very specific subject population, it is possible to draw some conclusions regarding that subject population, as separate and distinct from the more general population.

Questionnaire and Interviews

The first question on the questionnaire, included in Appendix A, is the question that Andrew Greeley developed for the NORC. This question was chosen because it is

one of the few pieces of shared instrumentation regarding mystical experience and as pointed out by Lukoff and Lu, progress in research on mystical experience “ultimately depends on obtaining some shared agreement regarding definitions and methods.”² Greeley’s question, designed to measure mystical experience is, “Have you ever felt as though you were very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?” Responses are rated on a 1-4 scale, with #1 representing “Never in my Life,” #2 representing “Once or Twice,” #3 being “Several Times,” and #4 being “Often.”³ The NORC actually used a five-point scale with #5 being, “I can not answer this question.” Choice number five was not included in this research, because with such a small sample population it was necessary to eliminate any subject who didn’t answer a question. Each questionnaire was reviewed to make sure it was filled out completely and subjects were asked to do their best to answer all the questions. There was only one questionnaire where the subject did not answer all the questions and that subject was eliminated from the study.

The next nineteen questions consist of Greeley’s descriptor items, which he used as a follow up survey, which Greeley had given to those who provided a positive response to the initial question. This study asked the descriptor items of all subjects, regardless of their response to the initial mystical experience question. Again, subjects were asked to rate these items on a 1-4 scale.

Some subjects were able to fill out the questionnaires on their own. Other subjects preferred to have the questionnaires read to them and to have the researcher circle their responses. The primary reason for this was to vision problems. Many of the subjects have difficulty with their eyesight and reading. Also, having the questions read

to them and telling the researcher their answers provided more social interaction, which appeared to be a positive for many of the subjects.

When the questions were read aloud and a subject came to a descriptor item that obviously stumped them and elicited a response such as "I don't know what they mean by that," or "I don't know how anyone could feel that," the researcher suggested that they do their best to answer the question. In several cases the subject still was overwhelmed by the question, in which case the researcher suggested if they didn't know what it meant or couldn't relate to anyone feeling that way it was likely that they had never experienced that particular item.

When the questions were read aloud, many subjects made comments along with giving their answers. While this research didn't officially record or keep track of the comments, they did provide a sense of some of the thought patterns as people completed the questionnaires. One thing of note with the initial Greeley questionnaire is that some of the subjects paid attention to the intent of the 1-4 scale from never to often. Other subjects tended to use the scale to demonstrate how strongly they felt about a given descriptor, rather than how often they experienced it. While it is likely that how strongly a person feels about something will have a large and significant correlation with how often they experience it, this research was not designed to systematically measure this and therefore it is simply noted that there were several interpretations in the way subjects scored the questionnaire items. This is likely to be the case in any sort of survey data. However, in this case, reading the surveys aloud to the subjects allowed some insight into the different ways it was being interpreted.

The Rosenberg Scale tended to be a more straightforward instrument for this population. It is included as part of appendix A. The Rosenberg Scale consists of ten items designed to measure self-esteem. Some of the items are phrased in the positive, "On the whole I am satisfied with myself," while other items are phrased in the negative, "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." In the course of reading the scale out loud, it was found that it was very important to emphasize the negatives in the negatively phrased statements. It was also discovered that there were two items in the scale that were potentially biased for this subject population. These were, "I am able to do things as well as most other people," and "I certainly feel useless at times." The first one garnered a number of answers that said things like, "Used to be," "When I was younger I could," "I don't have the physical strength anymore," etc. As far as feeling useless at times I received several comments like, "I do since my stroke," or "I feel useless when I can't do things for people that I used to do." Since the Rosenberg scale was not specifically developed for an aging population, it seemed possible that these items could potentially skew the data. Therefore, when compiling the statistics, correlations were done between the general Rosenberg score and a modified score that left out the two items in question. By scoring the measure both with and without the questions it was possible to see if the responses to these particular items skewed the results of the study.

The Interview

In order to create consistency between subjects, a strict format was followed for the interview. The first interview question was, "Do you believe you have ever had a mystical experience?" This question was used to cross check responses to the

Greeley question because wording the question in this way allowed an assessment of whether a given subject would consider themselves as having an experience that was “mystical” in contrast to whether a subject “ever felt as though you were close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself.”

If the subject answered “yes” to either the Greeley question or the question regarding mystical experience, the subject was then asked to describe the experience. While the subject described the experience, the researcher took notes on what they said. In general, the researcher commented as little as possible, while provided supportive focus and attention, in order to avoid influencing the subjects.

If a subject answered “no” to both the Greeley question and the question regarding mystical experience, the subject was then asked to describe their “most significant experience.” Again, the researcher interacted as little as possible, was encouraging, and took notes.

The interviews tend to be short and succinct. To the degree possible notes were taken verbatim in order to capture the language and syntax associated with the event. Several subjects spontaneously related several events or examples. In these cases, notes were taken on all the examples that were related.

Analysis

By definition this falls into the category of being a correlative, rather than an experimental, study.⁴ Analysis consists of comparing subjects’ responses to the questions asked and looking for patterns of correlations. To this end, all the demographic and questionnaire data was entered into a Microsoft excel spreadsheet. The interviews

were recorded separately and were broken into initial categories based on whether the subject was reporting a mystical experience, defined as providing a positive response to either the Greeley question or the Mystical experience question, or whether the subject was reporting a significant experience.

Categories were then created for the interviews. The coding definitions used are similar to coding processes used by both Stace and Hood in separate studies of mystical experience as well as categories used on the NORC. There are many categories of events that tend to be lumped under the category of mystical experience. Part of the purpose of creating the categories for coding the interviews was to have a way of grouping the types of experiences that elicited a positive response to either the Greeley or mystical experience questions. The categories used for coding include:

1. Unity, or visceral awareness of a Divine Source or Knowledge. This refers to any classical mystical experiences that include union with a divine source. This category was opened up to allow for awareness of divine source or knowledge, even if absolute union wasn't achieved.
2. Clairvoyance/ Visions/ Receiving knowledge or prediction of the future. This is a category researched by the GSS. This refers to anyone who receives knowledge, prediction, or sight into distant events or the future.
3. Synchronicity or Answered Prayers – whether in lay or religious terms, this refers to those experiences where something is needed or asked for and appears in a way that seems miraculous or beyond chance to the person involved.
4. Out of Body Experiences – any event where the subject describes leaving or being out of his or her body.

5. Near Death Experiences – this type of experiences are well documented by people like Raymond Moody⁵ and P.M.H. Atwater⁶. This category refers to experiences in the tradition they have written about.
6. Religious Experiences – any experience related to organized religion or the church. This category included things like being saved, becoming Christian, communions, wedding ceremonies, etc. It refers to any experience related to the rituals of organized religion.
7. Déjà vu – This is a category from the GSS. Any spontaneous report of déjà vu as either a mystical or significant.
8. Nature related mystical awe – a response to the wonders of nature.
9. Contact with the dead – this is another category from the GSS. This includes having someone who has died speak to the subject, be seen by the subject, touch the subject, provide knowledge to the subject, etc.
10. Personal illness or accident – this category is often listed as a trigger to mystical experience or as a significant experience in the life of the subject.
11. Loss (including both death and divorce) or illness of a loved one – this was a repeated theme given the age of the subject population.
12. Finding a partner – included in this category are meeting a spouse, getting married, etc. This was often included among the most significant experiences.
13. Family life – included in this category are things like having a family, spending time with family, grandchildren, etc. This population puts a high value on family and this category was a repeated theme, especially for those talking about their most significant experiences.
14. Work/Accomplishments – included in this category is anything related to accomplishment, winning, joining the military, working, farming, etc.
15. Survival/ good health – several participants felt their most significant experiences had to do with surviving, being here, achieving a given age, etc.
16. No response or unclassified – several subjects couldn't think of a significant experience or gave experiences that didn't fit into a repeated theme.

Coders were asked to place each interview into any and all of the categories that seemed to fit the event described in the interview. If a subject provided more than one example, coders placed each incident into the appropriate categories. Thus, many of the interviews were placed into more than one category, as the coders felt appropriate.

Three separate coders read the interviews and placed them into categories. Decisions regarding which categories were made based on the descriptions of the categories as given here. There was no coder training and no attempt was made to create agreement or discussion regarding the placement or logic of placing an interview into a particular category.

Each of the coders was selected based on their knowledge and expertise in this field. The three independent coders were Ann Nunley, Pat Norris, and Bill Schul. Their qualifications are as follows:

Ann Nunley, M.F.A., Ph.D.

“Dr. Nunley received her Master of Fine Arts degree in Design from the University of Kansas and her Ph.D. degree in Energy Medicine and Transpersonal Psychology from Greenwich University. Her spiritual paintings and professional graphics are widely published. Her book, the Inner Counselor, a modern I-Ching book of wisdom, combines a card deck with a book of readings and introduces an Integration Chart and Symbolic Process™ that are the conceptual and experiential core of the Inner Counselor courses. She is past Co-President of ISSSEEM and serves on the Executive Board of HUGS as Vice-President and Provost.”⁷

Patricia Norris, Ph.D.

“Dr. Norris is Clinical Director at Life Sciences Institute of Mind-Body Health. Her work emphasizes integrating body, emotions, mind and spirit using biofeedback-assisted psychophysiological self-regulation, psychosynthesis and imagery/visualization. Since 1978 Dr. Norris has worked with clients with cancer, autoimmune disorders such as MS and rheumatoid arthritis, and AIDS. Her research and treatment interests include neurotherapy and psychosynthesis in addictive disorders, energy medicine, and states of consciousness. She is past president of the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback and of ISSSEEM. She served as a Faculty Member of the Karl Menninger School of Psychiatry 1979-1995; she is an Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Union Graduate School; and serves on the boards of the International School for Psychotherapy, Counseling and Group Leadership, the Gladys Taylor McGarey Medical Foundation, and Health World On-Line.”⁸

Bill D. Schul, Ph.D.

“Dr. Schul “has been a lifetime student of the mind. He holds a doctorate degree in social psychology. He served as a therapist for the Center for Human Development; was one of the founders of the Center for the Improvement of Human Functioning where he conducted brainwave research; was the founder of MetaLearning; was a staff member of the Department of Preventive Psychiatry at The Menninger Foundation; Kansas director for the White House Conferences on Children and Youth; Director of the Shawnee County Comprehensive Mental Health Program; Kansas director for Juvenile and Youth Affairs under the auspices of the attorney general, and wrote a newspaper column, "Accent On Youth," for 118 Kansas newspapers. He served as the Kansas governor's representative to The President's Committee For The Prevention of Delinquency and Crime; was Kansas director for the 7th Step Foundation, a rehabilitation program for ex-offenders; was a trainer in mind expansion and non-ordinary states of consciousness for The Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences. He is the author of 11 books and more than 300 published articles. He has won a number of writing awards.”⁹

Each coder was sent a copy of the interviews as they appear in appendix C, as well as the list of categories as outlined above. In addition, each coder received a

sheet, which listed the category names in order and the following directions: "Please put the number of each of the interviews that fits into a given category next to the category name on the sheet that lists the categories. I understand that many of the interviews will fit under more than one category. Please mark all categories that appear to apply."

There was no conversation with any of the coders before completion of the coding of information. Therefore, all of their placements are self-selected and influenced only be the description of the categories and the inherent subjectivity of each individual coder.

Data Analysis

Simple Descriptive Statistics, including the mean and standard deviations, were run on the demographic data, the Greeley Question and the Mystical Experience Question. In addition, data on the Greeley question was analyzed in terms of frequency. Linear Pearson correlations were run between all the variables, including the demographic variables, the Greeley Question, the Mystical Experience Question, and all the descriptor items. In the interest of being conservative, all correlations are reported as two-tailed predictions, despite the fact that most of the items are clearly unidirectional variables. In several cases the unidirectional bias of the variable is so extreme that this is mentioned and the one-tailed prediction is given. This is above and beyond the general case where the significance levels of most of the predictions could be more accurately stated at the higher levels implied by a one-tailed prediction. Using the two-tailed prediction accounts for all possible directional configurations of the data and eliminates any question regarding the significance of the correlations.¹⁰

An ANOVA analysis was done comparing the various categories of experience as related in the interviews and categorized by the coders. However, small sample sizes and lack of agreement among coders render the statistical relationship between categories illegitimate as a means for prediction. The categories are useful for discussion and thought. However, it would require far larger sample sizes to generate findings that are statistically meaningful. Therefore, no statistical findings are reported for the categories. The actual scoring of categories is included as part of appendix C and a discussion of categories of mystical experience is included in the results section.

Section 2: Results

In this sample of Kansas farmers over the age of sixty, fifty percent report having a mystical experience. Of the sixty subjects surveyed, twenty-six answered in the affirmative to the Greeley question, "Have you ever felt as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself." This represents 43% of the sample, slightly higher than the national averages obtained by Greeley, when he asked the same question in the General Social Survey performed by the National Opinion Research Center in 1974.¹¹ Forty-three percent is also higher than the 1984 results on the General Social Survey. Levin analyzed the General Social Survey data and found that of the 1,481 respondents, only 31.5% reported numinous experience as defined by the Greeley Question.¹² It appears that numinous experience is fairly common for a population of rural farmers over the age of sixty. Certainly, their propensity to report this type of experience is on par, or slightly higher, than national averages.

In addition, the breakdown of subjects reporting mystical experiences on a scale of never, once or twice, several times, or often is also similar to the results on the 1974 General Social Survey. The primary difference in percentages is related to the percentage of subjects in this study who report "having felt as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself" once or twice. Twenty-

seven percent of the rural Kansans surveyed report this experience, while only eighteen percent of Greeley's subjects responded with the category "once or twice." Several times represents thirteen percent of the subjects surveyed for this study and twelve percent of the subjects completing the General Social Survey. Finally, the General Social Survey had a slightly greater percentage of subjects responding with the category often.¹³

The following graphs show the breakdown of reports of numinous experience, as measured by the Greeley question. Figure One represents the findings of the current study, while Figure Two represents Greeley's findings as reported in *The Sociology of the Paranormal: A Reconnaissance*.¹⁴

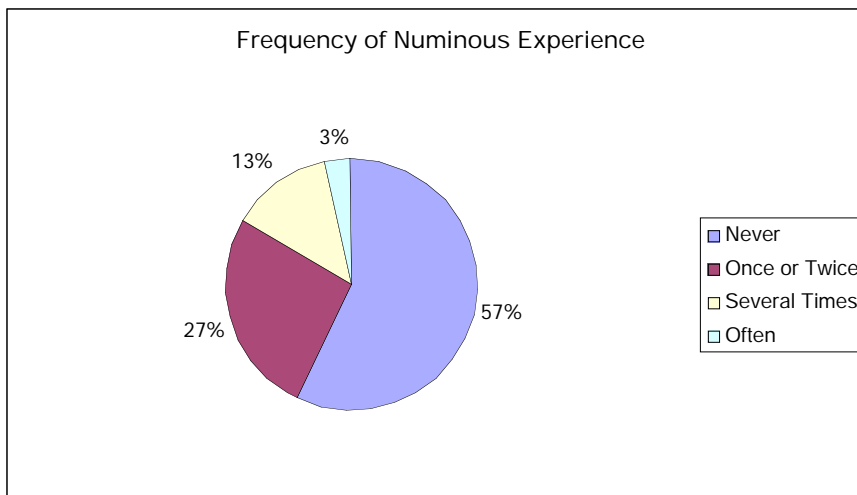


Figure 1. Current Study: Frequency of Numinous Experience as Measured by the Greeley Question.

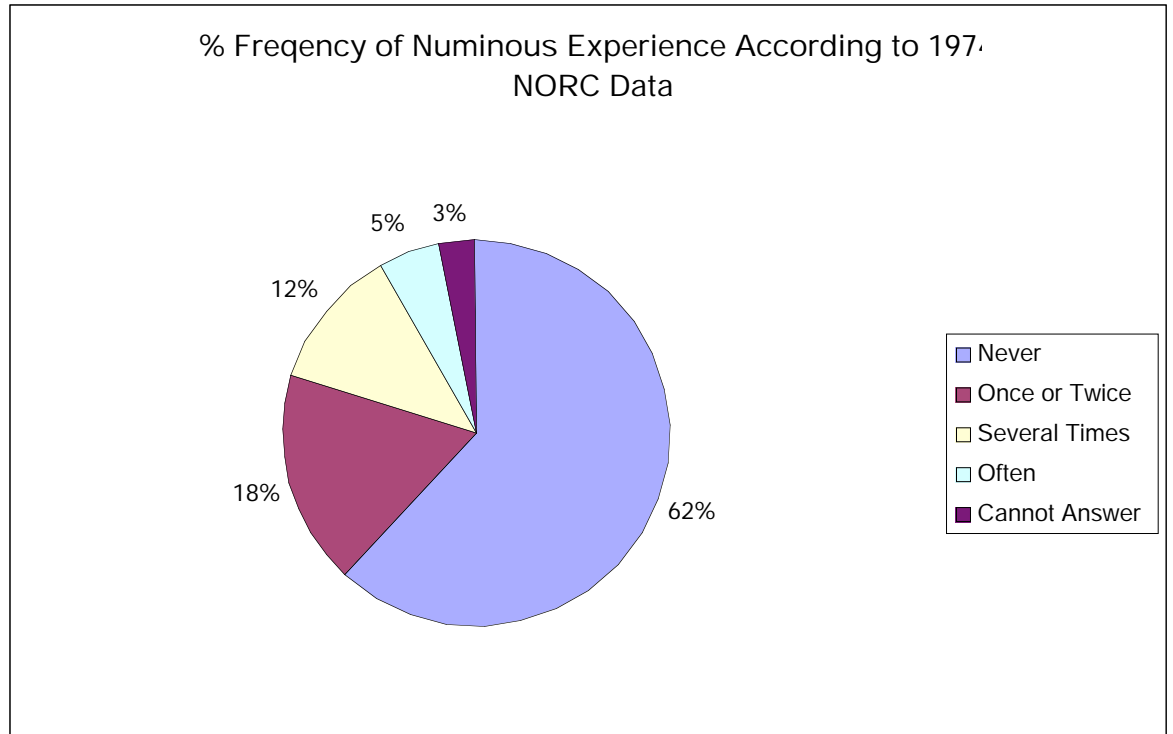


Figure 2. General Social Survey Study: Frequency of Numinous Experience as measured by the Greeley Question.

