

THE SOCIAL, SPIRITUAL, AND RELIGIONS EFFECTS
OF NUMINOUS EXPEREINCES

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Introduction

While researchers have investigated religious and spiritual experiences, often within the classification of parapsychological phenomena, little research has been undertaken specifically about numinous experiences. Often these studies examine broader categories of mystical experience or exceptional human experiences. While seeking a broader understanding of these religious, spiritual, psychological, or parapsychological experiences is significant, conducting a more limited examination of one particular experienced phenomenon is not only warranted, but necessary, if not merely undertaken as a reductionist scientific endeavor. Such is the focus of this present study, a specific research endeavor regarding the numinous. The specific and limited focus of this study is further justified as there are few research studies that have investigated any social dimensions of numinous experiences while no known studies have examined the social effects of numinous experiences on an individual's religious, spiritual, and social lives, a reality confirmed by Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995). Milton (1992) also supports the need for an investigation of the effects of paranormal experiences by noting “. . . we know relatively little about how people handle it . . . ”[i.e., paranormal experience(s)] “. . . and what factors influence whether they handle it well or badly . . . ” (i.e., from a mental health perspective)(p. 315). Although Milton's mental health effects are not specifically assessed in this present study, the narrative frames, combined with their rank order explanation, will provide some reflective insights into how individuals “handle” one form of paranormal experience.

Literature Review

Numinous Experiences

Rudolf Otto (1970) conceptualized the nature of numinous experience as “a moment of deeply-felt religious experience” (p. 8) while Jung adds the construct that such experiences are “. . . a dynamic agency or effect, not caused by an arbitrary act of the will . . .” (Hoy, 1983, p. 19), thus forming the operational definition for this study. As such, Hoy reports that numinous experiences are “. . . superlative in effect and rare in appearance” (p.18) while noting Jung’s commentary that it is the nature of the “affective pull” that is significant, and not merely the externality of the experience; essentially the experience “grips” the individual, at least emotionally. Furthermore, for Jung, meaning is “. . . not empirically verifiable. It is only subjectively confirmable...” (Hoy, 1983, p. 22). Jung also notes that "The numinous image is far more an expression of essentially unconscious processes than a product of rational inference" (Hoy, 1983, p. 27). Hoy then goes on to comment that (religious) rituals ". . . catch, bind and limit the numinous experience . . ." (p. 25), and later notes that "Properly performed religious rites render numinous experiences rare" (p. 25). Thus he "concludes" that such experiences are “controlled” through religions, societal rituals, and therapies. Thus, the conceptualizations of a numinous experience, as well as the social dimension associated with them, support the undertaking of this study. This is true, in light of Hoy’s comments, regarding researching the effects of numinous experiences on one’s religion, spirituality, and social life, in light of Hoy’s specific reference to these issues.

Beyond the influence of religion, societal rituals, and therapies, additional views of numinous experience exist. Jung and Hoy also see them as part of the process of individuation. For Jung that involves the ". . . conscious pursuit of self-realization . . ." (in Hoy, p. 28). Yet, Jung views such experiences as having "suggestive power" that may draw individuals to "inflation." Raphael (1994) also notes that the influence of the Judeo-Christian patriarchy cannot be ignored for such experiences. Consequently, the masculine "God" image, when religiously experienced or examined, is influenced by that patriarchal foundational religious concept, particularly with regard to numinous experiences. Therefore, the responses of subjects in this study can be examined through the perceptual lenses of individuation, defined as nonorthodox or non-conforming (religiously, spiritually, or socially), as well as any tendencies to "inflate" the social effects of the experiences, and finally regarding any "patriarchal" influences for individuals who identify with Judeo-Christian religions.

Regarding the nature of numinous experiences, a limited number of studies have been undertaken. In one study, Cameron and Gatewood (2003) examined numinous experiences ". . . in the unremembered past." Their exploratory study examined the comments of visitors to historical sites and museums. While agreeing with the operational definition of numinous, or numen-seeking, noting its Latin origins and a specific reference to ". . . a nod or beckoning from the gods . . ." (p. 57), their content analysis failed to apply this definitional standard. The comments evaluated as numinous were more nostalgic in effect, like a ". . . going back in time or an escape . . ." (p. 62). In a second study regarding age differences in mystical experiences, including numinous

experiences, Levin (1993) found most respondents reporting having one or two mystical experiences in their lifetime, albeit a declining rate with age, with subjective religiosity being a correlated factor for young middle aged and older aged adults. Regarding numinous experiences, of 1451 subjects, only 456 had one or more experiences, with a mean of 1.49. For this study the definition of numinous involved “Grace,” which is “Felt as though you were very close to powerful, spiritual forces that seemed to lift you out of yourself” (p. 509). Although both studies are perceptually related to this study, any direct utility to this study is unfounded, specifically to numinous experiences, as both studies fail to use the “classic” operational definition advanced by Otto and Jung.

While paranormal and mystical literature are related to this study in its broadest constructs, a detailed analysis of such studies is not undertaken, in light of the sought after specific effects of “classically” defined numinous experiences. Even though a detailed exploration of paranormal literature is not presented, the works of William James and Rhea White will be noted as conceptualized support for this study. Furthermore, studies by Hardy, Kennedy and Kanthamani, and Milton, regarding the effects of paranormal and/or spiritual experiences will be highlighted. These studies broaden not only support for this study but also provide additional referents for analysis.

The work of William James provides the broadest supportive context for undertaking this study. Through his writing in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James (1997) notes that “...union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end.....(and)....inner communion with the spirit thereof - be that spirit of ‘God’ or ‘law’ - is a process where work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces

effects, psychological and material, within the phenomenal world” (p. 377). Thus, out of the communion and the effects, James believes an individual should live or enact life rather than merely knowing life. Furthermore, the acts of connection, these personal experiences (i.e. for this study the numinous), even when small are “solid” “....so long as it lasts” (p. 387). Consequently, “...that which produces effects within another reality must be termed reality itself, so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal” (p. 399). It is the embracement of a connection with a spiritual realm, combined with lasting effects of that connection, which provides a broad supportive foundation for the investigation into the effects of numinous experiences.

