

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PEAK EXPERIENCE AND OTHER POSITIVE  
HUMAN EXPERIENCES AND WRITING

A Dissertation

by

JALEH FATEMI

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2004

Major Subject: Educational Psychology

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## ABSTRACT

An Exploratory Study of Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences  
and Writing. (December 2004)

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This study analyzes and reports on the characteristics of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences and explores some possible factors that can bring about such moments. Three basic questions were explored: Can writing trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences? How are writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences best described? What factors influence the occurrence of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences? Participants were asked to write about their happiest moment in writing. The sample consisted of 270 students enrolled in undergraduate writing classes at a major southwestern university. Of 270 participants, 119(44%) reported having had at least one peak experience or similar positive human experience as a result of writing. Protocols reporting peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing were analyzed for content, yielding a total of 14 descriptive attributes. The participants described their writing experiences as flow of the

words, the process of writing is its own reward, peak performance, clarity, disappearance of negative states of mind, and enhanced sense of power and personal worth. Content analysis also yielded 13 possible triggers of peak experience and other positive human experiences including self-expression, realization, free writing, use of writing for introspection, and creative and inspirational writing. In addition, personal orientation was explored as a possible trigger of peak experience and other positive human experiences using a 16-item questionnaire.

Factor analysis results yielded four factors: (1) *aesthetic creative expressive writing*, (2) *writing as a thinking and problem solving tool* (3) *self-discovery*, and (4) *not interested in writing*. Factor one accounted for the highest variance (37%). The common elements in this factor were expressive writing, self-related writing and creative poetic writing with *poetic and creative writing* having the highest loading.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my dearly departed mother who taught me the meaning of sacrifice, my dad who ignited the love of learning in my heart, and my son and best teacher who constantly inspires me to put my ideals in to actual practice. You are my ultimate inspiration.

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I would like to thank my committee members for all of their support, guidance, and faith in me and my work. I would especially like to express my thanks to Dr. Valerie Balester for her great enthusiasm and great contribution to my work. Her inputs not only gave new life to the project but expanded my views as far as what was possible. I would like to thank Dr. Linda Parrish, the unifying force in my committee, whose attention to detail and overall guidance proved very useful in improving the overall quality of this document. I would like to thank Dr. Sadoski for his great contribution to my development as a student of science. And finally, I would like to express my deepest thanks and appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Goetz, whose enormous patience, kind support, and constant nurturing of me and my work helped bring this work to life. I would like to thank my department and especially Ms. Carole Wagner, our academic advisor, who went beyond the call of duty to help me finish this work. Thank you Carole for all your help and support. I would also like to thank my dear friend and editor, Ms. Shomace Dadfar, for all the tireless editing and support she offered freely and lovingly. And finally, I would like to thank my dear husband, Mehrdad, and my son, Behnam, for staying the course with me and for all of their great sacrifice and love that sustained me in the years it took to bring this work into completion. I love you both and can never thank you two enough for all you have done for me. Thank you.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Maslow first introduced the term peak experience as a part of his description of self-actualized individuals. A peak experience can be defined as a moment of highest joy and happiness accompanied by distinctive cognitive states such as heightened awareness of reality as well as clarity of perception and vision (Maslow, 1968). Laski (1961) observed a similar phenomenon, which she termed *ecstasy* and characterized it as “joyful, transitory, unexpected, rare, valued, and extraordinary” (p. 105). Thorne (1963) defined a peak experience as an experience that is personally recognized to be one of the high points in a person’s life. Thorne (1963) also stated that a peak experience is one of the most exciting, rich, and fulfilling experiences one could ever have (p. 248). A similar phenomenon to a peak experience that has been investigated is termed *flow*. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988) describes flow as enjoyment and as an experience that is intrinsically rewarding. Flow is most often experienced in play and games, and can be described as the state of maximum performance and positive feelings. Flow can be distinguished from a peak experience in that flow is a heightened joy stemming from the optimal experience in a given activity while peak experience is based on both emotional and cognitive states that are not necessarily related to

performance.

In light of the gradual emergence of these and other similar theories and concepts, the last five decades have witnessed an increased emergence of research in the study of peak experience and other similar experiences (e.g., peak performance, flow). Researchers have begun to recognize that we can learn a lot about our true nature and potential by studying our best and happiest moments. There is some evidence that suggests a possible link between self-actualization and peak experience. For instance, even though peak moments are not exclusive to self-actualized individuals, they do occur most frequently among them (Maslow, 1968). This indicates that a connection may exist between the frequency of experiencing such moments and being self-actualized. So central is peak experience to the theory of self-actualization, that it has become one way of defining and studying self-actualization (Privette & Bundrick, 1991). Among the various research questions explored in this area is the question of what triggers peak experience. This question deals with the conditions or factors that could elicit peak experience.

A review of the studies in this area indicates that a peak experience can occur under a variety of conditions. For instance, the most frequently mentioned triggers of peak experience among Maslow's subjects were sex and music (Maslow, 1971). Peak experience has also been reported in connection with sports (Ravizza, 1977). Using interview techniques, Ravizza investigated the personal experiences of athletes. Results of this study indicated that in addition

to the physical aspect, there was an emotional and cognitive side to sports. Athletes' experiences revealed great similarities to the description of a peak experience identified by Maslow. Athletes described their experiences as full concentration, ego loss and union with the experience, distortion in time and space, and perfect God-like feelings. Laski (1961), in her study of ecstasy, also identified several triggers: "Art, nature, sexual love, religion, exercise and movement, creative work, beauty, child birth, scientific knowledge, recollection and introspection, and poetic knowledge" (p. 26).

Although a number of things have been identified that can trigger a peak experience, there may still be many other unexplored situations that can bring about such moments. An example of an unexplored situational variable is writing. The main purpose of this study is to extend the existing research regarding the nature and causes of peak moments and other positive human experiences by exploring writing as a possible trigger of peak experience and similar moments.

The data not only includes reports of writing-triggered peak experience, but also reports of other positive human experiences such as peak performance and general happy, pleasurable, or satisfying writing episodes. The advantages of studying positive moments along a wide spectrum of intensity and rarity, up to and including peak experiences and peak performances, is that we will have more data to analyze and consequently learn from. In addition our findings will be applicable to a wider range of writing-triggered positive experiences and

therefore will be of a greater practical value.

The present study is both exploratory and descriptive, and uses both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The analysis of narrative descriptions of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences constitutes the qualitative portion of this study. Van Dalen (1962) has described qualitative methodologies as an ideal way of exploring a new area such as this. The quantitative portion of this study was comprised of conducting several univariate and multivariate significance tests, as well as factor analyses based on participants' descriptive ratings regarding their writing habits and personal orientation in self-knowledge, introspection, thinking style, as well as frequency of engaging in writing in general.

#### Statement of the Problem

The question of whether or not writing can trigger peak experience or other positive human experiences is an important one. As writing still remains one of the most basic and universal tools in the realm of human communication, and also one of the most personally involving and revealing forms of human activity. Whether creating poetry or fiction, writing a technical paper or a scientific one, the *self* seems to be ever present, finding a concrete existence in words. In fact the relationship between the writer and his/her writing is so inseparable and natural that its significance and obvious implications for self-discovery and self-actualization may have been taken for granted.

Although writing has been one of the central measures of civility and culture, only recently have its benefits begun to get the kind of scientific attention and scrutiny it deserves. New discoveries about writing are exciting and promising, although not surprising. They indicate that writing can be beneficial in a variety of educational as well as psychological applications. For instance, there is now quantitative evidence suggesting that expressive writing can be helpful in improving mathematical abilities by promoting reflective thinking, which consequently enhances metacognitive skills (Allen, 1991).

In a study designed to examine the behavioral and psychological benefits of the disclosure of traumatic events using guided imagery writing, it was found that writing can be beneficial in improving an individual's psychological health (Polk, 1995). Furthermore, confronting troubling issues through psychophysical expression followed by writing has been associated with improved health, a decrease in negative affect, increased self understanding, and long lasting positive effects of value and meaning gained from the experience (Krantz, 1994). These findings highlight the value of writing as a tool of human healing and development. Could such a powerful tool of self-expression and, growth lead to peak experience and other positive human experiences?

#### Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to explore writing as a possible trigger of a peak experience and other positive human experiences, the ways in which one can describe such moments, as well as the possible factors that could

trigger them. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. Can writing trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences?
2. How are writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences best described?
3. What factors influence the occurrence of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences?

To address the first question, participants were asked to report any happy experience triggered by writing they were able to recall. To address the second question, these descriptions were closely examined and analyzed in order to describe writing-triggered peak experiences. To address the third question, the roles of writing context, within the writing conditions, and personal orientation in the occurrence of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences were explored.



## Definition of the Terms

This section provides an introduction to some of the main terminologies used in this document. It is intended to help the reader get better acquainted with the direction of thought and assumptions upon which this study was based and to help in clarifying new usage of words for the purpose of communicating certain concepts. These definitions are:

*Peak Experience*-A moment of highest joy and happiness accompanied by distinctive cognitive states such as heightened awareness of reality as well as clarity of perception and vision (Maslow, 1968).

*Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences*-This includes moments of highest happiness (or peak experience), moments of joy and enjoyment (which may be viewed as milder forms of peak experience), as well as moments of personal best (or peak performance) as well as its milder variations (i.e. high performance and effectiveness).

*Other Positive Human Experiences*-This category includes a range of positive experiences that are milder version of peak experience and peak performance.

*Happiness*-A subjective feeling of joy, or elation, a natural *high*.

*Non Writing*-Any activity that does not involve writing. For example using non-writing methods for introspection could imply that the person introspects through any medium *but* writing. These mediums could include thinking out loud, sharing and dialoguing with others, reading a book or watching a movie. An individual with this style of processing thought may never feel a need to write in

order to process thoughts, or express emotions.

*Think/thinkers and Think/writers*-These two terms were created specifically for this study and are based on the assumption that people can be divided into two groups based on their different styles for processing thoughts. A *think/thinker* is someone who processes thoughts either internally through self-dialogue, or externally through social interaction with others, but does not use writing as their main mode of processing thought. A *think/writer* is someone who has a deep and irresistible need to process the major portion of his or her thoughts and emotions through writing. The use of the word *writer* in this context does not imply anything else (e.g., it does not imply that the person is in fact a professional writer). It only means that a person does the majority of his or her thinking, or the expression of his or her feelings *in* (within the context of) writing.

*Introspective Orientation*-Introspective orientation is defined as having a deep need and genuine interest to engage in reflection. This could include but not be limited to interest in self-knowledge, self-evaluation, and self-actualization.

*Writing-triggered Peak Experience*-This term refers to peak moments, or peak experiences that are specifically triggered by writing, or the writing process.

*Within Writing Conditions as Triggers*-This refers to the factors within the writing process that could have triggered the peak experience or other positive human experiences in the first place. It can be defined as the main reason why a particular writing experience is remembered as pleasurable, or joyful or meaningful.

*Thematic Content Analysis*- A method of text analysis used to identify, extract, and report the basic qualities and characteristics of new phenomena or experience under the study. This method basically involves reading the text carefully looking for reoccurring words, phrases, and themes that seem to repeat themselves. Identifying and reporting these words, phrases, and themes can help us in reducing the experience into its underlying qualities or essence yielding what could be called *descriptions or attributes*.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As a way of drawing a general background to the study, the theoretical section will include a brief discussion on happiness as well as a review of theories of writing. It is hoped that such an opening will provide an adequate basic background to the study of peak experience and other positive human experiences.

Following this basic background the theoretical background will be presented. This will also include a look at some of main relevant psychological theories of the *fully functioning person*, which deal with the study of happy moments and optimum experiences. Among these are Maslow's theory of self-actualization, Csikszentmihalyi's theory of optimal functioning, Laski's study of ecstasy, as well as Privette's concept of peak performance and her comparative studies of optimum experiences.

This literature review will also include a look at some of the current literature on peak experience and benefits of writing as well as any existing relevant research on peak experience and writing.

#### An Overview of the Concept of Happiness

To appreciate and better understand the value of a study that focuses on what a happy moment is, we first need to understand and define what happiness is. The concept of happiness is vast and immense. Its definitions

and approaches are varied and often contradictory. One can easily spend a life time on the topic and still be unable to read and learn everything there is to know. This may be because every field of human knowledge, from philosophy, to religion, to education, has something to say about happiness. Add to this the individual and personal opinions, written or spoken, on the subject, and you will begin to fathom the scope and difficulty involved in achieving a thorough understanding of the area. Jones (1953) said it best when he compared the study of happiness as almost being synonymous with the history of mankind.

#### *Sources of Knowledge and the Study of Happiness*

In selecting a method to study happiness, we are usually faced with two basic options. One approach can be described as speculative and philosophical. This method requires looking at happiness through the act of reflection, contemplation, meditation, and sometimes, mere speculation.

In the other approach, which could be described as phenomenological, we try to better understand happiness through observation and description of happy moments. The main source of knowledge in this type of approach is the experience itself, or the phenomenon of being happy. In choosing this method we seek to understand and describe happiness by identifying and describing how one actually feels, thinks, behaves or performs while in a state of happiness. For example, we may ask people who have had happy experiences to report and describe a specific happy experience in order to learn more about the happy moments in general. Most studies of happy moments such as studies

of peak experience, peak performance, flow, and ecstasy fall into this category (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Laski, 1961; Maslow, 1968; Privette & Sherry, 1986).

Both approaches are necessary and complementary; in fact, by combining these two approaches to the study of happiness we can gain a more comprehensive understanding and knowledge of the subject matter.

There are many views concerning happiness and the literature is far too vast to discuss all there are within the context of this study. However, it is important to look at some of these views and approaches in order to appreciate the diversity of thought that exists on the matter. It should be mentioned here that this section is not intended as a thorough and comprehensive literature review on the general concept of happiness. It is merely an introductory sample of the diversity of thought and opinions that exist within the area.

One field that offers exciting and varied interpretations on the topic of happiness is philosophy, which until the last century, was the main tradition of reflection on happiness. For years, philosophizing about the meaning of life and happiness was considered the ultimate fruit of human contemplation and reflection. This fascination can be traced as far back as to Ancient Greece. Consider the Greek concept of virtue. According to this concept, any and all claims to a happy life (including pleasure) were an occasion for moral appraisal. This view on happiness made happiness and morality inseparable.

Happiness has been ever present in our psychic and social pursuits, whether as a goal, a dream, a concept, an illusion, or an unresolved intellectual dilemma.

Happiness has always been a part of human struggle and experience, and when it was not directly pursued, it was indirectly implied. Even most of our political or intellectual movements have been motivated by a desire to find happiness (the Renaissance, nineteenth-century political and economical movements).

Another source of knowledge on the topic of happiness is religion. Although no two religions completely agree as to how this goal is to be achieved, they all assert that man has a spiritual and an eternal side, and that the path to happiness is a spiritual one.

At the heart of this recipe for spiritual happiness lies the concept of *love* shared by all major religions (Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith). A love that encompasses our purpose in life, whether from man to God, or man to man, or God to man, the love that was the purpose of our creation as echoed here by the following quotation from Baha'u'llah (1994), "O Son of Man! I loved thy creation hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me..." (p. 39). Love seems to be the common factor repeated in all major religions as the purpose of creation and ultimate path to happiness.

Another way of looking at happiness from a religious point of view is in terms of acquiring divine virtues. This notion is based on the religious assumption that God has created man in *His own image*, and thus man, in essence, is capable of *reflecting Godlike virtues* such as love, compassion, justice, mercy, forgiveness, knowledge, and wisdom. Therefore, another way of becoming truly happy could be facilitated through acquiring *Godlike qualities and virtues*.

Nevertheless, explanations and prescriptions for happiness are not solely based in religion; the pursuit of happiness is also found in secular endeavors. The American Constitution contains the essence of man's noblest ideals and hope for a perfect society. At the heart of it is the notion of the individual's pursuit of happiness as humans' inalienable rights. It is these ideals and philosophies that have mesmerized masses of people from every land, making them look up to America as the land of promise, hope, and opportunity, where one is likely to find true happiness. On the concept of happiness, Joseph Addison (1897) wrote the following:

True happiness is of a retired nature, and an enemy to pomp and noise; it arises, in the first place, from the enjoyment of one self; and in the next, from the friendship, and conversation of a few select companions. It loves shade, and solitude (p. 59).

Other notable figures have commented on the topic of happiness. Ten years after the ratification of the Constitution, Samuel Harrison Smith (1794), published his remarks on education. He stated that the ultimate goal of learning is happiness, and defined a happy man in the following way:

If happiness depends on improvement of mind, and collision of mind with mind, happiness of an individual will depend on general diffusion of knowledge and a capacity to think and speak correctly, and that man seems, on the whole, to be the most happy, who possesses of a large stock of ideas, is in the constant habit of increasing them, and whom every hour of his



existence renders more informed. (p. 30)

It is obvious that views on happiness and how it is defined or is to be achieved vary greatly from individual to individual, culture to culture, and discipline to discipline. It seems that is ultimately up to each individual to decide for him or herself as to what goes into their recipe for happiness.

#### Psychology, Happiness, and the Study of Happy Moments

Psychology seemed to be the right candidate among all the sciences to be preoccupied with the study of happiness and what constitutes the basic makeup of a happy and healthy human being. Yet strangely enough, for years, psychological research remained one-sided, focusing primarily on sickness, its causes and its treatment. Our psychological knowledge was mostly based on the study of unhappy, psychologically unhealthy individuals, as well as laboratory animals. Subsequently, learning about wellbeing and attempts to understand happy and well functioning individuals remained scarce, and almost non-existent. Theories such as behaviorism assumed a mechanistic view, which at the end proved to be inadequate in describing the complexity of human behavior, including happiness.

Big changes began to appear when the study of psychology was directed toward the study of human motivation, specifically intrinsic motivation. These changes came about as a result of more and more individuals questioning the validity of explaining human motivation solely in terms of extrinsic motivation.

This new revolution and the concepts and theories it generated, laid the

foundation for the systematic and scientific study of the psychology of health. It revitalized the old philosophical interest in happiness, and through works such as Rogers' (1977) fully functioning individual theory, Maslow's (1968) self-actualization theory, and Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) optimal condition theory, succeeded in expanding our understanding of human motivation as well as human happiness.

### *Maslow's Self-actualization Theory*

Maslow (1968) was a psychologist and a personality theorist who broke with tradition by explaining motivation in terms of growth and self-actualization. Rather than focusing on the psychology of not having, striving and being frustrated, Maslow (1968) chose instead to study the psychology of being fulfilled and satisfied (i.e., happiness). He called this new psychology *being psychology* because it concerned itself with *ends* rather than *means*. In a book entitled *Towards a Psychology of Being*, Maslow (1968) introduced his theory of self-actualization and ushered in a new direction in the study of human behavior.

Maslow (1968) believed that western psychology had a tendency to look at everything from the point of view of its usefulness. He rejected this view as being one-sided and incomplete. He alleged that such a view neglected the writings of philosophers and theologians of the eastern world, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Hindus. He suggested that such a view failed to take into account contributions made by people like Goldstein, Murphy, C. Buhler, Huxle, Sorokin, Watts, and Angyal.

Maslow (1968) theorized that the deepest desire and the strongest motivational force operating on humans was the need to move toward perfection, or what he called *self-actualization*. This view sat in direct contrast to the more traditional views of human motivation of the time, which mostly explained behavior in terms of deficiency needs (need for food, sex, shelter). Self-actualization can be seen as a continuous process of self-discovery and self-realization, or developing of one's potentials, gifts, and talents, or finding and fulfilling one's calling or destiny.

Several concepts are at the heart and the foundation of Maslow's self-actualization theory: hierarchy of needs, the concept of inner entity, and peak experience or the B-cognition. In the following section these concepts will be briefly discussed.

### *Hierarchy of Needs*

The concept of hierarchy of needs is central to self-actualization theory. According to Maslow (1968), all human needs can be viewed as occupying a certain place in a pyramid, which he called hierarchy of needs. At the bottom of the pyramid we have the basic needs such as food, shelter, safety needs. A little higher up we have the more complex needs such as belonging and self-esteem. At the highest point of pyramid we have the need for self-actualization. Maslow hypothesized that in order to obtain self-actualization, an individual must first meet most of the lower level needs.

### *Inner Nature*

At the heart of Maslow's self-actualization theory is the concept of inner nature. Maslow considered inner nature as the essence of the person; one's true self, or one's unique identity. He asserted that in order for us to self-actualize a person's inner nature needs to be allowed to emerge. Maslow (1968) writes, "...this inner nature is not strong and overpowering and unmistakable like instinct of animals. It is weak, delicate, subtle, and easily overcome by habit, cultural pressure, and wrong attitudes towards it (p. 4)." Maslow (1968) theorized that our health, happiness, and well being is dependent on recognizing and respecting this inner need, and saw its denial and suppression as the root cause for psychological sickness, self-destructive, and violent behavior.

The existence of an inner entity that strives for perfection is not a new idea. Throughout history, various sources of knowledge have referred to an inner entity using different terminology. The idea of an inner entity, which is basically good and God-like, is an old notion in most religions. The concept reappears in the works of many of the modern thinkers, including humanistic and existential psychologists. For example, the basic assumption in Carl Rogers' (1977) *Client Centered Therapy* is the notion of human beings basic self-sufficiency. Fundamental to Rogerian therapy (Rogers, 1977) is the assertion that in order to become a fully functioning person, one needs to find the answers from within by learning to listen to one's inner self. To help the individual achieve this, the

therapist empowers the individual through presence and practice of genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding (Rogers, 1977). The therapist acts as a facilitator by providing an optimum environment for the growth and emergence of the individual by practicing a supportive, non-evaluative attitude, offering feedback to reinforce real listening.

In a book entitled *Man's Search for Himself*, Rollo May (1973) attributes modern man's biggest psychological problems to his sense of emptiness caused by man's alienation from himself. Among the contributing factors, May names industrialization with its dehumanizing effects on individual identity, overemphasis on importance of social acceptance, and fear of solitude. According to May (1973), the most obvious symptom of this self-alienation is anxiety:

This bewilderment ... this confusion as to who we are and what we should do, is the most painful thing about anxiety. But the positive and hopeful side is that just as anxiety destroys our self-awareness, so awareness of us can destroy anxiety. That is to say the stronger our consciousness of ourselves, the more we can take a stand against and overcome anxiety. (p. 44)

May (1973) relates this to self-actualization in the following way:

If any organism fails to fulfill its potentials, it becomes sick, just as your legs would wither if you never walked. This is the essence of neurosis the person's unused potentialities, blocked by hostile conditions in the environment (past or present) and by his own internalized conflicts. (p. 95)

### *Peak Experience*

Another central concept in Maslow's self-actualization theory is the concept of peak experience. Maslow (1968) defined peak experience as "...moments of the highest happiness and fulfillment" (p. 73). These moments surpass the usual level of functioning in terms of intensity, meaningfulness, and richness.

What is peak experience and how can it be described? How do we feel and perceive when we are in our happiest moments? Maslow (1968) provided one of the earliest accounts of peak experiences. After interviewing eighty individuals, analyzing the written responses of 190 college students and examining other evidence he wrote:

No one subject reported the full syndrome. I have added together all the partial responses to make a "perfect" composite syndrome. In addition, about fifty people wrote me unsolicited letters after reading my previously published papers, giving me personal reports of peak experiences. Finally, I have tapped the immense literature of mysticism, religion, art, creativeness, love, & etc. (p. 71)

Maslow (1968) described happiest moments in the following way: "These moments were of pure positive joy when doubts, fears, tensions, and weaknesses disappeared. A sense of closeness, oneness, unity with the world and object of one's love took over" (p. 71). His results indicated that regardless of what triggered the peak experience, the descriptions and the subjective experiences were similar. Maslow concluded that these experiences all

overlapped and were similar or even identical.

One way of looking at peak experience is in terms of self-actualization. Maslow (1968) noticed a considerable overlap between the descriptions of peak experience and the characteristics of the psychologically healthy, more integrated, and more alive, individuals. He noticed and recorded that these episodes were more frequent among the self-actualized, suggesting a relationship between the frequencies of experiencing happy moments, and being self-actualized.