Interestingly, the NORC study suggested a strong correlation between education and incidence of mystical experience. Greeley found that having a college education correlated with reporting a mystical experience “often” with a significance of .001.¹⁵ The demographics of the population for the present study are that the average years in education are 11.72. Eighty percent of this population completed high school. However, only one subject completed college and she went on to obtain a doctorate. Twelve subjects had one or more years of college while twelve subjects did not complete high school. Many of the subjects had some sort of trade school or job training, which was not measured as formal education.

This study did not show any significant correlation between years of education completed and positive response to having a mystical experience. Thus, for this sample it does not appear that answering in the affirmative that a subject has had the experience of “feeling as if you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself” is related to higher levels of education.

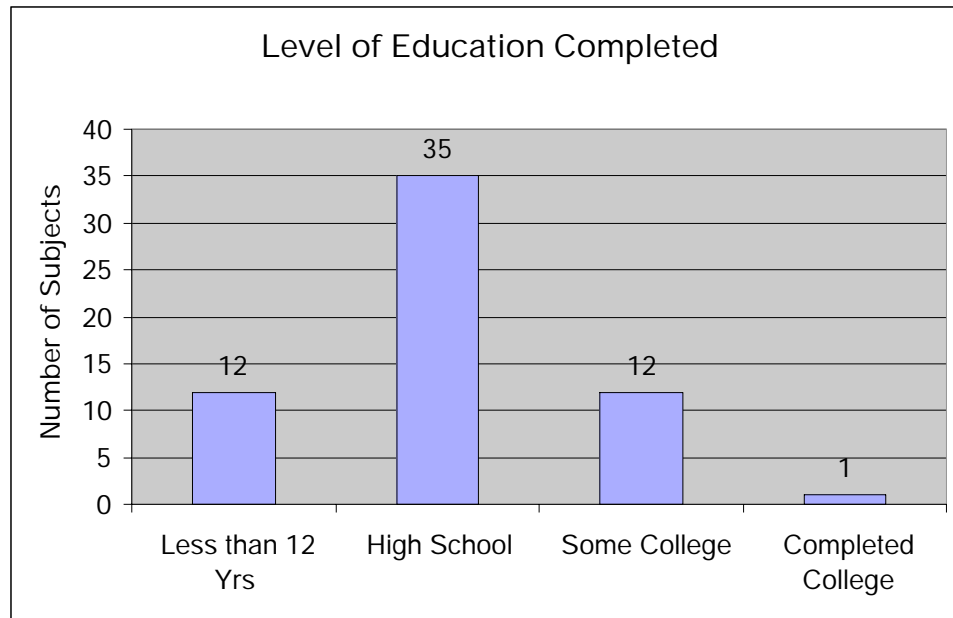


Figure 3. Current Study: Level of Education Completed.

This study found that years of education negatively correlated with age with a Pearson correlation of $-.299$ and a two-tailed significance of $.021$. The fact that education is negatively correlated with age makes sense given trends in education over the past sixty years. It is unclear whether this variation in education associated with age would confound the relationship between education and mystical experience for a population that is older and therefore less educated than a younger cohort of similar intelligence, social status, and income levels. As Levin points out there is an “ease with

which aging and cohort effects can be confounded in cross-sectional surveys.”¹⁶ This is not an issue for this study, with its specificity of subject population. In fact, studies like this one help raise issues and provide perspective on some of the questions raised in larger cross-sectional surveys.

This is not a cross-sectional survey, and one of the ways the population is defined is based on years in agriculture. The average number of years in agriculture was 37 years, but the standard deviation was 23 years. Figure Four is a frequency graph of the number of years spent in agriculture.

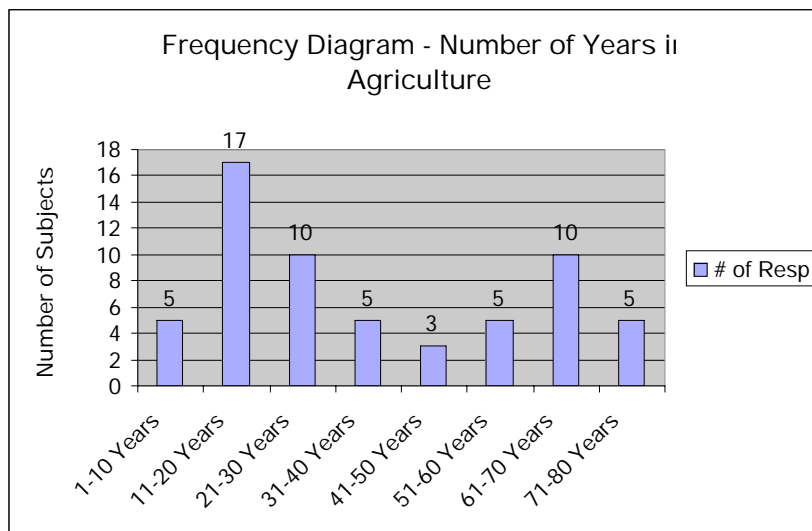


Figure 4. Number of Years Subjects Were Involved in Agriculture.

While involvement in farming and agriculture was a demographic used to define the subject population of this study, it was not a variable that correlated with responses to either the Greeley Question or the question regarding whether the subjects believed themselves to have had a mystical experience.

There are several possible reasons that years spent in farming or agriculture did not significantly correlate with mystical experience, as measured by either question. One of the reasons could be that the actual years spent in agriculture varied throughout the life span – from growing up on a farm to moving out to a farm after retirement. It may also be that all of the subjects interviewed had spent sufficient time involved with nature or the land to increase the likelihood of reporting a mystical experience. This is supported by Hood's work on the relationship between anticipatory set stress and sudden setting stress in nature related mystical experiences. Hood found that mystical experiences occur when incongruities suddenly make the subject aware of limits and "hence in so doing make 'transcendent' experiences possible."¹⁷

It may be that even those subjects who have been involved in farming and agriculture for less than ten years had sufficient opportunity to experience natural phenomena that would make them aware of limits and potentially trigger mystical experiences. It is possible that any experience working with nature or the land is sufficient to correlate with reporting a mystical experience. If this is the case, it would be necessary to compare this population with a control group that had never been involved in working the land in order to ascertain if there is any relationship between mystical experience and involvement in farming and agriculture. However, it would be difficult to find a control group that wasn't involved in farming and agriculture but was similar in other cultural variables. Kansas farmers over the age of sixty comprise a unique population, with any number of cultural and demographic variables associated with this group. Since this study looks at such a specific population, it is necessary to take the results at face value. These results clearly show that there is no significant relationship

between the number of years spent in farming or agriculture and reporting a mystical experience.

While 43% of the population surveyed reported having a numinous experience as measured by a positive response to the Greeley question, only 32% answered in the affirmative when asked straight out, "Do you believe you have ever had a mystical experience."

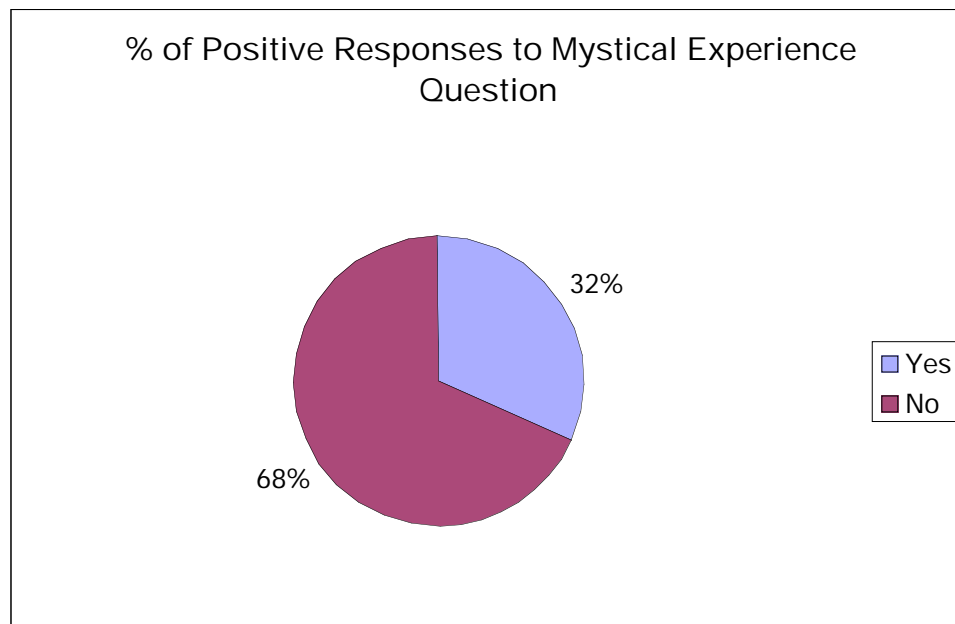


Figure 5. Percent of Positive Responses to the Mystical Experience Question.

This 32% positive response to the mystical experience question is extremely close to Levin's data using the 1988 General Social Survey data, where he found that 31.5% of Americans reported having a numinous experience as measured by the Greeley question.¹⁸ It is slightly lower than the 35% Greeley found for his question in the 1974 General Social Survey data.¹⁹ In one of their pretests Greeley asked subjects if "they

have ever had a 'religio-mystical experience?' and 50% said that they had.²⁰ On another try they asked subjects "if they had ever felt as though they had become completely one with God or the universe. About 45% said that they had."²¹ In their study on Religious Experience in Great Britain, Hay and Morisy did a comparison of the trends between Britain and the United States. They experimented with a number of questions and found that their results were within comparable ranges to those found in the United States. They found that 36.4% of their respondents were "aware of or influenced by a presence or power."²² In their study 30.4% of the subjects replied in the affirmative to the Greeley question.

Hay and Morisy point out that, "The most interesting point theoretically is that Greeley's results and ours are within 5% of each other, while if we take two of the standard measures of religiosity, membership of a church and frequency of church attendance, Americans are three times as likely as Britons to be 'religious.'"²³ I would make an observation consistent with Hay and Morisy's point that what is relevant about the outcome of this study regarding both the percentages that respond in the affirmative to the Greeley question and to those who respond in the affirmative to the mystical experience question, is how close these averages are to those obtained by other surveys of numinous or mystical experience. Even though positive responses to the Greeley question account for 43% of this subject population, differences are not significant when factors such as the specific demographics of the population are taken into account.

There are a number of demographic factors including age, education, and social class that are traditionally correlated with increased reports of religious experience.²⁴ The population studied here is defined in part by being at the upper parameters of groups

in terms of age. Being over a certain age has traditionally been associated with increased reporting of mystical experience. In contrast, this population demonstrated themselves to be significantly lower in several other demographic measures that are also associated with increased reporting of mystical experience. This population is at the lower parameters for education and Kansas farmers are traditionally lower on demographics such as social class and income. Other demographics that have been traditionally associated with increased reports of mystical experience include Protestant religious affiliation²⁵ and subcultures that encourage intense experiences.²⁶ This study did not collect data on religious affiliation. However, many of the participants are likely to be protestant based on the overall demographics of the population. This study also did not collect data on ethnicity or cultural identification. Again, however, the population being studied consists primarily of white Americans who would not typically associate themselves with any other religious-ethnicity and who are part of a culture that does not encourage intense experiences.

Given the size of the sample studied and the breakdown of demographic factors, it appears that this population falls within the expected response rates for reporting a mystical experience. The next question that often arises in studies of numinous or mystical experience is what the subjects mean when they report a mystical experience. As discussed in the chapter on definition, there is no clear and consistent definition for mystical experience. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, having a mystical experience is defined as giving a positive response to either the Greeley Question or to the direct question, "Do you believe you have ever had a mystical experience?"

The correlation between the Greeley and mystical experience questions is .384 using a Pearson Correlation. The two-tailed significance is .002, but since the correlation between a positive response to the two questions would always be in a positive direction, the actual significance level is $<.001$. The correlation between the two is extremely significant. However, it explains less than 15% of the response. This means that while there is a correlation between positive response to the Greeley Question and positive response the Mystical Experience question, it is far from universal. This is shown by comparing the frequencies and percentages of subjects reporting a positive response to both questions, to just the Greeley question, and to the mystical experience question.

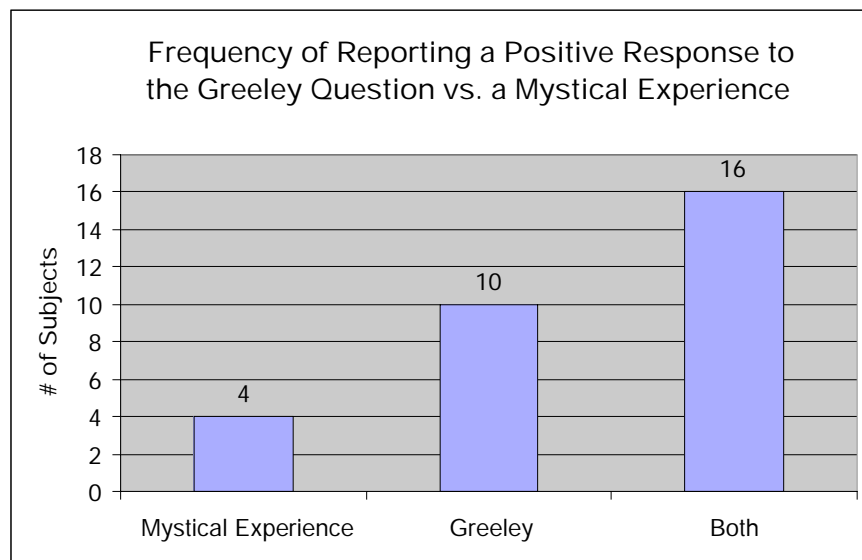


Figure 6. Frequency of Reporting a Positive Response to the Greeley Question versus the Mystical Experience Question.

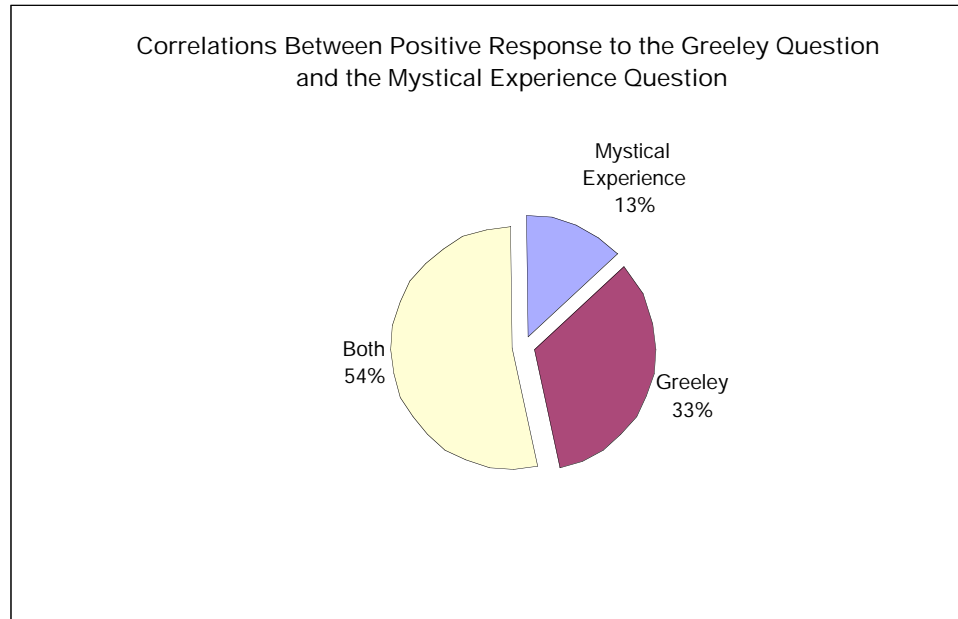


Figure 7. Percentage Reporting a Positive Response to the Greeley Question versus the Mystical Experience Question.

Sixteen respondents answered in the affirmative to both questions, ten answered in the affirmative to only the Greeley question, and four answered in the affirmative to the mystical experience question while claiming not to have experienced a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift them out of themselves.

It is apparent that at least some of the subjects did not feel that the two questions were measuring the same thing. Thomas and Cooper speak to this issue in their discussion of operational definitions of mystical experience. They explain the issue, "Recent work suggests that the marked discrepancies which exist in incidence estimates may be due to different operational definitions of what constitutes an intense spiritual or mystical experience. Though profound mystical consciousness appears quite rare, a variety of experiences which contain some elements of the classical mystical experience appear not at all uncommon."²⁷ In order to ascertain what subjects meant by their

responses, this research asked subjects to describe what happened when they “felt as if you had been close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself or when you felt you had a mystical experience.” In order to see if there was any difference in the type experiences reported by those who responded positively to both questions, to only the Greeley question, or to only the mystical experience question, the responses to the interviews were separated according to the subject’s response to the Greeley and Mystical Experience questions. For a list of the actual interviews, broken down by whether the subject gave a positive response to both the mystical experience question and the Greeley, or to only one or the other of the questions, please refer to Appendix C.

No pattern of response between type of experiences reported in the interviews and reporting of the experience as a numinous or mystical experience was immediately apparent. In order to test whether there was any consistency in type of experiences reported that would be consistently classified, categories were created for the interviews and three independent coders were asked to place the interviews into categories that the coders felt described an important aspect of the experience. The results of this will be discussed at the end of this chapter. However, overall there did not appear to be any generalizable categorization between a positive response to either the Greeley or the Mystical Experience question and a particular type of experience relayed in the interviews.