Rhea White (1999), Director of the Exceptional Human Experience (EHE) Network and a noted researcher regarding EHEs, categorizes EHEs as “...anomalous experiences that transform the individual who has them so they are engaged in a process of realizing their full human potential...”(p.1). Consequently, the term EHEs has become an umbrella term for a variety of experiences (i.e., mystical experiences, out-of-body experiences, near death experiences, etc.). What is a defining characteristic of an EHE is the lasting effect it has on the individual. Without the lasting effect, the experience is viewed as a mere anomaly. Not only are the effects lasting, they can also be transformative, allowing the individual to “rise above” or “surpass; exceed” (p. 1). White believes that all EHEs occur spontaneously. These experiences simply “.... happen to you-you can’t make them happen” (p.1). They also occur in a unified manner, thus they happen with “...no sense of separation....both within and without the person” (p. 1). Furthermore, EHEs are connective both internally and externally, “.... to the sacred” thus

engaging people in a “world of meaning and connection” (p.1). Thus EHEs can be categorized as having meaningful effects on individuals, a process that would also include the numinous.

Beyond these more general effects of EHEs, studies have investigated more specific effects of “paranormal” experiences. In a fairly extensive study of over 3000 subjects, with events and effects averaged per one thousand subjects, Hardy (1979) noted three “consequences” for religious experiences. Hardy’s subjects reported a “sense or purpose or new meaning in life (184.7)” “changes in religious belief (38.7)” and “changes in attitude to others (77)” [numbers in parenthesis are the averages per 1000 respondents]. In a second study, Kennedy and Kanthamani, in a convenience sample of individuals actively interested in parapsychology, thus a sample that “...were more likely candidates to have had anomalous experiences” (p. 251) (i.e., paranormal or EHE experiences), found effects that were “...generally due to a combination of experiences...” (p. 252) with changes being “...due primarily to more than one anomalous experience” (p. 253). Within their assessment of “changes resulting from the experiences” (p. 254) they found an “increased interest and belief in spiritual matters and increased well-being” (p. 254). Within the increased interest in spirituality-related matters they found a “desire to achieve a higher consciousness, belief in life after death, and interest in spiritual and religious matters” (p. 254). Regarding their assessment of well-being, they found positive responses for “...feelings of happiness and well-being, sense of connection to others, optimism about the future, purpose or meaning for life, and motivation to maintain health” (p. 254). Specifically, seventy-two percent reported that

their lives were “...guided or watched over by a higher power as a result of their experience...” (p. 255), sixty-three percent reported there was a perception of “life after death” and fifty-five percent of the subjects became “...significantly more spiritual or religious” (p. 255-256). Finally, they found a correlation between an individual’s current well-being, the importance of one’s spirituality, and the sense that one has regarding meaning in life and the “...degree of change in these variables resulting from anomalous experiences” (p. 257). Milton (1992), conducted a third study, which was an exploratory investigation regarding the effects of “paranormal,” which was conceptualized as an event “unlikely to be accounted for in terms of currently known physical laws” (p. 316). Milton was not concerned with event verification, rather utilizing the Jungian perspective regarding the subjects’ belief that the event happened. Regarding practical effects to their lives, most subjects reported no effects to this life dimension, although one individual determined their career path as a result of the experience, while another individual was “. . . talked out of committing suicide by what he perceived to be a disparate entity . . . ”(p. 320). When long-term effects regarding beliefs and values were examined, some respondents (no noted figure) reported that the “. . . experience had no effect upon these aspects of their lives . . . ”(p. 320); while others reflected a range of “one of the most important events of my life . . . ” to “. . . I cannot think that there is anything about my life which I could say was unaffected by this experience . . . ”(p. 320). Milton also found an enhancement of the respondents’ “spiritual or philosophical outlook” (p. 320) and for some a strengthened belief in life after death.

Although little research has been specifically done on numinous experiences, disciplinary paradigms appear to frame the analysis of these phenomena. One example of framing occurred in Laubach's (2004) study of the social effects of psychism. For Laubach psychisms are "...intrusions of psychic objects within the stream of consciousness..." (p. 2). Consequently, Laubach asserts that such experiences, including numinous experiences, are "mind glitches," where the person "externalizes the intruded objects by deciding that they originated in . . . a spirit realm, and interprets them as . . . conveying beliefs which . . . are privileged over socially validated beliefs" (p. 2). In this way Laubach promotes scientific reductionism. Additionally, a variety of disciplinary interpretations and explanations have been advanced, most of which advocate some psychological or social origin to such experiences, continuing the process of scientific reductionism. This study avoids this scientific reductionism, rather maintaining an existentialistic and humanistic orientation. Essentially what is stated as real for the individual, is real; thus the consequences of that experience are also real, positions supported by both Jung and James.

Framing and Frame Analysis

The framing and frame analysis used in this study is based on the work of Erving Goffman, particularly his conception of primary frameworks which "allow its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms" (p. 21). Combinations of "natural frameworks," those that deal with "un-directed" and "un-guided" experiences, part of the operational definition of a numinous experience, and "social frameworks," those that provide a background

understanding for events of will, aim or intelligence allowing for motive and intent, are used initially as methodological frames and then as analytical frames. Goffman recognized that there are natural worlds, in which nature imposes an occurrence, and special worlds, that involve the actor, but can vary for the actor. As such, there is a correspondence between an individual's perception and the organization of what is perceived. Subsumed within the primary framework conceptualization are five constructs, two of which are relevant for this study. The first is the "astounding complex" that "leads observers to doubt their overall approach to events" (p. 28). Often a "simple or natural explanation" is sought for such experiences. The second construct is fortuitousness, wherein a significant event is viewed as incidentally produced (p. 33) as the individual has an unexpected meeting of the "natural workings," with "consequential results" (p. 33).

