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Peak and mystical experiences in intimate relationships

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is intimate relationship peak experiences arising from loving or sexual involvement. Different types of peak experiences were described and their relevance to relationship functioning explored qualitatively and quantitatively. In a convenience sample (N = 298), participants who identified having peak experiences were on average significantly older, more passionate, more sexually responsive and had less negative affect. Participants reporting peak experiences of a mystical nature tended to be significantly older and more spiritually focused. We concluded that relationship peak and mystical peak experiences represent important and memorable occasions which are personally significant to some couple members, deepening their bond. As such, therapists may strengthen partners’ senses of belonging to the relationship by discussion of peak experiences.

Keywords: Intimate relationships, marital relationships, marital satisfaction, passion, peak experiences, sexuality, spirituality
Peak and mystical experiences in intimate relationships

Much of the clinical literature on long term relationships remains focused on marital failure and marital therapies. While the rewards of long term, loving relationships may seem self evident, some rewards may be largely hidden because people consider such experiences private. The particular interest of this research was to identify and explore the intensely memorable or extraordinarily joyful times that partners share. We were curious about whether these moments contribute to relationship resilience or personal well being and hence may have practical implications for relationship counselling.

The psychological study of peak experiences began with the seminal work of Abraham Maslow (1968). He felt the study of psychology should ideally provide an understanding of the heights of human experience and expression - “the ideal, authentic, or perfect or godlike human being” (1968, p. 11). He examined the attitudes and experiences of people he identified as being highly developed (or self actualized) and compared them to those of “ordinary” folk. He found that self actualized people described a fairly consistent pattern of powerfully positive peak experiences.

There were the same feelings of limitless horizons opening up to their vision, of the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space with, finally, the conviction that something extremely important and valuable had happened so that the subject is to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his (sic) daily life by such experiences. (Maslow, 1973, p. 190)
Hence, Maslow described the important features of these peak experiences and concluded they were prized by the people he interviewed.

Significantly, Maslow (1968) connected peak experiences, self actualization and psychological maturity.

Any person in any of the peak experiences takes on temporarily many of the characteristics which I found in self-actualizing individuals….Not only are these his happiest and most thrilling moments, but they are also moments of greatest maturity, individuation, fulfillment – in other words his healthiest moments……[Where they are] …more open for experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive or spontaneous, or fully functioning, more creative, more humorous, more ego-transcending. (p.97)

It is noteworthy that some of the people who described having peak experiences were not identified as self-actualized. Maslow described peak experiences as being distinctive, yet because they arose from a basic human capacity, he considered that many people had such experiences, though he did suggest that self-actualised people had more peak experiences than other people.

Maslow (1973) described peak experiences as emerging in different contexts, for example, crossing a river, seeing a sunset or a baby. His findings were supported in a number studies (e.g., Breed & Fagan, 1972; Davis, Lockwood, & Wright, 1991; Mathes, Zevon, Roter, & Joerger, 1982). However, there has been very little empirical work on the intimate relationships or sexual experiences of highly developed individuals or on sexual peak experiences in general. Maslow (1968) did refer to them: “it is possible in the aesthetic experience or the love experiences to become so absorbed and ‘poured into’
the object that the self, in a very real sense, disappears” (p. 79). He also described the sexual experiences of self-actualized people as mystical and the pleasures as overpowering and ecstatic (Maslow, 1970).

Maslow’s theory and research have been developed significantly by Mosher (1980) and Schnarch (1991, 1997). Mosher developed a detailed model to describe different styles, roles and depths (which he termed paths) of sexual engagement. He labeled these: trance-state, role enactment, and partner engagement. Trance involves a shift from reality orientation, where critical functions are left behind and the person becomes absorbed in a distinct sexual way of being. Role Enactment involves playful, dramatic and exhibitionistic sexual involvement with the partner. Partner Engagement is determined by the nature and strength of the bond between the partners and the type and meaning of interaction on any occasion. Mosher discussed varying depths of involvement in these three domains with mystical experiences of union representing the most profound. He also developed a ninety-item clinical tool to measure sexual involvement (Mosher, 1998).