The other measurement that was used in this study was the Rosenberg Scale of Self-Esteem. It was hypothesized that frequency of reporting a mystical experience in a population where such experiences weren’t generally accepted might be related to having a positive level of self-esteem, such that a subject would have enough self-confidence to

both interpret an experience as being spiritual or mystical and then to report this experience to an outside investigator. Scores on the Rosenberg scale show that the population studied tended to score in the positive range on the Rosenberg Scale. This can be demonstrated by a simple frequency distribution.

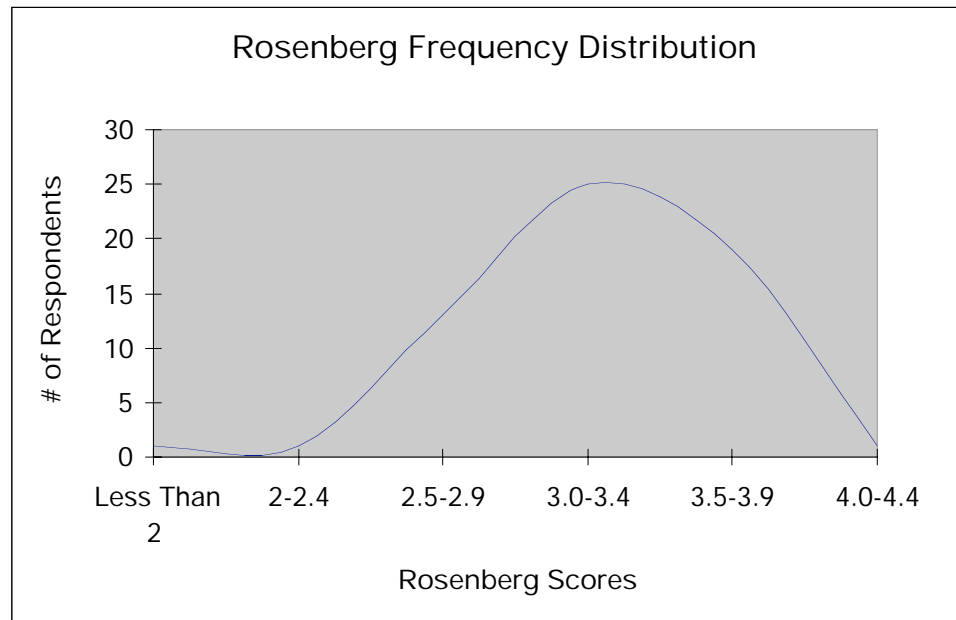


Figure 8. Frequency Distribution of Rosenberg Scores.

The mean score on the Rosenberg Scale, with a score of three to four representing positive levels of self-esteem was 3.2. Seventy-five percent of the respondents had a positive self-esteem score as measured by the Rosenberg scale.

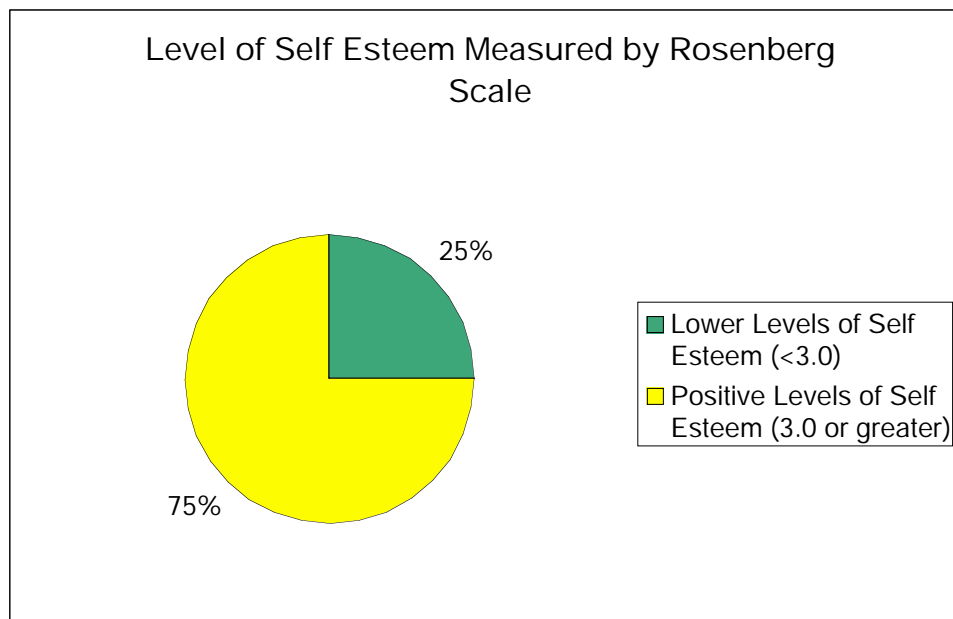


Figure 9 Percentage of Subjects Reporting Positive Self-esteem as Measured by the Rosenberg Scale.

These positive scores occurred despite the fact that the Rosenberg scale was not specifically designed for an older population. Since a number of the subjects had difficulty with their eyesight, it was necessary to read many of the surveys aloud. As the subjects responded to the surveys it became apparent that there were areas where the questions were problematic to some subjects. There were two statements that fell into this category on the Rosenberg scale. The first of these was, "#3 -- I am able to do things as well as most other people." A number of subjects hesitated at this item and then made comments like "Used to be," and "Some things I don't do as well as other people, I used to be stronger when I was young. I could do lots of things then." The subjects then decided how they wanted to score the item. Some decided it was appropriate to score it as if they were at the height of their strength. Others felt it appropriate to score it in the way they felt at the current time.

The other question that garnered similar types of responses was "#6 -- I certainly feel useless at times." Here the responses were things like, "I do since my stroke. Now people have to help me with things," and "I do now that everybody's grown and left. They don't need me much anymore." Comments of this sort raised the question whether the results of the Rosenberg measure might be skewed by responses that were comparative evaluations of physical conditions related to ageing, rather than actual correlates of low self esteem.

In order to test whether the Rosenberg measure was being affected by subject's responses to these two items the results of the test were first scored using standard measuring protocols for the Rosenberg measure and then re-measured after removing the scores for the two items that appeared to create hesitation for some subjects. The correlation between the Rosenberg scores with and without the two items in question was .980 at a one tailed significance that rounded to $< .0001$. In other words, the effects of age related concerns did not create a significant alteration in the outcome of the Rosenberg measure. Therefore, for the purposes of this discussion the standard Rosenberg scores are used, as they have been shown to be both reliable and valid as a measure of self-esteem.

The Rosenberg measure did not correlate with either the Greeley Question or the Self-esteem question. The initial hypothesis of this study was that a certain level of self-esteem would be necessary in order for a subject to interpret their experience as mystical and to be willing to relate their experience to an outsider. Besides not being significant, the actual correlations with the Rosenberg scale were negligible. The Pearson Correlation between the Rosenberg Scale and the Greeley Question was .091. There

doesn't appear to be any relationship between the two measures and therefore, even taking into account small sample sizes and high positive response to the Rosenberg measure, it is appropriate to conclude that reporting a mystical or numinous experience is not related to level of self-esteem for this population.

Besides asking individuals to respond to the initial Greeley question, the Self-esteem question, and to complete the Rosenberg instrument, subjects were asked to respond to Greeley's list of descriptor items for their experience. There were a good number of correlations between the descriptor items, the Greeley question, and the Rosenberg Scale. While these correlations are significant, perhaps the most significant finding from the descriptor items is the information that they provide about the subject population of this study.

For the purposes of this research, a very specific population was chosen – that of Kansas farmers over the age of sixty. This population was surveyed and interviewed about whether they had ever had a mystical experience. Greeley designed his descriptor items to reflect terms “used to describe the ‘classic’ mystical episodes.”²⁸ Interestingly, these descriptors can also be used to describe the values in a population. This is a group that is grounded in social and family values as evidenced by high scores on items like “sense of my own need to contribute to others” and “a conviction that love is at the center of everything.” This group also scored high on “sense of joy and laughter” and “a confidence in my own personal survival.” As a group, they scored low on items like “the sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am,” “a sense that I was being bathed in light,” and “a feeling of desolation.”

Q	Mean Value of Descriptor Items (by question number)	Mean
1	A feeling of deep and profound peace	2.53
2	A certainty that all things would work out for the good	3.25
3	Sense of my own need to contribute to others	3.58
4	A conviction that love is at the center of everything	3.57
5	Sense of joy and laughter	3.73
6	An experience of great emotional intensity	3.03
7	A great increase in my understanding and knowledge	3.07
8	A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it	2.72
9	A sense of new life or living in a new world	2.07
10	A confidence in my own personal survival	3.55
11	A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me	2.10
12	The sense that all the universe is alive	2.87
13	Personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am	1.95
13	A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical	2.37
14	A sensation of warmth or fire	2.53
15	A sense of being alone	2.63
17	A loss of concern about worldly problems	2.03
18	A sense that I was being bathed in light	1.63
19	A feeling of desolation	1.87

Table 1. Mean Values of Greeley Descriptor Items.

Values evidenced in the descriptor items were also evidenced in the interviews, where three of the most commonly mentioned categories were finding a partner, family life, and loss or illness of a loved one.

Several of the descriptor items were correlated with specific demographic variables, with gender being the primary demographic that affected responses to the descriptor items. Gender had no significant impact on whether or not a subject reported a mystical experience, as measured by either the Greeley question or the mystical experience question. However, gender did affect responses to the following descriptor items: "a feeling of deep and profound peace," "a certainty that all things would work out for the good," "a conviction that love is at the center of everything," "a sense of new life or living in a new world," "the sense that all the universe is alive," "a sensation of

warmth or fire,” and a loss of concern about worldly problems.” In each of these cases, women were more likely to report having experienced the descriptor item, and were also more likely to report having the experience with greater frequency than the men.

Descriptor Items Correlating with Gender (female has higher score)	Pearson	
	Correlation	2-Tail Sig
A feeling of deep and profound peace*	0.373	0.003
A certainty that all things would work out for the good	0.299	0.020
A conviction that love is at the center of everything*	0.391	0.002
A sense of new life or living in a new world*	0.361	0.005
The sense that all the universe is alive*	0.397	0.002
A sensation of warmth or fire	0.255	0.049
A loss of concern about worldly problems	0.278	0.032
*Correlation is Significant at Greater than the .01 level (2-tailed)		

Table 2. Greeley Descriptor Items Correlating with Gender.

There were thirty male subjects and thirty female subjects who participated in this study. Some of the subjects who participated were couples, where both individuals filled out the surveys and were interviewed. Other subjects were not married, were widowed or by themselves when I approached them to participate in the study, or only one member of a couple chose to participate. It is interesting to note that the relationship between gender and these specific responses to descriptor items was the only correlation with gender. Gender did not correlate with either the mystical experience questions, nor did gender correlate with the Rosenberg scores.

Another demographic variable that correlated with one of the descriptor items was years of agriculture, which had a slight negative, but significant, correlation with “a sense of new life or living in a new world.”

Descriptor Items Correlating with Years in Agriculture	Pearson Correlation	2-Tail Sig
A sense of new life or living in a new world	-0.272	0.035

Table 3. Greeley Descriptor Items Correlating with Years in Agriculture

It may be that the nature of agriculture creates an expectation of the cyclic renewal of life and therefore the longer a person is involved in agriculture, the more they see the world as made up of predictably repeating patterns. Farmers are constantly involved in the cyclic nature of the seasons and the years. Therefore, it may be that for this population the cycles themselves represent continuity and therefore farmers are likely to perceive a “sense of new life” as part of the normal patterns of the everyday world. If this is the case, it would offer an explanation for the slight negative correlation between years in agriculture and experiencing a sense of new life or living in a new world.

Another potential explanation of the slight negative correlation between number of years in agriculture and having “a sense of new life or living in a new world” is the fact that those subjects reporting the greatest number of years involved in farming and agriculture had lived on a farm for their entire lives. Some of the subjects appeared to respond to the questions in a literal manner. Therefore, it is possible that some subjects may have taken the descriptor to mean that they had literally moved to a new world, as in a new city or country. Those who had remained on the farm for their entire life would not have had this experience and therefore would give a negative response. Neither of these hypotheses were tested in the present study and it is also possible that the negative

correlation between years in agriculture and “sense of new life or living in a new world,” could be related to any number of factors that are not specifically analyzed or considered.

The final demographic variable that correlated with descriptor items was age. The one item that correlated positively with age was a loss of concern about worldly problems. There was a small but significant finding that people who were older were less concerned with problems of the world. On the other hand, people who were older were also less likely to report having an experience of great emotional intensity or a sensation of warmth or fire.

Descriptor Items Correlating with Age	Pearson	
	Correlation	2-Tail Sig
An experience of great emotional intensity	-0.398	0.002
A sensation of warmth or fire	-0.374	0.003
A loss of concern about worldly problems	0.261	0.044

*Correlation is Significant at Greater than the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4. Greeley Descriptor Items Correlating with Age.

Correlations between specific demographic items and descriptor items are useful. However, given the purpose of this study, it is most interesting to look at which descriptor items correlate with mystical experience, as indicated by a positive response to the Greeley question. The items, which correlated to positive response to the Greeley question, are given in table 5:

Descriptor Items Correlating with Greeley Question	Pearson	
	Correlation	2-Tail Sig
A feeling of deep and profound peace	0.287	0.026
A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me	0.26	0.041
Personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am	0.32	0.013
A sense of being alone	0.275	0.033
A feeling of desolation	0.263	0.042

Table 5. Descriptor Items Correlating with Greeley Question.

It is notable that, except for “a feeling of deep and profound peace,” the mean scores for each of these items were between one – never in my life and two – once or twice. The descriptor items related to the Greeley question were among the descriptor items least frequently experienced by this population.

While at the surface it may appear that some of these descriptor items are contradictory, there are logical reasons why they traditionally correlate with reports of mystical experience. Many people experience a mystical experience following a period of intense desolation. In the Christian tradition this is often referenced as “the dark night of the soul.”

Only one of the descriptor items had a significant correlation with subjects reporting that they believe themselves to have had a mystical experience and that was “a sense of being alone.” The correlation was .403 with a two-tailed significance of .001. It may be that believing themselves to have had a mystical experience caused people to have a sense of being isolated or set apart. However, the interviews suggest that there is enough variation in the ways that individuals define “having a mystical experience” to make any conclusion about the form of the correlation questionable. The data informs us that approximately 16% of the likelihood of reporting a mystical experience is

“explained” by having “a sense of being alone.” This finding is significant, rather than resulting from chance. People in this population who answered “yes” to the question, “Do you believe you have ever had a mystical experience” are far more likely to experience a sense of being alone.

There were a number of significant correlations between the Greeley descriptor items and the Rosenberg Scale. While the Rosenberg Scale did not prove itself predictive of reporting a numinous experience, it is highly predictive of a number of the descriptor items commonly associated with mystical experience. The Rosenberg scale correlated with having experienced “a feeling of deep and profound peace,” “a certainty that all things would work out for the good,” “sense of my own need to contribute to others,” “a sense of joy and laughter,” a great increase in my understanding and knowledge,” and “a confidence in my own personal survival.” It correlated negatively, but significantly, with “the sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am.”

Descriptor Items Correlating with Rosenberg Scale	Pearson	
	Correlation	2-Tail Sig
A feeling of deep and profound peace	0.33	0.01
A certainty that all things would work out for the good	0.257	0.047
Sense of my own need to contribute to others	0.257	0.048
Sense of joy and laughter*	0.562	0.000
A great increase in my understanding and knowledge*	0.42	0.001
A confidence in my own personal survival*	0.465	0.000
Personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am*	-0.391	0.002
*Correlation is Significant at Greater than the .01 level (2-tailed)		

Table 6. Greeley Descriptor Items Correlating with the Rosenberg Scale.

Most of the correlations with the Rosenberg scores were not highly predictive, with Pearson correlations at less than the .5 levels. However, they were highly significant, with significance ranges ranging from .05 to >.001. The descriptor item most highly correlated with the Rosenberg score was “sense of joy and laughter,” which had a Pearson correlation of .562 and a 2-tailed significance of .000. Those individuals with the highest levels of self-esteem are the happiest and experience the most joy and laughter. They also have the most confidence and are able to experience feelings of deep and profound peace; they know things are going to work out and that they will be okay no matter what happens. These relationships make intuitive sense. People who feel positively towards themselves also feel positive and confident in their relationships with the world.

It is interesting to note that the only descriptor item that correlated with both the Greeley measure and the Rosenberg scores was “a feeling of deep and profound peace.” Once again, this suggests that self-esteem is not the most useful predictor of mystical

experience. However self-esteem does appear to be correlated with many of the measures of classical mysticism, as defined by the Greeley descriptor items.

The final research of this study was to ask subjects to briefly recount their experience of being very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself, their mystical experience, or their most significant experience if they had answered “never in my life” to both the Greeley and Mystical Experience questions. The interviews are included as Appendix C. The original purpose of the interviews was to provide anecdotal evidence about what subjects meant when they gave a positive response to the Greeley Question or the Mystical Experience question. What the data shows is that there is a wide range of anecdotes describing what subjects mean by a mystical experience. A couple of examples, which highlight the diversity, are:

“My son died when he was eleven. One morning I felt like I woke up and he was standing there by the bed. He told me it was time for me to go with him. I told him I couldn’t because his sister needed me. I could see my mom and my husband’s mom. Then they just left. They went up the hall like they were chattering away, but I never heard a sound. I only heard my son. As soon as it happened and they were gone I got up and wrote it in the baby book so I would know when it happened.”

“My mystical experience was during my open-heart surgery. I could hear everything. Pretty soon there were all kinds of noises going on. I heard someone say, “Somebody’s got to go tell the family. We’ve got a feeling...” I was in a big light. Everything was going to be so nice.