Keys are also used within this framing process. A key is "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (p. 44). Since keys involve materials that are meaningful, the three keys used for this study are the social world of the subject, the religious experience of the subject, and the spiritual life of the subject. The latter key may be lacking in some capacity as a social framework for subjects, as spirituality remains culturally emergent in Western society. The other keys remain relevant because of the recruitment of subjects from religious backgrounds, who obviously live in a social world. Keying will also involve a "systematic alteration" of the numinous experience to the various frames, and

keying processes. Cues, for the transformation, will be assessed by bracketing the numinous experience with the social, religious, and spiritual frames, which may address Goffman's concern that natural events are less susceptible to keying than social ones. Additionally, "...the systematic transformation that a particular keying introduces may alter only slightly the activity thus transformed, but it utterly changes what it is the participant would say was going on" (p. 45). Therefore, "a keying, when there is one, performs a crucial role in determining what it is we think is really going on" (p. 45), a process that deals with realms, a part of the "meaningful universe sustained by activity" (p. 46).

Even though framing is relevant to this study, "the limits concerning what can be permissibly transcribed from actual events to scriptings thereof" (p. 56) needs to be considered. For frames, the "arena of action is fixed by the formal rules of the activity" (p. 57). This framing limitation is relevant to this study depending on the context in which the individual experienced the numinous event (i.e., church, religious service, a prayer group, etc. – a religious social setting). Ceremonials are also meaningful keys for understanding the impact on an individual. Ceremonials allow someone "to constrict, allowing one deed, one doing, to be stripped from the usual texture of events and choreographed to fill out a whole occasion..." (p. 58). Thus a ceremony "...keys an event..." (p. 58). Constriction thus is meaningful, and relevant, if the numinous event occurs in a religious ceremony.

Beyond Goffman's framing foundations, a number of researchers have utilized his frame analysis either theoretically or as a direct means of analyzing social phenomena.

From a more theoretical orientation, Fisher (1977) discussed the utilization of frames in a “discursive universe.” Fisher noted three conceptualizations of frames, including the perception (of Gamson) that “images lack fixed meaning,....because people possess the power to frame, and later reframe, them”(p. 10) (i.e. frames); that “....exceptional individuals can willfully affect framing, however, instances of individual-initiated changes to cultural frame structures rarely occur” (p.11); and finally that “social actors can reconstruct their ideological arguments by swapping cultural frames” (p. 22). Also from a theoretical and methodological orientation, Snow, et al., in a study of social movement organizations, utilized a number of particularized framing processes. The first particularized framing process involved frame bridging. This method links “...two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames...” (p. 467). They also used frame amplification, which involves “...the clarification and investigation of an interpretative frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events”” (p. 469). Belief amplification was also utilized as it deals with relationships between two constructs or subsumed characteristics that involve “...ideational elements that cognitively support or impede action in pursuit of desired values”(p. 469-470). Finally, Goffman (1974) used the concept of frame transformation, a process through which “...new values may have to be planted and nurtured, old meanings or understandings jettisoned, and erroneous beliefs or ‘misframings’ reframed” (p. 473).

Beyond the more theoretical and constructional framing dynamics, three representative studies that directly apply framing to various social phenomena are presented. Although these studies utilize framing analysis, only Johnson and Weigert

(1980) conducted primary research using this research methodology. Consequently, for two of these studies the researchers imposed or constructed the frames without subject involvement as to the contextual placement of content within the analytical frames.

In the first study, framing was used conceptually by Scheufele (1999) to examine media effects. Scheufele (1999) reported Iyengar's findings that network television newscasts "frame newscasts in episodic or thematic terms" (p. 112). Episodic analysis focuses on concrete issues while thematic analysis deals with things more abstractly. Thus Scheufele remains concerned about "...what kinds of organizational or structural factors of the media system, or which individual characteristics of journalists, can impact the framing of new content" (p. 115).

In a second study, Heinich (1993) used framing to reflect on the aesthetics and ethics of bullfighting. Heinich's analysis found the Goffmanian elements of keying, particularly ceremonials, "...characterized by an abundance of rules..." (§ 6), as being a relevant framing constructs associated with bullfighting. Heinich also noted the presence of interaction competence, a process through which there is a description of the actors and the "...type of competences called for..." (§ 8). Also highlighted was a tension between ethical and aesthetic realms, the former relating to the immediate world, while the latter addresses structured frames, such as performances and ceremonies. Therefore, for the bullfight "...conflict between invested values or expressed opinions lies in the very frame-analytical nature....the multiplicity of distinct frames being precisely what makes possible the de-multiplication of irreducible realms of values...." (§ 14). This

results in the necessary use of the inclusive and complex dimensions of framing, and subsumed dynamics.

In the third, and final study included, Johnson and Weigert (1980) used framing to examine the social construction of sexual sins within the Roman Catholic sacramental practice of confession. Through participant observation “pseudo” confessions, based on key informant confessional materials, research confederates presented sexually sinful confessions to Roman Catholic priests. They found that “Supernatural-Social” frames, a process of moral meaning attributed to God but mediated through the Roman Catholic Church, was used by “orthodox” confessors. For the “Supernatural-Individual” frame, a process that involves an assessment of sin within a context of interpersonal relationships that are “good,” they found that pastoral confessors used this framing process. For the final framing conceptualization, “Natural-Social” frame, which uses a definition of the situation and more current views of human behavior, they discovered that none of the confessors used this framing orientation. Thus they conclude that these frames influence the interaction, and consequently the effect(s) of the sacrament (i.e. absolution or no absolution) for the respective penitents.