Peak experience can also be looked at as being episodes of true identity, moments in which we are the closest to the essence of who we are. Maslow (1968) wrote: "In moments like this we feel more powerful than usual and experience unusual focus, joy, intensity, creativity, in other words being more fully human" (p. 72).

One of the earliest problems encountered by Maslow (1968) in studying self-actualization had to do with the motivational life of the self-actualized. Maslow's observations and analysis made him arrive at the conclusion that there was a difference in the motivational life of the self-actualized, a difference that only could be explained in terms of cognition, a kind of cognition he came to refer to as cognition of being (B-cognition). B-cognition refers to our cognitive state when we are in a state of being fully functioning or at a peak. It is a cognitive mode that is characterized by high functioning and integration, lack of anxiety, spontaneity, and focused perception where clarity rules (Maslow, 1968).

One central feature of B-cognition is its overall effect on perception.

Perception becomes *relatively ego transcending, self-forgetful, and ego-less*.

The perception can be unmotivated, impersonal, unselfish, and detached. It can be object-centered, rather than ego-centered, as if we perceive something that has independent reality of its own. Identification of the perceiver and the perceived can even be conceptualized as a union of two into one perfect entity (Sorokin, 1950).

Another quality of this state of mind is *complete absorption*. In this state of mind, we are in a state of fascination. We are completely fascinated with whatever we are doing, seeing, or experiencing. We are fully attending to our subject of interest; in other words we are fully concentrating. Whereas in ordinary cognition we are constantly in a state of comparing, judging, and evaluating, in B-cognition we are likely to become non-comparing, non-evaluative, and non-judgmental. We are more likely to see the things in and by themselves, as if they were the only things that exist in the whole universe. A person is seen in himself and for himself, in his uniqueness. A good example is how a mother perceives her child. She perceives her child selflessly with love and care. She loves every part of the child, and her love is whole and complete.

Because of this full acceptance and love the person *sees the true nature of the object of love*, free of relationship and usefulness. For example, a scientist looking at a deadly virus under the microscope might see the beauty and uniqueness of this organism rather than viewing it as a treat to humanity.



Our perception also becomes richer in B-cognition. The main reason for this is that love comes with fascination with the love-object; we never get tired of it, and we can look at and experience it over and over again. This makes us know our object of love or interest better than anyone else, and we can even see things others have missed. This is what enables a true scientist to discover something that perhaps seems so obvious once discovered, but yet was missed by everybody else before then, or bring new perspective to an old problem. What makes the difference is the intensity of interest, or the degree of love.

B-cognition can also be seen as an end rather than a means. It carries with it its own *intrinsic reward*. This deviates from the usual assumption that everything is done for the sake of some future goal or in order to achieve something else. Peak experiences of pure delight are among the ultimate goals of living and are justification for living as well. They are felt as self-validating, self-justifying moments that carry their own inner rewards.

Another characteristic of B-cognition is *disorientation in time and space*. In these moments, an individual loses touch with time or experiences a distorted sense of its passage. Time is perceived as passing quickly, and yet it is lived so intensely it seems as if it is lasting forever. When coming out of these moments, which encompass an activity we so intensely enjoy, we suddenly become aware of the passage of time. Further, our ability to see the world as one single, rich entity increases while in B-cognition. This ability to see the whole and rise above parts is characteristic of peak experience and other positive human

experiences. Examples of this state of mind can be found in some reports of religious, philosophical, or mystical experiences, and has been reported by previous research (Privette, 1983).

Is there a lasting effect due to having peak experiences where our perception is elevated and altered? Maslow (1968) noted higher frequency of peak experience reported by his sample of self-actualized people, hence implying a relationship between self-actualization and peak experience. It is possible to assume that such moments can indeed change a person's view of himself, as well as the view of others in a positive direction. These moments can even change our view of the world, or some aspects of it. Peak experience can also free us for greater creativity, spontaneity, expressiveness, and idiosyncrasy.

*Csikszentmihalyi's Theory of Optimal Condition and the Concept of Flow*

Another concept similar to peak experience is flow, which lead to Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) development of the theory of optimal experience. Csikszentmihalyi described flow as enjoyment, an experience that is intrinsically rewarding. Flow is most often experienced in play and games, and can be best described as the highest point of positive feelings as well as the peak of performance. While in flow, one requires no psychic energy to turn inward. One becomes fully absorbed in the subject at hand and becomes in full control of body and mind.

Csikszentmihalyi (1988) first noticed the phenomenon of flow while observing the behavior of a group of artists at work. He noticed that in absence of any

outward reward, these artists worked intensely on what they seemed to be enjoying immensely. The artists seemed to be totally absorbed in their work, forgetting where they were, as if they had lost all concepts of space and time. He also noticed that their fascination came to an end once the product was finally created or produced; in other words, the artists lost interest in what they were doing once the task was completed.

Csikszentmihalyi (1988) could not explain the behavior he had observed based on the existing and prevalent theories. These theories explained everything based on basic drives (such as sex, shelter, food) and external reward systems. After much contemplation, he concluded that the only way one could account for these behaviors was to explain them in terms of their intrinsic rewards.

Csikszentmihalyi (1988) was not alone in his observations. Many of his contemporaries were arriving at the same conclusions. More and more theorists were beginning to question the accuracy of extrinsic motivation theories, realizing that human behavior was much more complex than had previously been thought. Intrinsic motivation studies were beginning to appear everywhere, from study of laboratory animals, to differences in human behavior. It was found that even laboratory rats did not work exclusively to get food or avoid shock, but were motivated by curiosity and novelty drives (Butler & Alexander, Harlow, White, cited in Csikszentmihalyi, 1988).

Csikszentmihalyi (1988) tried to understand optimal states by studying their

occurrence in creative and challenging activities. He studied rock climbers, dancers, composers, surgeons, and chess players to understand the dynamics of inner experience when things go well. Csikszentmihalyi also studied the literature on play (Ailloy, Huizinga, Piaget, Sutton-Smith, cited in Csikszentmihalyi, 1988) and found in his observations that play was essentially intrinsically motivated, confirming his prior information on children's play.

Csikszentmihalyi (1988) then began to formulate his own motivation theory in order to explain many of our behaviors based on intrinsic motivation. He called his theory the theory of optimal condition, with flow as its central concept (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Optimal condition theory describes the conditions in which we perform at our best. According to this theory, flow occurs when there is a match between the perceived challenge and the skill level needed to handle the given challenge. If the challenge is too difficult and is above the individual's skill level, anxiety will set in. If the challenge is too easy, boredom will take over, eventually leading to depression. Another important component of flow is feedback, explicit or self-generated, and having a clear set of goals and knowing how to reach these goals. Flow represents the optimal condition of human functioning in which everything happens with ease. Flow shares many of the same qualities of the peak experience, such as ease of functioning, full absorption, and enjoyment.

#### *Laski's Study of Ecstasy*

Laski (1961), a British novelist, observed a similar phenomenon to peak

experience, which she termed *ecstasy* and characterized it as “joyful, transitory, unexpected, rare, valued, and extraordinary” (p. 105). Laski’s study of ecstasy came about by coincidence. Laski (1961) described how she began her study of ecstasy in the following passage:

In 1953 I wrote a novel in which, by means of an experience I believed was known as ecstasy, I translated my heroine from present to past time. This seemed to me to be credible in a fictional context, and it must have seemed credible to readers since the book was well received and no one questioned the device. But later I began to wonder why anything so extraordinary should be accepted as within the bounds of even fictional possibility, and this led me to speculate on ecstatic experiences in general. (p.1)

Once she started speculating about ecstasy, Laski (1961) began formulating questions, and asking people she knew what they thought or felt about this concept. She developed a questionnaire that asked people to report any transcendent experiences they may have had that they might consider as ecstasy. She asked for descriptions of these experiences as well as the triggers that may have caused these experiences to occur. Laski was especially interested in the possible link between inspiration and ecstasy. This link was later reconfirmed by Maslow’s (1968) work on peak experience. Maslow came to identify creative experience as one of the experiences that were similar to peak experience.

After collecting the answers to these questionnaires and reviewing the

descriptions that her participants depicted, she was convinced that these experiences were not only quite common, but also bore tremendous similarity to the descriptions given by her subjects. It was at this point that she decided to turn what originally had begun as something to satisfy her sense of curiosity into a systematic study of ecstatic experience.

Laski (1961) relied mainly on three major sources to collect her data, personal interview or personal questionnaire, summary and analysis of written records of ecstatic experiences of which she “demanded only that they had been published” (p. 12), and religious sources and accounts. The majority of the books she read were religious mysticism, written by believers who had attributed a supernatural cause for these experiences. She also summarized the accounts written by non-religious people who had tried to explain religious mystical experiences, usually attributing them to physical or psychological conditions.

Laski’s work can be considered as one of the earliest attempts to systematically describe our happiest moments. Laski (1961) published her work as a book entitled *Ecstasy* in which she presented the summary of her findings. In her book, Laski (1961) reported the following triggers, “Art, nature, sexual love, religion, exercise and movement, creative work, beauty, childbirth, scientific knowledge, recollection and introspection, and poetic knowledge” (p.26).

### *Privette's Comparative Studies*

The work of Privette (1982, 1983, and 1985) is of great value and interest to this study. Privette (1983) introduced a similar, but slightly different concept to peak experience, which she called peak performance. She defined peak performance as a behavior that went beyond a normal level of functioning. This could involve any behavior that used any aspect of human power or potential. According to Privette, behavior at peak performance is more efficient, creative, productive, and in some cases better than habitual.

In addition to introducing the concept of peak performance, Privette (1983) originated one of the first comparative typologies of peak-like experiences. She compared and contrasted peak experience, flow, and peak performance by studying and analyzing the detailed description of each phenomenon based on existing research. The comparison identifies, as well as clarifies, mutual and distinguishing characteristics of peak experience, peak performance, and flow.

Comparing peak experience to peak performance, Privette (1983) defined peak performance as an episode of superior functioning, mostly a behavior, in contrast to peak experience, which she sees as mostly a spiritual and a mystical experience (Privette, 1982, 1983, 1985; Privette & Landsman, 1983). In her view, both constructs represent subjective experiences and optimal levels that are not dependent on particular types of behavior. Privette maintained that flow is similar to both peak experience and peak performance. Flow shares the quality of enjoyment and valuing with peak experience and the behavior of peak

performance. Flow does not necessarily imply optimal joy or performance, but may include either or both. Another important contribution by Privette (1985) is her Experience Questionnaire, which is being used in this study. The questionnaire offers a useful and easy way to collect quantitative and qualitative data for measuring and describing peak experience, peak performance, and flow.

### Research Background to the Study

This section summarizes research in four areas relevant to the present study: peak experience, theories of writing, benefits of writing, and writing and peak experience.

#### *Peak Experience*

It is almost fifty years since Maslow first introduced his theory of health and peak experience at a Humanistic Psychology annual meeting. Since then the topic of peak experience has been explored in many different ways and from many different angles. Peak experience research can be described as descriptive and exploratory.

The main research methodology that is used is a naturalistic one as it is the best method for studying and understanding a subjective experience. The information is based on the subjective reports of individuals who had a peak experience or other highly positive experiences. This data is then analyzed using a variety of techniques to extract basic qualities of peak experience.

There are four basic questions that are usually asked in peak experience



studies. The first type of question deals with describing peak experience exploring what peak experience actually feels like emotionally, intellectually, cognitively, and physically. The second types of questions are trigger-related questions that explore factors that could trigger peak experience. Then there are outcome or effect type questions which explore the impact such experiences may have on a person, such as increased self-esteem, or improved positive feelings about self and others. And finally there are correlational questions that explore the relationship between peak experience, and other psychological factors or phenomenon, such as relationship between peak experience and moral reasoning or personal orientation.

Although my research did not identify any published work on writing as a trigger of peak experience, I found many other extremely interesting studies that have explored peak experience in many other contexts. The following literature review will present some of these research findings.

Lipscombe (1999) studied the relationship between the high-risk recreational activity of skydiving and peak experience. Skydiving or sport parachuting could involve jumping from an airplane from heights ranging from 3000 meters to 4600 meters. The free-fall may reach a terminal velocity in excess of 160 kilometers per hour. The goal of the study was to learn about what motivates people to skydive and repeat such a high-risk activity. The study hoped to gain insight into the meaning skydivers assigned to the experience. And finally, the study hoped to explore skydiving as a possible trigger of peak experience and its long-term

effects on the individual.

To gain insight and understanding into the skydiving world, Lipscombe (1999) looked into literature about the skydiving experience, conducted in-depth interviews with experienced skydivers, and analyzed the personal documents (skydiving journals) of the veteran skydivers. The data were collected using interview techniques and took over 18 months to collect. The data were analyzed with the goal of identifying repetitive patterns and the themes of the experience. After data reduction was completed, the conclusions drawn were verified with the help of skydivers. The participants comprised 10 experienced skydivers (3 women and 7 men, their ages ranging from 21 to 35) and had a minimum of 200 jumps.

The data analysis revealed that peak experience is a common phenomenon in skydiving and the most important reason why skydivers continue to dive. Their descriptions of peak experience are consistent with previous findings in peak experience research. Skydivers in this study described their peak experience as the most special and ultimate of their life experiences. They described their peak experience as God-like feelings, fusion of dichotomies, having rich perception, object unification or fusion of the individual and the experience, and losing track of time. The participants also described their experiences as self-validating and creating a desire to repeat the experience, thus considering the experience itself as the main motivational reason for continuing to skydive, and social factors as secondary motivational factors.

Among the lasting effects of skydiving-triggered peak experience reported by skydivers, were positive self-evaluation, enhanced self-esteem, self-actualization, emotional uplift characterized by unity, full focus, and clarity of self, achieving a state of serenity or transcendence. The experience elevated emotional and mental functioning for a long time after the experience was over.

By highlighting the power of peak experience in repeat behavior the study raises some important practical questions. For example, if peak experience can become such a powerful intrinsic force as to make a person jump from an airplane, how can we utilize this motivational force in other contexts of positive human endeavor in order to achieve better results in actualizing and developing human potential?

Lewis (2002) explored music as a trigger of peak experience. Of the 1000 college employees contacted for information on peak experience, 364 responded, and 111 expressed willingness to participate and, 102 (55 women, 47 men, ages 21 to 70) actually returned the survey. Data was collected using open-ended questions in a 41-item questionnaire. Participants were asked how involved they were musically, how important music was in their daily lives and how much time they spent listening to music every week.

The questionnaire was designed to measure the impact music had on them with questions such as, "When I listen to music I want to cry because it brings back memories of the past." The results indicated that 93.1 % of participants reported at least having had one peak experience as a result of listening to

music, or playing a musical instrument. Those with strong musical involvement (measured by the value of the music to their lives and the amount of time spent in active or passive music engagements) were most likely to have a peak experience. The most frequently checked item (from the 41-item questionnaire) was related to how music reminded an individual of the past. These reactions included physical, emotional and cognitive reactions.

Another study conducted by Christopher and associates (Christopher, Manaster, Campbell, & Weinfeld, 2002) explored the relationship between peak experience and social interest as described by Adler, and moral development as conceptualized by Kohlberd. They explored whether peak experience is related to having a different set of values and a more developed structure of moral reasoning. Maslow (1954) had noted that there was a relationship between self-actualization and ethical transformation using Adler's concept of social interest, he wrote:

This word (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*), invented by Adler, is the only one available that describes well the flavor of the feelings for mankind expressed by self-actualized subjects. They have for human beings in general a deep feeling of identification, sympathy and affection... Because of this they have a genuine desire to help the human race. It is as if they were all members of a single-family. (p. 217)

Adler defined social interest as a deep ability to empathize with the world and universe at large.

To collect the data two separate samples were used. The first sample consisted of 38 female and 412 male undergraduate students who were recruited from introductory psychology classes, with their ages ranging from 18 to 30 years. The second group comprised 35 female and 10 male graduate students in educational psychology and counseling classes, with ages ranging from 18 to 48. Both groups volunteered to participate in the study. The result of the study showed that peak experience was positively related to social interest, whereas moral reasoning was found to be related neither to peak experience nor social interest.

Hollander and Acevedo (2000) studied various aspects of an ultra endurance sport experience by studying English Channel swimmers. Various aspects of the English Channel swimming experience were explored, as well as factors affecting success and failure. Among the issues explored were cognitive orientation, strategies used by the participants to successfully swim the English Channel, the type of training and preparation required for such a difficult and challenging task, and the experience itself including possibility of having a peak experience and the meaning of such experiences to the swimmers.

Participants were made up of eight individuals (3 male, 5 female, with ages ranging from 23 to 70) who had completed swimming the English Channel. Two of the swimmers had failed in their first attempt but completed it the second time, three accomplished it the first time, and the rest had tried 2 to 31 times before finally achieving it.

Data were collected by interviewing the swimmers (a total of four times) using an open-ended question format. The interviews were conducted one week to two years after completion of the swim. The majority of interviews were conducted two months after completion of the swimming. The swimmers were asked questions such as the following: What gave you the idea to swim the English Channel? How did you prepare mentally and physically for the swim? What mental strategies did you use to help you complete this task (before, during, and after)? What were the distracters you had not expected before and how did you deal with them?

The results of the study indicated that in the area of cognitive orientation, certainty of completion and confidence, combined with mental toughness and tenacity for success were among the basic ingredients for successful completion. The cognitive strategies used for swimmers to persevere the long 14 to 16 hours of swimming included general goal setting, compartmentalization of time and swimming distance, positive self-talk, attention control, relaxation, and strategic dissociation techniques.

Common characteristics among these swimmers were confidence, mental toughness, and an unchanging regard for self-efficacy, being driven at almost all costs to complete the swim. Past research has indicated that perceived or developed mind toughness or cognitive hardiness improves chances of success. They were highly motivated people determined to achieve whatever goal they set. The goal attainment had a paradoxical joy and sorrow quality to it and was

accompanied by high peak experience. Many of the swimmers described their peak experience as environmental awareness, altered time perception, transcendence of the accomplishment into daily life, excitement and ease of movement, clear and present-centered awareness, and euphoria upon finishing. Most swimmers considered their experience as life altering. The swimmers described the lasting effects of their incredible experience in terms of increased self-confidence, increased awareness of unlimited potential.

In another study Kiehne (2002) explored Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990) flow experience in Tai Chi practitioners with at least five years of experience and compared the flow experience to peak experience (Maslow, 1968), peak performance (Privette, 1983), and Zone (Murphy & White, 1995). Kiehne's descriptive study of flow in Tai Chi practitioners was also an attempt to explore if flow can be triggered by choice, a notion denied by Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) who believes flow is out of human control. Tai Chi is an ancient Chinese physical and meditative practice, which combines physical, mental and spiritual realms and is based on philosophical roots of Taoism (Jou, 2001; Liao, 1990; Wile, 1996).

Using an open-ended interview method five participants (three men and two women between the ages of 30 and 65) were asked to describe their Tai Chi-triggered flow experiences. The collected data was then transcribed and analyzed using a heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990). The study results supported previous descriptive findings of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990).

Participants described their flow experiences as having the qualities of clear goals, immediate feedback, balance between challenges and skills, merging of action and awareness, lack of distraction, unconcern for failure, absence of self-awareness, disorientation in time, and autothelic experience. Only one participant reported having both a flow and a peak experience as a result of Tai Chi. This individual reported that a Tai Chi peak experience were different than a Tai Chi flow experience resulting in a deeper level of Tai Chi. He described the lasting effect of his combined peak and flow experience as becoming more accepting of himself and others. The findings of this study indicate that peak experience was qualitatively different from flow, with peak experience being more intense and rare.

Lavaysse (2002) studied music-triggered peak experience during public vocal performances. A total of six professional vocalists ranging in age from 30-46 (three men and three women) were interviewed with the goal of obtaining descriptive data on music-triggered peak experience using an open-ended interview method. Data was analyzed using Moustakas (1990) heuristic methodology. Based on the results obtained from this study music-triggered peak experience can best be described in the following way: spiritual, hard to describe, full absorption, here and now, disorientation in time.

Davis and associates (Davis, Lockwood, & Wright, 1998) explored reasons why people do not report peak experience. They asked three basic questions: Have you ever had a peak experience? How many people did you report it to?



And if you did not share your peak experience with anybody what were the reasons? Out of 246 who participated in the study, 79% reported having had at least one peak experience, more than half of them had told two people or fewer people, and one in five had told no one.

The most common reasons given for not sharing a peak experience with others were private and personal. Other reasons were fear of having their experience devalued or discredited, fear of being ridiculed, inability of verbal expression in communicating their experience, and what Maslow called resistance (1962) or playing it down or denying it. Only 4% of the people attributed a life-changing impact to their peak experience.

Hoffman (1998) explored occurrences of peak experience in childhood. He first tried to interview children for accounts of their childhood peak experience. After he ran into problems of insufficient data due to children's inability to express their thoughts, he asked the same questions of adults by placing "author queries" in dozens of different newspapers. The advertisement read something like this: "Can you recall any experiences from your childhood (before the age of 14) that could be considered mystical or intensely spiritual, or in which you seemed to experience a different kind of reality?" (p. 114). He received more than 250 accounts of childhood peak experiences. He categorized them as:

- Uplifting experiences in places of scenic grandeur
- Inspiring encounters with nature in one's own backyard
- Near-death or crisis episodes

- Peak moments during intense and personalized prayer
- Spontaneous moments of bliss or ecstasy
- Profound insights about self-identity, life and death, and related topics
- Exalted experiences in formal religious settings
- Uncanny perceptions with lasting import
- Unforgettable dreams (p. 116)

These findings are interesting because they show that all kinds of peak type experiences are possible in childhood. What is even more interesting is that these people reported remembering these moments as vividly and clearly as if they had happened moments ago. Hoffman (1998) reported the recollection of an elderly woman:

One day, when I was about four, I was standing alone in our Peoria backyard, which held eight large silver-leaf poplars, with bark that was black-and-white. I held a tiny china doll in my hand, and then placed the doll on a section of the bark. Suddenly, in a way that I still can't explain, I experienced the most wonderful, blazing feeling of happiness. I felt a euphoric awareness that "this world is wonderful!" Seventy years have passed. Though I've certainly had sadness in my life, this experience was like a beam of sunshine that seemed to be within everything: a joyful place to which I could always return. (p. 116)

In an interesting study, DeMares and Krycka (1999) explored peak experience triggered by oceanic wild animal encounters, in this case dolphins

and whales. The purpose of the study was to both describe such experiences and record and report the effect of such experiences on the individuals involved.

Participants comprised six individuals (five females and one male) who had a previous peak-like encounter with a wild oceanic animal. The phenomenological methodology was employed in order to reveal the underlying structure of experience with specific focus on qualities of the experience. The main question was as follows: "Tell me about your most memorable experience with a dolphin or whale" (p.164).

The results supported previous findings regarding descriptions of peak experience. Of greater interest is the effect of such encounters on those involved. The study results suggest that oceanic encounter with dolphins and whales can lead to a sense of harmony, connectedness, and alertness or a sensation of coming alive. The participants reported having direct and deliberate eye contact with the oceanic animals. Participants reported that peak experiences were triggered when the oceanic animal appeared to have initiated contact, or indicated some of intent and desire for communication and contact. Another interesting finding of this study is that the peak experience triggered by this short-lived connection was so powerful that many recalled forgetting about the possibility of the danger that such encounters may have. In other words they had totally immersed themselves in the experience and forgotten about themselves.

Using semi-structured interview techniques, Ravizza (1977) studied peak

experience in sports. He collected responses from six men and four women athletes who were involved in twelve different sports (e.g., golf, swimming, track and field, jogging, surfing, and skiing). These athletes demonstrated many of the same characteristics described by Maslow (1968). They described their experiences as total attention, temporary loss of ego, union with the experience, disorientation in time and space, total control of the situation, disappearance of usual fears associated with the activity, effortlessness and ease of performance, and a feeling of wonder. Ravizza (1977) concluded that not only is there a motor aspect to sport but also an emotional and cognitive aspect, which at times can be quite intense.