Mosher’s (1980) work influenced Schnarch’s (1991, 1997) ideas about the potential richness of sexual experience. David Schnarch is a marital and sex therapist interested in examining the possibilities of sex, beyond the capacity for orgasm or functionality. His therapeutic work aims to bring about more differentiated emotional and sexual functioning. Ideally, sexual and emotional growth mutually reinforce one another in his sexual marital therapy. Schnarch’s exploration of what he called “wall socket sex” (because it is extraordinary and electrifying) is among the few academic works to
document mystical or peak sexual experiences. He theorized that such experiences were more likely to occur with increasing psychological maturity and age.

One noteworthy addition to the empirical study of sexual peak experiences was undertaken by MacKnee (2002) who conducted in-depth interviews with five Christian men and five Christian women who had mystical sexual experiences. This research described the experience and aftereffects of peak sexual and spiritual encounters. Parallels with and differences from Tantric sexual experiences were made. Tantra is an esoteric form of Buddhism seeking to use sexual energy as a path to spiritual awakening rather than an impediment to it. Tantric practitioners and participants in MacKnee’s study described a loss of bodily sense and time, expansion, bliss, ecstasy, intense union, wonder, awe, mystery and paradox. Among the respondents there were reports of life changing, healing spiritual/sexual encounters, experiences of revealing the truth of the self and relinquishing false elements of the self. The author explained “the body, soul and spirit joined to celebrate bonding at new and wondrous heights” (p. 241).

Sovatsky (1985) also examined the qualitative experiences of six Tantric practitioners. Timelessness, bliss, ecstasy and loss of bodily limits were common features of the erotic sexual encounter. The body was perceived as a gateway to the experience of a rarified dimension of the universe.

As stated above, Maslow (1973) proposed that mystical or peak experiences emerge from a human capacity for transcendence. Mysticism involves the experience of altered states of consciousness, the transcendence of ordinary awareness into trance-like states of spiritual rapture and/or ecstatic union with God. Mystic traditions exist in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism. The latter three religions also
document the possibility of mystical sexual experiences in religious texts: the Kama Sutra, Vajrayana, and Kabbalah, respectively. Interestingly, the Kabbalah (Shimon Halevi, 1979) proposed that every human has at least one mystical experience at some point in his or her life.

Moore (1998), a psychologist, also proposed that sex is inherently “soulful” and that transcendence, timelessness and extraordinary sensations of space are within a range of expected experiences. He called such sensations liminal or threshold experiences and suggested this quality also exists in religious experiences. “We lose ourselves in the oblivion of sex and find our soul in the spiritual place that is accessible through openhearted passion. This is Venusian spirituality, a transcendence of self, achieved through intense, pleasurable union” (p. 153).

In sum, the notion that mystical sexual experiences are possible has been raised theoretically and empirically by the works of Maslow (1973) and Mosher (1980). Schnarch (1991) used vignettes from his clinical practice to describe sexual mystical experiences and proposed that such experiences are a consequence of growth towards differentiation. The existence of sexual peak experiences has been supported by other researchers (e.g., Sovatsky, 1985) and theorists (e.g., Moore, 1998). Yet a broader exploration of relationship peak experiences has rarely been featured in the scholarly literature, nor have the implications of such experiences for relationship functioning been closely examined.

In the present study, participants were asked to describe their peak moments in loving or sexual communion and these were categorized and examined to determine whether they could be classified as peak experiences as Maslow (1973) described them
(i.e., representing extraordinary or mystical states). The relationship of mystical and peak experiences to self-reported personal and relationship well-being was examined. Hence, three questions were explored – first, what type of peak experiences are described in relationship contexts? Second, what percentage of those peak experiences (if any) are mystical? Third, what are the implications of peak experiences for relationship functioning?

Method

Participants

Adults currently in an intimate relationship were sought to participate in the study and 305 individuals responded. Partnerships of any length were accepted but only one member of a couple could participate (to ensure independence of responses) and respondents were required to have a sexually active relationship. Six respondents were excluded because they were sexually inactive and one was excluded because he/she was the partner of another participant. Hence there were 298 participants and of these 70% (n=201) were women. The mean age of the women was 36 years (SD = 14 years) and for men was 48 years (SD = 16 years). The mean length of relationship was 12 years (SD = 13 years) and relationships ranged between a few weeks and 57 years. Sixty two percent were married, eight were in homosexual relationships, 67% had children and just over half had a tertiary (i.e., university) degree. Most respondents (61%) did not indicate a religious denomination. Three quarters of the sample (79%) were born in Australia.