Methodology

Participants

Although a random sample of the general population is the ideal research model, the nature of the study, having had a numinous experience, necessitates a sample based on self-identification and inclusion. This subject selection is supported, as there are no known statistical percentages which indicate the number of individuals who report having

numinous experiences. Since the effects of numinous experiences are the focus of this study, the use of a random sample from the general population would distract from the collection of the desired information of the study. Thus the nature of the study necessitates the use of a convenience sample because individuals will have to self-identify that they have had a numinous experience. Individuals were recruited through an email to college employees at a moderately sized community college in the Midwest (i.e., approximately 400 employees and 5000 full time equivalent student population), through two advertisements placed in the religious section of a regional newspaper, through letters sent to twenty-three churches within a Midwest region of approximately four hundred thousand people, and finally through conversational recruitment. Within the field of transpersonal research the number of subjects used for studies ranges from one, as in a case study, to hundreds of participants, with a number of studies using a handful of subjects (Braud and Anderson, 1998); thus the nine subjects for this study, while at the low end of the acceptable parameters, are sufficient for dissemination of the findings.

Design and Procedures

A sample of convenience is used for this study, due to the nature of self identification, and affirmation, of a numinous experience. Initially all subjects were asked to come to the research location on the same day to complete the research protocol. Only three subjects could comply, so individual meeting times were arranged for all other subjects. All subjects were screened to confirm that they had a numinous experience and, based on researcher interaction, were not deemed to be in a state of psychiatric or psychological distress, as identified by patterns and coherency of speech. All subjects

were determined to be competent to complete the research study, completing an informed consent that was certified by the researcher.

Prior to each subject writing their numinous experience, with each subject's permission, the following prayer was said; "We ask and pray that this be a place filled with a sacred presence. That it be and remain a sacred place as you share your encounters of the sacred and reflect upon their meaning to your life. May your life be blessed now as you share parts of your most sacred journey," thus introducing a transpersonally specific methodology.

After completing their description of the numinous experience, on 8 X 11 pieces of colored paper of their choosing, the subjects were given, separately and sequentially, although randomized, three 8 X 14 paper matting frames. They placed their written numinous experience, independently, in each of three frames; a "Religious Frame," a "Spiritual Frame," and a "Social Frame." Each set of directions asked the subject, based on the definition for each concept, to describe how their numinous impacted that particular aspect of their life. Once the subjects completed all three frames they were asked to rank order them regarding the perceived impact on their life, from most important to the least important. The subjects were then given another 8X10-lined piece of paper on which they were to describe why they ranked the various frames in the order that they did regarding the perceived life importance. This analysis will be used to examine if there is an emergent master frame for numinous experiences. For this study the operational definitions of the terms are:

Numinous: “a moment of deeply-felt religious experience not caused by an arbitrary act of the will” (Otto and Jung in Hoy, 1983, pp. 18-19)

Religion: a system of beliefs and rituals with reference to the sacred which binds people together into social groups, (Marshall, 1998, p. 336), and on the frame religion was defined as one’s participation in religious ritual and practice.

Spirituality: “addressing dynamics that concern or affect one’s soul”(www.wordreference.com)

Social Life: “...any situation involving two or more conspecifics...” that is, members of a species (Reber, 1995); Thus social life, would be any social or life circumstance that ‘involved your interaction with one or more individuals.’”

Data

Both pragmatical content analysis and sign-vehicle analysis were used to analyze the data (Janis in Stewart and Shamandasani, 1990) based on the written narrations provided by the subjects for each of the frames, as well as their rank ordered reflective narration. Pragmatic content analysis classified signs according to their probable causes and effects, placing emphasis on why something was said. In this study emphasis was placed on the effects of the numinous experience on each specific life framing orientation (i.e., religion, spirituality, or social life). Sign-vehicle analysis classified content according to the psychophysical properties of signs (counting the number of times specified words, or types of words are used). For example, the degree to which a topic emotionally involves the subjects may be revealed by examination of the number of emotion-laden words used (p. 107). In this study the emphasis was on emotional themes

discerned within each life framing orientation. For this study, “signs” are operationalized as the words written on the frames.

Each framing activity was individually coded by a single researcher. When marking each frame, signs were marked with either a “P” (Pragmatic Content Analysis) or “SV” (Semantical Content Analysis) which indicates their categorical placement for analysis. Similar signs, that are words, constructs or patterns, were identified. Sign patterns were identified through paraphrased summarizations and quoted representative examples. Patterns in pragmatical content analysis and sign-vehicle analysis were identified. Additionally, a contextual analysis using the framing constructs as articulated by Goffman was undertaken.

Results

Participant Demographics

The subjects for this study include eight females and one male, with a mean age of 45.5, and a range of 30 to 57. Three subjects were Roman Catholic, three were Protestant (two mainline and one evangelical), two practiced forms of Eastern spirituality (one individual practices Taoism and one individual practices Zen Buddhism), and one held “personal” beliefs (i.e., an internalized belief system that was more spiritual than religious.) Regarding the degree of religiosity, the degree of involvement in their stated belief system, all but one subject was involved in their self-identified belief system. The degree of involvement ranged from practicing “within faith,” weekly attendance, or daily acts of spiritual reflection (Taoist), with most individuals reporting active or occasional involvement.

Regarding the nature of the numinous experience, four individuals had the experience while dreaming, while five individuals had their experiences while in an awakened state. The dreams involved: an encounter of Jesus, encounters with known individuals (i.e., parent, former priest), encounter with an unknown individual, and an encounter with a centipede [some individuals reported more than one numinous dream]. The awakened numinous experiences involved: existing on a different plane with mom, who died that evening; hearing a deceased parent's voice; smelling something associated with a dear friend, with the smelled substance physically not being present in the person's house; seeing angels (one white and one black), along with seeing Jesus, Satan and "God the Father," including telepathic conversations; a feeling of "finally being alive" while competing in a Triathlon; a series of "synchronistic" events related to the giving up a child for adoption, and a secondary interpreted "synchronistic" perception of the birth of a child on the anniversary of a significant person's death.