In another study, types of peak experience were explored using Thorne's (1963) peak experience. Responses were collected from 133 male and 81 female university students. Thorne's classification of peak experience contained different categories of peak experience including sensual peak experience (e.g., pleasurable sensation and sexuality), emotional peak experience (e.g., love, states of euphoria, extreme good feelings, elation, and humor), cognitive peak experience and adventures of the mind (understanding and discovery, invention and creativity), actualization of self and coming to be what one can become (coming to like and respect the self, recognition of the self), cognitive peak experience, man against destiny (growth experience, joy in growing up, finding oneself, coming of age, man in control of himself, performing at his highest), climax experience (full living, extreme beauty, fulfillment, joy), the ultimate

experience (man in communion with nature), and spiritual crises (fortitude born out of the white heat of adversity, orgasmic experiences). The analysis of data revealed a major difference between reports obtained from different sexes.

Mogar (1965) showed that people who don't report peak experience are different from people who report peak experience in some interesting and important ways. People who report peak experience find their lives more meaningful and feel more positive about themselves. They appeared to exhibit the characteristics of reflective and introspective people, and they thought about the question of meaning and purpose more often (Savage, Fadiman, Mogar, 1966).

In another study done by Panzarella (1980), 103 music and art peak experience were content and factor analyzed for evidence of lasting effects. Factor analysis results yielded four factors: motor-sensory, renewal, withdrawal, and fusion-emotional experiences. Renewal factor was associated with visual art accounts, positively correlated with measures of sensation seeking and self-actualization. Motor sensory factors were associated with music accounts. Both music and visual art peak experience went through various stages, starting with cognitive responses and loss of self, climaxing with continued loss of self and motor responses, and subsiding with emotional responses of self-transformation. Panzarella (1980) found that 90% of the participants reported some lasting effects. Among the lasting effects were vivid and continually stimulating memories, enhanced appreciation involving more positive self-feelings, as well

as improved relationships with others and a boost of optimism.

Gordon (1985) explored peak experience in the context of face-to-face interpersonal communication. This was the first time a study of this kind was performed. It defined peak communication experiences as the greatest moments in interpersonal communication, or moments of highest mutual understanding, happiness being derived from the process of communication with other human beings. Data were collected using a brief inventory of characteristics of peak communication experiences that was developed based on Maslow's characteristics of peak experience. This inventory was focused on the context of communication. It modified the general descriptions of peak experience into the first person. For example, changing peak experience is a self-validation of the moment into our communication. This was valuable in and of itself. Sixty-four individuals participated in this study, 32 male and 32 female. The participants were asked to report their happiest interpersonal communication experience. They had to respond to a 19-item descriptive list, which encompassed a 5-point Likert scale. After submitting the data for component analysis, varimax rotation yielded 6 factors that accounted for 66.1% of the total variance. These factors were: loving acceptance (25.9%), open-minded insight (10.2%), spontaneity (9.2 %), pleasant fear (8.0%), absorption (7.0%), and self-detachment (5.8%). Analysis of variance showed that women rated their peak communication experiences on loving acceptance and spontaneity slightly higher than men.

### *Summary*

Peak experience has come a long way since their inception fifty years ago (Maslow, 1954). These studies have generated great deal of interesting information regarding nature of this experience (descriptions of peak experience, what conditions can bring them about (triggers), out come of experiencing them (lasting effect). The accumulated body of knowledge in the area has confirmed its validity and value as a legitimate and universal phenomenon.

Peak experience descriptions involve both descriptions of an emotional nature and altered cognitive states. These descriptions seem to be consistent from one study to another and independent of what triggers them. Qualities such as disorientation in time, full absorption, self-transcendence, disappearance of usual anxieties are reported by most studies.

Peak experience can occur in a wide range of activities and contexts ranging from music, singing, skydiving, sex, to swimming and encounters with oceanic animals. We know now that peak experience can occur in childhood and that people who have such unique moments may remember them for many years, or life.

Although some peak experiences may alter a person's emotions and cognition momentarily, some may have life changing and lasting effects. Although peak experience is a universal phenomenon, it seems to be underrated and not commonly reported. Finally although peak experience as a phenomenon is well studied there seems to be a need for more correlational

studies. For example it would be interesting to explore peak experience and its effect on physical health (such as stress level, blood pressure, longevity, etc), or its' connection to self-actualization.

### *Theories of Writing*

What is writing and how can it be best defined and explained? More importantly for the present study, how can the study of peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing contribute to a better understanding of this complex process?

To start, we will look at the history and evolution of the composition and writing theories and some of the controversial issues surrounding them. Although each theory has its own merits and has made major contribution to better understanding of writing, at each period only one theory seems to have dominated the scene. The modern arguments and issues regarding how writing should be taught go as far back as 50 years ago. The same issues were debated by the Greeks and through the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Is writing simply a set of rules, forms, and styles governing how preexisting information can be organized, re-categorized, or transmitted from one generation to next? According to *current-traditional* theories of writing this is the case. The current-traditional theories of writing are the most traditional way of looking at writing, with its roots going back to classical Greece (Gottschalk, 1996).

In its early 19<sup>th</sup> century form, a writing course meant learning about different



forms of organizing and presenting information such as persuasive writing, descriptive essays, comparison and contrast essays, and cause and effect essays. The traditional way of viewing and teaching writing was based on a simple assumption. Writing was viewed as a generic ability, a unified collection of rules and skills that could be easily taught through a lot of practice and discipline of the mind. Class time was used to offer the student as much information as possible about the subject, enabling the student to write about it and by doing so learn to write. In this traditional method of teaching writing the subject was the focus of teaching and not the student or his/her psychological development, voice, personality, or the processes he or she went through to compose a piece of writing. All these other considerations or aspects of writing stayed out of the consciousness of both the teacher and the student.

Current traditional theories of writing were finally challenged by a group of composition theorists who believed that there was more to writing than rules, forms, and style, and that writing was in fact the birthplace of *meaning*. Thus *process-oriented* (cognitive and expressive) theories of writing were born. They revolutionized, inspired, and challenged the views and teaching practices of the time. Elbow (1975) summarized the essence of this new perspective as, "writing is the creating or constructing of meaning, not the transmission of meaning already worked out" (p.134-135). So meaning, not information, took center stage.

Meaning and its creation imply the existence of a creative power, an active

being able to generate something new, whereas passing on and packaging information is a passive position only requiring a certain amount of technique and not a great deal of thinking or creative power.

Process theory also emphasized the importance of psychological aspects in writing, and for the first time the psychological concepts began to take prominence in viewing writing and how it actually emerges. Writing began to be seen as a reflection of a person's emotional and cognitive development and not a mere knowledge of rules of grammar or writing. Writing no longer was viewed as a single skill that could be taught, rather as an outcome of something independent of the writing process, namely the emerging human being, who had to be evolved at so many different levels before he or she could actually write.

Process theory basically states that what is important or should be important in teaching a writing course is the writing, and that our goal in a writing course should be to teach how writing actually takes place. To achieve this goal the supporters of this theory suggested reinforcing and developing the student's skills in two main areas, cognitive skills and writing skills.

In the 1960's and 1970's, new curricula emphasizing both cognitive and writing skills were created and offered. These curricula were designed to move the student writer's cognitive development from concrete into abstract thinking, and his or her writing abilities from writing to a safe familiar audiences to a distant hostile ones (Moffett, 1968).

Process theory put the student writer and his/her text at the center of

attention. The goal became how to help the student to come to terms with his/her identity as a writer and develop his/her own unique writing style. The concepts of voice and audience and the range in voices and audiences also began to get due attention. Audience can include self, a friend or a familiar or distant and even a hostile one. Voice also can take on different forms too, beginning from personal voice or many shades of inner voice to a collective voice.

Process theories also emphasized the importance of increasing awareness of student writers about the process of writing by making them more conscious of the processes they go through in order to write. Emig (1971) collected essays of her students, interviewed them, and had them compose essays aloud. She came up with the first taxonomy or classification of the process of writing. According to her taxonomy there are distinct stages that a writer goes through in order to write. They are planning, starting, composing aloud, hesitation, tempo of composing, reformulation, and stopping and contemplation. Emig (1971) believes that this is not a linear process, going from one end to the other without interruption, but rather it's the form and the style and the personality of the writer that determines its shape.

One of the most comprehensive cognitive theories of writing is dual coding theory of reading and writing (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). This model that originated from a general dual coding theory of cognition successfully and comprehensively integrates the polarities that historically has divided and

characterized the study of how reading and composing takes place. The dual coding theory of reading and writing is based on the assumption that reading and writing (composing) processes can be cognitively explained in terms of two distinct but interconnected coding systems, one verbal (language) the other non-verbal (images). The verbal system includes grammatical sequences, and units that are larger and smaller than words (such as common phrases). These coding systems each play an important role in creation of language written or spoken and are both independent and interdependent. The model also provides cognitive interpretation for persona. One such interpretation is the personality writer momentarily assumes in the context of writing task.

Then in the 1980's and 1990's came social theories of writing, a reflection of the mind-set of the time. These theories began to view writing as a social phenomenon and suggested that we do not write in a vacuum. We not only write to an audience (whether safe or hostile) we also interact with situations that are happening around us in the world, and those social forces both shape our thinking and writing as well as influence how we interpret reality.

Social theories of writing see writing as occurring within a complex social context. The writer as a solitary individual who creates from his or her center delivering a product independent of all else is challenged. The writer is seen as a part of a bigger picture, a dynamic, interactive, ever evolving entity that influences and gets influenced by social forces around him or her (Bizzell, 1982; Heath, 1983; Miller, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978).

Bizzell (1982), for example, introduced the concept of *hidden curricula*. She suggested that there are political implications behind why certain types of writing are taught and suggested a method called discourse analysis whereby the students looked at the writing critically and examined the motives behind the form.

Heath (1983) studied the relationship between different social groups and text interpretations and interactions. Based on her observations, Heath stated that different social groups interacted with the written text differently and consequently interpreted it differently. This in turn effected how children from different social groups interacted with and interpreted the text. The point of all this discussion is that we all may read the same text, but depending on our family, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, we may come up with different interpretations of it.

Miller (1984) redefined genre within the new cognitive conceptualization of theories of writing. Miller stated that genre was not a solid permanent set of rules and conventions that never changed, but rather are dynamic, alive, evolving rules that are shaped by changing demands of language emerging from a changing social culture of the time.

Vygotsky (1978) looked at writing in the context of development of language in children. Vygotsky (1978) said that children learned language through interaction with adults and then internalized the external dialogue into an internal speech. Spoken language therefore is a byproduct of social interaction between

the child and his/her social environment and so is writing.

Bakhtin (1981) challenged the notion of authentic voice by suggesting that there is no actual authentic voice. The concept of authentic voice is an assumption that is held dear by expressionists who believe in uniqueness of personal views and its expression by a conceptual entity called *personal voice*. Bakhtin saw personal voice as the culminating result of many voices that have influenced and formed our language and communication abilities. In other words we are the outcome of many voices all blended into one *our voice*, and so is our perception of language, our use of language and our understanding of its rules.

In a book entitled *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) challenged the banking method of education whereby information is simply deposited by a dominating wiser group to a less educated one, thus dictating the thinking and identity of the individual, and ultimately the culture. Freire's work is about individual empowerment for social ends. He believed that the role of education is to free people from social bondage and help them to think for themselves and regain their powers as agents of change. Freire's ideology goes beyond mere theories of writing and involves a liberating and empowering philosophy of education.

Movements that have called for an end to dichotomies created by social and cognitive views marked the next phase in the evolution of writing theories. People like Flower (1989) began to ask for an interactive model of writing, one

that could integrate both views and began to explain how the interaction actually takes place. According to Flower (1989), cognition is always busy mediating and interpreting “the particular world that context provides” (p.282). Flower believes that context and cognition do interact in three essential ways in constructing one another:

One principle is that cultural and social context can provide direct *cues* to cognition. The second is that, that context is also always *mediated* by the cognition of the individual writer. And the third is that the bounded purposes that emerge from this process are highly constrained but at the same time meaningful, rhetorical acts. (p.287)

Context cues cognition (first principle) through activating past experiences and knowledge, influencing three main cognitive areas of goal, criteria, and strategy, as well as setting the criteria whereby the text and the writer’s thinking is evaluated. Cognition in turn interacts with the context or mediates these contextual clues through process of planning, problem solving, and trial-and-error. However in final analysis it is the writer who after recognizing the contextual clues makes the decision (intentionality) as how to respond to the contextual purpose or what Flower calls bounded purpose (third principle). Bounded purpose refers to the outcome of a complex negotiative and interactive process whereby purpose important to *self* is integrated with the purpose imposed and demanded by the *context*. According to Flower an interactive theory of writing has to recognize the importance of both the cues of the context,

the mediating power of cognition, as well as rule of intentionality as it relates to *purpose*.

### *Benefits of Writing*

Writing has many benefits, ranging from therapeutic and educational to self-empowering and self-actualizing. Writing can be useful as a powerful technique to access subconscious imagery. The use of written imagery in creating a story seems to give the writer access to more material by allowing access to the subconscious. Gladding (1992) noted that imagery is a universal and natural modality for helping people change, and that this change can be achieved through writing.

Writing as a cathartic and self-help tool has been practiced for years. For example, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the physician Benjamin Rush asked his patients to write down their symptoms. He discovered that the writing process not only reduced the tension level in his patients, but also gave him better insight into their problems and personality (McKinney, 1976). One of the first psychologists to describe the therapeutic benefits of writing was Gordon Allport (1942). Other early references to specific clinical uses of writing can be found in the works of Farber (1953), Landsman (1951), and Messinger (1952). Progoff's (1975) intensive process journal method utilized the power of creative writing to bring out subconscious issues in order to be dealt with on a conscious level. Letter writing has been used to improve interpersonal communication between couples (Rudes, 1992). Short story writing by rape victims has proven helpful in



recovering from rape through enabling the victim to explore various meanings of the rape (Grove, 1984). Lindahal (1988) used letter writing in helping a six-year-old who was sexually abused with positive results. Writing has been used as a beneficial tool in helping the adult survivors of incest (Faria & Belohlavek, 1984). Deits (1988) has used letter writing in helping grieving individuals to take control and arrive at an acceptable understanding and closure.

Some of these benefits have been extensively researched, while others are just beginning to get their due attention. One such well-researched area is psychotherapeutic benefits of writing (Allport, 1942; Hodges, 1996; McKinney, 1976; Stone, 1998; McClellan, Schneider & Perney, 1998). A popular form of using writing as a therapeutic aid is journaling or writing in a diary. Many therapists find keeping a journal enhances and helps therapeutic work both in session and in between sessions (McCellan et al., 1998; Schneider & Stone, 1998).

The reason for the popularity of the diary may be found in the fact that the diary is the only form of writing that encourages total freedom of expression. Its private nature encourages honesty, which could lead to more discoveries. These discoveries could trigger moments of greatest joy or peak experience and other positive human experiences. A good example of how the use of a diary can lead to discoveries can be found in the life of Carl Jung. Jung's major psychological works evolved out of the intense self-study he followed in his diaries. He attributed the beginning of all his work to initial fantasies, which he

formulated in his diary (Jung, 1954).

Another important contributor to development and the use of a diary as a tool for self-help and self-development is Ira Progoff (1975). Progoff saw keeping a journal as an ideal context for continuous confrontation of self. According to Progoff the systematic method of keeping a diary can be considered a psychological laboratory in which personal growth is recorded and studied. It synthesizes the outer and inner parts of one's experiences into one.

Progoff (1975) believed that through writing one can access an inner source of life and energy that is usually hidden and inaccessible to human conscious. Through realizing the exact point of where we are in our journey we can tap into the answers that will guide us into the next phase of our journey. Progoff saw journaling as a tool of change controlled, initiated and monitored by the individual.

Progoff's (1975) philosophy is a non-evaluative one with respect to one's ability to find the answers for one's life from within using his intensive writing method. Although Progoff described his theory in terms of his unique workshop, I believe he was talking about basic principles of growth, human development and hidden power of writing. His work is a testimony to the hidden power of writing as a force of change and power of believing in human beings ability to help themselves by tapping into their own inner resources.

Writing used as a tool in creating a healthy, creative, and authentic life is also demonstrated in the life and work of Nin (1975) who contributed greatly to the

rise and popularity of practical and therapeutic use of the diary. Nin kept a diary from an early age to see herself through a difficult childhood. She believed in the power of the writing process in helping us solve problems, survive hardships, and create a healthy, creative, ever expanding life, using logic, intuition, and creativity. She believed that cultivating and nourishing our inner being can lead us to tap into a never ending source of inner strength. Nin believed in the rebirth of self through interaction between self, the writing process, and our collective experiences, progressively moving towards a greater coherence and personal knowledge. Her creativity was a way of life; she redefined the creative person as an alive, curious individual who is always finding new paths to grow, expand, and enjoy the moment. She saw the main value of the writing process not only in its ability to help us cope with life, but to live in it fully and creatively. She described her journey using the power of writing as "...a journey from subjectivity, and neurosis, to objectivity, expansion, fulfillment..." (Nin, 1975, p.23).

Journaling has been used successfully in aiding sex offenders who are still in denial to come to terms with what they have done and take the first step towards recovery (Stone, 1998). Hodges (1996) found that journal writing could be instrumental in helping returning nursing students (who are well into their adult years) find their voices and thus grow personally and professionally. Use of interactive writing in dialogue journals with gifted students has proven useful in increasing the quality of communication between parents, teachers, and gifted

students and has been helpful in giving the gifted student gain insight into their unique gifts and abilities (Farley & Farely, 1987). Through journal keeping, gifted adolescents were able to achieve a higher quality of self-analysis (Hall, 1990).

After keeping a journal for many years and using it as a helpful supportive tool in therapy McClellan et al (1998) conducted an empirical study to support the value of journal writing in psychotherapy. McClellan et al (1998) used 90 selected entries from 30 participants' journals to trace and identify five stages of change as described by Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross (1992) emergence of voice measured by "I statements" conceptualized by Gillian (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The results of the study supported the value of writing as a useful tool in fostering the emergence of *voice* and enhancing personal growth. McClellan et al (1998) suggests use of journaling as a complementary intervention in cognitive and Adlerian psychotherapy.

Stone (1998) refers to journaling as "story telling to ourselves" (p.537). Through studying our stories we can better understand how we interpret life. According to Stone the use of journaling in identifying our unique stories can speedup and enhance therapy. Journal writing can move the client from a black and white, either/or point of view to more open, flexible realization of existence of variety of options and choices. Stone sees writing as a reflection, decision making tool as well as a means for life evaluation. According to Stone the transforming power of writing resides in the process of writing and has less to do

with the content of writing.

In a qualitative study Brady and Sky (2003) explored benefits of keeping a journal among 15 older individuals (average age 69 years). The participants were members of an institute for learning in retirement in Maine. Journal writing was proven useful in helping the older learners to cope with life, nurture their own voice and spirit, and enhance self-discovery.

A newly emerging form of counseling is text-based counseling through internet (Wright, 2002). Users of chat rooms such as e-mail listening service have begun to discover the power of writing as a self-help tool (Wright & Chung, 2001). The *British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Goss, Anthony, Jamieson & Palmer, 2001) defines on-line therapy as a “text-based communication over the Internet either by email or by internet relay chat “(p. 37). In this form of therapy writing is used as the main tool of therapy giving clients the greatest control over their therapeutic process (Rasmussen & Tomm, 1992). Anthony (2000) looked at this new form of therapeutic relationship and made the following observation, “The rapport between counselor and client in cyber space is developed not by reacting to another person’s physical presence and spoken word, but by entering the client’s mental constructs via the written word” (p.626).

As cognitive therapists Adlerians believe that beliefs are the basic units or ingredients for change. By identifying these units and changing them a person can recreate a healthier life or *rewrite a new story* or design a new *life style* (Schneider & Stone, 1998). Schneider and Stone believe that this process can

be enhanced through the use of writing in a journal. Writing facilitates self change by allowing the individual to get in touch with their inner dialogue, the dialogue between self and self and thus makes examination of the belief system possible. Once the therapy begins to move forward writing can be useful in maintaining, planning and celebrating the changes the person has achieved. According to Schnieder and Stone what makes writing such a powerful tool for change is the element of honesty; in no other context or relationship can we hope to achieve that level of openness and honesty with ourselves.

In a drop-in women's shelter in Boston, therapeutic writing was used to empower women and help them regain a sense of connection to others (Wolf, Goldfader, & Lehan, 1997). Homeless women make up 25% of the homeless population in United States. Causes range from drug abuse, violence, and mental illness to poverty. In most cases a combination of these factors may exist. The Women Speak program was originated through collaboration between couple of graduate students and homeless women who wanted to write as a means of helping themselves. Using a person-centered approach based on Werner & Bower (1989), and influenced by the work of Freire (1970), students and homeless women worked together to help foster a sense of empowerment through application of writing therapy. Learning through reflection and creative expression replaced the traditional methods of care delivery. Women needed to put into words their unique experiences and found the process both healing and empowering. The collaborative work of these women

and the staff resulted in publication of their work.

An interesting study done by Pennebaker (1988) explored the relationship between self-disclosure through writing and physical health. This study was based on the basic assumption of psychosomatic model that holding back one's thoughts and feelings is associated with long-term stress and disease.

There have been studies that have suggested a connection between psychological conflict, anxiety, stress, and deterioration of physical health (Alexander, 1950; Selye, 1976). Pennebaker (1988) explored the relationship between actively confronting upsetting experiences through writing and health. To measure this, fifty healthy undergraduate students were asked to write about traumatic or superficial upsetting experiences for four continuous days. The participants' health levels were measured before and after the experiment using four different measures of health. These measures included a measure of change in the responsiveness of the immune system, a measure of change on autonomic levels, frequency of health center use, and frequency of subjective distress reports. The results of the study indicated that writing about traumatic events can have an over-all positive effect on all four measures.

Poetry therapy is used in a variety of therapeutic settings in treatment of many different forms of psychological problems. Based on many reports, it seems to be a very powerful tool for promoting emotional and psychological recovery in many instances. Poetry therapy can allow expression of suppressed feelings and thoughts and reduce tension and facilitate healing (Fuchel, 1985).

Its uses cover a spectrum of situations from helping mourning parents to deal with the death of their child (Mazza, 2001), to healing of battered women (Booker, 1999), to making identity diagnosis of psychiatric patients (Bjorklund, 1999). Poetry therapy has proven to be useful in treatment of troubled adolescents (Bowman, 1992). It also has been used in helping individuals dealing with serious physical disease such as cancer or other forms of terminal illnesses (Teucher, 2002), as well as in treatment of paranoid schizophrenia (Silver, 1993), survivors of sexual abuse, and depressed children (DeMaria, 1991; Trevizu, 2002).

In a dual-diagnosis alcohol and drug treatment program called Recovery Poetry 101, poetry was used to help facilitate value clarification as a part of recovery treatment. This program was then followed up with some form of individual writing exercises. The program took advantage of power of group dynamics and writing. Poetry was used as a means to process personal experiences and achieving insight into oneself and others. The results of the program indicated that use of poetry therapy can have a positive and helpful influence in recovery from drug and alcohol (Gillispie, 2001).

It is evident that the benefits of writing are many and cover a range of beneficial outcomes from daily self-expression in a journal, to many therapeutic benefits.



### *Peak Experience and Writing*

Is there a relationship between peak experience and writing? Because establishing such a connection based on existing research was not possible an inferential approach to the matter was taken. I also wanted to find answers to questions such as what motivates writers to write.

To begin this process I started by exploring the ties between the writing process and peak experience through examining the descriptions of writers about their writing experiences. I also tried to listen without allowing the familiar psychological terminology such as *peak experience* or *flow*, distract me from hearing what was described by writers as their writing experience.

Examining writing experiences of writers revealed valuable information regarding the relationship between peak experience and writing. In doing so one begins to understand why writers write despite the challenges and difficulties inherent in the writing process, such as writing blocks that seem never ending; painful periods when nothing comes out on paper, no matter how hard one tries; the creative struggle of trying to say one thing and writing another, and going through two hundred drafts to eventually saying it just right. Then there is dealing with the possibly less interesting, but unavoidable part of writing, the mechanical aspects, such as paying attention to grammatical details and proof reading, which has to be endured in order to complete the work. Consequently, the hard work involved in the writing process can only be understood if writing is examined in the context of what motivates writers to write.