I went with them to the room where the family was waiting. I went right with them. That was quite a ways so I knew I had to be out of my body. The family started crying and I thought this might be good for me, but what about them? I started fighting a little bit.

I heard a saw, and later on I found out that's how they did it. They sawed right into me. I've been back fifteen years."

"When I was saved. I just felt the lord's intervention at that time. I just felt different."

"I had a situation when I was on the farm. I was told the farm we lived on didn't have any water. I asked myself if Christ was still working miracles. I figured he was so I got myself a posthole digger and started digging a well. The end of the story is we found water.

That water wasn't just we were lucky. I got down to where the well diggers had stopped. It was solid rock and you couldn't get through it. I was crying. My hands were raw. Mom said not to get despondent. She was going to mass to pray.

My dad dreamed we dropped something in the well and got water. So that's what we did. We dropped a rock in the well and we got water. All the neighbors laughed at us. They said we couldn't find water but we did any way."

Reports of mystical experience range from contact with the dead, to déjà vu, to religious conversion, out of body experiences, and a generalized sense of merging, which subjects struggled to describe. Like all studies of mystical experience, this study observed that the subjects struggled to express the importance of the event. Sometimes there was language for what happened, but the importance of the event was ineffable. Subjects would hesitate for words, unable to express the significance of what they experienced.

This variation in the type experiences reported parallels the findings of Thomas and Cooper when they used the Greeley question in an open-ended format. They took the responses to the Greeley question and developed content categories that reflected the kinds of experience individuals defined as “intense spiritual” in nature.²⁹ Their findings were that 34% of the respondents reported that they had felt themselves in the presence of a spiritual force that lifted them outside of themselves. However, “When the open-ended responses were analyzed, it became clear that those persons who reported having had an intense spiritual experience varied dramatically in the nature of the experiences reported.”³⁰ Thomas and Cooper broke their findings into 5 categories as follows:

“Type 0. NO EXPERIENCE REPORTED:

Type 1. UNCODABLE: Insufficient information was given on which to base a coding decision, or respondents gave irrelevant experiences.

Type 2. MYSTICAL: Response included expression of awesome emotions, a sense of the ineffable, feeling of oneness with God, nature, or the universe. May also have included description of changed perceptions of time and surroundings and a feeling of “knowing” coupled with a reordering of life priorities.

Type 3. PSYCHIC: Respondent described an “other worldly” experience in which an extraordinary or supernatural element was present (e.g., ESP, telepathy, out-of body, contact with spirits). Experiences which were vicarious in nature or which contained mention of religiosity or spirituality in addition to these elements were included.

Type 4. FAITH AND CONSOLATION: Experience described mentions religious or spiritual elements, but no indication of the extra-

ordinary or the supernatural is given. Experiences were often of a traditional, church-related nature.”³¹

Thomas and Cooper categorized a total of 305 complete questionnaires for three separate age groups – 17-29, 30-59, and over 60. They found that only two protocols were coded as indicating a genuine mystical experience. The largest group of affirmative responses was “Faith and Consolation,” which made up 16% of the total sample, and 8% of the total sample reported experiences containing a psychic element.³² In another study, Thomas and Cooper used the same question and categories with a population of 302 young adults. For this population the breakdown was: no experience 66%, uncodable 8%, mystical 2%, psychic 12%, and faith and consolation 12%.³³

This study used far more categories than the Thomas and Cooper studies. The sixteen categories for the current study were:

17. Unity, or visceral awareness of a Divine Source or Knowledge. This refers to any classical mystical experiences that include union with a divine source. I also thought it useful to open up the category to allow for awareness of divine source or knowledge, even if union isn’t achieved.
18. Clairvoyance/ Visions/ Receiving knowledge or prediction of the future. This is a category researched by the GSS. This refers to anyone who receives knowledge, prediction, or sight into distant events or the future.
19. Synchronicity or Answered Prayers – whether in lay or religious terms, this refers to those experiences where something is needed or asked for and appears in a way that seems miraculous or beyond chance to the person involved.
20. Out of Body Experiences – any event where the subject describes leaving or being out of his or her body.

21. Near Death Experiences – this type of experiences are well documented by people like Raymond Moody and P.M.H. Atwater. I am referring to experiences in the tradition they have written about.
22. Religious Experiences – any experience related to organized religion or the church. In this category I include things like being saved, becoming Christian, communions, wedding ceremonies, etc. It refers to any experience related to the rituals of organized religion.
23. Nature related mystical awe – a response to the wonders of nature.
24. Déjà vu – Again, this is a category from the GSS and thus I included it. I didn't find many subjects who spontaneously reported déjà vu as either a mystical or significant experience and would be just as happy to drop this category. However, I am including it for the sake of consistency.
25. Contact with the dead – this is another category from the GSS. It is also a category that was reported a number of times. This includes having someone who has died speak to the subject, be seen by the subject, touch the subject, provide knowledge to the subject, etc.
26. Personal illness or accident – this category is often listed as a trigger to mystical experience or as a significant experience in the life of the subject.
27. Loss (including both death and divorce) or illness of a loved one – this was a repeated theme given the age of my population.
28. Finding a partner – included in this category are meeting a spouse, getting married, etc. This was often included among the most significant experiences.
29. Family life – included in this category are things like having a family, spending time with family, grandchildren, etc. This population puts a high value on family and this category was a repeated theme, especially for those talking about their most significant experiences.
30. Work/Accomplishments – included in this category is anything related to accomplishment, winning, joining the military, working, farming, etc.
31. Survival/ good health – several participants felt their most significant experiences had to do with surviving, being here, achieving a given age, etc.

32. No response or unclassified – several subjects couldn't think of a significant experience or gave experiences that didn't fit into a repeated theme.

Categorization of the interviews by the independent coders were as follows:

Categorization of Interviews	Frequency of Placement
Finding a Partner	28
Loss or illness of loved one	23
Answered Prayers	20
Contact with the dead	19
Family Life	17
Religious Experience	17
Unity with Divine Source	17
No response or Unclassified	14
Visions/Clairvoyance	13
Out of Body Experience	11
Personal Illness or accident	10
Work or Accomplish	10
Near Death Experience	8
Survival or Good Health	8
Déjà vu	5
Nature Experience	4

Table 7. Categorization of Interviews.

For purposes of comparison, it is possible to group the categories used for this study in a way that provides similar results to the categories used by Thomas and Cooper.

Thus categories #10 through #16 would be considered uncodable. These categories had a lot to do with those who reported only a significant experience and most of them have to do with major life events rather than mystical experiences. Categories #1 -- Unity or visceral experience with the divine source or knowledge and #7 -- Nature Related Mystical Experience comprise a category similar to that which Thomas and Cooper call Mystical. Categories #2 through #5, as well as #8 and #9 parallel the Psychic

Category. And Finally Faith and Consolation parallels my category #6, Religious Experience.

Since definition is such a key issue when dealing with mystical experience, the researcher chose not to code the responses into categories. Rather, I three independent raters were asked to code the responses. There was no training offered and no attempt to arrive at coder agreement. Therefore, inclusion in categories was independent for all three raters, and was based on their experience and interpretation. Instructions were that an interview could be placed in as many categories as seemed appropriate. Therefore, for the purposes of this comparison, overall scores for each category are calculated and then divided by three, since total agreement on any one subject would result in a score of three, while two raters in agreement would result in a score of two, and one rater placing an interview into a specific category would result in a score of one.

It is important to be aware that interviews may have been placed into more than one category and that there is not absolute agreement about placement. It is also important to be aware that there is not an absolute correlation between the combined categories used for this study and the categories used for the Thomas and Cooper studies. In particular, the way that the categories are arranged for this study under-represents Thomas and Cooper's Faith and Consolation category, because some of the items that they would have placed in this category have been put into the Psychic Category because they fell under the general heading of "Synchronicity or Answered Prayers." It is also notable that the Uncodable category is way over-represented because of the inclusion of interviews for those subjects who reported only a significant experience. Nevertheless, the comparison is as follows.

Type 1 -- Uncodable – only 10%³⁴ and 8%³⁵ of Thomas and Cooper’s respondents gave protocols that were rated as uncodable. 61% of the respondents of this study gave “uncodable” responses. As mentioned above, this is due primarily to responses that are describing significant, rather than mystical, experiences.

Type 2 -- Mystical – Thomas and Cooper found that genuine mystical experience represented slightly under 1% of their respondents in one study³⁶ and 2% in the study of young adults.³⁷ The findings of this study were the same as Thomas and Cooper’s more generalized study in that 1% of the protocols were included in the mystical category.³⁸

Type 3 – Psychic. Thomas and Cooper found that 8%³⁹ and 12%⁴⁰ of their total sample reported experiences that included a psychic element. The percentages for this study were much higher, with the psychic category representing 42% of the respondents. Even when the category of Synchronicity or Answered Prayers was removed from the psychic category, psychic phenomena still represented 31% of respondents.

Type 4 – Faith and Consolation was the largest single group in the Thomas and Cooper study. 50 protocols representing 16% of the total sample were coded as Faith and Consolation for the more generalized study,⁴¹ while 12% were coded as Faith and Consolation in their study limited to young adults.⁴² It is notable that one of the places where Thomas and Cooper drew subjects for both studies was from religious organizations, “both Protestant and Catholic.”⁴³ In contrast, only 1% of the responses in this study were designated in the category of religious experience. However, if you include synchronicity or answered prayers along with Religious experience, the category represents 20%, which is very similar to the Thomas and Cooper figures.

Comparison to Thomas & Coopers Results by Type of Spiritual Experience		
	Ag Respondents	T&C
Uncodable	61%	10%
Mystical	1%	1%
Psychic	42%	8%
Faith & Consolation	1%	16%

Table 8. Comparison of Categories to Thomas and Cooper’s Work.

This quick comparison demonstrates the difficulty in defining and coding responses. Both studies were primarily concerned with defining what constitutes a

mystical experience and measuring which protocols came close to fitting the classic definitions of numinous experience. It is notable that the percentages of respondents who fall into this category are virtually identical to those of Thomas and Cooper's more generalized study and similar to their findings with young adults.

When the categories for the interviews were created, several categories were chosen because they had been measured separately by specific questions on the General Social Survey. The categories that were included in the General Social Survey were Paranormal and Psychic phenomena and Contact with the Dead. In the General Social Survey these categories were scored on the same scale as the Mystical Experience Question, in that respondents were asked to respond on a four-point scale ranging from "Never in my life" to "Often." Questions regarding Paranormal Experiences were:

- "Thought you were somewhere you had been before, but knowing that it was impossible (déjà vu)
- Felt as though you were in touch with someone when they were far away (extrasensory perception)
- Seen events that happened at a great distance as they were happening (clairvoyance)⁴⁴

Contact with the dead was rated on the same four-point scale using the question:

- "Have you ever felt that you were really in touch with someone who had died?"⁴⁵

Not surprisingly the General Social Survey findings for both psychic phenomena and contact with the dead are far higher than the findings for these categories in this study. Greeley found that 59% of his respondents reported a déjà vu experience, 58%

reported some sort of extrasensory perception, 22% reported clairvoyance, and 27% reported contact with the dead. By classifying the interviews into similar categories, this study found that less than 1% reported any of the psychic categories and 1% of the rural farmers gave anecdotes that were classified as contact with the dead. It is likely that the primary cause of the variation is that Greeley specifically asked about these areas. Respondents in this study told about their most mystical experience. What this suggests is that a majority of respondents were not talking about psychic phenomena when they responded to the question regarding mystical experience. It also serves to once again highlight the importance of specificity and definition when studying mystical and religious experience.

The conclusion of this study is that rural farmers over the age of sixty are likely to report mystical or numinous experiences. The language and interpretation of these experiences are related to the background of the people who have the experiences.

When people are asked to report whether they have experienced any of the classic descriptors of mystical experience or to tell about their most significant or mystical experience, results exist in a range. This study supports the findings of almost every researcher who has attempted to study mystical experience. The conclusions show that whether a subject reports a mystical experience depends on how the question is defined and where on the continuum a subject defines an experience as "mystical" rather than "ordinary."

Section 3: Discussion

This research brings up a number of questions and of possibilities for further elucidation and study. Mystical experience is one small piece of the range of human experience and Kansas farmers over the age of 60 are one specific population among a large range of demographic groups. The specificity of this study allows us to gain an understanding of the sort of events this group has experienced and classified as mystical. This is just a beginning and suggests a number of possibilities for future research.

The first obvious possibility for further research in this area is to do similar studies with different subject populations. This would allow for comparison between the experiences of rural farmers and other subpopulations. This study raises a number of questions that it are beyond the scope of this research. Questions such as whether people living in urban tenements would be likely to report the same sort of experiences, yet interpret those experiences differently, could be examined by doing similar studies with different populations. There are several of the descriptor items that seemed to be a part of the norm for this subject population. It could be that these items are commonly reported among the general population, or among an elderly population, or among a rural population no matter the age of the subjects. The only way to answer questions such as these is to ask the same questions of various populations and compare the results.

Several of the descriptor items had positive correlations with the Rosenberg measure of self-esteem. The Rosenberg scale has been widely used among various populations. It would be interesting to see if the same descriptor items correlate with positive self-esteem across different populations and subject groups. The subject population for this study generally had positive self-esteem. It could be that this is

correlated with the values inherent with the descriptor items. The values inherent in these descriptor items are values traditionally associated with having a mystical experience. It is possible that a subject population that holds these values will generally have greater self-esteem and be happier than a population with a different set of values. Again, the way to find this out is to use the measures utilized in this study to examine different populations with different beliefs and values.

It would be possible to discuss potential similar studies across different populations in great detail. However, those wishing to further explore this field and its possibilities will naturally see the possibilities inherent in studies of this type and will make choices that allow each researcher to focus in on the questions that are most pressing to their curiosity and purpose.

The next logical set of possibilities for future research is to further explore the subject population of this study. There is not a lot of research available on the psychological development and experiences of farmers over the age of sixty. There are any number of excellent measures that could be used to correlate with the mystical experiences of this group. It could be that the state-trait index would provide beneficial data, or perhaps an index that measures internal-external locus of control. A Personal Stress Assessment or Symptom Index might also provide some strong correlations with mystical experience or with the descriptor items of mystical experience. All of these tests are also likely to correlate with the results on the Rosenberg scale of self-esteem. The possibilities for gathering relevant and valuable data are endless. Since mystical experience is related to personal growth as well as to psychological well-being any scale that measures things that are likely to be related to these factors, either positively or

negatively, is likely to provide valuable information on the effects and correlations of mystical experience and the overall well-being of the subjects.

Another sort of study that could provide a lot of information about when and how mystical experiences occur would be a longitudinal study where subjects are studied over time. Since many of the studies, including the current study, of mystical experience are attempting to examine spontaneous mystical experience it would be interesting to see where in the life cycle these experiences occur and if different experiences occur at different times in a subject's life. However, trying to look at this from the viewpoint of a specific demographic group, or even from a large-scale randomized study, will be likely to leave age and cohort effects inextricably confused. If, on the other hand, it was possible to look at generalized age effects from large-scale randomized studies, and compare these results with the results from longitudinal studies where specific subject populations are followed across the life span, lifetime patterns of mystical experience would potentially become observable.

Other types of studies involving mystical experience are those that look at deliberately induced mystical experience. The current research on the physiological correlates of mystical experience are fascinating and have great potential for providing information on what triggers mystical experience as well as what sort of physiological changes are caused by the experience. Newberg, D'Aquili, and Rause are doing valuable work on the physical triggers of mystical experience including the process of deafferentation.⁴⁶ Additional studies of the process of ritual behavior, deafferentation, and other brain processes will be a valuable addition to the information available in the field.

People such as Joseph Chilton Pearce argue that the environment, both physical and social, affects an individual's ability to experience transcendent consciousness.⁴⁷ Pearce believes that environmental factors may actually affect the biological precursors and triggers for mystical experience. The current study looked at the mystical experiences of a population that had spent at least a portion of their lives in a rural environment. It would be interesting to do studies that were able to more specifically correlate environment and its relationship with mystical experience.

There are many ways of looking at mystical experience. By examining mystical experience in as many ways as possible, we broaden our understanding of the experience. It appears likely that mystical experiences have components that are affected by, and affect, every layer of a person's being. Therefore, there are many ways of examining mystical experience. All methods are valuable and when looked at as part of a whole, every study brings us closer to an understanding of what is commonly believed to be one of the most significant and life changing events human beings are capable of experiencing.

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APPENDIX A: INSTRUMENTS USED

Subject Informed Consent

Investigator in Charge of Study: Genevieve Hangen, M.S., Ph.D.(c)

Purpose:

This is a study using survey and interview techniques to examine the incidence of mystical experience among a rural population. This study will examine the relationship between self-reported mystical experiences and a measure of self-esteem. The purpose of this study is to further our knowledge about the incidence and effects of mystical experience.

Inclusion Criteria:

You must be 60 years old or older, and live in rural Kansas.
You must show willingness to participate by signing this voluntary informed consent form.

Procedures:

You will complete a questionnaire on mystical experience and a survey on levels of self-esteem.

You will then be interviewed about a mystical or significant experience in your life. You will be asked to describe the experience and to talk about any effects this experience had on your life.

Confidentiality of Records:

Your identity as part of this Study will be kept confidential. Results of this study may be reported in academic presentations or publications, but you will not be identified. Your identity will not be disclosed to anyone else, unless required by law.

Questions:

This form has told you what this Study is about. If you have any questions about the Study, please contact Genevieve Hangen, M.S., Ph.D.(c) at (785) 883-4399.

Subject Statement:

I am signing this consent freely and am not being forced. I understand that, by signing this form, I do not lose any rights to which I am entitled.

I hereby state that I have the legal capacity to enter into contract and that no guardian has been appointed to me.

The consent form has been read by, or to, me and study information has been fully explained to me. Any questions that have occurred to me have been fully answered by the Study coordinator. I may request a signed copy of this form.