Measures

Qualitative measure of peak experience: Participants were asked an optional, open-ended question after completing a series of relationship and well-being measures:
“Have you ever had a peak experience in a love relationship, for example: an experience of profound oneness, incredibly intense joy during sexual contact or arising from loving your partner? Yes/No. If so could you describe this experience.”

**Personal functioning:** The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) was included to help determine whether peak experiences were associated with well being (as expected) rather than more depressed and anxious emotional states. This scale showed satisfactory reliabilities for positive affect (Cronbach’s alpha = .82) and for negative affect (.89). Respondents were asked to rate how often they generally experienced each of 20 emotions on a Likert type scale where 1= very slightly or not at all and 5 = extremely.

**Passionate Love:** The Eros subscale of the Love Attitudes Scale (LAS, Hendrick & Hendrick, 1990) was used because passion has been associated with positive relationship dynamics including relationship satisfaction and relationship stability (Hendrick, Hendrick & Adler, 1988) according to research conducted by these authors – delete this bracketed bit. The Eros subscale focuses upon passionate love and considered the most relevant to transcendent and peak experiences. This subscale has 6 items which are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree (α = .73).

**Relationship Satisfaction:** The satisfaction subscale of Spanier’s (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was used to assess the extent to which a lover is content and satisfied in a relationship. This scale was used to explore whether having mystical or peak intimate relationship experiences were related to a more positive sense of a person’s relationship. Hunsley and Pisent (1995) reported that the DAS satisfaction subscale is an
adequate substitute for the full scale as it explaining most of the variance. The 10 item Likert type scale had a Cronbach alpha reliability of .84.

Sexual Functioning: The Sexual Arousability Inventory (Hoon & Chambless, 1998), is a 14-item measure of reported sexual arousal to a range of physical and cognitive stimuli. The response format for the scale (which lists a range of potentially erotic stimuli) ranges from 0 = adversely affects arousal to 6 = always causes sexual arousal. The measure was reliable with an alpha of .86.

Spirituality: The Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont, 1999) was used because it could measure Christian, non-Christian and non-mainstream notions of spirituality. As the name suggests, its subscales include items relevant to mystical experiences and therefore such experiences should be positively related to the items of this scale. Cronbach alpha reliabilities in the present study for the three subscales were .72, .92 and .91 for Connectedness, Universality and Prayer Fulfillment respectively. Connectedness concerns a sense of responsibility to others of different generations and to those in the wider community. Universality involves a belief in the interconnection, unity and purpose of life which renders a sense of responsibility to other living creatures. Prayer Fulfillment is about focusing on and absorption in prayer and meditation, as well as joy, contentment, and personal strength arising from prayer or meditation. The response format was a six point Likert type response where 1 = very untrue of me and 6 = very true of me. The items were summed to produce three sub-scale scores.

Procedure

Data Gathering Process. Data from this study came from a larger project examining mature passionate love. In a pilot study, approximately 20 of 187 participants
reported mystical experiences. The same open-ended question (described above) was asked both in the pilot and the current sample. Pilot study findings concerning mystical experiences were included in advertisements for the current study. Approximately 50% of the current sample was exposed to media coverage (including radio interviews and brief metropolitan newspaper and magazine articles) over several months, which alerted potential participants that mystical relationship experiences were a point of interest. Hence, the advertising to invite participation in the study was likely to heighten the prevalence of reported mystical and perhaps peak relationship experiences in this sample. The other 50% of the sample was gathered through psychology student participation and snowball techniques.

**Coding qualitative data.** Written descriptions of the 159 peak experiences reported by the sample of 298 were collated. Comparisons were made (on well-being outcomes) between those who identified that they had had peak experiences and those that said they had not, even if the experiences recorded did not fulfill theoretical definitions of peak experiences. This was because we were interested in how the perception of having had such an experience was related to well being and relationship variables.