The question of what motivates a writer to write is an important one as in it may lay the reasons that, at least for some, writing is such a pleasurable and fulfilling experience. One possible explanation, given by Bertagnolli and Rackham (1982), is that writing is basically an intrinsically rewarding process:

The best writers have seldom written only to publish. Through hard work and continual effort, they have learned there is joy in the act of writing, a pleasure in discovering who and what they are as human beings and what it means to be alive. If the pleasure of the act results in a published product, fine. It feels good to know that someone, even a single editor, likes what you have written. But most writers who have published will admit the real satisfaction comes in the writing. It is the process, not the product that validates their lives. (p. 1)

If the real satisfaction gained in the writing process comes from the writing experience itself, and not the external rewards that follow, the next natural question would be finding out what those intrinsic rewards are. What are the inner rewards of writing that make some people develop a need to write? This finally brings us to the central question of interest to this study, the question of writing and peak experience and other positive human experiences. Is it possible that writer's report having peak type experiences, without ever calling it a *peak experience*?

To find the answer, the descriptions of peak experience had to be compared and contrasted with how some writers describe their writing experiences. A

close match was found between the two. For example, writers tended to describe their writing experiences in terms of self-transcendence, self-absorption, qualities that could be attributed to peak moments (Bertagnolli & Rackham, 1982; Nin, 1975; Twyman, 1990). Writers reported becoming more of who they were as a result of the writing process. This shares a great deal of resemblance to peak moments being described as an acute identity episode (Maslow, 1968).

The reason for these similarities may be found in the fact that the writing process essentially is a creative one. In describing B-type experiences, Maslow (1968) described a group of experiences that were identical or similar to peak experience, such as the love, parental, mystical, oceanic experience, aesthetic, and finally the creative experience. Maslow (1968) concluded that much of what we have learned from peak experience studies could be transferred directly to the area of creativity and creative attitude.

When comparing descriptions of the creative state with peak experience, it is found that these descriptions are indeed similar if not identical (Maslow, 1968). The qualities such as absorption, intrinsic value, rich perception, disorientation in time and space, and freedom from usual fears and anxieties. These are common qualities for both peak moments and creative experiences. Moments like this are perceived as pure and innocent, almost child like in character.

Maslow (1968) also drew a parallel between the creative experience and mystical experiences, calling creative experiences a diluted, more secular

version of the mystical experience. Mystical experiences are described as a loss of self or ego, transcendence of self, oneness, an integration of some sort of the self and non-self, seeing of what is hidden, the hidden truth, a revelation, the sense of stripping away of veils and finally the whole experience is experienced. Maslow (1968) believed that his own research on peak experience and mystical experiences and Laski's (1961) description of ecstasy were a rich source of insight on creativity and the creative process. It is possible to speculate that one reason peak experience is triggered in writing is the creative nature of the writing process itself. Another reason could be the intrinsic rewards of writing. Could it be that some types of writing can bring about insight, which in turn could lead in to peak moments? Another way to look at the possible relationship between the writing process and peak experience is in terms of the relationship between writing and self. Writing at least in some cases is nothing but the ability to communicate with one's inner self and acquire the ability to listen to our inner voices. It is through this process that writing takes us to worlds we could never have imagined or experienced otherwise. The writing process quietly and powerfully teaches us about our inner psychological complexity, using nothing but mere words. The connection between the writer and self is undeniable, as expressed by the following statement (Bertagnolli & Rackham, 1982):

For many of us the act of writing is one way of discovering what is hidden inside us, a way of gaining access to the imagination, to memory, to

emotions. In this sense, we know we cannot separate writing from living, from being alive, from the life we have lived. The process we are talking about then is an “organic” one, what Thomas Huxley called “almost an equivalent of the word living.” (p. 3)

In this sense, one can compare a person writing to an artist sitting at the canvas with his/her brush, portraying emotions and feelings and unique perceptions from the depths of his/her being. The painter’s art comprises pictures for all to see, share, and experience. The same is true about writing, and like any art form it involves self at the center and heart of it. Twyman (1990) writes:

The quest for self-knowledge through art is not a new one and each writer, in his or her own unique way, has a wonderful avenue with which to explore one’s inner being through poetry, prose, or short stories. And while the audience can appreciate the art, they can also perhaps gain some insight into their own soul. (p. 36)

A parallel relationship exists between self and peak experience. The concept of self has been mentioned in connection to peak experience descriptions such as self in clear focus, self-transcendence, self in full control (Maslow, 1968; Panzarella, 1980). Maslow (1968) saw peak experience as acute identity episodes in which we were most ourselves. Privette (1983) uses peak experience as a way of defining self-actualization. Maslow (1968) found a greater frequency of peak experience among self-actualizing individuals. The

same can be said about the impact of writing on the writer, as writing can lead to better understanding and discovery of self. In some instances, writing can encompass many experiences all at once, leading to the greatest moments of happiness. Nickerson (1985) writes:

The process begins with the writer in stillness, observes the physical world. As he connects with that world, the distractions of self and ego drop away. The writer becomes one with all there is, achieving what Maslow, has termed a “peak-experience.” The words used to capture that experience become the experience itself. The poem, therefore, is not about something but is the thing itself. (p. 307)

When peak experience actually occurs in writing, the results can be powerful and self-transforming. A good example of peak experience and its empowering qualities in connection to writing can be found in studying the life of Julia Ward Howe (Hetherington, 1982), who wrote the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Howe’s story is an inspirational and interesting one. It is a good illustration of the connection between writing, self-actualization, and peak experience. She lived during the nineteenth century, in a period where women were oppressed by their cultural mindset (Hetherington, 1982). She had a dominating husband who controlled her life. Yet despite her limiting circumstances, while caring for her six children, and using her writing as her only weapon, Howe managed to fight her way to independence against an oppressive social and home environment. The most important sources of strength for Howe according to her

own writing were occasional peak experience that helped her in restoring her sense of self, uniting her thoughts and ideas. Writing the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” was one such moment. Moments such as these gave her the hope she needed to not give in to total despair. These self-restoring experiences enabled her to use her mind not only to survive, but also to transcend her limiting and oppressing environment. It made her emerge as one of the distinguished female leaders of her time who devoted her later years to social reform, and women’s rights.

### *Summary*

Peak experience research has come a long way since its early days. Peak experience descriptions and many circumstances under which it occurs are well documented. It is safe now to conclude that peak experience is a unique phenomenon with specific qualities and characteristics. This study is intended to expand our existing knowledge of the descriptions and possible triggers of peak experience and other positive human experiences in to the realm of writing.

Theories of writing have a lot to offer us in the area of peak experience studies, as well as therapeutic uses of writing. Psychological theories in general and studies of optimum moments specifically (such as study of peak experience and other similar experiences) can also enrich both teaching and advancement of theoretical concepts of writing compositions.

It is my hope that study of writing-triggered peak experience and other

positive human experiences can also ignite a new interest in a more philosophical discussion of happiness and discovery of hidden powers of writing.



## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Participants

The sample consisted of 270 students enrolled in undergraduate writing classes offered by the English Department at Texas A&M University (English 104, Composition & Rhetoric, English 203, Introduction to Literature; English 210 or 301, Technical Writing). These students volunteered without any financial or class credit compensation. The choice of participants was based on the assumption that they would be involved in some sort of writing and that they would consequently be more likely to provide insightful information about their writing experience.

Although 270 individuals responded to the demographic survey (which was collected for the sole purpose of sample description) participants' responses to all items were not consistent (they chose to respond to some items and ignore others). This explains why in some categories the frequencies of the total number of participants do not add up to 270.

A total of 270 individuals responded to the *gender* item, indicating that there were 138 males (51.1%) and 132 females (48.9%). A total of 247 individuals responded to the *birth order* items, resulting in the following information: first child 108 (44%), second child 82(33%), third child 30(22%), last child 3 (1%), only children 3 (1%), and other 21(8%). 253 individuals responded to *school classification* item. They were 64 freshmen (23%), 58 sophomores (22%), 51

juniors (19%), 80 seniors (30%). For the 253 responded to the *age* item, the mean age was 21, with a standard deviation of 2.12 and a range of 17 to 36. And finally a total of 270 people responded to the *study major* item. As can be seen in Table 1, a variety of

Table 1:

*Frequencies of the Major Courses of Study as Reported by Students*

Study Majors (Frequencies)		Study Majors (Frequencies)	
Psychology	36	Genetics	2
Education	36	Geography	2
Engineering	36	Geology	2
Science	29	Marketing	2
Business	23	Physics	2
Management	16	Sociology	2
General studies	11	Accounting	1
Political science	9	Archeology	1
Agriculture	7	Biomedical	1
History	6	Biomedical science	1
Kinesiology	6	Communication disorder	1
Journalism	5	Economy	1
Architecture	3	Finance	1
Biochemistry	3	Finance	2
Biology	3	Math	1
Construction	3	Veterinary sciences	1
English	3	Medicine	1
Industrial distribution	3	Nutrition	1
Community health	2	Pre-law	1
Entomology	2	Premed	1

study majors were present in the sample. No other information regarding demographic variables was collected.

### Instruments and Materials

Previous empirical studies investigating peak experience as well as peak performance have used rating scales to understand the phenomenon (Privette & Dunham, 1989; Privette & Landsman, 1983; Privette & Sherry, 1986; Privette & Bundrick, 1987). The following is a list of all the instruments and materials that were used in this study:

1. A Demographic Survey. The purpose of this survey (designed specifically for this study) was used to obtain basic demographic information on the research participants (such as, age, sex, and the study major) (see Appendices A & B).
2. The Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1983). This questionnaire was used to collect any report of a writing triggered happy moment (see Appendices C & D).
3. The Personal Orientation Questionnaire, which was designed specifically for this study. The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather further information on writing interests and habits of the research participants (Appendices E & F).
4. A letter of introduction and consent. The purpose of this letter was to obtain the research participant's permission to use the data provided for the

purpose of scientific investigation, and to assure confidentiality. Both the researcher and the individual participant signed the letter (Appendices G&H).

### *Demographic Survey*

A brief instrument was used to describe the sample, asking questions with regard to their gender, birth order, and study majors (Appendices A&B).

### *Experience Questionnaire*

The Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1983; Privette & Bundrick, 1991) is a research instrument that was derived from the literature on peak experience, peak performance, and flow. This questionnaire (see Appendices C&D) asks for descriptions regarding one of six life events: moments of the highest happiness (peak experience), incidents described as functioning at one's best (peak performance), incidents involving extremely positive experiences in sports or games (flow), incidents characterized by a sad event (misery), incidents characterized by an inability to succeed (failure), and incidents characterized by average events. For the purpose of this study, the use of this instrument was limited to the occurrences and descriptions of writing-triggered peak experience, or other positive human experiences.

The Experience Questionnaire has two parts. The first part consists of an open-ended question that elicits the narratives of one of six different life events. The second part consists of 42 Likert-type rating scales ranging from 1(no

importance) to 5 (great importance). The 42 items measure eight common factors: (1) self in clear process, (2) full focus, (3) significance, (4) fulfillment, (5) spirituality, (6) other people, (7) play, and (8) outer structure. In addition there are 5 more items (items 43 to 47) intended to identify the type of experience reported by the participant (ranging from misery to the highest happiness). Item 43 measures peak performance while item 44 determines whether a peak experience was actually being reported. Item 44 directly asks the person to choose the feeling they have experienced out of 7 categories, ranging from *the highest happiness* (7), to *joy* (6), to *enjoyment* (5), to *neutrality* (4), to *boredom* (3), to *worry* (2), and finally, to *misery* (1).

Due to great similarities and overlap between the characteristics of peak experience and peak performance, protocols mentioning either experience were included in the final data pool. Furthermore, any protocol with a rating of less than 5 was eliminated. In a study conducted by Privette and Sherry (1986) the reliability of the instrument was measured with data from 33 respondents. Participants consisted of university students majoring in psychology (12 men, and 21 women, ranging in age from 20 to 49 years). The participants were instructed to report a peak performance experience and rate the 42 items. The individuals participated in the study twice (one week apart). Test-retest reliability was calculated (using a Pearson product-moment correlation), resulting in an  $r = .70$ .

### *Personal Orientation Questionnaire*

This questionnaire was developed especially for this study for the purpose of inquiring whether certain personal orientations could act as factors in triggering a peak experience, or other positive human experiences. The questionnaire is based on a 6-point Likert-type rating scale and contains 16 personal items that assesses the factors that might be related to the occurrence of peak experiences. These 16 items are based on my personal hypotheses or hunches as to what kind of personal orientations can act as triggers for a peak experience (see Appendices E & F).

One such possible personal orientation that can act as a trigger has to do with *thinking style*. Based on a personal assumption people were divided into two groups, *thinker/thinkers* and *writer/thinkers*. *Thinker/thinkers* were individuals who were assumed to process their thoughts internally and quietly without a need to write. *Thinker /writers* on the other hand were individuals who were assumed to need to write in order to think clearly and effectively. It was hypothesized that the people who needed to write in order to think had a greater chance of experiencing peak moments as a result of writing.

The other assumption regarding personal orientation as a trigger has to do with having an *introspective orientation*. The *introspective orientation* is defined as having a deep need and genuine interest to engage in reflection. This could include (but not limited to) interest in self-knowledge, self-evaluation, and self-actualization. It is hypothesized that when this *introspective orientation* is

combined with an interest or need *to introspect in writing* result could mean frequent peak experience.

And finally, it was assumed that the *frequency of writing* in and of itself could act as a trigger. The rationale for this assumption was a simple one. It was assumed that the more one writes the more one has the chance to have a writing-triggered peak experience. The Questionnaire consists of 16 items which are: interest in self knowledge and self discovery (Q1); interest in introspection (Q2); frequency of use of writing in general (Q3); frequency of use of writing for self- knowledge (Q4); frequency of use of writing for introspection (Q5); frequency of use of writing as a primary decision making tool (Q6); frequency of use of writing as a primary thinking tool (Q7); frequency of use of writing as a personal problem solving tool (Q8); frequency of use of non-writing means for personal problem solving (Q9); frequency of use of non-writing means for self-knowledge (Q10); frequency of engaging in technical writing (Q11); frequency of engaging in poetic/creative writing (Q12); frequency of engaging in literary writing (Q13); frequency of engaging in personal self expression using writing (Q14); frequency of experiencing peak experience in general (Q 15); frequency of having writing-triggered peak experiences (Q16).

#### *Letter of Consent and Introduction*

These two letters were intended to introduce the study to the participants while asking their permission to use the information gathered from them for the purpose of a scientific investigation and to assure confidentiality (Appendices G

& H).

### Procedure

The data were collected over a five-month period in the spring of 1998. The participants were asked to sit in a comfortable place where they could write. Then, the participants were given a consent form and a brief introduction to the study. The purpose of this introduction was to give the participants an accurate but brief overview concerning what they were being asked to do. Participants were also informed about the importance of the study. Once the participants were told that the purpose of the study was to learn more about our happy moments and experiences, the research material was distributed. The participants were asked to complete The Experience Questionnaire first and then go on to the Personal Orientation Questionnaire. Finally, participants were asked to provide their demographic information.



## CHAPTER VI

### RESULTS

The primary purpose of this study was to describe a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences and explore and identify some possible triggers. This research project was conducted with three basic questions as its main focus:

1. Can writing trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences?
2. How are writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences best described?
3. What factors influence the occurrence of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences?

#### Research Question One: Can Writing Trigger Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences?

Using a multi-level criterion specially developed for this study two independent judges rated the 270 written responses to Privette's (1983) Experience Questionnaire, which asks for the description of the happiest life moments while engaged in the writing process. At each level, protocols were measured against a set of criteria predefined for that level. If the protocol passed the first level of assessment it went on to the next level, otherwise it was eliminated. Only the protocols that passed all three levels were accepted into the final data pool for final analysis.

At the most basic level, or level one, Privette's (1983) criteria of readability, comprehensibility, and believability were followed to screen the protocols. The primary goal at this step was to eliminate protocols that could not be clearly read or understood due to stylistic or other writing problems. All 270 protocols passed this level with 100% agreement between the two judges.

At the second level, a new criterion specially designed for this study was used to separate authentic reports of peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing from reports that appeared to be peak reports at first glance. A protocol was accepted as an authentic peak experience and other positive human experiences if it was happy, specific, and was a direct outcome of the writing process (see Appendix I). From the original 270 protocols, judges agreed on 119 (44%) being authentic peak experience and other positive human experiences, while 151(56%) protocols were rejected. Of the latter, 24(9 %) were blank, and 16 (6%) reported never having peak experience and other positive human experiences. The never responses included statements such as "never had a happy moment in writing" as well as "I hate writing." Of the remaining 111 (41 %) protocols 91(33 %) were rejected by both judges, and 20 (7 %) were responses in which the two judges could not come to an agreement on whether they were peak experience or other positive human experiences or not. Only protocols accepted by both judges were passed on to the final selection criterion. The reliability of these judgments was assessed via the proportion of inter-rater agreement, which was .90.

Finally at the last level, the selected 119 protocols were double checked against the ratings given by the individual on Privette's (1983) Experience Questionnaire (Part II), specifically using items 42, 43, and 44, which identify and verify whether a peak experience or peak performance has actually occurred (based on the self-rating of the participant). Item 44 directly asks the person to choose from 7 categories, the feeling they have experienced, ranging from *the highest happiness* (7), to *joy* (6), to *enjoyment* (5), to *neutrality* (4), to *boredom* (3), to *worry* (2), to *misery* (1). Any protocols with less than a 5 rating were eliminated from the data pool. Only the categories of the highest happiness, joy, and enjoyment were accepted as peak experience or other positive human experiences.

As this was the first exploratory study of peak experience and writing I allowed entry of lower categories of 6 (joy), and 5 (enjoyment) into the final data providing a wide range of positive experiences to be explored, and studied. This not only gave me access to a wider range of positive human experiences to study and learn from, but it also made the results more useful as they can be applied to a wider range of positive writing experiences.

The exact same procedure was repeated for item 43, which measures peak performance. Due to great similarities and overlap between the characteristics of peak experience and peak performance, both groups of protocols were admitted in to the final data pool (see Appendices C&D). All 119 protocols (62 female and 54 male) passed this final checkpoint and were selected as the main

body of data to be analyzed for content.

In examining the responses, it appears that the answer to the first question, whether peak experience and other positive human experiences occur in writing, is affirmative. More than two out of five participants (approximately 44%) reported having at least one moment when they had a writing-triggered peak experience or other positive human experiences as a result of writing. Therefore, one can add writing to the list of previously identified triggers of peak experience and other positive human experiences.

Research Question Two: How Are Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences Best Described?

One of the main goals of this study was to describe writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. In order to achieve this, three different approaches were used. The first one involved looking at the length of protocols using the total number of words in each protocol. The second method involved analyzing the content of these protocols to identify attributes or repeating themes by reading and carefully categorizing, extracting, identifying any significant words or themes that could best describe a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. A final approach involved examining responses to Privette's (1983) 42 descriptive items.

*Describing Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences Using Protocol Length*

One way of describing a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences involved an examination of protocol word length. To achieve this, the number of words in each protocol was counted. This procedure was conducted for the peak and non-peak protocols. Never and blank responses were not included in this analysis. Then, using word count as the dependent variable, the two groups (*peak and non-peak*) were compared and contrasted by conducting a *t*-test for independent samples. This was done in order to ascertain whether or not a statistically significant difference existed.

Results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variance for this *t*-test were not significant ( $p = .439$ ); therefore, equality of variance was assumed between the peak and non-peak groups. As can be seen in Table 2 the mean word count for the peak group (this includes writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences) was 65.04, whereas the average mean for the word count for the non-peak group was 53.63. This resulted in a mean difference of 11.41 between the peak and non-peak groups. Results of the *t*-test were statistically significant  $t(228) = 2.708$ ,  $p < .05$  and yielded a small effect size ( $\eta^2 = .031$ ). This result means that on average, the protocols written by people who reported a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences were longer (on average having 11 more words).

Table 2:

*Means and Standard Deviations for Peak and Non-peak Protocol Word Counts*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Standard Error of the Mean</i>
Peak	119	65.04	30.20	2.77
No Peak	111	53.63	33.70	3.20

What could this difference mean? One way of interpreting these findings is to speculate that the peak protocols were longer because people with a peak experience and other positive human experiences had something to report and needed more words to report it. On the other hand the longer protocols of those reporting peak experience and other positive human experiences could reflect greater fluency or superior language ability. It is also possible that this difference reflects a difference in style of thinking (think/writer). As mentioned before a person with a think/writer style of thinking does most of their thinking in writing, whereas a person with a think/thinking style of thinking thinks quietly and internally or thinks aloud through other means besides writing (such as dialogue with others or self). Therefore it is possible that the difference in protocol length could also be attributed to this difference in thinking style. Since these and other explanations seem plausible the appropriate interpretation of this finding is unclear.

*Describing Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human  
Experiences Using Thematic Content Analysis*

The 119 written descriptions of peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing were content analyzed for the purpose of identifying attributes or qualities that characterized students' reports of these events. As seen in Table 3, the content analysis yielded 14 attributes with some individual protocol having at least one of these attributes. None of the protocols had all 14 attributes and some had more than one and some had none. This last group was made up of individuals whose protocols did not yield any attribute except to say it was an unusually happy or positive experience. Together these 14 attributes represent descriptions of peak experience and other positive human experiences resulting from writing.

My main method of analysis in identifying these 14 attributes was simple. First of all I *immersed* myself in the protocols by reading and examining them many times over a long period of time and with many breaks in between the readings. I took my main clues *directly from the text* and the *words* used by the participants and did my utmost not to rely too much on inference or subjective interpretation in extracting these attributes.

Because I did not use the help or judgment of a second person the results obtained are solely based on my own evaluation and assessment and therefore could be considered by some as somewhat subjective and open for questioning. Neither can I offer an inter-rater agreement reliability value. Nevertheless I

believe that repetitive analysis and immersion method I explained earlier and using the exact descriptions given by the participants did lower the possibility of error and prevented this type of analysis from appearing too subjective or unreliable.

Table 3:

*Frequency of the 14 Descriptive Attributes of Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences*

Attribute	Frequency
Flow of the words (click)	20
The process of writing was its own reward (Intrinsic Value)	12
Peak performance	6
Clarity	6
Disappearance of negative states of mind	5
Enhanced sense of personal power, and self worth	5
Spontaneity	5
Unusual speed	3
Amount written	3
Enhanced sense of confidence	1
Disorientation in time	1
Innocent and real	1
Heightened visual and sensual acuteness	1
Peacefulness	1

*N=119*

Most of these characteristics are consistent with the results and descriptions reported by previous research while others are unique to the writing process and can be considered unique characteristics of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. Specifically spontaneity, disorientation in time, effortlessness, and clarity have been repeatedly reported in a variety of



peak experience studies (Hoffman, 1998; Lavaysse, 2002; Maslow, 1968; Privette, 1983; Raviza, 1977) whereas flow of the words (click) and quantity of written material (indicated by both amount and speed of writing) seem to be unique to writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences.

In the following sections, a number of protocols were selected that are believed to be representative of the majority of protocols identified as reflecting each of the 14 qualities listed in Table 3. The complete 119 protocols are to be found in Appendix J. For rules used to create the following categories please refer to Appendix K.

#### *Flow of the Words (Click)*

Flow is the most frequently reported quality of peak experience and other positive human experiences. It is defined as the *fluency* or ease with which the words appear on to the paper. It also can be defined as a sudden unexpected change in the speed, quality, and amount of writing, which usually catches the person by surprise and can be quite overwhelming. Some individuals refer to this sudden shift in writing quality, fluency and speed as *click*.

Some of these qualities have been reported by previous research. One such quality is effortlessness or ease (Maslow, 1968; Privette 1983). Effortlessness in writing means that writing goes unusually smooth as if directed from another source. The participants communicated these, using phrases such as *it was not even work*, or *information just presented itself*. The quality of flow was reported

in different forms in at least 20 instances.