I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Signature

Date

Subject's Name (Printed)

Greeley Questionnaire

Age _____

Gender _____

Have you been involved in farming or agriculture? Yes No

If yes, how many years? _____

Questionnaire Item	Never	Once	1 Several	2 Often	3	4
In my Life						
or Twice						
Times						

Have you ever felt as though you were very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?	1	2	3	4
--	---	---	---	---

I have experienced:

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) A feeling of deep and profound peace: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2) A certainty that all things would work out for the good: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3) A sense of my own need to contribute to others: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4) A conviction that love is at the center of everything: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5) A sense of joy and laughter: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6) An experience of great emotional intensity: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7) A great increase in my understanding and knowledge: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

	1	2	3	4		Never In my Life	Once or Twice	Several Times	Often
8) A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it:						1	2	3	4
9) A sense of a new life or living in a new world:						1	2	3	4
10) A confidence in my own personal survival:						1	2	3	4
11) A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me:						1	2	3	4
12) The sense that all the universe is alive:						1	2	3	4
13) The sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am:						1	2	3	4
14) A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical:						1	2	3	4
15) A sensation of warmth or fire:						1	2	3	4
16) A sense of being alone:						1	2	3	4
17) A loss of concern about worldly problems:						1	2	3	4
18) A sense that I was being bathed in light:						1	2	3	4
19) A feeling of desolation:						1	2	3	4

Rosenberg Scale

Please circle the appropriate answer for each question, depending on whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

1. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. At times I think I am no good at all.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. I certainly feel useless at times.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX B: Statistical Results

Descriptive Statistics

Demographics/Greeley Question/Mystical Question/Rosenberg Scale

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	Filter	<none>
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	N of Rows in Working Data File	61
Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User-defined missing values are treated as missing.
	Cases Used	Statistics for each pair of variables are based on all the cases with valid data for that pair.
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Resources	Elapsed Time	0:00:00.05

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Age	72.87	8.480	60
Gender	1.50	.504	60
Years in Agriculture	36.75	22.738	60
Years in Education	11.72	2.218	60
Greeley Question	1.63	.843	60

Correlations

		Age	Gender	Years in Agriculture	Years in Education	Greeley Question
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-.040	-.080	-.299(*)	-.111
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.764	.543	.021	.397
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.040	1	-.174	.220	.159
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.764	.	.184	.092	.224
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Years in Agriculture	Pearson Correlation	-.080	-.174	1	.156	.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.543	.184	.	.234	.971
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Years in Education	Pearson Correlation	-.299(*)	.220	.156	1	.025
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.092	.234	.	.849
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Greeley Question	Pearson Correlation	-.111	.159	.005	.025	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.397	.224	.971	.849	.
	N	60	60	60	60	60

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Mystical Experience	1.32	.469	60
Greeley Question	1.63	.843	60

		Mystical Experience	Greeley Question
Mystical Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.384(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002

		Mystical Experience	Age	Gender	Years in Agriculture	Years in Education
Mystical Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.079	.107	.089	-.059
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.549	.414	.501	.655
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Age	Pearson Correlation	.079	1	-.040	-.080	-.299(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.549	.	.764	.543	.021
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.107	-.040	1	-.174	.220
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.414	.764	.	.184	.092
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Years in Agriculture	Pearson Correlation	.089	-.080	-.174	1	.156
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.501	.543	.184	.	.234
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Years in Education	Pearson Correlation	-.059	-.299(*)	.220	.156	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.655	.021	.092	.234	.
	N	60	60	60	60	60

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

		Greeley Question	Rosenberg Score	Modified Rosenberg Score
Greeley Question	Pearson Correlation	1	-.091	-.032
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.489	.811
	N	60	60	60
Rosenberg Score	Pearson Correlation	-.091	1	.980(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.489	.	.000
	N	60	60	60
Modified Rosenberg Score	Pearson Correlation	-.032	.980(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.811	.000	.
	N	60	60	60

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Descriptive Statistics

Greeley Descriptor Items

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Greeley Question	1.63	.843	60
A feeling of deep and profound peace.	2.53	1.171	60
A certainty that all things would work out for the good.	3.25	1.068	60
Sense of my own need to contribute to others.	3.58	.809	60
A conviction that love is at the center of everything.	3.57	.945	60
Sense of joy and laughter.	3.73	.578	60
An experience of great emotional intensity.	3.03	.974	60
A great increase in my understanding and knowledge.	3.07	1.006	60
A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it.	2.72	1.223	60
A sense of new life or living in a new world.	2.07	1.118	60
A confidence in my own personal survival.	3.55	.852	60
A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me.	2.10	1.003	60
The sense that all the universe is alive.	2.87	1.268	60
The sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am.	1.95	.999	60
A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical.	2.37	1.207	60
A sensation of warmth or fire.	2.53	1.186	60
A sense of being alone.	2.63	1.164	60
A loss of concern about worldly problems.	2.03	1.089	60
A sense that I was being bathed in light.	1.63	.882	60
A feeling of desolation.	1.87	.999	60

Correlations – Greeley Question and Descriptor Items

		Greeley Question
Greeley Question	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	60
A feeling of deep and profound peace.	Pearson Correlation	.287(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026
	N	60
A certainty that all things would work out for the good.	Pearson Correlation	-.028
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.830
	N	60
Sense of my own need to contribute to others.	Pearson Correlation	-.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.550
	N	60
A conviction that love is at the center of everything.	Pearson Correlation	.244
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.060
	N	60
Sense of joy and laughter.	Pearson Correlation	.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.765
	N	60
An experience of great emotional intensity.	Pearson Correlation	.180
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.168
	N	60
A great increase in my understanding and knowledge.	Pearson Correlation	.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.406
	N	60
A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it.	Pearson Correlation	.161
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.220
	N	60
A sense of new life or living in a new world.	Pearson Correlation	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.455
	N	60
A confidence in my own personal survival.	Pearson Correlation	.050
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.707

	N	60
A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me.	Pearson Correlation	.264(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041
	N	60
The sense that all the universe is alive.	Pearson Correlation	.160
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.223
	N	60
The sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am.	Pearson Correlation	.320(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013
	N	60
A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical.	Pearson Correlation	.218
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.095
	N	60
A sensation of warmth or fire.	Pearson Correlation	.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.385
	N	60
A sense of being alone.	Pearson Correlation	.275(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033
	N	60
A loss of concern about worldly problems.	Pearson Correlation	.124
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.344
	N	60
A sense that I was being bathed in light.	Pearson Correlation	.112
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.392
	N	60
A feeling of desolation.	Pearson Correlation	.263(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042
	N	60

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations – Mystical Experience Question and Descriptor Items

		Mystical Experience
Mystical Experience	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	60
A feeling of deep and profound peace.	Pearson Correlation	.212
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.104
	N	60
A certainty that all things would work out for the good.	Pearson Correlation	.076
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.563
	N	60
Sense of my own need to contribute to others.	Pearson Correlation	-.048
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.713
	N	60
A conviction that love is at the center of everything.	Pearson Correlation	.085
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.517
	N	60
Sense of joy and laughter.	Pearson Correlation	.004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.975
	N	60
An experience of great emotional intensity.	Pearson Correlation	.199
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.127
	N	60
A great increase in my understanding and knowledge.	Pearson Correlation	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.456
	N	60
A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it.	Pearson Correlation	.130
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.324
	N	60
A sense of new life or living in a new world.	Pearson Correlation	.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.671
	N	60
A confidence in my own personal survival.	Pearson Correlation	-.019
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.885
	N	60

A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me.	Pearson Correlation	.148
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.260
	N	60
The sense that all the universe is alive.	Pearson Correlation	.186
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.155
	N	60
The sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am.	Pearson Correlation	.251
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.053
	N	60
A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical.	Pearson Correlation	.181
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.167
	N	60
A sensation of warmth or fire.	Pearson Correlation	-.035
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.793
	N	60
A sense of being alone.	Pearson Correlation	.403(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	60
A loss of concern about worldly problems.	Pearson Correlation	.244
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.060
	N	60
A sense that I was being bathed in light.	Pearson Correlation	.162
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.215
	N	60
A feeling of desolation.	Pearson Correlation	.200
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.125
	N	60

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations – Score on Rosenberg Scale and Descriptor Items

		Rosenberg Score	Modified Rosenberg Score
Rosenberg Score	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 . 60	.980(**) .000 60
Modified Rosenberg Score	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.980(**) .000 60	1 . 60
A feeling of deep and profound peace.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.330(*) .010 60	.351(**) .006 60
A certainty that all things would work out for the good.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.257(*) .047 60	.273(*) .035 60
Sense of my own need to contribute to others.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.257(*) .048 60	.235 .071 60
A conviction that love is at the center of everything.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.059 .655 60	.098 .456 60
Sense of joy and laughter.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.562(**) .000 60	.555(**) .000 60
An experience of great emotional intensity.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.151 .249 60	.154 .240 60
A great increase in my understanding and knowledge.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.420(**) .001 60	.409(**) .001 60
A sense of the unity of everything and	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.097 .463	.084 .521

my own part in it.	N	60	60
A sense of new life or living in a new world.	Pearson Correlation	.058	.045
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.660	.733
	N	60	60
A confidence in my own personal survival.	Pearson Correlation	.465(**)	.471(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	60	60
A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me.	Pearson Correlation	-.141	-.112
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.281	.396
	N	60	60
The sense that all the universe is alive.	Pearson Correlation	.013	-.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.921	.799
	N	60	60
The sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am.	Pearson Correlation	-.391(**)	-.364(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.004
	N	60	60
A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical.	Pearson Correlation	.221	.240
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.090	.064
	N	60	60
A sensation of warmth or fire.	Pearson Correlation	.209	.245
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.109	.059
	N	60	60
A sense of being alone.	Pearson Correlation	-.126	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.339	.601
	N	60	60
A loss of concern about worldly problems.	Pearson Correlation	-.036	-.047
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.787	.724
	N	60	60
A sense that I was being bathed in light.	Pearson Correlation	.078	.086
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.551	.513
	N	60	60
A feeling of desolation.	Pearson Correlation	-.232	-.159
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.075	.226
	N	60	60

Correlations – Demographic Variables and Descriptor Items

		Age	Gender	Years in. Agriculture	Years of Education
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-.040	-.080	-.299(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.764	.543	.021
	N	60	60	60	60
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.040	1	-.174	.220
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.764	.	.184	.092
	N	60	60	60	60
Years in Agriculture	Pearson Correlation	-.080	-.174	1	.156
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.543	.184	.	.234
	N	60	60	60	60
Years in Education	Pearson Correlation	-.299(*)	.220	.156	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.092	.234	.
	N	60	60	60	60
A feeling of deep and profound peace.	Pearson Correlation	-.203	.373(**)	.071	.196
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.121	.003	.588	.133
	N	60	60	60	60
A certainty that all things would work out for the good.	Pearson Correlation	-.200	.299(*)	.008	.174
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.125	.020	.955	.185
	N	60	60	60	60
Sense of my own need to contribute to others.	Pearson Correlation	-.159	.104	-.112	.065
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.225	.429	.395	.620
	N	60	60	60	60
A conviction that love is at the center of everything.	Pearson Correlation	-.238	.391(**)	-.178	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.067	.002	.174	.402
	N	60	60	60	60
Sense of joy and laughter.	Pearson Correlation	-.125	.000	.103	-.113
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.342	1.000	.433	.391
	N	60	60	60	60
An experience of great emotional intensity.	Pearson Correlation	-.398(**)	.242	-.124	.224
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.063	.347	.085
	N	60	60	60	60
A great increase in my understanding and knowledge.	Pearson Correlation	-.192	.100	-.177	.077
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.142	.446	.176	.559
	N	60	60	60	60
A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it.	Pearson Correlation	-.226	.096	-.054	.139
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.082	.465	.683	.291
	N	60	60	60	60
A sense of new life or living in a new world.	Pearson Correlation	-.046	.361(**)	-.272(*)	.124
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.730	.005	.035	.345
	N	60	60	60	60
A confidence in my own	Pearson Correlation	-.140	.099	.249	.093

personal survival.	Sig. (2-tailed)	.287	.454	.055	.481
	N	60	60	60	60
A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me.	Pearson Correlation	-.010	.034	-.067	.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.937	.799	.610	.498
	N	60	60	60	60
The sense that all the universe is alive.	Pearson Correlation	-.140	.397(**)	.022	.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.285	.002	.866	.690
	N	60	60	60	60
The sensation that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am.	Pearson Correlation	.031	.118	-.115	-.007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.813	.370	.383	.961
	N	60	60	60	60
A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical.	Pearson Correlation	-.143	.111	.094	.134
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.277	.397	.474	.306
	N	60	60	60	60
A sensation of warmth or fire.	Pearson Correlation	-.374(**)	.255(*)	-.156	.104
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.049	.234	.431
	N	60	60	60	60
A sense of being alone.	Pearson Correlation	.150	-.058	.005	-.028
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.254	.661	.967	.833
	N	60	60	60	60
A loss of concern about worldly problems.	Pearson Correlation	.261(*)	.278(*)	.074	-.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	.032	.576	.441
	N	60	60	60	60
A sense that I was being bathed in light.	Pearson Correlation	-.027	.190	-.179	.085
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.838	.145	.172	.520
	N	60	60	60	60
A feeling of desolation.	Pearson Correlation	-.166	.101	-.037	.128
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.205	.443	.782	.330
	N	60	60	60	60

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX C: Interview Results

Interviews From Subjects Reporting Only a Significant Experience

#1 "When I found my wife. She kept turning me down to get married. I kept bugging her and bugging her." Her family was on my side so she decided to marry me. That really made me happy. Just felt like a dream come true because she was so much different from my first wife. To my first wife I was an old man. My current wife is just three months younger than my first wife but she never looked at me like that.

"Every time I look at the stars I stand there and wonder why. Why is there a little dipper and a big dipper?"

.....

#2 We had a female dog in heat and a Great Dane came to visit. I yelled for it to go away but it was threatening. I started praying real hard, then turned and walked away. "I really felt like there was someone there keeping it from attacking me." His name was Caesar. That was my most vivid experience. "That's when I knew it wasn't in my hands that was going to take care of the situation." I was running a day care home. I had six toddlers under the age of three when this happened. I yelled at them and told them to get up to the front door and wait on me.

.....

#4 Grabbing my wife I guess and having the kids. Being able to work and be a good help. I've had a pretty full normal life. I think of my life as about average. Good health - A good place to sleep. Never really wanted for anything you have to have. You can't really beat that.

.....

#5 The worst thing I have ever experienced was the death of my Granddaughter. That's the worst thing that ever happened to me. The best thing was when I met my husband and we were married. We had our 61st anniversary and you just can't hardly beat that.

At times since my granddaughter as been gone I have imagined I heard her voice.

.....

#6 The day I married my wife. It was a change in my life. I'd never lived anywhere but at home. I was going to start a home. It was quite a step for me. I had everything pictured in my mind. Things weren't just exactly what I thought they'd be though. I'd had visions of how the house would be....

.....

#7 I had four grandmothers pass away the same year. We haven't had many serious things in our life to happen really. We've been real fortunate.

.....

#8 Living to be eighty, I guess. Can't think of anything particular. Just kind of plodded along. Living to be eighty and nobody shooting me.

.....

#11 One night after my wife had passed away, maybe two or three weeks after she was gone, I woke up in a startle one morning like she was standing beside my bed and she says, "good-bye, I'm going to see my grandma."

.....

#12 When I was in the Navy, in South America gaining experiences with people and places. I've remembered them all my life.

I've had some spiritual experiences too. I've been rather surprised at how prayers were answered. Things like someone getting well when they shouldn't have.

One time in a storm I had a pet chicken locked away from the others. I stayed awake all night worrying that that chicken would be drowned. In the morning that little naked chicken was running all around, "peep, peep." I knew that prayers had been answered. You see the shelter was an old mailbox with both ends open so the chicken didn't have much protection.

Many times I've felt close to a powerful spiritual force. A light distracted me and made me starting thinking about my life. The light seemed to shape itself into a cross, which was rather amazing.

.....

#13 I lost my sister with brain cancer. We traveled a lot and were together all the time. I lost my husband with cancer too. He suffered for three years.

.....

#14 I was driving by myself and it was getting near dusk. My car started sputtering – missing. I said a quick prayer and the car was fine. It went on. The lord heard my prayer.

When I'm reading the bible and it's a suggested scripture, sometimes it falls to the right chapter and verse.

.....

#15 When I lost my mother. She died of brain cancer. She was all I had and when I lost her that was it.

.....

#16 I could see this big long tunnel and I was going down it. I don't know if I was floating or what. I was going down it. I don't know if I died or what. I was probably in High School when it happened. I just remember moving down the tunnel.

.....

#20 When I won at Las Vegas. I won \$2500. I thought that was pretty cool. I was playing the Elvis machine and I said "Elvis be good to me." I talked to Elvis and he talked back.

.....

#22 Family life I guess. I'm very thankful I can walk. I'm glad to have my husband, my son, and some grandchildren.

.....

#23 Something I'll never forget is when I had blood clots go through my heart and into my lungs. I just feel kind of lucky that I'm here. When the clots came I had terrible chest pain and I couldn't get enough air. I'd had bypass surgery three weeks previous to that.

.....

#25 My family. My parents and my kids. My childhood. Living on a farm. We were just happy kids.

.....

#27 The birth of my children. Also, when I got married. I was so happy. But the most significant is having my boys because I was so excited. Both of us were.

.....

#29 What hit me the hardest, I got left alone with two kids to raise in the days where there were no jobs for women.

When I paint, I'm in another world. I'm oblivious to what's around me. I get in to the painting. One time I was painting a man with a bucket and the next think I knew I was worrying the paint in the bucket was going to get on his pants. That's just in the painting. It isn't true really.