Although not asked for, spontaneous comments, in the numinous description, were made as to the effects of the numinous; these included: reducing one's dependence on material possessions (with a Christian interpretation), "solving or closing one large, old problem in my life," "feeling as if I let my mother go," an encounter of joy in seeing "dad's face"; not feeling anxious about an exam, where they normally would be, as they felt the calming presence of a priest; a feeling of love, when walking with their mother (the one who died at the time of the numinous experience); a feeling of peace in the moment (with a continuing and life long peace throughout life); an "incredible, warm, peaceful, feeling" that surrounds the individual; a feeling of assurance of need for

religious involvement and of making the right decision in the face of “evil”; a feeling of “unbelievable joy” and eventually feeling “healed”; and a feeling that the adoptive parents “are the ones’.”

The final general finding regarding the numinous experiences was the rank ordering regarding the degree of impact or significance. Eight of nine subjects completed the rank ordering, with seven reporting the most significant impact of the numinous event on their spirituality, while one noted the most significant impact was within their social life. Social life and religion were interchangeable for rank orderings two and three for seven of the subjects. Reasons for ranking the impacts on their spirituality include: soul/spirit is who she is and how she interacts with the world; because God is spirit, through which she has a strong faith, hope and trust; experience reinforced concept of soul and continuing of soul life and of God, loving and helping; spirituality is the overriding content of life; what happens with spirit affects everything else; and after the numinous experience they became aware of spirituality, intensely.

Spirituality Results

Regarding this frame, individuals were asked to describe how the numinous experience impacted their spirituality, which was defined as “addressing dynamics that concern or impact one’s soul.” For seven of nine individuals there were impacts to their spirituality that are viewed as significant. These effects fall into two broad categories, internal effects and external effects. Internal effects are defined as those dealing with internal psychological processes, while external effects are defined as those involving interactions with others.

Examining the internal effects found two generalized realms of impact. Individuals documenting internal effects noted changes in their emotional state(s) of existence. The second realm of impact involved a “connection” to a dimension of either the sacred, soul, or life process. While noting the connection to a dimension beyond a purely physical existence, the impact did not reinforce an “orthodox” relationship to their belief systems. Rather, the numinous experience often challenged traditional and “orthodox” beliefs found in the religious belief systems of these individuals.

Representative comments include:

“Felt the truth of it...and that Self is Soul” while seeing their “soul’s power in connection with the source,” within a context of a “non-ordinary reality” and one that has a “continuity of love after death” (Subject 9).

Sees “God as loving” in which the soul continues in the afterlife in a context where spirituality is seen in different places than my church might want me to”(Subject 3).

The soul is allowed to “love and give them the spirit of God” and that “God is in control” believing in things unseen, especially the existence of Satan and evil (Subject 4).

Although not sure of soul the experience resulted in “being more peaceful.” They “realize the difference between a minor problems, true disaster,” and thus they are a “more compassionate, understanding person” (Subject 6).

That they see “beauty in everything” being convinced of a “power greater than myself” that allows them to know that “everything happens for a reason,” which allows them to “stay hopeful” and to “let go when things seem to be out of my control” (Subject 7).

They “monitor relationships and material possessions” thus influencing their “spiritual path, choices and my spiritual development” (Subject 5).

Regarding external impacts, the individuals used their internal effects within the social world, particularly with their interactions with others. The nature of the impact promoted a connectedness socially at a “soul” level. Representative comments include:

Their core, which is soul, “allows me to connect to others”(Subject 1).

The experience resulted in a “unity...connection to all” in which they “see themselves” as an “instrument of comfort and light” (Subject 9).

They are “more respectful of others’ souls” and generally more “respecting of other people more,” while having a “feeling of being alive” (Subject 6)

I’m “not judgmental....as they are like me” (Subject 7).

Yet not all effects in this realm were socially “positive” as one individual was “leaving behind my family....to follow a deep desire and need” (Subject 5).

Religion Results

Regarding this frame, individuals were asked to describe how the numinous experience impacted their religion which was defined as “one’s participation in religious ritual and practice.” For six of nine subjects, the comments were viewed as having a positive effect on their religion while two subjects reported negative effects, and one subject’s comments were considered “neutral.” One interesting finding was the lack of comments that specifically reflected on a subject’s participation in religious rituals, as only one subject noted a cessation of participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (i.e., confession) (Subject 3, Roman Catholic). One other individual made a comment about religious rituals, noting that they shared testimonies in church (Subject 4, Protestant Christian). Yet, while comments about religious rituals are missing, there were comments made that include religious practices. Consequently, the findings regarding impacts to religion are positive, negative, and neutral. Comments made by subjects:

The positive effects are seen through the following comments:

“Helped keep me in the church” (Subject 3)

“I know there is a heaven” (Subject 8)

“Pray more often...looked for God for answers” (Subject 7)

“Attends church...practice what I preach...believe in prayer...turn my will and my life over to care of God” (Subject 4)

“Interactions are viewed with God in mind...peace is a way of life” (Subject 1)

The negative comments are seen through the following comments:

“More disillusioned with organized religion” (Subject 2)

“No longer find my present church satisfying, spiritually nurturing” and they “question more the reasons and beliefs behind religious rituals and practice” (Subject 9)

The neutral comment was seen through:

“Didn’t go before or after” regarding formal religious practices](Subject 6)

As to the effects on religious practices, in addition to the positive affects noted above, the subjects’ comments that were viewed as relevant to this frame include:

“Read the Bible.....share my stories for testimony...out of church” (Subject 4)

“Experience God (he or she) as perfect and can deal with imperfection” (Subject 1).

“Belief was restored” in a higher power (Subject 7).

“Searched for another priest as warm and loving” and “closest I’ve come is my present pastor” (Subject 3).