A protocol was identified as exhibiting flow if it had one or some combination of the above mentioned qualities as can be seen in the following examples:

One day I was writing a letter to my parents. I had talked to them on the phone just hours before. I begun to write the letter, but I thought that they would appreciate it, any ways when I started to write the letter I told them how much they meant to me. As I continued to write, I discovered that the words were just flowing on to the page. I did not even have to think of what to write my thoughts were going straight to my hand. I remember thinking about how important my parents are to me, and how much they have done for me. The letter touched me in my heart, because I had taken my whole life for granted. This gave me a chance to thank them. They loved the letter.

Another person writes:

I became really compassionate one time when I had to write a paper for a class. The paper was about sustainable agriculture, and this is a topic I have always felt strongly about. I remember the words just coming out of my brain, through my hands, and pouring out into the paper. It wasn't even work; it was what I believed, backed by facts. I received a 98 on the paper. It made me very happy, that I was able to convey my thoughts that well.

Why is flow so frequently associated with writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences? One can only speculate. Perhaps at certain moments a number of factors yet to be identified come

together and succeed in removing the barriers that usually prevents us from listening to our inner selves. One can further speculate that on such rare moments when barriers between *external self* and *inner self* are removed we briefly experience our *true identity*. We can further speculate that this is a moment of total joy as we have embraced our real self and true identity. It is in such moments and states of mind and spirits that Maslow's *inner nature* or expressionist *voice* is finally liberated and is in full motion. This can be a moment of celebration and overwhelming joy for human soul and is *experienced* as peak experience or other positive human experiences.

*The Process of Writing Was Its Own Reward (Intrinsic Value)*

One of the most cited descriptions of peak experience is its intrinsic value (Laski, 1961; Lipscombe, 1999; Privette, 1983). I found 12 such cases in my study. Csikszentmihalyi (1988) defined flow as an experience that is intrinsically rewarding. In the case of writing this means that the writing process itself is the most rewarding part of the whole experience. In the protocols this was either directly stated or indirectly implied by the individual. In the following example the person is free writing and the overall joy seems to be the result of the process of writing and not anything else in particular:

While writing, I have had several pleasurable experiences. The one I can recall was not an assignment. It was a clear baking day, I sat outside in the grass as it leaned a little from the breeze and the sun penetrated my skin. I wrote about everything that I was thinking. I was extremely pleased with my

writing.

In the next example the individual specifies directly that the writing process itself is reason why the experience was a happy one:

When I was writing a love song for my girlfriend at Christmas time, she wanted me to write something for her, for a long time, and when I finally did, she loved it. Just the process of writing the song made me very happy.

### *Peak Performance*

Peak performance (Privette, 1983) is defined as moments in which we operate beyond our usual level of operation. I found six cases of peak performance in my data. Peak performance can sometimes accompany peak experience (Privette, 1983). In case of writing it means our writing becomes exceptionally good and above our usual skill level. This could trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences, as it is an exciting occurrence.

In the following example, the element of surprise has to do with the person somehow managing to write above and beyond his or her usual ability:

While writing my girlfriend a letter, I was able to somehow convey my thoughts in some way to her. I'm not very good with words, but I was able to write an almost poetic statement. It made me feel relieved and proud.

In the next example the student seems to have arrived at an important realization through writing poetry:

I wrote a poem last year after I got back from visiting my family for Easter. I am actually getting emotional now just thinking about it. The poem was about what a strong bond my family possesses, and the memories we share. Writing the poem made me realize how incredibly lucky I am to have a family that loves and cares for me unconditionally. It also made me realize as my sisters and I grow older and leave home, that the importance of my family will never change.

### *Clarity*

The attribute of clarity is one of the most defining qualities of peak experience in general (Hoffman, 1998), and writing triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences in specific. I found 6 cases of clarity in my data. Writing can help us achieve an unimaginable sense of clarity about life and ourselves. This clarity can be a powerful tool in helping us improve our lives, set clear goals, and know who we are and what we want out of life. Arriving at this moment through writing could bring about an intense release of emotions such as joy, excitement and hope leading to peak experience and other positive human experiences. Thus, clarity can be seen both as a description of peak experience and other positive human experiences or a possible trigger of it.

One participant wrote:

Writing has always been a means of self-exploration (for me). After a particularly long period of confusion about my own values and goals, and what I was going to do with my life, I was particularly overjoyed when, as I

wrote, things became clearer. And as I read the words I wrote, I began to truly understand myself better.

#### *Disappearance of Negative States of Mind*

Another characteristic of peak experience is the disappearance of negative thoughts and emotions such as fear and anxiety (Maslow, 1968; Privette & Bundrick, 1987, 1991). This characteristic of peak experience is well documented by previous research. This is also true when writing-triggers peak experience and other positive human experiences. I identified 5 such cases in which the peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing had eliminated sadness, and negative states of mind such as following example:

My happiest moment during writing occurred last semester while I was working on a paper with the topic of family values. I was feeling very lonely and homesick at the time, considering that this was my first experience away from home. While I was writing, I began to remember all the things we had ever done together, like our vacation's to Disney World. It was then, that I realized that even though they were in another city, they still remained very close to me in my heart.

#### *Enhanced Sense of Personal Power and Self Worth*

Another characteristic of peak experience is enhanced sense of personal power and self worth. I found 5 such cases in my data. While in peak experience, we feel strong and good about ourselves, the best we can ever feel. Writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences share

the same qualities. Writing can be an empowering experience such as in the following example:

When my boyfriend of two years and I broke up with great finality, I wrote a document claiming independence from him. I felt clear headed and strong after writing this down.

Writing something difficult can make a person feel worthwhile, and it can be quite fulfilling. It can increase an individual's feeling of self-worth, such as in the following example:

I wrote a poetry explication for my English class. I really did not look forward to it, but once I got into it, I began to get a sense of self-worth.

Poetry is usually difficult for me to comprehend, so when I began to understand the poem enough to write about it, I felt a sense of happiness and I wanted to write about it, to prove my knowledge.

Another person wrote:

I think writing my resume was hard, but fun at the same time. It gave me a headache and joy at the same time. Knowing that I was laying out, in written format my experience and qualification for my career really pleased me. I had a great feeling of self worth, and positive emotions after completion.

This one little document has listed briefly my struggle through college and my triumph.

### *Spontaneity*

Another characteristic of peak experience is spontaneity. I found 5 cases of

this category in my data. Sometimes without any real planning, the writing turns out to be unusually good; there is an element of spontaneity, surprise and inspiration to it as in the following examples:

I don't believe I've ever had a happy moment in writing in school, but being a songwriter, I've encountered numerous ones at home. I remember my first real good song, up to that point; my other songs sounded more like poetry, but this song told a powerful story, and it had a good rhythm too. Every time I wrote a new verse down, I was amazed at how good it was. By the time I was finished writing the song, I was overwhelmed with pride, and satisfaction. It was not a planned but had an element of surprise. I just wrote what came to my mind.

or,

During my time in Germany, I was a member of a rock band. Granted, most lyricists don't receive much respect, but I took it very seriously. One of the happiest moments of my life was the completion of three poems, but even more so was the uniting of those poems with music. As far as the poems are concerned, I could not tell you what truly inspired me to sit down and write, although my motives seem clear to me through the writing. The combination of music, and words accomplished so spontaneously is what I remember vividly.

The above two protocols are also good examples of moments of inspiration and how such moments allow us to operate beyond our usual level of



performance. There is the element of ease with which these writings *just happen* and delightfully surprise the writers with their own creation.

#### *Unusual Speed*

A unique characteristic of peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing is *speed* by which writing takes place. I have identified 3 such cases in my data. In a normal state of mind writing moves slowly or its speed is not either noticed or remembered. In a peak state writing speed is a quality that is both remembered and is reported, as it is the cause of amazement. This category could be viewed as a sub-category of effortlessness or even flow. I decided to offer it as a separate category to emphasize its occurrence as in the following example:

I had a big lab report and analysis due. The happy moment was felt when I understood, and had a clear idea of what I was writing about. All the information seemed to fall into place, and I didn't even have to think hard about organization. The information seemed to present itself. In fact, I had to type very fast just to keep up with the flow of information.

#### *Amount Written*

In addition to ease and quantity of writing, the amount written is a distinguishing attribute in writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. I found 3 such cases in my data as in the following example:

My most enjoyable writing experience occurred one day several years ago,

when everything I wrote made sense. I was philosophizing, thinking, and more importantly writing. I was finally were able to put in to words everything that I felt, about everything. I wrote about 5000 words in one night.

#### *Enhanced Sense of Confidence*

Another characteristic of peak experience in general and writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences specifically has to do with confidence (Hollander & Acevedo, 2000). I identified 1 such case in my data. Sometimes this translates into an unusual sense of confidence in one's writing ability. At other times, it is the process that builds up the individual's confidence, as in the following example:

I guess you could say it was when I was writing my essay for the SAAS Test. The prompt was to debate whether or not you think the US should be a global cop and why. I stated that the US should take care of business at home first, before they go off on their crusades. I felt so confident while I was writing it. I did so well it gave me a lot of confidence in my writing ability.

#### *Disorientation in Time*

Another characteristic of peak experience is a sense of disorientation in time and space, which could mean losing track of time (Kiehne, 2002; Maslow, 1968; Ravizza, 1977). This quality has been well documented. This may be due to total absorption that characterizes peak moments. I identified one such case in my data. In the following example, flow of the words is accompanied with the loss of sense of time, leading to an important insight:

One of the happiest times I have experienced while writing was while I was writing a letter to my lord and savior. I began writing down my thoughts on a particular subject, and the words just began to flow. I wrote for hours, when I was through writing I realized just how much God cared for me.

#### *Innocent and Real*

The distinguishing feature of the one protocol was the way language was described as innocent and real. I only found 1 such description in all my data. This quality can be interpreted as both being child-like, pure, written from heart, and even inspired:

I like to write poetry or prose. Most of the time, I feel very confused or cluttered when I write, but this time it was very different. I sat down, didn't know exactly what I was going to say, but I knew it would be a letter to my ex-boyfriend, who I was still in love with. I wrote with a clear conscience, and let the words flow onto the page. The closer I got to the end, the happier I became, because the language was innocent and real. It was a wonderful feeling to get all that off my chest.

#### *Heightened Visual and Sensual Acuteness*

One of the characteristics of peak experience reported by previous research is a heightened sense of awareness. I identified 1 such report in my data:

I was writing a memorial for my dog that I had put to sleep. As I wrote, a flood of memories came back to me. I experienced heightened visual and sensual acuteness. I could actually see and feel her again. I was overcome

with grief for my loss. As I wrote the last line I buried my sister today I started crying and couldn't stop for five minutes. After I had finished crying, I experienced catharsis. I was happy for her life and what she had done for me.

### *Peacefulness*

Writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences can be felt as a sense of joy and inner peace as in the following example: "Journal writing during one of my quiet times. I gained insight about life and how the Bible gives me knowledge of God and direction in life. It gave me an inner peace and a sense of direction." I identified 1 such case in my data.

### *Describing Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences Using the Responses to Privette's Descriptive Items*

The third method used to describe a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences was by looking at the ratings of Privette's 42 descriptive items. These 42 descriptions were put together by Privette (1983) using previously studied descriptions of peak experience, and similar experiences.

The participants rated each item on a rating scale that ranged from 1 to 5, five being the highest. The reliability of this data was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, which was .91.

The means for these items, ranked in descending order, are presented in Table 4 along with other descriptive statistics. The top five most highly rated items ( $N=115$ ) were as follows: (1) absorption (Q11); (2) the need to continue until completion (Q12); (3) event was personal (Q22); (4) thoughts and actions were spontaneous (Q 15); (5) my intentions were strong (Q 19). For the complete table of means which also includes mode, standard deviation and median see Table 4.

Table 4:

*Descriptive Statistics for Privette's (1983) Items for Student Reporting Writing - triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences*

	Measure	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Q11	Absorption	4.48	5.00	5.00	0.93
Q12	The need to continue until completion	4.44	5.00	5.00	1.04
Q22	Event was personal	4.34	5.00	5.00	1.15
Q15	Thoughts and actions were spontaneous	4.24	5.00	5.00	1.11
Q19	My intentions were strong	4.13	5.00	5.00	1.21
Q42	I experienced joy and fulfillment	4.02	4.00	5.00	1.11
Q17	My inner process was clear	4.01	4.00	5.00	1.14
Q9	Clear focus	4.01	4.00	5.00	1.23
Q10	Event involved a personal value	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.30
Q16	I felt free of restrictions	3.89	4.00	5.00	1.33
Q14	I had a strong sense of self	3.83	4.00	5.00	1.33
Q5	Process seemed to click	3.80	4.00	5.00	1.41
Q23	I had a sense of personal responsibility	3.77	4.00	5.00	1.29
Q24	Experience involved other senses	3.77	4.00	5.00	1.30
Q41	The experience was its own reward	3.77	4.00	5.00	1.33
Q1	Event involved action or behavior	3.76	4.00	5.00	1.40
Q18	I was aware of my powers	3.64	4.00	5.00	1.40
Q21	I felt all together	3.62	4.00	5.00	1.35
Q7	Actions, thoughts were new	3.55	4.00	5.00	1.40
Q2	Related involvement	3.54	4.00	5.00	1.37
Q4	Intensity	3.45	3.00	5.00	1.35
Q30	The event was fun	3.24	4.00	4.00	1.50
Q3	Spontaneous	3.23	4.00	5.00	1.63
Q32	The event was perceptual rather than behavioral	3.32	3.00	5.00	1.39
Q13	I was interactive	3.20	3.00	5.00	1.50
Q31	The event had a mystical or spiritual quality	3.20	3.00	5.00	1.49
Q25	The experience involved unity of self	3.15	3.00	1.00	3.28
Q37	The event had great meaning for me	3.01	4.00	5.00	1.21
Q29	Rules, motivations, were build in to the situation	2.95	3.00	1.00	1.54
Q40	The experience was beyond words	2.86	3.00	3.00	1.39
Q39	The event was brief	2.70	3.00	3.00	1.34
Q38	The other people influenced the outcome	2.69	2.00	1.00	1.57
Q33	I was receptive and passive	2.49	2.00	1.00	1.48
Q35	I experienced a loss of time	2.49	2.00	1.00	1.48
Q36	Encounter with something outside myself	2.44	2.00	1.00	1.60
Q20	The event was not motivated	2.33	2.00	1.00	1.50
Q27	The event was playful	2.32	2.00	1.00	1.68
Q6	Event was practiced	2.19	2.00	1.00	1.34
Q28	Differences were resolved	2.19	2.00	1.00	1.44
Q34	I enjoyed another or persons during the event	2.09	1.00	1.00	1.49
Q8	Event seemed an emergency	2.06	1.00	1.00	1.32
Q26	Expeirience involved loss of self	1.10	1.00	1.00	1.30

N=115

### Research Question Three: What Factors Influence the Occurrence of Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences?

What factors could trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing? Three different approaches were chosen in an attempt to answer this question. My first approach involved exploring the writing context as a possible trigger of writing triggered-peak experience and other positive human experiences. The writing context is defined as the type of writing in which a person is involved while having a peak experience and other positive human experiences (e.g., writing a poem or a letter). My second approach was to research possible factors or conditions within the writing situation that could act as possible triggers. This was defined as the main reason a person remembered or reported a writing event as being joyful, meaningful, or memorable.

Finally, I looked at some aspects of personal orientation as a possible trigger of peak experience and other positive human experiences such as interest in self knowledge and introspection, frequency of use of writing in general or for the purpose of introspection, decision making, thinking, and problem solving, and self knowledge.

#### *The Writing Contexts as a Trigger of Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences*

One way of identifying possible triggers of peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing was done by examining the type of writing a

person was involved in while having a peak experience and other positive human experiences, also referred to as the *writing context*. A total of 18 writing contexts as possible triggers of peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing were identified. Table 5 shows the writing contexts as a trigger of peak experience and other positive human experiences.

Table 5:

*Writing Context as a Trigger of Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences in Writing*

Type of Writing	Frequency
School related work such as papers, exams, test, essays	28
Writing personal letters	28
Poetic/creative writing	9
Writing in a diary or journal	7
Writing a story	5
Song writing	4
Writing for entrance exams and school application	4
Using writing to deal with personal emotions	3
Being involved in some form of introspective writing	3
Speech writing	3
Writing about one of the life's happiest moments	2
Setting personal goals in writing	2
Writing a resume	1
Writing a memorial for deceased	1
Evaluating one's accomplishments	1
Writing in a yearbook	1
Sending an E-mail	1
Writing for pleasure	1

As can be seen in Table 5 the two most frequently reported types of writing associated with writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences were associated with *school-related* and *writing personal letters*,



each with a frequency of 28. Together, they accounted for 53% of the peak experience and other positive human experiences reported. Several other points might be made from these data.

It is easy to explain the frequency of the first two of categories considering the basic characteristics of the sample. The sample is consisted of students with an age range of 17 to 36, with an average age of 21; in other words our sample is made up of young college students. It is reasonable to assume two things about this sample. First, students do a lot of school related writing which in turn increases the frequency of the time they are engaged in some form of writing in this particular area.

Second, being young, it is reasonable to assume romantic and love involvement which usually involves letter writing of some sort (mostly love letters). It is also reasonable to assume that when these young students are not writing for schoolwork or their personal love life, they would be writing to their families about their experiences. Therefore both high frequencies can be explained in terms of sample type (students), sample age (young).

What are more to the point and of great interest and relevance to the question of triggers raised by this study are the remaining categories that deserve some discussion and interpretation here. The remaining categories add up to a total of 16 categories and account for a total frequency of 48. Among them we can find writings that can be considered as creative, introspective, technical, or writing for pleasure.

Two main categories among this group deserve closer examination. The first group includes any type of writing that can be considered as creative. The creative categories are the sub-categories of poetic and creative writing (with a frequency of 9), writing a story (with a frequency of 5), song writing (with a frequency of 4), and all adding up to a total frequency of 18.

Maslow (1968) identified a group of experiences that he called peak-type experiences, among them he listed and elaborated on creative experiences. Maslow believed that creative experiences are very similar to peak experience. It also is reasonable to assume that all forms of creative writing are indeed sub-categories of *creative experience*. Thus this finding not only supports Maslow's assertion concerning creative experiences, it adds creative writing to the list of possible trigger of peak experience and other positive human experiences.

The other major category is the introspective category. This includes writing in a diary or journal (with a frequency of 7); using writing to deal with personal emotions (with a frequency of 3); being involved in some form of introspective writing (with a frequency of 3); writing about one of the life's happiest moments (with a frequency of 2); evaluating one's accomplishments (with a frequency of 1); and finally writing memorial for deceased (with a frequency of 1); all adding up to a total frequency of 17.

Why should introspection trigger peak experience or other similar positive experiences is not clear but one can speculate. For example it is possible to assume that there may be a connection (yet to be explored) between the

process of introspection and full expression and actualization of self. This of course is purely speculative and needs further exploration.

*Within Writing Conditions as a Trigger of Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences*

Another way to explore the question of what factors could trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing is to look at the conditions within the writing situation that may prompt the writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. In extracting these conditions I acted on couple of simple but basic assumptions. First of all I assumed that although most people write for many reasons only few of such experiences are remembered as memorable and reported as peak experience and other positive human experiences. I further assumed that whatever those central reasons were they constituted the trigger conditions I was looking for. Based on these assumptions my content analysis yielded 13 possible conditions or factors.

My main method of analysis in identifying these 13 possible conditions was basic and simple. First of all I *immersed* myself in the protocols by reading and examining them many times over a long period of time and with many breaks in between the readings. I took my main clues *directly from the text* and the *words* used by the participants and did my outmost best not to rely too much on inference or subjective interpretation in extracting the following categories of *triggers*. For example if the person highlights or emphasized the *realization* as

the main reason why the experience was so meaningful, or, happy, or satisfying, or among the highest happiness, I used the word *realization* to create a possible trigger category.

Because I did not use the help or judgment of a second person the results obtained are solely based on my own evaluation and assessment and therefore could be considered by some as somewhat subjective and open for questioning. Neither can I offer an inter-rater agreement reliability value.

Nevertheless I believe that repetitive analysis and immersion method I explained earlier and using the exact words and descriptions given by the participants could lower the possibility of error and prevent this type of analysis from appearing too subjective or unreliable.

As can be seen in Table 6, the top six triggers were: *self expression* which refers to being able to express one's thoughts, feelings, or point of view with a frequency of 31; *realization* which refers to arriving at an important and meaningful realization as a result of writing with a frequency of 20; *free writing* which refers to writing whatever comes to one's mind or heart without evaluation, analysis or holding back for any external or internal reasons, with a frequency of 17; *creative/inspirational* writing which refers to many forms of writing that involve novel, new, unexpected, original type of writing with a frequency of 13; *introspective/reflective* writing which refers to using writing to look at one's self with the purpose of evaluation, reflection, appraisal, remembering, or pleasure, with a frequency of 12; and finally completing a

difficult and meaningful task with a frequency of 11.

Table 6:

*Within Writing Conditions as a Trigger of Writing-triggered Peak Experience  
and Other Positive Human Experiences*

Triggers	Frequency
Self-expression	31
Realization	20
Free writing	17
Creative/inspirational writing	13
Reflective/introspective writing	2
Completing a difficult and meaningful writing task	11
Sharing	5
Remembering a loved one	4
Solving a difficult problem	4
Writing about past happy moments	4
Planning	1
Writing about who we are	1
Just the process of writing (intrinsic value of writing)	1

*N=119*

What do these findings mean? One can speculate that if and when any of these elements or conditions is present by itself or in combination with other factors (for example self-expression leading to realization) peak experience and other positive human experiences will occur.

Let us now speculate on why the presence of such conditions could lead to peak experience and other positive human experiences. One possible explanation can be found in the context of human nature. If we assume that *human nature* is ultimately *free* then it can be concluded that any experience that would facilitate it's free expression could trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences, and even lead to self-actualization.

We also may further speculate a similar thing about realization and its value. That need to discover or uncover a mystery is deeply rooted human trait which when satisfied leads to great joy and produces deep satisfaction.

In summary we may further speculate that these activities lead to peak experience and other positive human experiences because through engaging in any of these activities we enter higher states of being and become more in tuned and in harmony with our true nature. In conclusion we can say that activities such as self-expression, creation, realization, and exploration in the form of introspection, trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences because they are experiences that are consistent with our true nature. For the complete list of these triggers please refer to Table 6.

*Personal Orientation as a Trigger of Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences*

Another way to learn more about possible triggers of peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing was to look at personal orientation as a possible trigger of peak experience and other positive human experiences. To do this the responses to Personal Orientation Questionnaire were analyzed. This instrument explores people's writing and thinking preferences, as well as the frequency of engaging in various types of writing activities.

First a reliability analysis was conducted. Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was computed. Results indicated that the measure had good reliability ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and was appropriate for quantitative analysis.

Moreover, a MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) was conducted to determine if a statistically significant difference was present between the two groups (peaks/non-peaks) on the 16 items as a set (Table 7). A statistically significant difference was found between the two groups  $F_{(16,231)} = 2.71, p. < 0.001$ . Then, in order to test these assumptions individually, several  $t$ -tests were conducted.

First a  $t$ -test for independent samples with peaks/non-peaks (see Table 8) as independent variables and each single question (assumption) as a dependent variable was run to explore if any statistically significant differences existed between the two groups on each single item (question).

The main question here was to explore how people who reported having a peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing differed from people who reported no such experience on every single question. Peak group here refers to the group of protocols that belongs to writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. Table 8 shows the result of these  $t$ -tests.