.....

#30 My marriage – we had fifty-four wonderful years together.

.....

#32 When I became a Christian. It's the thing I go back to more often than anything. I was fourteen; it's been a long time. It's overwhelming at the moment. You don't feel as though you touch the ground for a few days. I didn't have to worry about hell anymore. Christians will be judged when they get there but the wicked are already condemned.

I had a dream one time that I think had some meaning. I had bypass surgery in 1983. In 1985 they said I was plugged up again but they didn't do surgery.

The dream indicated it would be a good life. What I was doing was skating barefooted down a blacktop hill. No pain, it was easy all the way down. At the end I got off the side and it was a little bit rough in the gravel.

It has been easy these last twenty years and I expect the last couple days may be a little bit rough.

.....

#39 I don't know.

.....

#40 My service in the navy. I was in two years during WWII. Just being able to serve and be away from my family and on my own. I went to live on the East Coast with the navy.

.....

#42 Family. Good family. I have seven kids, seventeen grandkids and six great grandkids.

.....

#43 I've had so many experiences that nothing really stands out.

.....

#45 Going to work in the bank. I never thought I'd do something like that.

Meeting Mr. Right.

.....

#46 When we got married. One of those things I thought would never happen to me and all of a sudden it did.

I enjoy the football games and the kids and the school. I enjoy my work and I always did. I was always trying to learn something new.

.....

#47 When I went through a divorce. The loss of self-esteem when you go through a divorce. It makes a person feel like they're a failure in some way or another.

I do believe I've got a guardian angel. I wouldn't call that mystical though. I've had a lot of near misses. I fell off the top of a thirty-foot wall one time. A guy standing down there bent over broke my fall. All I got were bruises.

A friend was driving and we raced a train to the crossing. We got missed by about ten feet. I figure ten feet is as good as a mile.

.....

#57 When my wife had heart surgery. It was very rough. I was trying to work, see her, and sleep. It wasn't easy.

.....

#59 None stand out in my mind.

Interviews from those reporting both a Mystical Experience measured by a positive response to the Mystical Experience Question and Numinous Experience as Measured by Positive Response to the Greeley Question:

#3 It is sort of a repeated experience. I always feel like I'm in another place. I feel like it's a good place. I feel like it's a doorway to somewhere. I can see it, but I can't go there. I can't go through the doorway. If I could go further I would see things, I would know things. I always have the feeling this is a place that would be accessible to everyone if they were willing to go there.

.....

#9 It was in 1972 or 73. I had a big farming operation. One of the guys who worked for me was very superstitious. He was cultivating potatoes and came upon an area about twenty feet around. This area had no vegetation and it was hard and flat. There were five footprints leading away from the area and then they disappeared. They were like kids shoes. Burned out. It was quite strange. Everything around the ring was very green. The ring looked like white sand with a thick crust. The ring could have been formed by a lighting flash, but what explains the prints? That other guy saw them and I saw them with my own eyes.

Every once in a while I feel that there's someone looking over my shoulder. It raises the hair on the back of my neck. It feels like there's a presence. I don't think its God. I think it's mother, dad, or granddad. Someone back in my family who's passed away. We're all very close. It usually happens when I'm around by myself.

These are two of the highlights of what I've felt. I never told anyone.

.....

#10 We had a bad marriage for forty-three years. He left for vacation with another lady. I filed for divorce while he was gone and he moved out. Our anniversary was July 4th. At 11:00 on the 4th I got a call from his lady friend telling me that my husband was bad. I went up to their house. He had a heart attack and was lying on the floor. The paramedics were there and they life-flighted him to the hospital. I was at the hospital for one hour and he had died. I started seeing a therapist and went to church. Between the therapist and God I came out of a shell I'd been in for many years. I met my current husband a year and a half later. We've been tremendous happy.

.....

#17 I was in bed one night. I don't know if I quit breathing or not. When I woke up, my cat was on my chest pumping as hard as it could. It felt as if I was coming out of a big dark pipe as I came to. It was like I was coming out of a dark hole.

One other time, I was working in the rock quarry during the depression. A man came up to me and I knew exactly what he was going to say and what I was going to answer. It was like I'd been there before.

.....

#19 I feel like there's someone around me because they play with my eyebrows and my hair. I feel like my mom and dad are around me all the time.

One time I was driving to work in Olathe and I felt somebody take hold of the back of my seat and pull himself forward. I knew it was my dad.

We saw my dad one time. We were coming to the house and there was someone standing in the door with a white shirt on and I knew it was him.

When I was getting ready for my open-heart surgery mom and dad came to me in a dream. I was down at the farm we used to live on. They were right above me in the driveway. I asked if I was going to go with them and they said, "No, I had to come back. They'd come get me when the file was complete or full." I saw a bright light and they were standing on some ice or something.

One night lying in my bed, it felt like my body was floating out of my physical form. It was like I was in a different world. It's hard to explain.

.....

#24 Someone calls on the phone when you're thinking of them or you run into someone right after thinking of them.

In WWII the army car pulled into our driveway and I knew exactly what it was. Of course, it was very unusual for an army car to be in our neighborhood.

.....

#26 I can't describe it. I had a nervous breakdown and I needed help. God lifted me up. I needed help and I got it.

.....

#28 I was in the hospital. They couldn't get my heart regulated. They said I almost kicked the bucket. While this was happening, it seemed like I was just floating in air more or less. My head seemed to be working but I just couldn't move any part of my body. I wasn't excited or anything. I was just as calm as could be.

When you join the church and give yourself to God, you have a mystical experience. At least you are supposed to – I did. I felt more at ease.

When you marry, all those things change your life.

.....

#33 My son died when he was eleven. One morning I felt like I woke up and he was standing there by the bed. He told me it was time for me to go with him. I told him I couldn't because his sister needed me. I could see my mom and my husband's mom. Then they just left. They went up the hall like they were chattering away, but I never heard a sound. I only heard my son. As soon as it happened and they were gone I got up and wrote it in the baby book so I would know when it happened.

After my ex-husband died a year ago I had an encounter. Nothing was said, but I knew it was him. I could smell him and I could see his hands. His hands were just so big.

Sometimes I feel like my Dad's close because I smell smoke and he smoked a lot.

.....

#36 Before my father died he told me he wouldn't be around much longer. He's talked to me a couple of times after he died about how I should continue my life.

At night, lying in bed before sleep, I've felt like he was talking to me. It stayed with me but it doesn't feel as strong today as it did at that point.

.....

#37 It happened at a time when I was experiencing a tremendous amount of stress with my job. I was close to the age where my mother had a heart attack. I was afraid I would have a heart attack. My mother came to me in the middle of the night and said, "You're going to be okay. It's not your time." Basically, I know my mother was a very strong spiritual woman. It was like she was sent to tell me.

From time to time I have felt like as I'm going through something -- that I have dreamed of it. That I'm going through it again. It makes me feel okay, like this is part of the plan for my life. When this has happened it has been things that are for the better.

.....

#50 My mystical experience was during my open-heart surgery. I could hear everything. Pretty soon there were all kinds of noises going on. I heard someone say, "Somebody's got to go tell the family. We've got a feeling...." I was in a big light. Everything was going to be so nice.

I went with them to the room where the family was waiting. I went right with them. That was quite a ways so I knew I had to be out of my body. The family started

crying and I thought this might be good for me, but what about them. I started fighting a little bit.

I heard a saw, and later on I found out that's how they did it. They sawed right into me. I've been back fifteen years.

.....

#51 When I had my heart attack. I've had three. They had to get me down there in a hurry and do surgery. It just happened in a hurry. My heart attack was the most significant surgery. I've had two knee surgeries and a knee replacement.

.....

#54 I can't explain. Sometimes just day-to-day stuff.

.....

#55 When I was saved. I just felt the lord's intervention at that time. I just felt different.

.....

#60 I had a situation when I was on the farm. I was told the farm we lived on didn't have any water. I asked myself if Christ was still working miracles. I figured he was so I got myself a posthole digger and started digging a well. The end of the story is we found water.

That water wasn't just we were lucky. I got down to where the well diggers had stopped. It was solid rock and you couldn't get through it. I was crying. My hands were raw. Mom said not to get despondent. She was going to mass to pray.

My dad dreamed we dropped something in the well and got water. So that's what we did. We dropped a rock in the well and we got water. All the neighbors laughed at us. They said we couldn't find water but we did any way.

.....

Interviews from those subjects reporting only a Mystical Experience while answering "Never in My Life" to the Greeley Question:

#18 When my husband died. I kept on working but it was hard. It got too lonesome. He and I were always together when he was alive.

.....

#52 I've had several mystical experiences. I was in my house one day and I fell sound asleep in my chair. While I was asleep I saw a vision. I saw a bad car wreck. I prayed and asked God to protect my family. The next morning I got a phone call. My boy had been in a bad car wreck. A truck came off the highway and lost its brakes. I seen that all. The car bounced off it and my boy was not hurt.

.....

#53 I had an aneurysm and made it thought it. I was lucky to make it.

.....

#58 I've been saved. I can't see much difference though. I did it for my wife and kids. It made a difference in some ways but I really was never a strong church member.

Interviews from those subjects reporting only a Numinous Experience as measured by a positive response to the Greeley Question and a negative response to the mystical experience question:

#21 I went to a Catholic School and the priest treated us three protestant boys like we were Catholic kids. He taught us mass and everything. It was a real turning point for me that has always stuck with me.

When I met mama and we got married and I took my instructions and everything. Got married and through trials and tribulations we made it this far. That's what makes a life.

.....

#31 My most significant experiences were back in childhood.

.....

#34 When I accepted Christ as my savior. I was in third grade and it was quite an experience for a child that age. I felt I understood everything and that Christ had died for me. I still feel that way. That's the heat part.

.....

#35 I feel like a powerful spiritual force is lifting me out of my self in my nightmares. I'm in a funeral home in a casket. My friends and relatives that passed away are visiting me. I see friends, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. I lie in the casket and look up and see them. It's pretty intense. I woke the wife up one night and asked her if I was still alive. I've had several dreams that way since I had the heart attack.

.....

#38 It was church. Something I never witnessed. I was given some strength. You don't forget it, for sure. The power in it. I experienced the power of God within me. They sort of bring it out. It is just power. You don't have the words, but you have the feeling. It was good to witness that. It was about fifteen years ago.

.....

#41 I went through a drastic change in outward character. I went from being an introvert to an extrovert. I realized if you want friends you have to be willing to be a friend.

I nearly died. There was no pain. I don't even remember falling down. My heart just plain quit. The next-door neighbors found me. I was very fortunate how things worked out. It was very fortunate. The young man had taken CPR. My chest was sore for seven weeks, but I lived.

.....

#44 I used to go walking at night in the sticks in Southern Missouri. There are panthers there. One time I heard one screaming. I heard a voice saying everything would be all right. It told me not to be scared, to be calm. After that I felt calm. I knew nothing would touch me that night. After that I didn't hear the cat but I always wondered to this day who was talking.

.....

#48 My father died at age 70. He just fell over dead. It was such a shock. I feel like I have some power because I was just able to take over at the time. Someone was helping me because I was able to do it. Somebody was propping me up and helping me until my brother could come back and we could do it together.

My divorce. It was unexpected to me and I feel like I handled it very well at the time.

My husband and I. We were drawn together from our experiences. We became good friends and then we got married. Somebody had to have a hand in getting us together.

.....

#49 I was driving a truck and I fell asleep at a road detour on the turnpike. Just as I fell asleep something called my name. Whatever it was, it woke me up and there was an orange cone right in front of the truck. I swerved and

When I was driving the truck it felt like I had someone with me lots of times. It gives you a wonderful feeling.

One time I was working in a rock quarry. The told me to put the lime in the middle of the pile. The pile caved of and the truck and I went down fifteen or twenty feet. If somebody hadn't been looking out for me that could have killed me right there.

.....

#56 When I read the bible, I compare it to my own self. I don't think I've been lifted out of my self. I don't know what that would be.

Ten years ago in Florida, I stepped off a step and broke my knee. Here I was in the hospital and I couldn't do what I wanted to do.

Categories for Interviews

1. Unity, or visceral awareness of a Divine Source or Knowledge. This refers to any classical mystical experiences that include union with a divine source. I also thought it useful to open up the category to allow for awareness of divine source or knowledge, even if union isn't achieved.
2. Clairvoyance/ Visions/ Receiving knowledge or prediction of the future. This is a category researched by the GSS. This refers to anyone who receives knowledge, prediction, or sight into distant events or the future.
3. Synchronicity or Answered Prayers – whether in lay or religious terms, this refers to those experiences where something is needed or asked for and appears in a way that seems miraculous or beyond chance to the person involved.
4. Out of Body Experiences – any event where the subject describes leaving or being out of his or her body.
5. Near Death Experiences – this type of experiences are well documented by people like Raymond Moody and P.M.H. Atwater. I am referring to experiences in the tradition they have written about.
6. Religious Experiences – any experience related to organized religion or the church. In this category I include things like being saved, becoming Christian, communions, wedding ceremonies, etc. It refers to any experience related to the rituals of organized religion.
7. Déjà vu – This is a category from the GSS and thus I included it. This includes experiences where the subject feels like this has happened before or they have dreamed of this event.
8. Nature related mystical awe – a response to the wonders of nature.
9. Contact with the dead – this is another category from the GSS. It is also a category that was reported a number of times. This includes having someone who has died speak to the subject, be seen by the subject, touch the subject, provide knowledge to the subject, etc.
10. Personal illness or accident – this category is often listed as a trigger to mystical experience or as a significant experience in the life of the subject.

11. Loss (including both death and divorce) or illness of a loved one – this was a repeated theme given the age of my population.

12. Finding a partner – included in this category are meeting a spouse, getting married, etc. This was often included among the most significant experiences.

13. Family life – included in this category are things like having a family, spending time with family, grandchildren, etc. This population puts a high value on family and this category was a repeated theme, especially for those talking about their most significant experiences.

14. Work/Accomplishments – included in this category is anything related to accomplishment, winning, joining the military, working, farming, etc.

15. Survival/ good health – several participants felt their most significant experiences had to do with surviving, being here, achieving a given age, etc.

16. No response or unclassified – several subjects couldn't think of a significant experience or gave experiences that didn't fit into a repeated theme.

Interviews by Category

(Coders were instructed to put each interview into as many categories as seemed appropriate.)

Unity With a Divine Source

Two Coders categorized as Unity with a Divine Source:

#12 When I was in the Navy, in South America gaining experiences with people and places. I've remembered them all my life.

I've had some spiritual experiences too. I've been rather surprised at how prayers were answered. Things like someone getting well when they shouldn't have.

One time in a storm I had a pet chicken locked away from the others. I stayed awake all night worrying that that chicken would be drowned. In the morning that little naked chicken was running all around, "peep, peep." I knew that prayers had been answered. You see the shelter was an old mailbox with both ends open so the chicken didn't have much protection.

Many times I've felt close to a powerful spiritual force. A light distracted me and made me starting thinking about my life. The light seemed to shape itself into a cross, which was rather amazing.

.....

#26 I can't describe it. I had a nervous breakdown and I needed help. God lifted me up. I needed help and I got it.

.....

One Coder categorized as Unity with a Divine Source:

#2 We had a female dog in heat and a Great Dane came to visit. I yelled for it to go away but it was threatening. I started praying real hard, then turned and walked away. "I really felt like there was someone there keeping it from attacking me." His name was Caesar. That was my most vivid experience. "That's when I knew it wasn't in my hands that was going to take care of the situation." I was running a day care home. I had six

toddlers under the age of three when this happened. I yelled at them and told them to get up to the front door and wait on me.

.....

#6 The day I married my wife. It was a change in my life. I'd never lived anywhere but at home. I was going to start a home. It was quite a step for me. I had everything pictured in my mind. Things weren't just exactly what I thought they'd be though. I'd had visions of how the house would be....

.....

#10 We had a bad marriage for forty-three years. He left for vacation with another lady. I filed for divorce while he was gone and he moved out. Our anniversary was July 4th. At 11:00 on the 4th I got a call from his lady friend telling me that my husband was bad. I went up to their house. He had a heart attack and was lying on the floor. The paramedics were there and they life-flighted him to the hospital. I was at the hospital for one hour and he had died. I started seeing a therapist and went to church. Between the therapist and God I came out of a shell I'd been in for many years. I met my current husband a year and a half later. We've been tremendous happy.

.....

#14 I was driving by myself and it was getting near dusk. My car started sputtering – missing. I said a quick prayer and the car was fine. It went on. The lord heard my prayer.

When I'm reading the bible and it's a suggested scripture, sometimes it falls to the right chapter and verse.

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#16 I could see this big long tunnel and I was going down it. I don't know if I was floating or what. I was going down it. I don't know if I died or what. I was probably in High School when it happened. I just remember moving down the tunnel.

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#24 Someone calls on the phone when you're thinking of them or you run into someone right after thinking of them.

In WWII the army car pulled into our driveway and I knew exactly what it was. Of course, it was very unusual for an army car to be in our neighborhood.

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#29 What hit me the hardest, I got left alone with two kids to raise in the days where there were no jobs for women.

When I paint, I'm in another world. I'm oblivious to what's around me. I get in to the painting. One time I was painting a man with a bucket and the next think I knew I was worrying the paint in the bucket was going to get on his pants. That's just in the painting. It isn't true really.

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#32 When I became a Christian. It's the thing I go back to more often than anything. I was fourteen; it's been a long time. It's overwhelming at the moment. You don't feel as though you touch the ground for a few days. I didn't have to worry about hell anymore. Christians will be judged when they get there but the wicked are already condemned.

I had a dream one time that I think had some meaning. I had bypass surgery in 1983. In 1985 they said I was plugged up again but they didn't do surgery.

The dream indicated it would be a good life. What I was doing was skating barefooted down a blacktop hill. No pain, it was easy all the way down. At the end I got off the side and it was a little bit rough in the gravel.