“If I did not follow the pull of my soul...would regret that choice” (Subject 5, Eastern Spirituality – Zen/Taoist Buddhism).

Social Life Results

Regarding this frame, individuals were asked to describe how the numinous experience impacted their social life which was defined as “any situation involving two

or more conspecifics (members of a species) and thus involved your interaction with one or more individuals.” All but one subject reported some dimension of impact within the social realm. The one subject who reported no impact commented that s/he had discussed the numinous experience with his/her mother and friends, but there was no negative response from his/her mom nor any social impact (i.e., comments) from his/her friends. Regarding the other subjects their responses were either perceptually internalized or externalized responses. Three individuals reported internalized impacts while six individuals reported externalized impacts. One of the six “externalized” individuals reported both internalized and externalized impacts.

The internalized impacts were reported as:

“Realized I am no better or worse than others . . . don’t have to see air to be able to stay alive . . . I just have to breathe” (Subject 1).

Person “was a big part of my life socially . . . so a reminder she was still there” (Subject 8).

“Desire to follow my inner sense of direction” (Subject 5).

“Spent less time with meaningless activity” (Subject 9)

“Made me happy about being here” (Subject 6).

The more externalized responses are seen in the following comments:

“Hope that maybe by sharing my experiences might be a help to someone. . . more confident around people” (Subject 2)

“People and circumstances placed in my life are my chance to let God reveal himself through me ... love your neighbor as yourself” (Subject 4).

“I see social interaction as part of my spiritual development” (Subject 5).

“Easily accept social situations that become uncomfortable” and “Share this experience with individuals who are hopeless . . . so they may have hope” (Subject 7).

“Narrowed my circle of friends . . . choosing only those who allow/accept my experience” and “shared my experience and beliefs with my sons” and has found “people who share my belief in ‘non-ordinary’ beliefs” (Subject 9).

“Feeling of joy at still being alive has spilled over into my relationships with other people” and “treating people with more compassion.” (Subject 6).

Discussion

The effects of a numinous experience impact both internalized and externalized dimensions of life within the realms of spirituality, religion and one’s social life. Although all three realms are impacted on these two dimensions, the internalized dimensions are more prevalent. This internalized prevalence is seen in the emotional comments regarding the spiritual impacts, in the positive comments made about the religious impacts, and with the internalized comments made about one’s social life although the latter dimension had a significant number of externalized comments. Thus the findings of this study support the findings of White (1999) in that the numinous experience allows the individual to connect both internally and externally, particularly with the sacred, as well as within a context of a broader connection, with meaning, to the social world.

The rank ordering of spirituality as the life dimension that was impacted the most by the numinous experience provides additional support for the field of transpersonal studies and transpersonal psychology. The impacts to the “soul,” both internalized and externalized, are meaningful to the individuals and thus are viewed as significant within this qualitative study. The broad affirmation that the soul was impacted, with clearly

articulated impacts, supports this psychological, and religious, dimension of human experience. This internalized spiritual impact supports the findings of Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995) regarding the spiritual effects of numinous or anomalous experiences. While they noted the spiritual impacts, their correlations found that individuals became not only more spiritual but more religious as a result of the experience. This study challenges the religious dimension of their findings, as most subjects in this study did not become more involved in their religions, while remaining spiritually affected. Additionally, Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995) found that it was a combination of experiences that led to this deepened spiritual and religious involvement. This study also challenges this finding, as individuals reported single events or modalities of numinous experiences. Thus a single numinous event, and not multiple experiences, can change one's perception of and involvement with spiritual dimensions of life. Finally, Kennedy and Kanthamani used a sample predisposed, by their stated interest, to paranormal experiences. This sampling process confounds the generalizability of their findings. This study challenges this limitation, as the subjects in the present study were recruited from the general population and not from groups predisposed to paranormal experiences. Therefore, the impacts of numinous experiences, and thus potentially paranormal experiences, can be significant for non-predisposed individuals.

This study also challenges the contemporary realms of sociological investigation regarding the social institution of religion. Sociologists have generally confined their analysis of the realm of religion, at a macro sociological level, and its influences within society, to institutional dynamics. This would include the exertion of power within the

social, and societal, arenas by churches and denominations. At the micro sociological level, sociologists have examined the nature, meaning and use of religious symbols. Consequently, the limited effects of the numinous experience on the religious life and practices of an individual demand, at a minimum, that researchers look beyond the institutional and symbolic aspects of religion. The rank order of spirituality as being impacted the most by the numinous experience, for all but two individuals, reveals an emergent pattern that can be viewed as more than merely psychological. Although the soul is the disciplinary core of psychology, it is the common affirmation of the internalized effects of the numinous experiences combined with the externalized, and thus social, impacts that provides support to the development of a sociology of spirituality.

From a research perspective, the articulated meanings shared by the individuals provide a qualitative empirical foundation, while not generalizable, that adds to the scientific study of transpersonal studies and transpersonal psychology. The meanings and effects may not be replicable, thus violating one of the methodological “rules” of science, but the limitations of the methodological “rules” should not constrain the research, nor the scientific merit of such research endeavors. The nature of a numinous experience, as operationally defined, limits the ability of ever meeting the research “requirement” regarding replication. Additionally, the use of a control group is methodologically “nonsensical” because a numinous experience is emergent and not a controlled, or controllable, independent variable. Therefore, it is the nature of the research paradigm and methodological “rules” that need to be reexamined, and broadened, to allow for the

inclusion of such anomalous experiences. To discount the validity of these experiences, because of a methodological standard, places methods above the nature and reality of human experience.