Table: 7

*Group Differences between Peak and Non-peak Protocols on Personal  
Orientation Questionnaire*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig
Peak	Pillai's Trace	.16	2.71	16	231	.001
No Peak	Wilks' Lambda	.84	2.71	16	231	.001
	Hotelling's Trace	.19	2.71	16	231	.001
	Roy's Largest Root	.19	2.71	16	231	.001



Table 8:

*Basic Descriptive Statistics for the t-test for Independent Samples Using  
Personal Orientation Questionnaire*

	Peak			Non-peak			T	Df	P	n2
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD				
1 Interest in self knowledge and self discovery	117	4.90	1.32	143	4.62	1.45	1.58	258	.11	0.01
2 Interest in introspection	114	4.24	1.34	139	3.94	1.49	1.63	258	.10	0.01
3 Frequency of use of writing in general	117	4.14	1.31	144	3.55	1.57	3.30	259	.00	0.04
4 Frequency of use of writing for self knowledge and self discovery	117	3.35	1.57	143	2.44	1.48	4.80	258	.00	0.08
5 Frequency of use of writing for introspection	114	3.06	1.39	139	2.32	1.48	4.12	251	.00	0.06
6 Frequency of use of writing as a decision making tool	117	3.41	1.51	144	2.97	1.65	2.26	259	.03	0.02
7 Frequency of use of writing a primary thinking too	117	3.15	1.54	144	2.58	1.49	3.01	259	.00	0.03
8 Frequency of use of writing as a personal problem solving tool	117	3.33	1.50	144	2.84	1.59	2.55	259	.01	0.02
9 Frequency of use of non-writing means for personal problem solving	117	4.76	1.07	144	4.85	1.25	-.641	259	.52	0.01
10 Frequency of use of non-writing means for self-knowledge and introspection	117	4.43	1.22	142	4.57	1.42	-.808	257	.42	0.00
11 Frequency of engaging in the process of technical writing	117	3.03	1.36	144	3.01	1.61	.110	259	.91	0.00
12 Frequency of engaging in the process of poetic/creative writing	117	3.06	1.69	143	2.20	1.48	4.31	232	.00	0.07
13 Frequency of engaging in the process of literary writing	117	2.47	1.37	143	2.08	1.34	2.29	258	.02	0.02
14 Frequency of engaging in the process of personal expression using writing	117	3.52	1.86	144	2.58	1.73	4.22	259	.00	0.06
15 Frequency of experiencing peak experience in general (non-writing peak)	117	4.90	1.10	144	4.84	1.24	.410	259	.68	0.00
16 Frequency of experiencing writing-triggered peak experiences	115	3.13	1.36	144	2.16	1.32	5.75	257	.00	0.12

Since there was more than one *t*-test conducted (16 questions in all), a correction for experimental error was calculated and the alpha level was set at a 0.003 level (instead of the usual 0.05). By looking at these results, one can see that out of the 16 items, 6 showed a statistically significant difference. The effect sizes for all 16 items were calculated using  $\eta^2$  and yielded small effects ranging from  $\eta^2=.000$  to  $\eta^2=.12$ . The six questions that showed statistically significant differences were as follows:

Q3	Frequency of use of writing in general
Q14	Frequency of engaging in personal self-expression using writing
Q4	Frequency of use of writing for self-knowledge
Q16	Frequency of having peak experience
Q5	Frequency of use of writing for introspection
Q12	Frequency of engaging in poetic/creative writing

These results indicate that at least for 6 (out of 16) personality orientations or traits there are statistically significant differences between the peak group and non-peak group. Let's examine these items closely and see if we can make sense out of them. Let's begin our examination by looking at four of these items that seem to be closely related, namely self-expression, creative writing, introspective writing, and writing for self knowledge. The single common element that binds these four items together is *self* and *its expression*. For example self-knowledge involves a need to know self. One can speculate that a person with this type of orientation enjoys this type of detective work, *self as a*

*puzzle.*

What about creative writing? This may not seem to directly involve self but it actually completely is about *self*. Introspection too, involves self, as there is no reason to introspect unless we want to understand things deeper either through self-examination, examination of the self in the context of life events and experiences, or in studying and philosophizing about life independent of ourselves.

One thing is clear and that is that the peak group and non-peak group in my sample are different in that the peak group seems to be more interested in self and its expression and use of writing to do so than the non-peak group. This also helps to explain the last two items, higher frequency of experiencing peak experience and other positive human experiences and greater use of writing in general. It stands for reason that if interest in self-knowledge, self-expression, and introspection are combined with use of writing the chances of peak experience and other positive human experiences triggered by writing could go up. These speculations of course, need to be further investigated by future research, but it is quite possible that the items picked up by *t*-test are actually correlated.

In order to reduce the 16 questions of the Personal Orientation Questionnaire into their underlying components, a factor analysis was conducted. Results of the factor analysis using principal components as the extraction method yielded 4 factors each with an eigenvalues above 1.0 (see page 115).

Factor 1 had an eigenvalue of 5.92 (as seen on page 115) and accounted for 37% of the total variance in the data. The questions that loaded on this factor were: Q12, frequency of engaging in the process of poetic/creative writing; Q14, frequency of use of writing for personal expression; Q16, frequency of having a peak experience in writing; Q4, frequency of using writing for the purpose of self knowledge or self discovery; Q5, frequency of use of writing for the process of introspection; Q13, frequency of engaging in the process of literary writing; and Q3, frequency of use of writing in general. The common elements in these factors were expressive writing, self-oriented writing and creative poetic writing, so this factor was named the *esthetic creative expressive writing* factor.

The second factor has an eigenvalue of 1.80 and accounted for the 11% of the total variance in the data. The questions that loaded on this factor were Q7, use of writing as a primary thinking tool; Q6 use of writing for the purpose of decision making; Q8, frequency of use of writing as a personal problem solving tool; and Q11, frequency of engaging in technical writing. The common denominator among these questions was thinking and problem solving in writing, so I decided to name this factor *writing as a thinking and problem solving tool* factor.

The third factor had an eigenvalue of 1.59 and accounted for the 10 % of the total variance of the data. The questions that loaded on these factors were Q2, interest in introspection; and Q1, interest in the process of self- knowledge and self discovery. This factor was named the *self-discovery* factor.

The fourth factor had an eigenvalue of 1.26 and accounted for 8 % of variance of the whole data. The questions that loaded on this factor were Q9, frequency of use of non-writing means to solve personal problems; Q10, frequency of use of non-writing means for the purpose of self-knowledge and introspection; and Q15, frequency of having peak experiences in general (non-writing peak). Absence rather than presence of writing were the common denominator, so I decided to call this factor *not interested in writing* factor. All the four factors taken together explain 66.06% of the total variance in the data.

Among the most interesting outcome of these findings is similarities and, close match between the items that were grouped together in Factor 1 (the *aesthetic creative expressive writing*, Q3, 4, 5, 12, 13, 14, 16), and the 6 items identified by *t*-test for independent sample (Q3, 4, 5, 12, 14, 16). This supports my previous assertion regarding possibility of correlation between items picked up by *t*-test.

This means that these items are not only possible triggers independently (based on the result of t-test) but are actually in some form and degree correlated (based on their grouping in one factor by factor analysis). What is even more fascinating is that the highest factor loading on factor one (esthetic creative expressive writing) is creativity/poetic writing, which also emerges in content analysis results as the third highest category (with a frequency of 9).

The Inter-correlations of Personal Orientation Questionnaire Items, summary of Personal Orientation Questionnaire, and factor analysis factor loadings of Personal Orientation Questionnaire items are displayed in Tables 9, 10, and 11.

Table: 9

*Inter-correlations of Personal Orientation Questionnaire Items*

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16
Q1	1	0.69	0.22	0.34	0.27	0.25	0.15	0.21	-0.04	0.06	0.07	0.17	0.09	0.13	-0.03	0.19
Q2	0.69	1	0.22	0.26	0.33	0.14	0.09	0.14	0.03	0.15	0.14	0.19	0.08	0.13	0.01	0.15
Q3	0.22	0.22	1	0.55	0.5	0.47	0.47	0.46	0.04	-0.02	0.43	0.5	0.46	0.47	0.18	0.49
Q4	0.34	0.26	0.55	1	0.76	0.53	0.46	0.53	-0.13	-0.18	0.17	0.58	0.43	0.58	0.01	0.54
Q5	0.27	0.33	0.5	0.76	1	0.5	0.47	0.53	-0.14	-0.14	0.19	0.55	0.48	0.53	0	0.51
Q6	0.25	0.14	0.47	0.53	0.5	1	0.73	0.77	-0.03	-0.13	0.32	0.39	0.41	0.39	0.05	0.43
Q7	0.15	0.09	0.47	0.46	0.47	0.73	1	0.79	-0.12	-0.16	0.39	0.38	0.41	0.42	0.03	0.43
Q8	0.21	0.14	0.46		0.53	0.77	0.79	1	-0.11	-0.21	0.26	0.41	0.37	0.41	0.05	0.44
Q9	-0.04	-0.03	0.04	-0.13	-0.14	-0.03	-0.12	-0.11	1	-0.6	-0.01	-0.05	-0.11	-0.1	0.17	-0.08
Q10	0.06	0.15	-0.02	-0.18	-0.14	-0.13	-0.16	-0.22	0.6	1	0.05	-0.11	-0.07	0.11	0.14	-0.14
Q11	0.07	0.14	0.43	0.17	0.19	0.32	0.39	0.26	-0.01	0.05	1	0.19	0.32	0.11	0.12	-0.19
Q12	0.17	0.19	0.5	0.58	0.55	0.39	0.38	0.41	-0.05	-0.11	1.86	1	0.62	0.53	0.05	0.56
Q13	0.09	0.08	0.46	0.43	0.48	0.41	0.41	0.37	-0.1	-0.07	0.32	0.62	1	0.43	0.11	0.45
Q14	0.13	0.13	0.47	0.58	0.53	0.39	0.42	0.41	-0.1	-0.11	0.11	0.53	0.43	1	0.11	0.58
Q15	-0.03	-0.02	0.18	0.01	0	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.17	0.14	0.12	0.05	0.11	0.11	1	0.23
Q16	0.19	0.15	0.49	0.54	0.51	0.43	0.43	0.44	-0.08	-0.14	0.19	0.56	0.45	0.58	0.23	1

Table 10:

*Summary of Personal Orientation Questionnaire Factor Analysis*

Component	Total Eigen Value	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.92	36.99	36.99
2	1.80	11.26	48.24
3	1.59	9.94	58.18
4	1.26	7.87	66.06
5	.97	6.05	72.11
6	.89	5.56	77.67
7	.59	3.71	81.38
8	.51	3.19	84.57
9	.48	2.97	87.54
10	.41	2.57	90.11
11	.35	2.18	92.30
12	.34	2.15	94.45
13	.29	1.83	96.28
14	.25	1.53	97.81
15	.18	1.12	98.93
16	.17	1.07	100.00

Extraction Method: Principle Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a- Rotation converged in 6 iterations.



Table: 11

*Factor Loadings of Personal Orientation Questionnaire Items*

Component	1	2	3	4
Q1	.12	.11	.88	-.02
Q2	.13	.04	.89	.07
Q3	.59	.44	.13	.19
Q4	.72	.28	.29	-.17
Q5	.70	.29	.29	-.16
Q6	.34	.79	.12	-.07
Q7	.32	.84	.01	.13
Q8	.36	.78	.09	-.18
Q9	-.11	.01	.01	.82
Q10	-.16	-.07	.20	.82
Q11	.08	.61	.02	.21
Q12	.80	.14	.08	.00
Q13	.67	.27	-.07	.04
Q14	.77	.14	.02	-.05
Q15	.25	.02	-.20	.49
Q16	.76	.20	.09	.02

Extraction Method: Principle Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary and Discussion of the Results

This study was designed to explore three basic questions: (1) Can writing trigger peak experience and other positive human experiences?

(2) How are writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences best described? (3) What factors influence the occurrence of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences?

*Research Question One: Can Writing Trigger Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences?*

Peak experience has been explored in a variety of contexts and activities. Peak experience has been reported as a result of Tai Chi practice, music, swimming, public vocal performances, skydiving, and oceanic wild animal encounters (DeMares & Krycka, 1999; Hollander & Acevedo 2000; Kiehne, 2002; Lowis, 2002; Lavaysse, 2002; Lipscombe, 1999). Ravizza (1977) studied and reported characteristics of sport-triggered peak experience. Maslow's participants reported sex and music as triggers of peak experience (Maslow, 1968). Although many triggers have been identified by previous research writing as a trigger has not been explored.

The result of this study adds writing to the list of previously reported triggers of peak experience and other positive human experiences. Out of 270

participants, 119 (44%) reported having had at least one peak experience and other positive human experiences as a result of writing. In other words, more than two out of five participants reported having at least one writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences.

*Research Question Two: How Are Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human Experiences Best Described?*

One way of describing the peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing was to look at the length of the writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. Results of the study indicated that individuals who had a peak experience and other positive human experiences tended to write more than those who did not. One possible interpretation could be that perhaps the group who reported having a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences (peak group) actually had something to write about and consequently wrote more than the non-peak group. On the other hand the longer protocols of those reporting peak experience and other positive human experiences could reflect greater fluency or superior language ability.

It is also possible that this difference reflects a difference in style of thinking (think/writer). As mentioned before a person with a think/writer style of thinking does most of their thinking in writing, whereas a person with a think/thinking style of thinking thinks quietly and internally or thinks aloud through other means besides writing (such as dialogue with others or self). Therefore it is possible

that the difference in protocol length could also be attributed to this difference in thinking style. Since these and other explanations seem plausible the appropriate interpretation of this finding is unclear.

Another way of describing the writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences was to analyze the contents of the peak protocols in order to identify qualities or descriptions of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. Fourteen attributes were extracted many of which were consistent with the previously reported descriptions of peak experience (Hollander & Acevedo, 2000; Lipscombe, 1999; Lavaysse, 2002; Maslow, 1968; Privette, 1983; Ravizza, 1977). Through content analysis of the protocols 14 descriptive attributes were identified, some of them unique to writing such as flow of the words (click), the intrinsic value of writing (writing process was its own reward), speed of writing, and amount of writing.

Lastly, a description of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences was sought through analysis and examination of Privette's 42 descriptive items. When the means for the descriptions of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences were selected and ranked in descending order (see Table 4) *absorption* and *need to continue until completion* ranked as the highest reported descriptions to be followed by *the personal nature of the event*, and *spontaneity of thoughts and actions*. These findings are consistent with the previous research findings regarding peak experience. One way of interpreting these descriptive findings is to conclude

that peak experience and other similar positive human experiences is indeed a universal phenomenon, one whose descriptions are independent of the type of situations or the contexts that may trigger it. In other words peak experience is experienced the same whether triggered by music, sex, or writing.

*Research Question Three: What Factors Influence the Occurrence of  
Writing-triggered Peak Experience and Other Positive Human  
Experiences?*

Previous research on peak experience and similar events (e.g., ecstasy, flow) has indicated that these moments could take place through a variety of situations and contexts such as Tai Chi practice, music, swimming, public vocal performances, skydiving, oceanic wild animal encounters (DeMares & Krycka, 1999; Hollander & Acevedo, 2000; Kiehne, 2002; Lowis, 2002; Lavaysse, 2002; Lipscombe, 1999). Laski (1961) also reported ecstatic moments in art, religion, exercise, movement, creative work, beauty, childbirth, scientific knowledge, recollection, introspection, and poetic knowledge.

To explore the question of what triggers peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing, three different factors or conditions were explored, writing context, conditions within the writing situation itself, and finally personal orientation.

In looking at writing context as a trigger 18 categories were identified. Among the top four were school-related work, writing personal letters, creative

writing, and introspective writing.

In examining the conditions within the writing situation itself content analysis revealed 13 possible triggers. Among them were self-expression, realization, free writing, creative/inspirational writing, introspective/reflective writing, and completion of difficult and meaningful tasks.

Finally, the responses to the Personal Orientation Questionnaire were compared between those who were judged to have had peak experience and those who were not. Multivariate analyses revealed that the peak and non-peak groups differed with regard to the questionnaire as a whole. However, in locating the source of the differences amongst the items, only 6 out of the 16 items on the questionnaire were found to be statistically significant (*t*-test for independent sample results). It appears that people who were judged to have a peak experience and other positive human experiences and those who did not were statistically different with regard to frequency of time engaged in writing in general, creative and poetic writing, and interest in self-knowledge, introspection, and self expression. They also showed a higher frequency of experiencing writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences.

In addition to these analyses, a factor analysis was conducted in order to classify the 16 items on the Personal Orientation Questionnaire into their underlying themes or constructs. The analysis yielded four factors: (1) *aesthetic creative expressive writing*, (2) *writing as a thinking & problem solving tool* (3)

*self-discovery*, and (4) *not interested in writing*.

Among the most interesting outcomes of these findings is similarities and a close match between the items that were grouped together in factor 1 (the *aesthetic creative expressive writing*, Q3, 4, 5, 12, 13, 14, 16), and the 6 items identified by *t*-test for independent sample (Q3, 4, 5, 12, 14, 16). This means that these items are not only possible triggers independently (based on the result of *t*-test) but are actually in some form and degree correlated (based on their grouping in one factor by factor analysis). What is even more fascinating is that the highest factor loading on factor one, which is creativity/poetic writing also, emerges in content analysis results as the third highest category (with a frequency of 9). What is of the greatest interest is that this correlation may be reflective of some kind of underlying process or phenomenon which needs further exploration.

#### Implications of the Study

The study of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences is important and valuable because it takes positive human experiences beyond the realm of philosophical speculation into a more practical, measurable, and achievable direction. The finding of this study increases our knowledge of descriptions and triggers of peak experience and extends it into realm of writing. In doing so it adds to the existing body of knowledge of peak experience and other positive human experiences. Furthermore the study brings writing to the forefront of research, highlighting an important tool in self-

development, healing, and growth.

The benefits of writing are many and well documented and were discussed in earlier chapters. They cover a wide spectrum of personal and therapeutic areas. The result of this study confirms and supports some of these previous findings. For example based on the findings of this study we now know that writing can lead to peak experience and other positive human experiences. As 2 out of 5 people (44%) reported having at least one peak experience and other positive human experiences as a result of writing.

This not only establishes writing as another context within which peak experience and other positive human experiences may occur, but it is also a promising news for individuals who have to deal with writing on a regular basis. This group could include students who have to write for school related purposes, teachers who have to teach writing and find it hard to convince students of writing's beneficial and joy producing value, and therapists who are looking for additional supportive tools for facilitating and speeding-up the healing process of change and growth.

The results of this study indicate that peak experience and other positive human experiences can happen in a wide range of contexts. For example writing can lead to peak experience and other positive human experiences while a student is working on a school project or paper. It also can happen when a person engages in writing letters of a different kind. Writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences can also occur when we are



involved in different forms of creative and poetic writing. And finally it could occur as a result of introspective type of writing such as writing in a journal or a diary.

The results of this study also give us some clues as to why some forms of writing could be such positive human experiences. The study explored this area by looking at the conditions within the writing situation itself that could explain why writing can be such a positive human experience. Among these conditions one can mention self-expression, realization, free writing, creative/inspirational writing, introspective/reflective writing, and completion of difficult and meaningful tasks. We can then speculate based on these findings that by providing or planning writing tasks that allow for these *conditions* to occur we can help people develop an interest in writing, as it is possible that if these conditions are met positive experience are soon to be followed.

Descriptions of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences are also interesting and useful as they can shed light into why writing has been considered by many as therapeutic and extremely beneficial. For example keeping a diary for centuries has been a cherished practice by many diverse people, across many cultures, and throughout many ages. If any explanation were ever given as to the usefulness of these practices they were mostly personal, subjective and vague or too general. Whereas now based on these findings we are able to make a more intelligent guess as to why keeping a journal is so therapeutic and why so many practitioners encourage its use (Mc

Clelland & el al. 1998; Stone, 1998; Schneider & Stone, 1998).

For example Stone (1998) refers to journaling as “story telling to ourselves” (p.537). He believes that writing in a journal could speedup and enhances therapy. According to Stone the transforming power of writing resides in the process of writing and has less to do with the content of writing. Schneider and Stone (1998) believe that writing facilitates self-change by allowing the individual to get in touch with their inner dialogue (the dialogue between self and self) and thus make examination of their belief system possible.

Qualities such as flow of the words, the intrinsic value of writing, peak performance, and disappearance of negative states of mind, enhanced sense of personal power and self worth, all support and at the same time offer an explanation as to why writing has been regarded by many throughout ages as been useful or therapeutic. These descriptions or attributes of writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences all are worthy of careful study both as description of peak experience and as why writing is therapeutic.

The trigger factors that were found in this study are also significant as they offer useful clues as to what type of writing could bring about a range of positive human experiences. This knowledge in turn can have direct impact on many educational areas that deal with theory development, practice and teaching of writing.

For example knowledge of writing contexts as a trigger of peak experience and other positive human experiences can be useful in curriculum design. For

instance a first year college writing course could take into consideration the importance of including creative as well as introspective types of writing exercises as a part their curriculum development in order to get better teaching results by making writing more enjoyable as well as meaningful.

Another implication of this study is in its potential to contribute to the enhancement of writing theories in general. For example one of the most interesting results of this study is the discovery of the importance of self-expression (creative, emotional, personal, and inter personal expression) in bringing about a wide range of positive human experiences (triggering peak experience and other similar positive human experiences). For instance we have learned that people report positive feelings and changed cognitive states if they get an opportunity to express themselves in form of writing. This can take many forms such as poetry, story telling, letter writing, or writing in a diary in solitude of self-dialogue in activities such as introspection and self-knowledge.

What is important and note worthy is that the single common factor in all these trigger conditions is *self expression* (in some shape or form). This consequently highlights the importance of *self* in connection to writing. It almost seems that any theory of writing that doesn't take into account the importance of self expression in making writing enjoyable and meaningful cannot adequately describe the writing process.

This raises some interesting questions that need pursuing by future studies. For example is there an interactive relationship between the growth and

emergence of self (through the process of self expression) on one hand and development of writing skills and abilities on the other? Can there be a connection between self expression (in writing) self actualization, and development of writing skills?

#### Limitations of the Study

An obvious limitation of the study is the choice of participants. Ideally, a study that explores peak experience and other positive human experiences in writing should tap into the great resource of insight and knowledge found in professional writers. The results from this study are based on data collected from students who for the most part had to enroll in writing classes as a part of their degree requirement, and not professional writers.

The second limitation of the study lies in its research methodology. Any time one uses reports of subjective experiences one runs the danger of being less than accurate or objective. Yet in an exploratory study of this nature the researcher has no choice but to turn to human experience as its source of knowledge and understanding of a particular phenomenon.

Another limitation of the study lies in the type of instruments used to collect the data. The Personal Orientation Questionnaire was created for this study and was used for the first time in this study. Although the data in the present study demonstrated acceptable reliability, further investigations of the reliability and validity of this instrument is needed.

The other limitation of the study relates to the issue of counterbalancing in

the use of questionnaires in collecting the data. In this study all the participants received all the material in the exact same order. The future studies should take this issue in to consideration.

Another limitation of this study could be said to be in allowing a wide range of positive experiences to be explored in addition to peak experiences (use of items 43 and 44 in regard to selection criteria). The resulting final data pool included the ratings of 5 in both peak experience and peak performance categories. Although this allowed for a wider pool of positive experiences to be explored and studied it might have had a masking effect on some of the specific information directly relevant to peak experience. For this reason the future studies may want to limit the use of these two rating scales to ratings of 6 and 7 only. It would be interesting to see how this change in selection criteria would effect the total outcome of the results.

Another limitation of this study lies in the fact that I did not employ the help of a second judge in running my content analysis. My main method of analysis involved immersion which involved repeated study of the protocols over a long period of time and with many breaks in between the readings. I took my main clues *directly from the text* and the *words* used by the participants and did my utmost not to rely too much on inference or subjective interpretation in extracting these attributes.

Because I did not use the help or judgment of a second person the results obtained are solely based on my own evaluation and assessment and therefore

could be considered by some as somewhat subjective and open for questioning. Neither could I offer an inter-rater reliability value for content analyzed sets of data. However I believe that the repetitive analysis and immersion method I explained earlier and using the exact descriptions given by the participants did lower the possibility of error and prevented this type of analysis from appearing too subjective or unreliable.

### Suggestions for Future Studies

One of the most interesting questions that has emerged in this study is the question of *is it trigger or a description?* Although triggers and descriptions of peak experience have been studied as separate entities, there seems at least in some cases an overlap between the boundaries of the two. For example, if self-discovery is mentioned every time a person describes their peak experience and other positive human experiences are they just describing their experience, or hinting at what triggered it?