It has been easy these last twenty years and I expect the last couple days may be a little bit rough.

.....

#38 It was church. Something I never witnessed. I was given some strength. You don't forget it, for sure. The power in it. I experienced the power of God within me. They sort of bring it out. It is just power. You don't have the words, but you have the feeling. It was good to witness that. It was about fifteen years ago.

.....

#48 My father died at age 70. He just fell over dead. It was such a shock. I feel like I have some power because I was just able to take over at the time. Someone was helping me because I was able to do it. Somebody was propping me up and helping me until my brother could come back and we could do it together.

My divorce. It was unexpected to me and I feel like I handled it very well at the time.

My husband and I. We were drawn together from our experiences. We became good friends and then we got married. Somebody had to have a hand in getting us together.

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#49 I was driving a truck and I fell asleep at a road detour on the turnpike. Just as I fell asleep something called my name. Whatever it was, it woke me up and there was an orange cone right in front of the truck. I swerved and

When I was driving the truck it felt like I had someone with me lots of times. It gives you a wonderful feeling.

One time I was working in a rock quarry. The told me to put the lime in the middle of the pile. The pile caved of and the truck and I went down fifteen or twenty feet. If somebody hadn't been looking out for me that could have killed me right there.

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#55 When I was saved. I just felt the lord's intervention at that time. I just felt different.

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#56 When I read the bible, I compare it to my own self. I don't think I've been lifted out of my self. I don't know what that would be.

Ten years ago in Florida, I stepped off a step and broke my knee. Here I was in the hospital and I couldn't do what I wanted to do.

Visions/Clairvoyance

All three Coders categorized as Visions/Clairvoyance:

#32 When I became a Christian. It's the thing I go back to more often than anything. I was fourteen; it's been a long time. It's overwhelming at the moment. You don't feel as though you touch the ground for a few days. I didn't have to worry about hell anymore. Christians will be judged when they get there but the wicked are already condemned.

I had a dream one time that I think had some meaning. I had bypass surgery in 1983. In 1985 they said I was plugged up again but they didn't do surgery.

The dream indicated it would be a good life. What I was doing was skating barefooted down a blacktop hill. No pain, it was easy all the way down. At the end I got off the side and it was a little bit rough in the gravel.

It has been easy these last twenty years and I expect the last couple days may be a little bit rough.

.....

Two Coders categorized as Visions/Clairvoyance:

#24 Someone calls on the phone when you're thinking of them or you run into someone right after thinking of them.

In WWII the army car pulled into our driveway and I knew exactly what it was. Of course, it was very unusual for an army car to be in our neighborhood.

.....

#52 I've had several mystical experiences. I was in my house one day and I fell sound asleep in my chair. While I was asleep I saw a vision. I saw a bad car wreck. I prayed and asked God to protect my family. The next morning I got a phone call. My boy had been in a bad car wreck. A truck came off the highway and lost its brakes. I seen that all. The car bounced off it and my boy was not hurt.

.....

One Coder categorized as Visions/Clairvoyance:

#3 It is sort of a repeated experience. I always feel like I'm in another place. I feel like it's a good place. I feel like it's a doorway to somewhere. I can see it, but I can't go

there. I can't go through the doorway. If I could go further I would see things, I would know things. I always have the feeling this is a place that would be accessible to everyone if they were willing to go there.

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#5 The worst thing I have ever experienced was the death of my Granddaughter. That's the worst thing that ever happened to me. The best thing was when I met my husband and we were married. We had our 61st anniversary and you just can't hardly beat that.

At times since my granddaughter as been gone I have imagined I heard her voice.

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#6 The day I married my wife. It was a change in my life. I'd never lived anywhere but at home. I was going to start a home. It was quite a step for me. I had everything pictured in my mind. Things weren't just exactly what I thought they'd be though. I'd had visions of how the house would be....

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When I'm reading the bible and it's a suggested scripture, sometimes it falls to the right chapter and verse.

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When I paint, I'm in another world. I'm oblivious to what's around me. I get in to the painting. One time I was painting a man with a bucket and the next think I knew I was worrying the paint in the bucket was going to get on his pants. That's just in the painting. It isn't true really.

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#44 I used to go walking at night in the sticks in Southern Missouri. There are panthers there. One time I heard one screaming. I heard a voice saying everything would be all right. It told me not to be scared, to be calm. After that I felt calm. I knew nothing would touch me that night. After that I didn't hear the cat but I always wondered to this day who was talking.

.....

Synchronicity or Answered Prayers

All three coders categorized as Synchronicity or Answered Prayers:

#2 We had a female dog in heat and a Great Dane came to visit. I yelled for it to go away but it was threatening. I started praying real hard, then turned and walked away. "I really felt like there was someone there keeping it from attacking me." His name was Caesar. That was my most vivid experience. "That's when I knew it wasn't in my hands that was going to take care of the situation." I was running a day care home. I had six toddlers under the age of three when this happened. I yelled at them and told them to get up to the front door and wait on me.

.....

#47 When I went through a divorce. The loss of self-esteem when you go through a divorce. It makes a person feel like they're a failure in some way or another.

I do believe I've got a guardian angel. I wouldn't call that mystical though. I've had a lot of near misses. I fell off the top of a thirty-foot wall one time. A guy standing down there bent over broke my fall. All I got were bruises.

A friend was driving and we raced a train to the crossing. We got missed by about ten feet. I figure ten feet is as good as a mile.

.....

Two Coders categorized as Synchronicity/Answered Prayers:

#12 When I was in the Navy, in South America gaining experiences with people and places. I've remembered them all my life.

I've had some spiritual experiences too. I've been rather surprised at how prayers were answered. Things like someone getting well when they shouldn't have.

One time in a storm I had a pet chicken locked away from the others. I stayed awake all night worrying that that chicken would be drowned. In the morning that little naked chicken was running all around, "peep, peep." I knew that prayers had been answered. You see the shelter was an old mailbox with both ends open so the chicken didn't have much protection.

Many times I've felt close to a powerful spiritual force. A light distracted me and made me starting thinking about my life. The light seemed to shape itself into a cross, which was rather amazing.

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#14 I was driving by myself and it was getting near dusk. My car started sputtering – missing. I said a quick prayer and the car was fine. It went on. The lord heard my prayer.

When I'm reading the bible and it's a suggested scripture, sometimes it falls to the right chapter and verse.

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#1 "When I found my wife. She kept turning me down to get married. I kept bugging her and bugging her." Her family was on my side so she decided to marry me. That really made me happy. Just felt like a dream come true because she was so much different from my first wife. To my first wife I was an old man. My current wife is just three months younger than my first wife but she never looked at me like that.

"Every time I look at the stars I stand there and wonder why. Why is there a little dipper and a big dipper?"

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#3 It is sort of a repeated experience. I always feel like I'm in another place. I feel like it's a good place. I feel like it's a doorway to somewhere. I can see it, but I can't go there. I can't go through the doorway. If I could go further I would see things, I would know things. I always have the feeling this is a place that would be accessible to everyone if they were willing to go there.

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#9 It was in 1972 or 73. I had a big farming operation. One of the guys who worked for me was very superstitious. He was cultivating potatoes and came upon an area about twenty feet around. This area had no vegetation and it was hard and flat. There were five footprints leading away from the area and then they disappeared. They were like kids shoes. Burned out. It was quite strange. Everything around the ring was very green. The ring looked like white sand with a thick crust. The ring could have been formed by a lighting flash, but what explains the prints? That other guy saw them and I saw them with my own eyes.

Every once in a while I feel that there's someone looking over my shoulder. It raises the hair on the back of my neck. It feels like there's a presence. I don't think its

God. I think it's mother, dad, or granddad. Someone back in my family who's passed away. We're all very close. It usually happens when I'm around by myself.

These are two of the highlights of what I've felt. I never told anyone.

.....

#20 When I won at Las Vegas. I won \$2500. I thought that was pretty cool. I was playing the Elvis machine and I said "Elvis be good to me." I talked to Elvis and he talked back.

.....

#24 Someone calls on the phone when you're thinking of them or you run into someone right after thinking of them.

In WWII the army car pulled into our driveway and I knew exactly what it was. Of course, it was very unusual for an army car to be in our neighborhood.

.....

#26 I can't describe it. I had a nervous breakdown and I needed help. God lifted me up. I needed help and I got it.

.....

#44 I used to go walking at night in the sticks in Southern Missouri. There are panthers there. One time I heard one screaming. I heard a voice saying everything would be all right. It told me not to be scared, to be calm. After that I felt calm. I knew nothing would touch me that night. After that I didn't hear the cat but I always wondered to this day who was talking.

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#48 My father died at age 70. He just fell over dead. It was such a shock. I feel like I have some power because I was just able to take over at the time. Someone was helping me because I was able to do it. Somebody was propping me up and helping me until my brother could come back and we could do it together.

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My husband and I. We were drawn together from our experiences. We became good friends and then we got married. Somebody had to have a hand in getting us together.

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When I was driving the truck it felt like I had someone with me lots of times. It gives you a wonderful feeling.

One time I was working in a rock quarry. The told me to put the lime in the middle of the pile. The pile caved of and the truck and I went down fifteen or twenty feet. If somebody hadn't been looking out for me that could have killed me right there.

.....

#60 I had a situation when I was on the farm. I was told the farm we lived on didn't have any water. I asked myself if Christ was still working miracles. I figured he was so I got myself a posthole digger and started digging a well. The end of the story is we found water.

That water wasn't just we were lucky. I got down to where the well diggers had stopped. It was solid rock and you couldn't get through it. I was crying. My hands were raw. Mom said not to get despondent. She was going to mass to pray.

My dad dreamed we dropped something in the well and got water. So that's what we did. We dropped a rock in the well and we got water. All the neighbors laughed at us. They said we couldn't find water but we did any way.

.....

Out of Body Experience

Two Coders categorized as an Out of Body Experience:

#3 It is sort of a repeated experience. I always feel like I'm in another place. I feel like it's a good place. I feel like it's a doorway to somewhere. I can see it, but I can't go there. I can't go through the doorway. If I could go further I would see things, I would know things. I always have the feeling this is a place that would be accessible to everyone if they were willing to go there.

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#19 I feel like there's someone around me because they play with my eyebrows and my hair. I feel like my mom and dad are around me all the time.

One time I was driving to work in Olathe and I felt somebody take hold of the back of my seat and pull himself forward. I knew it was my dad.

We saw my dad one time. We were coming to the house and there was someone standing in the door with a white shirt on and I knew it was him.

When I was getting ready for my open-heart surgery mom and dad came to me in a dream. I was down at the farm we used to live on. They were right above me in the driveway. I asked if I was going to go with them and they said, "No, I had to come back. They'd come get me when the file was complete or full." I saw a bright light and they were standing on some ice or something.

One night lying in my bed, it felt like my body was floating out of my physical form. It was like I was in a different world. It's hard to explain.

.....

#35 I feel like a powerful spiritual force is lifting me out of my self in my nightmares. I'm in a funeral home in a casket. My friends and relatives that passed away are visiting me. I see friends, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. I lie in the casket and look up and see them. It's pretty intense. I woke the wife up one night and asked her if I was still alive. I've had several dreams that way since I had the heart attack.

.....

#50 My mystical experience was during my open-heart surgery. I could hear everything. Pretty soon there were all kinds of noises going on. I heard someone say, "Somebody's got to go tell the family. We've got a feeling..." I was in a big light. Everything was going to be so nice.

I went with them to the room where the family was waiting. I went right with them. That was quite a ways so I knew I had to be out of my body. The family started crying and I thought this might be good for me, but what about them. I started fighting a little bit.

I heard a saw, and later on I found out that's how they did it. They sawed right into me. I've been back fifteen years.

.....

One Coder categorized as an Out of Body Experience:

#16 I could see this big long tunnel and I was going down it. I don't know if I was floating or what. I was going down it. I don't know if I died or what. I was probably in High School when it happened. I just remember moving down the tunnel.

.....

#17 I was in bed one night. I don't know if I quit breathing or not. When I woke up, my cat was on my chest pumping as hard as it could. It felt as if I was coming out of a big dark pipe as I came to. It was like I was coming out of a dark hole.

One other time, I was working in the rock quarry during the depression. A man came up to me and I knew exactly what he was going to say and what I was going to answer. It was like I'd been there before.

.....

#28 I was in the hospital. They couldn't get my heart regulated. They said I almost kicked the bucket. While this was happening, it seemed like I was just floating in air more or less. My head seemed to be working but I just couldn't move any part of my body. I wasn't excited or anything. I was just as calm as could be.

When you join the church and give yourself to God, you have a mystical experience. At least you are supposed to – I did. I felt more at ease.

When you marry, all those things change your life.

.....

Near Death Experience

Two Coders categorized as a Near Death Experience:

#16 I could see this big long tunnel and I was going down it. I don't know if I was floating or what. I was going down it. I don't know if I died or what. I was probably in High School when it happened. I just remember moving down the tunnel.

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When you join the church and give yourself to God, you have a mystical experience. At least you are supposed to – I did. I felt more at ease.

When you marry, all those things change your life.

.....

One Coder categorized as a Near Death Experience:

#41 I went through a drastic change in outward character. I went from being an introvert to an extrovert. I realized if you want friends you have to be willing to be a friend.

I nearly died. There was no pain. I don't even remember falling down. My heart just plain quit. The next-door neighbors found me. I was very fortunate how things worked out. It was very fortunate. The young man had taken CPR. My chest was sore for seven weeks, but I lived.

.....

#50 My mystical experience was during my open-heart surgery. I could hear everything. Pretty soon there were all kinds of noises going on. I heard someone say, "Somebody's got to go tell the family. We've got a feeling...." I was in a big light. Everything was going to be so nice.

I went with them to the room where the family was waiting. I went right with them. That was quite a ways so I knew I had to be out of my body. The family started crying and I thought this might be good for me, but what about them. I started fighting a little bit.

I heard a saw, and later on I found out that's how they did it. They sawed right into me. I've been back fifteen years.

.....

Religious Experience

All Three Coders categorized as a Religious Experience:

#32 When I became a Christian. It's the thing I go back to more often than anything. I was fourteen; it's been a long time. It's overwhelming at the moment. You don't feel as though you touch the ground for a few days. I didn't have to worry about hell anymore. Christians will be judged when they get there but the wicked are already condemned.

I had a dream one time that I think had some meaning. I had bypass surgery in 1983. In 1985 they said I was plugged up again but they didn't do surgery.

The dream indicated it would be a good life. What I was doing was skating barefooted down a blacktop hill. No pain, it was easy all the way down. At the end I got off the side and it was a little bit rough in the gravel.

It has been easy these last twenty years and I expect the last couple days may be a little bit rough.

.....

Two Coders categorized as a Religious Experience:

#21 I went to a Catholic School and the priest treated us three protestant boys like we were Catholic kids. He taught us mass and everything. It was a real turning point for me that has always stuck with me.

When I met mama and we got married and I took my instructions and everything. Got married and through trials and tribulations we made it this far. That's what makes a life.

.....

#28 I was in the hospital. They couldn't get my heart regulated. They said I almost kicked the bucket. While this was happening, it seemed like I was just floating in air more or less. My head seemed to be working but I just couldn't move any part of my body. I wasn't excited or anything. I was just as calm as could be.

When you join the church and give yourself to God, you have a mystical experience. At least you are supposed to – I did. I felt more at ease.

When you marry, all those things change your life.

.....

#34 When I accepted Christ as my savior. I was in third grade and it was quite an experience for a child that age. I felt I understood everything and that Christ had died for me. I still feel that way. That's the heat part.

.....

#38 It was church. Something I never witnessed. I was given some strength. You don't forget it, for sure. The power in it. I experienced the power of God within me. They sort of bring it out. It is just power. You don't have the words, but you have the feeling. It was good to witness that. It was about fifteen years ago.

.....

#58 I've been saved. I can't see much difference though. I did it for my wife and kids. It made a difference in some ways but I really was never a strong church member.

.....

One Coder categorized as a Religious Experience:

#10 We had a bad marriage for forty-three years. He left for vacation with another lady. I filed for divorce while he was gone and he moved out. Our anniversary was July 4th. At 11:00 on the 4th I got a call from his lady friend telling me that my husband was bad. I went up to their house. He had a heart attack and was lying on the floor. The paramedics were there and they life-flighted him to the hospital. I was at the hospital for one hour and he had died. I started seeing a therapist and went to church. Between the therapist and God I came out of a shell I'd been in for many years. I met my current husband a year and a half later. We've been tremendous happy.

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#12 When I was in the Navy, in South America gaining experiences with people and places. I've remembered them all my life.

I've had some spiritual experiences too. I've been rather surprised at how prayers were answered. Things like someone getting well when they shouldn't have.

One time in a storm I had a pet chicken locked away from the others. I stayed awake all night worrying that that chicken would be drowned. In the morning that little naked chicken was running all around, "peep, peep." I knew that prayers had been answered. You see the shelter was an old mailbox with both ends open so the chicken didn't have much protection.

Many times I've felt close to a powerful spiritual force. A light distracted me and made me starting thinking about my life. The light seemed to shape itself into a cross, which was rather amazing.

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#55 When I was saved. I just felt the lord's intervention at that time. I just felt different.

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#56 When I read the bible, I compare it to my own self. I don't think I've been lifted out of my self. I don't know what that would be.

Ten years ago in Florida, I stepped off a step and broke my knee. Here I was in the hospital and I couldn't do what I wanted to do.

.....

Déjà vu

Two Coders categorized as a Déjà vu experience:

#17 I was in bed one night. I don't know if I quit breathing or not. When I woke up, my cat was on my chest pumping as hard as it could. It felt as if I was coming out of a big dark pipe as I came to. It was like I was coming out of a dark hole.

One other time, I was working in the rock quarry during the depression. A man came up to me and I knew exactly what he was going to say and what I was going to answer. It was like I'd been there before.