Regarding the use and implications of frame analysis, as noted by Goffman (1974) their relevance is seen within this study. Although the researcher provided the “frames,” (i.e., religion, spirituality and social life), the “naturalness” of these frames is supported by the EHE research of White, and the paranormal research of Kennedy and Kanthamani. These natural frameworks merely allowed the subjects to articulate their “motives and intent” regarding the numinous experience. Furthermore, the “correspondence” between the “special worlds” and the “actor” was seen as the subjects framed the numinous experience. The numinous was viewed as a part of a special world, and the actor framed contextualizations of their religious, spiritual and social lives. Additionally, the subsumed framing conceptualization of the “astounding complex,” although not seen within its classical meaning, as few doubted their numinous experience, was seen in the simple explanatory dimensions articulated. This simplicity was displayed by direct, limited, comments within various frames, such as “I know there is a heaven,” “pray more often...looked for God for answers,” “Belief was restored,” and “Spend less time with meaningless activity,” without expanded explanations or comments. Furthermore, the Goffmanian conceptualization of fortuitousness was supported, as subjects reported that their numinous experiences were “incidentally produced” (p.33) [that is, not consciously anticipated] and essentially were an “unexpected meeting of the ‘nature workings,’ with consequential results....,” (p. 33) in

this case the effects to their spiritual, religious and social lives. Most assuredly Goffmanian keying was used and seen in the three frames. Yet, the operational definitions for religion, spirituality and social life provided a more fixed arena of action and any subsequent actions by the subject. Finally, within the framing context, ceremonies were not seen as keying events, as only two religious rituals were noted by any subjects (i.e., confession and church testimonies). Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of a literal framing undertaken by the subjects, and not by the researcher, is a valid methodological tool for undertaking frame analysis in qualitative research studies.

When comparing the findings to this study to the more theoretical or applicational research studies, a number of direct comparisons can be made. In comparison to the Fisher study, the findings challenge the finding that individuals rarely change cultural frames. Religion is a dominant cultural frame in the United States with over eighty percent of Americans self reporting that religion is important to their life (in Botterweck et al., 2004). Consequently, one would expect religion and religious framing to be the dominant analytical frame. The subjects in this study did not support this position. The majority reported challenges to orthodox religious beliefs while reporting strong influences within their spiritual lives. Thus they actively engaged in restructuring and changing the dominant cultural frame of religion. Yet, Fisher's (1997) second finding might be supported, in that the subjects might have simply swapped cultural frames, noting the influence to their spiritual lives versus their religious lives. A stronger conclusion regarding this finding is not possible within this study as the emergent importance of spirituality in America is not truly known. Regarding the Snow et al.

(1986) study, two comparative points of analysis can be made. Subjects in this study sometimes connected their spiritual frame to their religious frame. This seemed to occur as a reaction to the socialized significance of the religion in their life, seen more through subtle comments. Additionally, their finding of belief amplification can be seen in the tensions expressed as subjects expressed their emergent spirituality, a supportive contextual frame for their lives while noting some impediments as they reacted to religious influences in their lives. Finally, frame transformations were found when individuals ranked their spirituality as being more impacted than the religious dimensions of their life, seen for some, through the “jettison” of all or some of the rites and practices associated with their religious beliefs.

Regarding the more applicational effects, the Scheufele’s (1993) and Heinich’s (1999) studies provide a few points for analytical comparison. Scheufele’s study postulates a significant question regarding what characteristics of an individual can impact the framing of content. Thus the limited demographic information regarding religious or spiritual beliefs and their degree of involvement can be significant. The subjects expressed tensions between their religious activities and their spiritual lives, noting some affirmations while confirming some conflicts. Consequently, as noted by Scheufele, characteristics can influence, and did influence, the framing within this study. The degree of influence was not assessed and thus the methodology used during this study may need to be expanded to investigate this concern. Finally, regarding comparisons to the Johnson and Weigert (1980) study it is clear that the frames influence individuals, including the effects of the framing process. Thus the findings of this study

support their conclusions regarding the nature of framing, although the analytical frames used were different. Yet, this study challenges their use of framing analysis. Although they used key informants to construct their frames, they failed to use the subjects to help develop the frames used for analysis. They also failed to use the subject's input regarding which content was placed within the frames. Both of these limitations perpetuate the use of a researcher imposed framing methodology. This work, while imposing analytical frames, expanded the methodology of framing by having subjects directly construct the content placed within each frame. This process reduces any researcher bias or effects while adding a degree of specificity and clarity regarding the intentions and impacts experienced by subjects. Consequently, this methodological refinement should be considered for future studies utilizing framing methodology. Finally, this study challenges Milton's (1992) findings regarding the effects to the practical or long-term beliefs and values of respondents. All subjects in this study reported significant effects for at least one dimension of the study with many reporting effects within multiple life domains. Although these effects challenge some of Milton's findings, the noted positive effects on the subject in this study regarding spirituality support Milton's finding that subjects found "enhancement" within that dimension of life.

This study, while limited by the number of subjects and the geographical location in which it was conducted, provides a foundational examination into the social, spiritual and religious effects of numinous experience as a unique experience and not subsumed within a broad category of parapsychological phenomena, thus contributing to the literature. Yet, the requisite cautionary recommendations are mandated as to the non-

generalizability of these findings to the general population, nor to other individuals who have had numinous experiences. Even with this notation there were noticeable impacts to these dimensions of the lives of individuals having numinous experiences. Therefore, there is a need to expand the nature of this study beyond the limited number of subjects and the Midwest location in which the study was undertaken. Another expansion of the study would involve an examination of the psychological effects of numinous experiences, thus broadening the foundational and exploratory examination of such experiences to four dimensions (i.e. social, religious, spiritual, and psychological) of the field of transpersonal studies.

A second contribution of this study to the literature is the adaptation of the research methodology of framing. While traditional framing methodology involves the researcher identifying, or imposing, not only frames but the content of the frames, this study expanded that methodology. While the research provided the operational definition for the material for each frame, the individual contextualized the material place on the frame, in direct reference to the numinous event. This direct placement eliminates, in part, any potential researcher interpretative analytical bias. An additional contribution is the use of the literal framing of the phenomena under investigation, thus directly having the subject contextualize their response as they reference the numinous event and respond on a literal frame to the operationally defined variable under investigation. This provides a clear refinement in the methodological analysis of framing. Additionally, the use of literal frames provided for direct categorical rank ordering of the frames regarding

their effect on the individuals' lives. This provided a second opportunity for analytical clarity as part of the research methodology.