Another issue that should be further explored by future studies is the issue of word count or the *length of the protocols*. The main question to be addressed here is this: What do fewer words in a protocol mean? Does it mean that the individual who used more words (peak group) had actually more to say or were they merely more fluent in use of the English language? Experience in the use of language and ability to communicate more effectively is a factor that should be taken into account when comparing and contrasting the peak protocols and non-peak protocols in regards to protocol length. This was not done in this

study and should be considered in future studies.

Another interesting finding of this study that requires further exploration is the role of poetry and creative writing in triggering a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. The poetry/creative factor has been identified by both factor analysis results (poetry and creative writing has the highest loading in factor one), and the outcome of writing context analysis (the third highest frequency among 18 categories).

The role of creative writing as a trigger of peak experience and other positive human experiences and the possible link between personal orientation and likelihood of having peak experience and other positive human experiences needs further exploration. For example we can look at the relationship between all the factors that loaded on factor one (aesthetic expressive creative factor) or study each one separately.

The study can generate interest in future exploration of the relationship between writing and peak experience and other positive human experiences and cognition. Cognition of peak experience in general, and in writing in particular is an interesting area to explore. For example one of the writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences descriptions reported by this study is the need to continue until completion, which ties very closely to another description of peak experience that of absorption. What is the cognitive reason behind these descriptions? What kind of cognitive processes are involved when we are fully concentrating and absorbed in a task?

These questions remain to be answered and promise to be both exciting and useful in their application if pursued.

Because I did not use the help of an independent judge in content analyzing my data I did not had the benefit if protecting my findings from possibility of errors. Because these types of studies by their very nature are subjective the use of a second judge is highly advisable.

Another suggestion for the future studies is the greater use of demographic information. The demographic information collected in this study was only used to describe the participants in general. It could be interesting to explore the role of factors such as sex, study major, birth order.

It is my hope that this study can inspire others to pursue these and other possible related issues in the best interests of the individual and of society.



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## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

The following demographic data sheet is made-up of two sections. Your response to Section B is optional. Please proceed.

APPENDIX B  
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

This demographic survey consists of two sections. Please read both sections before you begin your response.

Section A

1. Sex      Male \_\_\_\_\_  
              Female \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age                    \_\_\_\_\_

3. Field of study: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Classification

- a)      Freshman
- b)              Sophomore
- c)              Junior
- d)              Senior

5. Birth order

- a)              First child      b)              Second child              c)
- Third child
- d)      Other

Section B

Please read this section before deciding if you wish to respond to it. Responding to this section is completely optional.

1. Would you like to be contacted with the report of the results of the study?
2. If you have any interesting data to share in regards to having a peak

experience and other positive human experiences and other positive human experiences as a result of or during the process of writing would you like to be contacted for an in-depth interview by the researcher?

3. If your answer to any of the above questions was yes please leave your name, address and phone number in order to be contacted.



## APPENDIX C

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please describe an incident of a peak experience and other positive human experiences that you have had as a result of writing or while engaged in the process of writing using the Experience Questionnaire. This Questionnaire is made-up of two parts. The first part asks for your personal description of this event. Use your own words to describe this event. The second part offers you a list of descriptions on a rating scale to which you are only required to respond by circling or check marking the best choice.

Please proceed.

APPENDIX D  
EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

*Experience Questionnaire*

*Gayle Privette  
The University of West Florida*

Please do not turn this page until you have finished your description.  
Describe one life experience you have had during the last year or two.  
Describe as fully as you can, especially your thoughts and feelings.

May your description be used in reports of this research? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Age now \_\_\_ Age at time of experience \_\_\_ Sex M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_ Race \_\_\_\_\_

Completing the following is optional:

Highest level of education: \_\_\_\_\_ Marital status: \_\_\_\_\_

Family income:

0-\$19,999 \_\_\_  
\$20,000-39,999 \_\_\_  
\$40,000-59,999 \_\_\_  
\$60,000 up \_\_\_

Job classification or field of interest:

arts, humanities	___	military	___
business	___	science	___
education, social	___	sport, recreation	___
services	___	technical	___
homemaking	___		___

**DIRECTIONS:** Circle the number that best describes the importance of each item to the experience you reported.

5 = Great Importance    4 = Much Importance    3 = Some Importance    2 = Little Importance    1 = No Importance

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

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

personal best    \_\_\_    inefficiency    \_\_\_  
 high performance    \_\_\_    inadequacy    \_\_\_  
 effectiveness    \_\_\_    failure    \_\_\_  
 mediocrity    \_\_\_

What was the role of other people?

interfering    \_\_\_  
 not present    \_\_\_  
 present only    \_\_\_  
 contributing    \_\_\_  
 essential    \_\_\_

How do you characterize your feeling afterwards?

extremely positive    \_\_\_  
 positive    \_\_\_  
 neutral    \_\_\_  
 negative    \_\_\_  
 extremely negative    \_\_\_

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

highest happiness    \_\_\_    boredom    \_\_\_  
 joy    \_\_\_    worry    \_\_\_  
 enjoyment    \_\_\_    misery    \_\_\_  
 neutrality    \_\_\_

How do you characterize the aftereffects?

turning point    \_\_\_  
 significant    \_\_\_  
 some    \_\_\_  
 little    \_\_\_  
 none    \_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR PERSONAL ORIENTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire entitled Personal Orientation and Writing Questionnaire is made-up of 16 items based on a 1 to 6 rating scale. Please read each question carefully and circle the rating that best describes your answer. Try to respond to all the questions.

Please proceed.

## APPENDIX F

## PERSONAL ORIENTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

- |  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 5 | 6                  |
|--|----------------------|---|---|---|--------------------|
| 1. How <u>interested</u> are you in the process of <u>self knowledge</u> , and <u>self discovery</u> ?                 | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 2. How <u>interested</u> are you in the process of <u>introspection</u> ?  | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 3. How <u>frequently</u> do you use writing in <u>general</u>  | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 4. How <u>frequently</u> do you <u>use</u> writing for the purpose of <u>self knowledge</u> or <u>self discovery</u> ? | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 5. How <u>frequently</u> do you use writing for the process of <u>introspection</u> ?                                  | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 6. How <u>often</u> do you use writing as a tool to help you <u>make a decision</u> ?                                  | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 7. How <u>frequently</u> do you use writing as your <u>primary tool in thinking</u> ?                                  | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 8. How <u>frequently</u> do you use writing as a personal <u>problem solving</u> tool?                                 | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 9. How <u>often</u> do you use other means besides writing to <u>solve personal problems</u> ?                         | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   | very<br>interested |

- |   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6                  |
|---|----------------------|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
| 10. How <u>often</u> do you use <u>other means</u> besides writing for the purpose of <u>self knowledge and Introspection</u> ? | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 11. How <u>often</u> do you engage in the process of <u>technical writing</u> ?   | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 12. How <u>often</u> do you engage in the process of <u>poetic/creative writing</u> ?   | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 13. How <u>often</u> do you engage in the process of <u>literary writing</u> ?  | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 14. How <u>often</u> do you engage in the process of <u>personal expression</u> (eg. Diary writing, journal writing, etc)?      | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 15. How <u>often</u> have you experienced <u>happy moments</u> (do not include a writing one)?                                  | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   |   | very<br>interested |
| 16. How <u>often</u> do you very had a <u>happy moment</u> while engaged in <u>the process of writing</u> ?                     | very<br>uninterested |   |   |   |   | very<br>interested |

APPENDIX G  
LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Let me first begin by introducing myself. My name is Jaleh Fatemi. I am a doctoral student at the College of Education at Texas A&M University. My main interest is to learn more about what causes us to be happier and healthier individuals by studying our happiest moments or what Maslow called “peak experiences”. By sharing your personal experiences you will be playing an essential part in expanding our knowledge and understanding of human health and happiness. Everything you need in order to participate in this study is contained in this handout.

This material is arranged in the exact order in which you are to respond to them. Before proceeding, do not forget to read and sign the consent letter on the following page. I thank you again for your participation and support.

## APPENDIX H

## LETTER OF CONSENT

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your help and participation in this study by offering a brief summary of the objectives of this study and what is required of you if you chose to participate. It is also intended to inform you of your rights and privileges as a research participant, and finally it is to gain your consent for your participation in this study. Please read this letter carefully and sign it. The purpose of this study is to investigate and explore the feelings of extreme happiness. The specific objectives are to see if any one will report having had any such moments as a result of writing.

In the package that you have just received, you should find the following materials: 1) A letter of introduction; 2) Informed consent letter (2 copies); 3) One set of "Experience Questionnaire" and specific instructions as to how to respond to it; 4) A second questionnaire entitled The Personal Orientation Questionnaire; 5) A one page demographic data sheet. You are provided with two exact copies of the informed consent letter. Please retain one copy for your own records.

The study you are about to participate utilizes a survey type method using two sets of questionnaire. There will be no personal risk or discomfort involved as a result of your participation in this study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will not receive any specific compensation (such as extra credit or financial reward) for your participation in this study. The amount of time needed for the completion of all the necessary material is estimated to be roughly about 45 minutes. In the course of responding to any of the material you receive, you may refuse to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may withdraw from the study at any point in time. There will be no negative consequences for such withdrawals. Please read and sign the following statement:

I have read and understand and the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Participant and Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subject Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, the Institutional review Board may be contacted through Dr. Richard E. Miller, IRB Coordinator, Office of Vice President for Research and Associate provost for graduate Studies at (409) 845-1811.

Please sign this copy and leave it in the booklet.



APPENDIX I  
GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR SELECTION OF WRITING-TRIGGERED  
PEAK EXPERIENCE AND OTHER POSITIVE HUMAN EXPERIENCE  
PROTOCOLS

Dear Judges:

The following are the categories that may emerge as you read the protocols. Use the following guidelines to accept or reject a protocol:

*Never Responses-* This category contains the individuals who have never had a happy moment in writing. These protocols will be categorized, as *never had a happy moment in writing*. For short they will be called the *never* category. A *never* respond, is clearly not a *peak* respond. It is absence of a happy experience, so it lacks the first criteria of a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences, *that of being happy*, and thus cannot be accepted as an authentic writing-trigger peak experiences and other positive human experiences and protocol. Mark the protocol as *never*, and proceed.

*Hate Writing Responses-* *Hate writing* responses, cannot be accepted as a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences protocol, as by definition these responses are opposite of happy moments. These may include people who have had negative writing experiences, and clearly dislike writing. Sometimes the *never* category and this category can be one. The person has never had a happy moment, and dislikes writing. In that case use two words to describe the protocol (*Never* and *dislikes*). I separated two categories because I thought they might exist. In these cases although the person does not dislike writing, he/she has never had a happy moment in writing. For the purpose of categorizing we will call this response a *dislike* category. Just mark the protocol as *dislikes* and then proceed.

*General Positive or Happy Experiences Involving Writing-* Many people instead of sharing one specific experience share their positive experiences in writing. This may include how they feel about writing, how often they write or to whom they write, and why. For example someone may say "I love writing, in my journal. I have had many happy moments, and writing has helped me solve many problems". This person clearly enjoys writing, actually writes regularly, and has had many happy moments while writing, but because she has not given us a specific incident to analyze. For a protocol to be accepted as a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences, it has to be specific. Mark this as *generally positive* and proceed.

*Writing Happy Moments, which are Actually the Outcome of Something Else* - These may include the protocols that are happy and specific moments in writing, but in closer examination is not a direct result of writing process. For example if a person is writing and, while writing hears a good news, and talks about the good news that made him happy, yet report this as an incident of happy moment in writing, this can not be accepted as a happy moment in writing. Hearing a good while engaged in writing can not be considered as an authentic writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences. In fact it is quite probable that the only reason a person remembers the writing experience is because it had accompanied a positive external incident. Mark these protocols as *not directly relevant* and proceed.

*Sharing Good News in Writing* - Sometimes important and significant life events may prompt a person to share this news in writing, so the person begins to write in an already happy overjoyed state. The person may even recall that experience as the happiest writing experience but only because of what happened before she/he started writing. These protocols will not be accepted as an authentic writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences, even though they may be a happy writing experience, mainly because the joy and the happiness is not an outcome of the writing experience but what preceded the writing. Mark this as *life/happy moment* and proceed.

*The joy of Completion of a Writing Task* -The sense of achievement that may come as a result of a writing task is a direct outcome of writing process that reaches its climax at the moment of completion. Although many happy moments in writing may occur in process of writing, in some cases the completion can be the high point of a writing task both emotionally and cognitively. These protocols will be accepted as a writing-triggered peak experience and other positive human experiences.

*Not sure* category-This will include the protocols that do not fit any of the above criteria or categories. Mark these as *not sure* and proceed.

## APPENDIX J

## 119 WRITING-TRIGGERED PEAK EXPERIENCES AND OTHER POSITIVE

## HUMAN EXPERIENCES PROTOCOLS

#2

I guess you could say it was when I was writing my essay for the SAAS Test. The prompt was to debate whether or not you think the US should be a “global cop” and why. I stated that the U.S. should take care of business at home first, before they go off on their crusades. I felt so confident while I was writing it. I did so well that I received a 4 on it, which is the highest you can get. This gives me a lot of confidence in my writing ability.

#8

The happiest moment I have writing was when I was taking a history test. I was supposed to write an essay about a topic that I knew little about. The time I had left to write the essay was running out. While I was wondering what to write, something clicked inside my head. I began to write a good essay, and ended up making a good grade on my test.

#9

The happiest moment while engaged in the process of writing was the time I sat down in front of my word processor, and a physics theory that I have been puzzling over for the last few years finally clicked. I felt a sense of accomplishment, and finally, a gleam of hope for my future in the sciences. I really felt like I knew what my life’s work would be.

#10

My most enjoyable writing experience occurred one day several years ago, when everything I wrote made sense. I was philosophizing, thinking, and more importantly writing. I was finally were able to put in to words everything that I felt, about everything. I wrote about 5000 words in one night.

#11

This would have to be the last year, when I finished a series of stories that I was writing. It took me a total of three months. When I finished I felt that I had accomplished something. One of my goals was close at hand. That goal is to have some of my work published. I felt great.

#12

I was happy when I wrote my sociology term paper. I was so glad to finally be done with the research and a have a great paper.

#15

I do not write much, but when I do it is normally in my journal. I write about conflict, and happy times. One of the happiest moments I had, was when I was writing about my boyfriend. We had a beautiful weekend. It's a long distance relationship, and it is hard for us. We came to terms with, and knew we were in love.

#16

For the longest time I was completely wrapped up in this one particular girl, but she would have nothing to do with me. All of my feelings were pinned up, so I began to write about them. While I was writing I felt a release, and I realized I could live without her.

#17

When I was writing a love song for my girl friend at Christmas time. She had wanted me to write something for her, for a long time, and when I finally did, she loved it. Just the process of writing the song made me very happy.

#22

While engaged in writing, one of the happiest moments of my life was when I was given an assignment to write about something that influenced me growing up. Well I chose to write about my father, who has always supported me in what I wanted to do. The more I wrote, the more I realized how fortunate I was to have such a wonderful parent. My mother had died of cancer when I was ten, and through this writing, I understood how much my father had done for me. This helped me to see what characteristics that my dad had, that I wanted to have myself, and this brought me joy; that I had been so fortunate to have a dad like that.

#24

About two years ago, I would often write letters to an ex-girl friend. There was an important letter that I thought was a significant piece of writing material. I was trying to convey messages to her, about the love that I felt for her. I described my emotions, and my descriptions were very complex. I would remind her how she was the meaning in my life, and how she makes me feel totally numb when I am around her. I would tell her that her happiness was all that mattered to me. While I was writing this letter, I felt extremely happy about the relationship and myself, because I was putting my deepest feelings down on the paper. The letter helped straighten our relationship, and confidence, and trust was established.

#26

My happiest moment in writing was a paper I wrote on the death penalty, in the fall of '96. I felt like I really expressed the point I wanted to make.

#27

I was actually writing about my happiness, and once I started writing I realized that there was so much more to be grateful for; and felt even happier once I finished writing. I was writing a letter to my fiancé, now my husband, while he was in Bosnia, and I was planning my wedding.

#29

I was writing a letter to my boyfriend, who lives away from here. I started expressing my feelings for him, and I realized how happy I was with him, and how much love I felt. I wanted to be with him forever. I felt a sense of real love, respect admiration, loyalty, closeness, trust and potential for a future. We've been together three and half years, and through it all, I carry all these feelings for him, and sometimes I can't put into words the way I feel about him.

#30

I was writing a letter to my girlfriend while she was away in Europe. I had not seen her or spoken to her in two months. As I began to write, all of these good feelings about her came out, and I started to reminisce about the things we did together. It was great to have the time to reflect about her, and how much she meant to me. I was smiling and laughing as memories and thoughts came to mind. I should sit down and write letters to her more often.

#33

Earlier this year I worked up the nerve to tell one of my best friends exactly how I felt about her. I wrote a long letter telling her about my feelings, and intentions towards the future I wanted us to have. I was so happy that I was finally writing the letter. I read it about a hundred times, before I actually sent it. It made me so happy just to put more feeling on paper. We have been together for about 6 months now.

#34

Completing my first research paper in college was a happy moment in my life. The sense of fulfillment and completion was great. The feeling that I had written a good paper made the experience even better.

#36

I studied abroad in Italy for one semester. While there, I wrote about my family, and friends. While writing to my boyfriend about my excitement, I realized how special my trip was. I felt excited about life; I was energized, and positive. I felt like he was a special person, one of the small groups who would ever reach a true understanding about people and the world.

#38

My fondest memory writing involved writing a letter of application and personal

essays to dental school. I enjoyed this because I was able to tell the school who I was, and why I was qualified for the dental profession. That was my first experience writing something important that was not for a grade.

#40

While writing my girlfriend a letter, I was able to somehow convey my thoughts in some way to her. I'm not very good with words, but I was able to write an almost poetic statement. It made me feel relieved and proud.

#43

The night before my wedding, I wrote a small journal for my parents thanking them for everything they had ever given me, including love, happiness, and support. The journal was extremely sentimental, and it brought tears to my eyes. I couldn't help but think how lucky I was to have such wonderful parents.

#45

The happiest moment writing has to do with writing my business plan. This was the happiest moment writing because I was actually writing something, which I will use in the future, not just a project that will be put aside. It is a source for future prosperity, and is what I want to achieve in my carrier.

#49

I wrote a poem last year after I got back from visiting my family for Easter. I am actually getting emotional now just thinking about it. The poem was about what a strong bond my family possesses, and the memories we share. Writing the poem made me realize how incredibly lucky I am to have a family that loves and cares for me unconditionally. It also made me realize as my sisters and I grow older and leave home, that the importance of my family will never change.

#51

One day I was writing a letter to my parents. I had talked to them on the phone just hours before. I begun to write the letter, but I thought that they would appreciate it, any ways when I started to write the letter I told them how much they mean to me. As I continued to write, I discovered that the words were just flowing on to the page. I did not even have to think of what to write my thoughts were going straight to my hand. I remember thinking about how important my parents are to me, and how much they have done for me. The letter touched me in my heart, because I had taken my whole life for granted. This gave me a chance to thank them. They loved the letter.

#53

The girl I am dating now, I was up thinking about her, and our relationship. I started writing a poem for her; to say all the things I couldn't verbally tell her. While writing, the words just flowed, and with every line, I would realize more

and more how much I loved her. That no doubt made me a very happy person.

#55

Wrote a paper on telemetry. It was over 40 pages long. When I finally finished it I was very happy.

#56

In writing my essay describing my future goals, and past experiences. In writing this report, I was able to enjoy what past accomplishments I received, and saw how they affect my life. Thinking about my future goals got me thinking about how I could become a greater contributor in today's society.

#58

Last year I wrote a paper about "racism". In this paper I wrote about the ill effect of racism on society and, I attained a high level of personal accomplishment in writing this paper. In a world where you are surrounded by some things that you might not agree with, it is very satisfying to be able to express your own view.

#60

I was enrolled in literature 203 at Texas A&M, and had to write in a notebook diary we were keeping for the class. In the notebook, I wrote about a life experience; about how it felt to be a young Mexican female from south Texas. I wrote about the hardship I faced in wanting to attend a university as a youth. The past might not have been happy, but the fact that I could put it into words gave me great satisfaction; but the greatest happiness came when my proof said I should consider writing a story, because my story was very close to "House on Mango Street" by Sandra Censors. This was a great surprise for me.

#62

I had a lot of fun writing a letter to my landlord. I got to use a lot of nasty words. It was a blast.

#63

I really don't enjoy writing, but I do remember one paper where I wrote about someone very special to me. I wrote a paper about my grandfather, and how he positively influenced my life. He was a great strength to me, and every time I picture him in my mind, I see his bright smiling face. I enjoy the memories we shared and I enjoy sharing them with others.

#64

I was writing a letter to a very close personal friend. This was a very important letter because my friend needed an extra pick me up, to get her going through a difficult time. It is hard to put those intense feelings into words. There was a

point in the writing, where I felt frustrated, because I was trying to say something that wouldn't come out. Then it just clicked, and the words started flowing. It was this overwhelming feeling of completion that I felt by the end. It's like my heart was caught in my throat until that moment, and then all of a sudden it retook its original position by the end, and all I could do was smile, even though I was near tears by the pressure of emotions that were brought out in me.

#66

While applying to dental school, there were many questions I had to answer. Going through the OPISA office, there was a set of twenty questions, which I had to answer. These questions asked me to reflect on my life experiences, and to describe why I wanted to become a dentist. The answers I came up with made it clear to me that I really wanted to become a dentist; I was not fooling myself. All and all, this was a very fulfilling experience.

#67

My best writing experience would have to be when writing a letter to a young lady I had just met who lives far away. It was a recent event, about 3 weeks ago. In some ways I guess it was a love letter, but an immature love. It was about the longest letter I had ever written.

#68

I recently wrote a letter concerning recent events. I felt that the letter was concise and generally expressed my thoughts very well.

#69

One of the happiest moments in writing was starting my Dear God diary. I started writing to God about my day. I included problems, joys, and prayers. I felt really close to God and very fulfilled.

#70

I became really compassionate one time when I had to write a paper for a class. The paper was about sustainable agriculture, and this is a topic I have always felt strongly about. I remember the words just coming out of my brain, through my hands, and pouring out into the paper. It wasn't even work; it was what I believed, backed by facts. I received a 98 on the paper. It made me very happy, that I was able to convey my thoughts that well.

#76

I wrote a letter to the better business bureau about some service I received. Doing so made a great weight be lifted. I should have written the letter two years ago, but didn't have enough tact to express myself. I'm happy I finally got my frustrations down on paper.



#91

One experience I had in the process of writing would be writing my priest. I haven't seen my priest in about 6 years, after he left to preach in a church in Dallas. I sent him a graduation invitation, along with a letter. In the letter I told him about all the positive things that happened in the past that I was proud of. He was a part of the family and I wanted to fill him in.

#92

I was working on a project for another class, earlier this week, and was doing some creative writing. It was very fun to combine words, especially more sophisticated words, to convey exactly what I wanted to say. Two of my friends working on the project with me were very impressed by my writing.

#93

The most fulfilling writing experience I had recently had was when I wrote my father. I felt I finally had something in common. I was telling him about my classes, and describing my history class, and what we were doing.

#100

I was writing a letter to a friend of mine and while I was writing, I realized the issues we had or didn't have. I cleared the path between us and the letter helped her to too because she didn't know what I was thinking.

#101

I had to write personal essays for my dental school application last summer. This made me really reflect on who I was, and what was truly important to me. It helped me to realize my goals in life. It was an enlightening experience.

#103

While writing I have had many happy experiences. In scientific writing, probably the most fulfillment's one has, comes upon completion. But when looking at my entire life, I would say writing letters to my family; one letter in particular made me feel very good. I had a lot of stressful things happen, and the letter provided me an outlet for these pressures. I also felt enjoyment from being able to be there and communicate with this particular loved one.

#107

Writing an email to my mother telling her about my girlfriend. This was a love email going into how I felt about the girl and how she felt about me. As I put the words down, I thought more and more about my relationship with this girl, and felt better about it.

#108

I was writing a story for my cousin about friendship. She had a friend that moved away and was scared that she would never make another friend. I wrote her a story that cheered her up, more importantly, while I was writing it, it made me happy. I realized now how important friends are, and that people can always have them.

#109

Writing my letter of compliment for technical writing. It made me laugh and realize again the joy and power of words. I felt very capable.