.....

#37 It happened at a time when I was experiencing a tremendous amount of stress with my job. I was close to the age where my mother had a heart attack. I was afraid I would have a heart attack. My mother came to me in the middle of the night and said, "You're going to be okay. It's not your time." Basically, I know my mother was a very strong spiritual woman. It was like she was sent to tell me.

From time to time I have felt like as I'm going through something -- that I have dreamed of it. That I'm going through it again. It makes me feel okay, like this is part of the plan for my life. When this has happened it has been things that are for the better.

.....

One Coder categorized as a Déjà vu experience:

#3 It is sort of a repeated experience. I always feel like I'm in another place. I feel like it's a good place. I feel like it's a doorway to somewhere. I can see it, but I can't go there. I can't go through the doorway. If I could go further I would see things, I would know things. I always have the feeling this is a place that would be accessible to everyone if they were willing to go there.

Nature Experience

All three Coders categorized as a Nature Experience:

#1 "When I found my wife. She kept turning me down to get married. I kept bugging her and bugging her." Her family was on my side so she decided to marry me. That really made me happy. Just felt like a dream come true because she was so much different from my first wife. To my first wife I was an old man. My current wife is just three months younger than my first wife but she never looked at me like that.

"Every time I look at the stars I stand there and wonder why. Why is there a little dipper and a big dipper?"

.....

One Coder categorized as a Nature Experience:

#9 It was in 1972 or 73. I had a big farming operation. One of the guys who worked for me was very superstitious. He was cultivating potatoes and came upon an area about twenty feet around. This area had no vegetation and it was hard and flat. There were five footprints leading away from the area and then they disappeared. They were like kids shoes. Burned out. It was quite strange. Everything around the ring was very green. The ring looked like white sand with a thick crust. The ring could have been formed by a lighting flash, but what explains the prints? That other guy saw them and I saw them with my own eyes.

Every once in a while I feel that there's someone looking over my shoulder. It raises the hair on the back of my neck. It feels like there's a presence. I don't think its God. I think it's mother, dad, or granddad. Someone back in my family who's passed away. We're all very close. It usually happens when I'm around by myself.

These are two of the highlights of what I've felt. I never told anyone.

.....

Contact with the Dead

All three Coders categorized as Contact with the Dead:

#11 One night after my wife had passed away, maybe two or three weeks after she was gone, I woke up in a startle one morning like she was standing beside my bed and she says, "good-bye, I'm going to see my grandma."

.....

Two Coders categorized as Contact with the Dead:

#5 The worst thing I have ever experienced was the death of my Granddaughter. That's the worst thing that ever happened to me. The best thing was when I met my husband and we were married. We had our 61st anniversary and you just can't hardly beat that.

At times since my granddaughter as been gone I have imagined I heard her voice.

.....

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We saw my dad one time. We were coming to the house and there was someone standing in the door with a white shirt on and I knew it was him.

When I was getting ready for my open-heart surgery mom and dad came to me in a dream. I was down at the farm we used to live on. They were right above me in the driveway. I asked if I was going to go with them and they said, "No, I had to come back. They'd come get me when the file was complete or full." I saw a bright light and they were standing on some ice or something.

One night lying in my bed, it felt like my body was floating out of my physical form. It was like I was in a different world. It's hard to explain.

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#33 My son died when he was eleven. One morning I felt like I woke up and he was standing there by the bed. He told me it was time for me to go with him. I told him I couldn't because his sister needed me. I could see my mom and my husband's mom. Then they just left. They went up the hall like they were chattering away, but I never heard a sound. I only heard my son. As soon as it happened and they were gone I got up and wrote it in the baby book so I would know when it happened.

After my ex-husband died a year ago I had an encounter. Nothing was said, but I knew it was him. I could smell him and I could see his hands. His hands were just so big.

Sometimes I feel like my Dad's close because I smell smoke and he smoked a lot.

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#35 I feel like a powerful spiritual force is lifting me out of my self in my nightmares. I'm in a funeral home in a casket. My friends and relatives that passed away are visiting me. I see friends, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. I lie in the casket and look up and see them. It's pretty intense. I woke the wife up one night and asked her if I was still alive. I've had several dreams that way since I had the heart attack.

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#36 Before my father died he told me he wouldn't be around much longer. He's talked to me a couple of times after he died about how I should continue my life.

At night, lying in bed before sleep, I've felt like he was talking to me. It stayed with me but it doesn't feel as strong today as it did at that point.

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#37 It happened at a time when I was experiencing a tremendous amount of stress with my job. I was close to the age where my mother had a heart attack. I was afraid I would have a heart attack. My mother came to me in the middle of the night and said,

"You're going to be okay. It's not your time." Basically, I know my mother was a very strong spiritual woman. It was like she was sent to tell me.

From time to time I have felt like as I'm going through something -- that I have dreamed of it. That I'm going through it again. It makes me feel okay, like this is part of the plan for my life. When this has happened it has been things that are for the better.

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One Coder categorized as Contact with the Dead:

#28 I was in the hospital. They couldn't get my heart regulated. They said I almost kicked the bucket. While this was happening, it seemed like I was just floating in air more or less. My head seemed to be working but I just couldn't move any part of my body. I wasn't excited or anything. I was just as calm as could be.

When you join the church and give yourself to God, you have a mystical experience. At least you are supposed to – I did. I felt more at ease.

When you marry, all those things change your life.

.....

#44 I used to go walking at night in the sticks in Southern Missouri. There are panthers there. One time I heard one screaming. I heard a voice saying everything would be all right. It told me not to be scared, to be calm. After that I felt calm. I knew nothing would touch me that night. After that I didn't hear the cat but I always wondered to this day who was talking.

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Illness or Accident

All Three Coders categorized as Illness or Accident:

#23 Something I'll never forget is when I had blood clots go through my heart and into my lungs. I just feel kind of lucky that I'm here. When the clots came I had terrible chest pain and I couldn't get enough air. I'd had bypass surgery three weeks previous to that.

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Two Coders categorized as Illness or Accident:

#53 I had an aneurysm and made it thought it. I was lucky to make it.

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#56 When I read the bible, I compare it to my own self. I don't think I've been lifted out of my self. I don't know what that would be.

Ten years ago in Florida, I stepped off a step and broke my knee. Here I was in the hospital and I couldn't do what I wanted to do.

.....

One Coder categorized as Illness or Accident:

#41 I went through a drastic change in outward character. I went from being an introvert to an extrovert. I realized if you want friends you have to be willing to be a friend.

I nearly died. There was no pain. I don't even remember falling down. My heart just plain quit. The next-door neighbors found me. I was very fortunate how things worked out. It was very fortunate. The young man had taken CPR. My chest was sore for seven weeks, but I lived.

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#50 My mystical experience was during my open-heart surgery. I could hear everything. Pretty soon there were all kinds of noises going on. I heard someone say, "Somebody's got to go tell the family. We've got a feeling...." I was in a big light. Everything was going to be so nice.

I went with them to the room where the family was waiting. I went right with them. That was quite a ways so I knew I had to be out of my body. The family started crying and I thought this might be good for me, but what about them. I started fighting a little bit.

I heard a saw, and later on I found out that's how they did it. They sawed right into me. I've been back fifteen years.

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#51 When I had my heart attack. I've had three. They had to get me down there in a hurry and do surgery. It just happened in a hurry. My heart attack was the most significant surgery. I've had two knee surgeries and a knee replacement.

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Loss or Illness of a Loved One

All three Coders categorized as Loss or Illness of a Loved One:

#5 The worst thing I have ever experienced was the death of my Granddaughter. That's the worst thing that ever happened to me. The best thing was when I met my husband and we were married. We had our 61st anniversary and you just can't hardly beat that.

At times since my granddaughter as been gone I have imagined I heard her voice.

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#7 I had four grandmothers pass away the same year. We haven't had many serious things in our life to happen really. We've been real fortunate.

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#13 I lost my sister with brain cancer. We traveled a lot and were together all the time. I lost my husband with cancer too. He suffered for three years.

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#15 When I lost my mother. She died of brain cancer. She was all I had and when I lost her that was it.

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Two Coders categorized as Loss or Illness of a Loved One:

#18 When my husband died. I kept on working but it was hard. It got too lonesome. He and I were always together when he was alive.

.....

#48 My father died at age 70. He just fell over dead. It was such a shock. I feel like I have some power because I was just able to take over at the time. Someone was helping me because I was able to do it. Somebody was propping me up and helping me until my brother could come back and we could do it together.

My divorce. It was unexpected to me and I feel like I handled it very well at the time.

My husband and I. We were drawn together from our experiences. We became good friends and then we got married. Somebody had to have a hand in getting us together.

.....

One Coder categorized as Loss or Illness of a Loved One:

#10 We had a bad marriage for forty-three years. He left for vacation with another lady. I filed for divorce while he was gone and he moved out. Our anniversary was July 4th. At 11:00 on the 4th I got a call from his lady friend telling me that my husband was bad. I went up to their house. He had a heart attack and was lying on the floor. The paramedics were there and they life-flighted him to the hospital. I was at the hospital for one hour and he had died. I started seeing a therapist and went to church. Between the therapist and God I came out of a shell I'd been in for many years. I met my current husband a year and a half later. We've been tremendous happy.

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#11 One night after my wife had passed away, maybe two or three weeks after she was gone, I woke up in a startle one morning like she was standing beside my bed and she says, "good-bye, I'm going to see my grandma."

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#29 What hit me the hardest, I got left alone with two kids to raise in the days where there were no jobs for women.

When I paint, I'm in another world. I'm oblivious to what's around me. I get in to the painting. One time I was painting a man with a bucket and the next think I knew I was worrying the paint in the bucket was going to get on his pants. That's just in the painting. It isn't true really.

.....

#47 When I went through a divorce. The loss of self-esteem when you go through a divorce. It makes a person feel like they're a failure in some way or another.

I do believe I've got a guardian angel. I wouldn't call that mystical though. I've had a lot of near misses. I fell off the top of a thirty-foot wall one time. A guy standing down there bent over broke my fall. All I got were bruises.

A friend was driving and we raced a train to the crossing. We got missed by about ten feet. I figure ten feet is as good as a mile.

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Finding a Partner

All three Coders categorized as Finding a Partner:

#1 "When I found my wife. She kept turning me down to get married. I kept bugging her and bugging her." Her family was on my side so she decided to marry me. That really made me happy. Just felt like a dream come true because she was so much different from my first wife. To my first wife I was an old man. My current wife is just three months younger than my first wife but she never looked at me like that.

"Every time I look at the stars I stand there and wonder why. Why is there a little dipper and a big dipper?"

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#4 Grabbing my wife I guess and having the kids. Being able to work and be a good help. I've had a pretty full normal life. I think of my life as about average. Good health-
- A good place to sleep. Never really wanted for anything you have to have. You can't really beat that.

.....

#6 The day I married my wife. It was a change in my life. I'd never lived anywhere but at home. I was going to start a home. It was quite a step for me. I had everything pictured in my mind. Things weren't just exactly what I thought they'd be though. I'd had visions of how the house would be....

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#30 My marriage – we had fifty-four wonderful years together.

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#45 Going to work in the bank. I never thought I'd do something like that.

Meeting Mr. Right.

.....

#46 When we got married. One of those things I thought would never happen to me and all of a sudden it did.

I enjoy the football games and the kids and the school. I enjoy my work and I always did. I was always trying to learn something new.

Two Coders categorized as Finding a Partner:

#5 The worst thing I have ever experienced was the death of my Granddaughter. That's the worst thing that ever happened to me. The best thing was when I met my husband and we were married. We had our 61st anniversary and you just can't hardly beat that.

At times since my granddaughter as been gone I have imagined I heard her voice.

.....

#21 I went to a Catholic School and the priest treated us three protestant boys like we were Catholic kids. He taught us mass and everything. It was a real turning point for me that has always stuck with me.

When I met mama and we got married and I took my instructions and everything. Got married and through trials and tribulations we made it this far. That's what makes a life.

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#27 The birth of my children. Also, when I got married. I was so happy. But the most significant is having my boys because I was so excited. Both of us were.

.....

#48 My father died at age 70. He just fell over dead. It was such a shock. I feel like I have some power because I was just able to take over at the time. Someone was helping me because I was able to do it. Somebody was propping me up and helping me until my brother could come back and we could do it together.

My divorce. It was unexpected to me and I feel like I handled it very well at the time.

My husband and I. We were drawn together from our experiences. We became good friends and then we got married. Somebody had to have a hand in getting us together.

.....

One Coder categorized as Finding a Partner:

#10 We had a bad marriage for forty-three years. He left for vacation with another lady. I filed for divorce while he was gone and he moved out. Our anniversary was July 4th. At 11:00 on the 4th I got a call from his lady friend telling me that my husband was

bad. I went up to their house. He had a heart attack and was lying on the floor. The paramedics were there and they life-flighted him to the hospital. I was at the hospital for one hour and he had died. I started seeing a therapist and went to church. Between the therapist and God I came out of a shell I'd been in for many years. I met my current husband a year and a half later. We've been tremendous happy.

#28 I was in the hospital. They couldn't get my heart regulated. They said I almost kicked the bucket. While this was happening, it seemed like I was just floating in air more or less. My head seemed to be working but I just couldn't move any part of my body. I wasn't excited or anything. I was just as calm as could be.

When you join the church and give yourself to God, you have a mystical experience. At least you are supposed to – I did. I felt more at ease.

When you marry, all those things change your life.

Family Life

All three Coders Categorized as Family Life:

#22 Family life I guess. I'm very thankful I can walk. I'm glad to have my husband, my son, and some grandchildren.

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#25 My family. My parents and my kids. My childhood. Living on a farm. We were just happy kids.

.....

#27 The birth of my children. Also, when I got married. I was so happy. But the most significant is having my boys because I was so excited. Both of us were.

.....

#42 Family. Good family. I have seven kids, seventeen grandkids and six great grandkids.

.....

Two Coders categorized as Family Life:

#4 Grabbing my wife I guess and having the kids. Being able to work and be a good help. I've had a pretty full normal life. I think of my life as about average. Good health - A good place to sleep. Never really wanted for anything you have to have. You can't really beat that.

.....

One Coder categorized as Family Life:

#5 The worst thing I have ever experienced was the death of my Granddaughter. That's the worst thing that ever happened to me. The best thing was when I met my husband and we were married. We had our 61st anniversary and you just can't hardly beat that.

At times since my granddaughter as been gone I have imagined I heard her voice.

.....

#18 When my husband died. I kept on working but it was hard. It got too lonesome. He and I were always together when he was alive.

.....

#46 When we got married. One of those things I thought would never happen to me and all of a sudden it did.

I enjoy the football games and the kids and the school. I enjoy my work and I always did. I was always trying to learn something new.

.....

Work or Accomplishment

All three Coders categorized as Work or Accomplishment:

#45 Going to work in the bank. I never thought I'd do something like that.

Meeting Mr. Right.

Two Coders categorized as Work or Accomplishment:

#40 My service in the navy. I was in two years during WWII. Just being able to serve and be away from my family and on my own. I went to live on the East Coast with the navy.

One Coder categorized as Work or Accomplishment:

#12 When I was in the Navy, in South America gaining experiences with people and places. I've remembered them all my life.

I've had some spiritual experiences too. I've been rather surprised at how prayers were answered. Things like someone getting well when they shouldn't have.

One time in a storm I had a pet chicken locked away from the others. I stayed awake all night worrying that that chicken would be drowned. In the morning that little naked chicken was running all around, "peep, peep." I knew that prayers had been answered. You see the shelter was an old mailbox with both ends open so the chicken didn't have much protection.

Many times I've felt close to a powerful spiritual force. A light distracted me and made me starting thinking about my life. The light seemed to shape itself into a cross, which was rather amazing.

#14 I was driving by myself and it was getting near dusk. My car started sputtering – missing. I said a quick prayer and the car was fine. It went on. The lord heard my prayer.

When I'm reading the bible and it's a suggested scripture, sometimes it falls to the right chapter and verse.

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#20 When I won at Las Vegas. I won \$2500. I thought that was pretty cool. I was playing the Elvis machine and I said "Elvis be good to me." I talked to Elvis and he talked back.

.....

#29 What hit me the hardest, I got left alone with two kids to raise in the days where there were no jobs for women.

When I paint, I'm in another world. I'm oblivious to what's around me. I get in to the painting. One time I was painting a man with a bucket and the next think I knew I was worrying the paint in the bucket was going to get on his pants. That's just in the painting. It isn't true really.

.....

#46 When we got married. One of those things I thought would never happen to me and all of a sudden it did.

I enjoy the football games and the kids and the school. I enjoy my work and I always did. I was always trying to learn something new.

Survival or Good Health

All three Coders categorized as Survival or Good Health:

#4 Grabbing my wife I guess and having the kids. Being able to work and be a good help. I've had a pretty full normal life. I think of my life as about average. Good health-
- A good place to sleep. Never really wanted for anything you have to have. You can't really beat that.

.....

#8 Living to be eighty, I guess. Can't think of anything particular. Just kind of plodded along. Living to be eighty and nobody shooting me.

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Two Coders categorized as Survival or Good Health:

#22 Family life I guess. I'm very thankful I can walk. I'm glad to have my husband, my son, and some grandchildren.

.....

No Response or Unclassified

All three Coders categorized as No Response or Unclassified:

#39 I don't know.

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#43 I've had so many experiences that nothing really stands out.

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#59 None stand out in my mind.

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Two Coders categorized as No Response or Unclassified:

#31 My most significant experiences were back in childhood.

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#54 I can't explain. Sometimes just day-to-day stuff.

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One Coder categorized as No Response or Unclassified:

#56 When I read the bible, I compare it to my own self. I don't think I've been lifted out of my self. I don't know what that would be.

Ten years ago in Florida, I stepped off a step and broke my knee. Here I was in the hospital and I couldn't do what I wanted to do.