A third contribution to the literature is the foundational support provided for the establishment of a sociology of spirituality. The noted impact to this dimension of the subject's lives, especially in light of the rank ordering of effect that had religious impacts being less impacted, provides at least an initial level of support for such an undertaking. Traditionally sociologists focus on the social institution of religion while often subsuming spiritual experiences or spirituality within that institutional framework. This study thus begs the enactment of the sociological imagination by sociologists to move beyond the disciplinary constraints of the traditional social institutions and investigate spirituality as an emerging and emergent social construct and potential new social institution.

Finally, there is a need to recommend that the investigation of numinous experiences continue beyond this foundational study. In fact, the nature of the numinous experience, from a Jungian "non-willed" perspective, should be studied independently from other parapsychological or paraphenomenal experiences. It is this unique dimension of this reality, combined with the religious dimension of the experience(s) that suggests the continued investigation of such experiences independent of other related phenomena (i.e. exceptional human experiences). The continued investigation of such experience may also add to other emergent fields of study, such as the investigation of spiritual capital. This study is thus only the genesis of a delving into this realm of human experience significant in its contributions to the literature while demanding

further study to develop a body of evidentiary data from which to enlighten and clarify the nature of such experiences within the human condition.

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Appendix One

Informed Consent

Researchers have been investigating the nature of religious and spiritual experiences for extended periods of time. Some of these studies attempt to authenticate the nature of these experiences. Often these experiences are categorized as "parapsychological." Yet, the religious, spiritual and social dimensions of these experiences, as identified by the individual, have rarely, if ever, been studied.

This study is an attempt to investigate the religious, spiritual and social effects of numinous experiences. This study is being conducted as part of the research interests of the primary researcher, Dr. Bruce D. LeBlanc, as part of his completion of an M.A. in Transpersonal Studies at Atlantic University. No external group or organization is funding this study. Dr. LeBlanc is interested in undertaking research in this "underrepresented area" of inquiry.

The study will consist of asking participants to write down their most significant numinous experience. After describing the experience, each participant will be asked to reflect upon the effects of the experience on their religious, spiritual and social dimensions of their lives. Individuals will also be asked to "rank order" their responses as to the level of impact and provide a commentary as to this ranking.

This study will utilize limited methodologies within the field of transpersonal studies. For this study it will invoke a prayer prior to individuals beginning any writing activities. The prayer is designed to remain respectful of the religious and spiritual traditions of individuals.

To maintain the confidentiality of research participants, all participants will be assigned a numerical code that will be attached to their work, including the collection of demographic data (i.e. sex, religious affiliation, age). No names will be attached to any of the data gathering or recorded materials.

Your cooperation with this study is greatly appreciated. Please remember that at any time you can remove yourself from the study without any consequence.

Researchers must undertake ethical studies. Their studies must cause no harm to their subjects. Traditional research ethics stress that this study must cause no physical harm, no psychological harm, not intrude without your knowledge, and must obtain your informed consent.

This study is designed so that it will cause no physical harm. The research design does not include any component that would put you at risk for physical harm. Psychological harm is much more difficult to assess. A reflection on numinous experiences, when contemplated, may provoke an emotional response. If you find yourself reacting to the questions in a manner that produces an uncomfortable response, please discontinue the study, merely state you are terminating your participation in the study, and seek professional assistance. I will not be intruding without your knowledge, as you would have given consent to receive these materials. Finally, I will obtain your informed consent at the end of this document.

While there are perceived minimal risks involved with your participation, there are benefits as well. A recent search of academic literature found no known studies that have investigated the religious, spiritual, and social effects of numinous experiences. Consequently, a benefit will be your being able to view yourself as a contributor to the understanding of these experiences. Furthermore, the use of an actual "framing" analysis will contribute to a refinement of a research evaluation process. Finally, your written reflections on the religious, spiritual, and social effects of numinous experiences may provide a meaningful perspective on the effects or impacts of this experience in significant dimensions of your life.

There is no compensation for your participation in the study. Research protocol, with limited exceptions, indicates that individuals should not be compensated as such consideration may bias or influence responses or it may influence the type of individuals who participate in a study. Dr. LeBlanc's only direct benefit from undertaking this research will be the reporting of the findings in an article or in presentations.

To indicate your informed consent you will be asked to initial this document. If you fail to "initial" this document, you will not be allowed to continue in the study.

By initialing below you are indicating that you understand the general nature of the study, that you have a right to terminate your involvement in the study at any time and without any consequence(s), and that no identification information will be retained once the final interview has been conducted or once you have terminated your involvement the study.

"I have read "informed consent." The nature, demands, risks and benefits of the study have been basically explained and I have an understanding of them. I understand that I may ask questions of the researcher to clarify any concerns before continuing with the study. I am free to terminate my involvement at any time. I also understand that this consent form will be filed separately from the numinous experience descriptor and my

framing endeavors, to maintain anonymity. Access to any research data will be limited to the principal investigator or authorized individuals to whom Dr. LeBlanc must demonstrate compliance with human subjects research criteria. A copy of this consent form will be returned to the research participant, if requested.

Initials: _____

Date: _____

I have carefully explained, in this form, to the subject the nature of the above study. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the subject initializing this consent form understands the nature, demands, and risks involved with participating in the study. This knowledge is based on the initial contact and the form being returned by the subject.

Attested: _____

Principal Researcher

Contact Information:

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If you have any concerns regarding the nature of this study or the conduct of Dr. LeBlanc regarding his undertaking this study, please contact Dr. Tom Curley, the supervising faculty member, for this culminating project. Dr. Curley can be reached at:

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