#110

One of the happiest moments in my life, dealing with writing, would have to be when I was in love with my ex-girlfriend and I wrote her a love song on the guitar.

#112

I guess I don't really enjoy writing that much so this question is hard for me to answer. However I guess the time I enjoyed writing the most was when I was writing the commencement speech for graduation from high school. It was fun to reflect on the past four years and use that to fill in my speech and tie it all together.

#120

I guess it would be when I wrote my fiancée a letter I just put all of my feelings down on paper.

#122

While writing, I have had several pleasurable experiences. The one I can recall most happily was not an assignment. It was a clear baking day, I sat outside in the grass as it leaned a little from the breeze and the sun penetrated my skin. I wrote about everything that I was thinking. I extremely pleased with my writing.

#123

One of the happiest moments while writing came when I helped my wife fill out her application to the Bush School of government. Feelings included such things as assertiveness, insight, potential, experience, strength, idealism, challenge, and control.

#125

Writing a song. I've written lots of songs, but a couple of them just poured out and I believe are pretty good songs. One in particular most people seem to really like. It's called "over you".

#126

When I began to write a letter to my boyfriend and I realized how special he was in my life. I love him very much.

#128

I wrote a paper in high school about a summer camp that I attended. While writing it, I reflected back on my experience and it was very enjoyable and memorable. I enjoyed writing the paper because it was over a subject that I enjoyed, and made me happy.

#131

I was writing an English research paper my freshman year of college. The paper was on the professionalism of chiropractic. I received a high "A" on the paper.

#132

My happiest experience while writing, was when, I sat on a bench by rudder fountain at night, and wrote a letter to God, about everything that was going wrong, and had gone wrong in my life. While the topic was melancholy, I felt a sense of reassurance, and relief. I was happy knowing my conscience was clear, and that God knew what I knew. He is my best friend, and doesn't take much for him to change my mood, and tell me it's all right.

#133

I am not quite sure about the question, but I will answer to the best of my ability. While on Christmas break I had completed a semester. I had no worries and no complaints at that moment in time. My life was perfect; therefore I felt the need to express my thoughts. The clarity I felt, I could see things without any difficulty.

#138

The happiest experience I had was while writing a college entrance essay on my involvement in the Plan Drumlin. It brought up old memories of the past four years, and I really enjoyed it.

#139

During an exam, answering an essay question I felt a profound sense of satisfaction, and contentment. Not only did I know the answer, but also I was able to present it in a clear concise manner that expressed my own interest in the subject.

#142

It has been a while since I've written any thing that made me happy. The only thing I can think of right now is about my son. My son makes me happy, and I like to tell, and write about him, because my whole life revolves around him. I

love my son so much, and the little things he does. My essay was more targeted for young mothers who like me thought about abortion. I am so glad that I did not go through with the abortion. I felt the confusion, frightfulness disappointment, and then the happiness all over again.

#143

During my time in Germany, I was a member of a rock band. Granted, most lyricists don't receive much respect, but I took it very seriously. One of the happiest moments of my life was the completion of 3 poems, but even more so was the uniting of those poems with music. As far as the poems are concerned, I could not tell you what truly inspired me to sit down and write, although my motives seem clear to me through the writing. The combination of music, and words accomplished so spontaneously is what I remember vividly.

#147

In my senior year in high school we had to research our family background. I had no idea how I was going to do this, so my dad told me that the best way that this could be done is by going, and talking to some of my relatives myself. Well I got to meet a lot of my family, and by doing this figure out that family should or is the most important thing in one's life. I finished my paper, and I was very happy that I had achieved that task. It was a feeling that was unexplainable, but then to top at all, I received an in the paper. Not only was I excited that I had succeeded in what was asked of me but also I had found out who I really was.

#148

When I wrote the opening story for the school yearbook I was happy. While writing, it felt good to know that the product would be published, and read by my peers, and teachers, and preserved for later reflection. Not only this, but knowing that someone had enough confidence in my writing abilities to entrust something I considered a big responsibility to me was also gratifying. Putting words down on paper can be therapeutic, but for me, true feelings of happiness came with the end of result. It is good to know that something as personal as written evidence of your thoughts makes sense and can provide enjoyment for other people.

#153

I wrote the man I loved back; and, to know that a person as fine and kind as him loved me filled my heart beyond measures. To write him, and be able to tell him all that was happening to me so that he could take care of me when he came home from his mission filled me with great joy.

#157

I have a great passion for writing. When I start my family I hope to be able to

stay at home with my kids and write children's books, and also illustrate them. I have had many joys while writing. It seems that the whole process brings happiness and at the end you have a good sense of accomplishment. Guess the happiest I have been while writing is when I transcribed one of my deceased granny's stories on to paper. That brought so much emotion and joy with it. My grandma's words just seemed to pour on to the paper, and it is now something I will always have to remember her by, and who knows maybe one day I will have the pleasure of sharing it with the world.

#158

I wrote a poetry explication for my English class. I really did not look forward to it, but once I got into it, I began to get a sense of self-worth. Poetry is usually difficult for me to comprehend, so when I began to understand the poem enough to write about it, I felt a sense of happiness and I wanted to write about it, to prove my knowledge

#160

One experience I had in the process of writing would be writing my priest. I haven't seen my priest in about 6 years, after he left to preach in a church in Dallas. I sent him a graduation invitation, along with a letter. In the letter I told him about all the positive things that happened in the past that I was proud of. He was a part of the family, and I wanted to fill him in.

#161

My happiest experience while writing was when I was in high school. I took a creative writing class. One day I was writing a poem, and I was pushed for deadlines. I didn't think about what I was writing. I just started writing and the words just started appearing on paper. When I was finished, I read back over my poem, and found that it was exceptionally good. I was proud of myself, and also surprised. The poem wasn't planned since then I've learned to write the first words that came.

#162

I wrote a letter to my best friend this summer. I had a lot to say to her, and it all seemed to flow onto the letter. I enjoyed doing it because I trusted my thoughts and emotions well, and I used some style I picked up from some great author.

#163

My happiest moment during writing occurred last semester while I was working on a paper with the topic of family values. I was feeling very lonely and homesick at the time, considering that this was my first experience away from home. While I was writing, I began to remember all the things we had ever done together, like our vacation's to Disney World. It was then, that I realized that even though they were in another city, they still remained very

close to me in my heart.

#165

Well, I had a few hard weeks of school and volleyball, and life in general. It seemed like some of my goals for the volleyball team wasn't going to happen, and that I wasn't very unhappy with my social life. I wrote in a journal. I can just let my mind go, and let it all out. In doing so, I see things that I can do differently, and I change my attitude. I began to think, and write positively and by the end I just felt good. It is enough to keep me struggling for what I want.

#170

My roommate graduated this past December. Her mom put together a book that all of her friends signed. When I was writing in it, I realized how proud I was of her for all her accomplishments. I also knew my time to graduate and go into the real world was coming soon, and I can't wait for that to happen.

#171

I can remember taking an essay test in English class in high school. The teacher was very hard, and expected a lot from his students. It was a difficult question. And I had no clue. Then, a light came on; I understood exactly what he wanted, and what the writer meant. I went on to write an excellent paper that I was very proud, and content with. It was one of the first times I had really understood, and written about literature.

#172

Writing has always been a means for self-exploration for me. After a particularly long period of confusion about my own values, and goals, and what I was going to do with my life, I was particularly overjoyed when as I wrote things became clearer. And as I read the words I wrote, I began to truly understand myself better.

#173

I think writing my resume was hard, but fun at the same time. It gave me a headache and joy at the same time. Knowing that I was laying out, in written format, my experience and qualification for my career really pleased me. I had a great feeling of self worth, and positive emotions after completion. This one little document has listened briefly my struggle through college and my triumph.

#175

One of the happiest times during writing was when I wrote a poem for an English class. It was a poem about growing up and the influence my dad had on me. It was so good that it was published in a booklet. My dad got hold of it, framed it, and put up in his office.

#178

I like to write poetry or prose. Most of the time, I feel very confused, or “cluttered” when I write, but this time was very different. I sat down, didn’t know exactly what I was going to say, but I knew it would be a letter to my ex-boyfriend, who I was still in love with. I wrote with a clear conscious, and let the words flow onto the page. The closer I got to the end, the happier I got, because the language was innocent, and real. It was a wonderful feeling to get all that off my chest.

#184

I was sitting on the swimming deck at my camp, watching the sunrise, and writing in my journal about how wonderful the last few days has been.

#185

Writing about an event, which made me, sad and happy. Feelings flooded in me instantly. I disregarded any problem or uncertainty in the relationship. It made me eager to make the best of my relationship, and I longed for that moment again.

#188

I don’t believe I’ve ever had a happy moment in writing, in school, but being a songwriter, I’ve encountered numerous at home. I remember my first real good song. Up to that point, my other songs sounded more like poetry, but this song told a powerful story, and it had a good rhythm too. Every time I wrote a new verse down, I was amazed at how good it was. By the time I was finished writing the song, I was overwhelmed with pride, and satisfaction.

#190

When I finished the writing portions of the last essay. This to me was the happiest writing moment I’ve ever had.

#192

Happiness in the writing process depends on the purpose of the writing and its interest to me. A little over two years ago, I had a writing assignment, to do a short essay on any topic. I wrote about an attempt to write a book, that some friends and I made the year before. It was over the “written rules”, that we had observed that seemed to be so common, that they must be required, yet we could find no such requirements. These things could almost have been called stereotypes. My friends and I had a lot of fun with the book, even though it remains unfinished. Consequently, the memories that the essay brought back also added a sense of enjoyment to the project.

#193

I was writing a memorial for my dog that I had put to sleep. As I wrote, a flood of memories came back to me. I experienced heightened visual and sensual

acuteness. I could actually see and feel her again. I was overcome with my grief for my loss. As I wrote the last line "I buried my sister today" I started crying and couldn't stop for 5 minutes. After I was finished crying, I experienced catharsis. I was happy for her life and what she had done for me.

#196

The happiest I have ever been while I was writing, was last summer. It was the time I wrote a letter to my boy friend, telling him for the first time, that I loved him. It was an emotional, joyful experience for me. I poured my soul out on paper. I wrote about my feelings, my hopes, and wishes, and my dreams. I wanted to share every thing about myself with him. I didn't plan this writing experience with detail. I just decided to write whatever came to my mind. When I was finished, I felt genuinely happy, and elated.

#197

When I was in high school, I had to write an essay for French. My friend and I got together to work on it. We came up with the most bizarre, preposterous story, but had a great time doing it. In fact, the story was longer, and more complicated than it was supposed to be. We were having so much fun, we just kept on writing.

#198

Plagued by apprehension, I sat outwardly calm, as the remaining few filled silently into the room. This was not a test for a grade, nor was it a tangible record of my worth. Yet for me, it was a moment where I would prove to myself my capabilities. Nothing more than a competition-it would mean anything if I lost, and not much more if I won. As I waited for the quote upon which I would try to compose a response; I was nervous for the first time I could remember. Would I have anything to say about it? Or would it all become B.S and then it came from above "this too shall pass". Not only were they the words that made me smile. It was the prompt that made me happy.

#199

A happy experience I had with writing was this semester. I was very frustrated, and could not seem to think of anything to write. Nothing made any sense. Then all of a sudden I just started writing, and the words didn't seem to stop. I felt like a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders, and I was overjoyed going from a time of true worry to not having a care in the world. It was great.

#200

I had a big lab report and analysis due. The 'happy' moment was felt when I understood and had a clear idea of what I was writing about. All the information seemed to fall into place, and I didn't even have to think hard about organization. The information seemed to present itself. In fact I had to type very fast just to keep up with the flow of information.



#201

Before Christmas I decided to email my friends a new and improved rendition of "The night before Christmas". I started writing, changing words here and there; soon I was laughing out loud at the stuff I was coming up with. The poem turned out better than I expected. It made all my friends laugh. That made me happy.

#202

Two years ago my cousin committed suicide. While sitting alone one night, I decided to write a poem to the family. I felt that writing the poem gave me internal peace, and I was joyous that the poem could ease the pain of those I was writing to.

#204

When writing a response paper, I was happy that I understood the poem I was writing about and I came to several personal revelations that have included personal discovery.

#205

Probably one of the few happiest moments while writing was last week when I had to write a speech of my culture. While I was writing I began to think what an awesome culture I have. I really do feel proud of where I come from because it has made me whom I am.

#212

During my final year of high school, I wrote a paper, which was entirely original. Usually papers I write are based on something, or are a reaction to something,

but the dream paper I wrote was purely from my imagination. When I turned it in, I was afraid the teacher would take off points because it strayed from the prompt, but she returned my paper with a 100 circled at the top.

#213

Journal writing during one of my quiet times, I gained insight about life and how the Bible gives me knowledge of God and direction in life. It gave me an inner peace and a sense of direction.

#214

I was writing a letter to my best friend telling him how much I missed him. I was excited because I was going to visit him that weekend, and I couldn't wait. I was over anxious. He is very close to my heart, and I enjoy every moment we share together.

#215

One of the happiest times I have experienced while writing was while I was writing a letter to my lord and savior. I began writing down my thoughts on a particular subject and the words just began to flow. I wrote for hours, when I was through writing I realized just how much God cared for me.

#217

The details of this experience are kind of unclear since it can happen at any time. I remember being very happy, after writing a short fiction story. I was proud of myself, but I needed one particular stamp of appraisal that could make or break my feelings about my work. I opened the story. I gave the story to my dad to read. He sat back and gave me this really wearied look. I was nervous and fidgety. I thought he was going to laugh. Instead he praised me, and complimented me on my beautiful usage of detail, and imagery. I was overwhelmed with joy. A compliment like that from my father was rare. He was a walking dictionary of knowledge.

#218

When I am writing personal letters to my friends, I enjoy writing the most. This summer I wrote a letter to my best friend, who lives in Virginia, asking her what airport I should fly into if I were to come visit her. She didn't know that I was planning on coming, and I knew that she would be thrilled when she read the letter. I was so excited, because I hadn't seen her since the end of my sophomore year in high school.

#220

It may sound silly, but just a moment ago as I was writing the detailed description of my happy moment, it pulled back up the feelings and emotions I experienced at the time, and made me smile and feel joy all over again.

#221

My happiest writing experience was in high school, my junior year. We were all asked to write on the particular subject of aids. I wrote an entry of a young man that was dealing with the aids virus. I won an award. #229

One of the best experiences I've had while writing is when I first wrote home to my parents from college. I felt independent and responsible, yet at the same time closer to my family than I had been before.

#232

In my junior year I wrote a research paper over the sitcom "married with children". This was the most pleasurable experience in writing, one that I had a lot of fun doing.

#233

While in the process of writing I've had the happiest moment while writing about

my girlfriend. It was about an assignment I had to do for Valentine's Day last year.

#234

Fall semester 1997 we were given a large group assignment, and worked on it all semester. Happiness came as I was completing the final revisions, late the night before it was due. Pride was present in our accomplishment and feeling of accomplishment arose. It was exciting to see several months of work come to conclusion in one final outcome.

#239

A happy moment in my life while engaged in the process of writing would have been my last essay for English senior year. When I was writing I tried to make it my best because I knew it would be my last. When I was finished I felt I had completed a great masterpiece that really wasn't. It made me feel that high school was over and I knew the time was around the corner.

#240

While writing about my girlfriend and getting engaged. I started to think about the things that went on during that period, and I just kept thinking about the time I won the U.S. open Teakwood championship. I guess just writing about the happy moments brought all this on. Well, it was 1996 and I was in Colorado Springs for the tournament, and I felt good about myself. I worked out into the ring. My heart was racing like an engine. I performed to the best of my abilities and when it was all said and done my hand was raised and I was the winner. I couldn't believe it. It seemed as though the whole world just stopped and left me alone. That was a pretty good feeling.

#241

When I was a junior in high school I wrote a paper on Sherman. Through my research of his march through the south, I found so many interesting things. I was learning at the same time that I was writing. I ended up with an "A" on it.

#242

In my high school yearbook a place is provided for the seniors to express their thoughts. They usually write a lengthy half page about themselves, my quote was simply this, and "the epitome of genius is the individual who admits they know nothing". I hoped to burst a few egos with this quote, and quite often when I go back and read it, it bursts my ego.

#243

I wrote a poem about Oklahoma City bombing, and I was just happy to finally express how I felt about the entire situation on paper. It felt great to get the words out on paper.

#244

I was very emotional from an encounter that I had with a girl whom I was very infatuated with. I was so moved and sat down and wrote a song describing my feelings for her, and after I had finished I felt relieved, and I more deeply understood my own feelings.

#245

When my boyfriend of two years and I broke up with great finality, I wrote a document claiming independence from him. I felt clear headed, and strong after writing this down.

#246

The happiest moment while I was writing happened this year when I wrote my mother to say hi. I love her so much and I was in a great mood.

#252

The happiest moment of my life while writing was expressing my truest feelings to my boyfriend in a letter that I wrote him about my love for him and his role in my life.

#258

I was chosen to give a sermon at church. It was the first time a youth had done it in over twenty years. I had a lot of joy and feeling of accomplishment, as I wrote and decided what to say.

#259

I think I always feel happiness when I write. I love to do it, but I think the most happiness I felt was writing my ex girlfriend, now best friend a poem describing our time spent together, what we had, and her future, for her high school graduation present. While writing, all the feelings, and the experiences we had the happiness some get when they bring something to a close.

#260

In high school, I used to goof off and not really focus when we were writing in class. So my writings turned out to be goofy and quite fun. One of my pieces called "the adventures of under-the-chair-boy" won awards, and was published in our high school book. This made me proud, and also made me consider writing more and possibly looking into a career in writing.

#261

One experience that made me happy while I was writing was when I made my mom a card on mother's day, and wrote her a letter. It made me feel good that I was telling her that I loved her. I was happy because I knew she would be

happy.

#262

Last semester in “English104” I had to write a few papers. One of these papers was about Wetlands. While writing, my feelings flowed freely, and I felt great. I could put my true feelings down on paper, and it was ok. I didn’t worry about people, or what they thought.

#264

Usually I am not moved to happiness through writing. It is usually just a required assignment. I will say though writing on my experience of happiness made me remember how moving it was for me as well as keep me motivated to pursue that goal of teaching.

#269

For the last year or two, I have been questioning all of the things that have been secure in my life, those things like religion, and love that had never been in question. I wrote down a few things about each, formulating a solution, or explanation to the intangible things in life. Although those aren’t completely developed, it has been a milestone in my life that has been positive and insightful.

#270

One of my happiest writing experiences was listing and describing my life accomplishments.

## APPENDIX K

## RULES OF SELECTION OF 14 ATTRIBUTES

The following are the rules used to create the 14 writing-triggered Peak experience and other positive human experiences attributes.

- 1) If a word appeared more than once and seemed to be central in describing why a peak experience and other positive human experiences had occurred or how it could be best described, that word was used to create a descriptive or trigger or outcome category. For example the word flow was used in more than one incident and was central to explanation of why peak took place, why writing was remembered so flow became a category.
- 2) Some categories were created based on what could best describe or get to the essence of participant's descriptions of their experiences really meant. For example sometimes a category of description was implied but never directly stated; in those cases I gave it a name. For example I based on the subject's explanation of how easy the writing experience had taken place deducted the category of effortless.
- 3) Some categories as you will see are single categories. These categories were created and reported either based on an actual description given by the subject or was created by me to best describe an important element, which I did not want to lose or not report. In most cases the description fit previous descriptions in the literature such as losing track of time.

APPENDIX L  
AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Personal Background*

*Born Out of a Need*

The question of whether or not peak experience can occur in writing grew out of a personal journey that took its roots from an intense personal need to discover the secrets of true happiness. Such an obsession may appear to be a foolish, never-ending pursuit of a mirage, yet despite all of its pitfalls, this obsession succeeded in luring me under its intoxicating spell, in the hope of discovering its undeniable meaning.

Driven by this inner urge, I began my search years ago looking into anything that promised delivering a part of the puzzle. This passionate search has given my life meaning and purpose. I am constantly searching to find the different pieces of the puzzle, while anxiously awaiting the emergence of a bigger picture.

*My Journey*

Although my need to uncover the basic elements of personal happiness goes as far back as my early childhood, my systematic search to unlock the basic ingredients did not start until I entered adulthood. After completing my master's work in counseling I realized that so many options were now open to me. Suddenly I had a new zest for life. Yet despite all my new and exciting experiences I was neither happier nor at peace with myself. For every answer I

had found, thousands of new questions had emerged, all running through my mind simultaneously, demanding and seeking immediate answers. From questions such as who am I; or what I really want out of life; to problems involving bigger social issues that affect all of us; and issues that were close to my heart. It was at this point that out of complete desperation, I turned to writing.

*Writing a Pathway to Clarity and Vision*

As far back as I can remember, I have always turned to writing in times of change or trouble. Nothing ever seemed real or complete until I transcribed it into the written word.

I put my trust in the process of writing. I didn't care where it was taking me. The more I wrote, the more intriguing the whole process became. After four years of writing, the clutter had disappeared. It was replaced with an unimaginable sense of clarity and vision.

This outpouring of thoughts and emotions on paper usually followed a certain routine. It first began with an urge to write. I wrote freely, allowing every thought or emotion to find equal expression. Eventually, a sense of inner order and peace would begin to appear. Gradually, I would find myself in a state of relaxed and focused concentration, a state of total absorption. This state has helped me to solve my problems, make important decisions, and visualize many possibilities with the greatest of clarity. In my experience, this incredible thought- enhancing quality is unique to writing something I have never been



able to achieve through mere self-dialogue or communication with others. I have learned that even quiet contemplation does not have the same effect.

This state of mind was accompanied with a unique and powerful emotional state, an incredible sense of calmness and joy. It's during these moments that I begin to achieve moments of incredible joy and ecstasy, moments, which I eventually came to identify as "peak experience."

Maslow (1963) saw these moments as acute identity episodes, moments in which we are most ourselves. To me these moments were more than mere identity episodes or therapeutic experiences. These moments were moments of transcendence in which time and space no longer existed. These moments were mystical and unusual in nature; not only in the quality of peace and calm they bring, but also in the kind of unique perception they create. I felt one with the world, and extremely alive and happy. I experienced joy, completeness, and oneness with myself.

Today I am living the life I visualized in writing during those four years, and am the happiest I have ever been. I have discovered many of my interests and talents and am on my way to achieving the realization of my initial goal, living a joyful existence, by creating an authentic life based on a better understanding of who I really am (self-knowledge) and who I am capable of becoming (basic potential and talents).

*A Study Is Born*

Completion of this incredible personal experience coincided with me resuming my studies in educational psychology on a doctoral level. My new questions were no longer about how to achieve personal happiness; they were directed instead toward a better understanding of the incredible experience I had encountered. My writing experiences had been so intertwined with the peak moments I had experienced that I could not decide whether I was looking at writing as a phenomenon or its peak moments as an experience. I wondered how much of my metamorphosis was due to the incredible transforming powers of writing and how much to the result of experiencing so many peak moments. I resolved the dilemma by envisioning a research study that would look at the whole experience. This not only gave me the opportunity to explore some of my questions and hunches, but also enabled me to pull together in a meaningful way all that I had learned and discovered in writing.

## VITA

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EDUCATION

- Ph.D. Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, 1989-2004  
Minor: Gifted & Talented
- M.Ed. The University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio, 1984  
Major: Guidance & Counselor Education
- B.A. The University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio, 1983  
Major: Psychology; Minor: Educational Psychology  
Cum Laude

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Human Development Specialist & Counseling: Private Practice, 1985-2004; Specializing in: Self-actualization through writing (identification and fostering of individual's unique strengths and gifts); education & psychology of gifted & talented & creative individuals (a new perspective on autism, Asperger syndrome, and ADD); therapeutic benefits of writing.

OTHER RESEARCH INTERESTS

Writing as a tool for self-actualization; therapeutic benefits of writing; relationship between journal writing and self-actualization; relationship between writing and emergence of self; relationship between depression & self-actualization; relationship between gifted mind & autistic type behaviors and personality; Asperger syndrome & giftedness; late talking kids & autism; psychology of visual learner; psychology of gifted and creative child; education without labels & drugs; meaning, insight and movies.