Two methods were used to categorise responses: (i) reading and rereading the descriptions and using the method of constant comparisons to find a manageable number of groupings; and (ii) matching theoretically derived categories (e.g., Maslow, 1973; Macknee, 2002) with sample descriptions that seemed to have a mystical dimension to them.
The mystical peak experiences described had a clearer theoretical underpinning e.g., MacKnee. 2002 – in this instance I think that we need to include this author as all four were used to justify the categories listed below; Maslow, 1968; Mosher, 1980; Schnarch, 1991, 1997). Hence, a further attempt was made to categorise only these experiences. To help clarify whether participants’ descriptions implied mystical sexual or love experiences, careful instructions on mystical categorisation were developed for the raters, including an introduction to the concept of mystical experiences based on work by Maslow (1968). Seven mystical descriptors were developed as follows, and two independent raters used them to classify experiences:

(i) *Bliss or ecstasy* (MacKnee, 2002)— an experience described as being extremely intense or overwhelming.

(ii) *Change body* (Mosher, 1980; Schnarch, 1997)— change in the experience of being in the body, or a change in the bodily boundaries. Experiences of being out of the body, the respondent “melts” or “melds” into the body of their lover or is “blended” into the lover

(iii) *Change consciousness/disappearance of self* (Maslow, 1968; MacKnee, 2002; Mosher, 1980)— feelings of unboundedness, or feelings that their sense of self is affected dramatically, not just emotionally but with a sense that the person’s awareness has been altered significantly. The respondent could describe leaving this dimension or describe transcendence, or use the words psychic or astral.

(iv) *Change space* – (Maslow, 1968; MacKnee, 2002; Schnarch, 1997) people’s normal awareness of space and their place in it is altered or distorted by their

...
experience. They may describe experiencing themselves being in a different
dimension or in another place from where they are physically.

(v) *Change Time* - (Maslow, 1968; Schnarch, 1997) – feeling like time stopped or
was altered

(vi) *God/universe* (Macknee, 2002) – mention of the relatedness of the experience to
God or spirit or the universe as a whole. It should not simply be feeling spiritually
one but a profound and powerful connection to God, the universe or to spirit.
Metaphysics could be used as a descriptor.

(vii) *Soul connection* (Macknee, 2002) – the experience of love or sex is not
primarily on a physical level but feels like two souls or spirits are connecting,
merging, entwining or souls are making love above the bodies.

Data were categorized by one rater as mystical experiences if they fitted into one
or more of the above descriptions. At this stage, questionable categorisations were
included, to produce the largest possible number of instances. To determine inter-rater
reliability, one third of the peak experience responses and the assigned categories were
shown to one other rater. Inter-rater reliability using these inclusion/non-inclusion criteria
averaged 86%. As this was considered a highly acceptable result, the first rater
categorized the remainder of the experiences as mystical or not.

Results

*Peak and Mystical Experiences: Qualitative Analysis*

Nearly two-thirds of participants (190 of 298) indicated that they had a profoundly
intense experience in love or sex. Of these 190 participants, 159 participants gave some
written description of the experience. Table 1 shows examples of some major themes
emerging from peak experience descriptions. These responses do not encompass all response categories, but rather demonstrate the variation and overlap among the themes, and exhibit some of the characteristics that respondents believed made up their peak experiences. Peak experiences were described which involved mystical sexual or loving experiences, feelings of sexual ‘oneness’ with a partner, intense passion or intense feelings of closeness and belonging, and out of the ordinary positive feelings such as overwhelming joy or happiness. Additionally, some people described special, life-changing sexual events, or sexual experiences which followed other key life events and so took on particular value and importance.

Some peak experiences descriptions had a mystical component to them, others included the experience or relationship’s fate or pre-ordainment. Ten participants referred to the fateful aspect of their relationship. Participants mentioned being soul mates (i.e., meant for each other) and this was highlighted by, or an integral part of the meaning derived from, the peak experiences (see, e.g., category 6 of Table 1). Other participants wrote of their sense of belonging, loving, gratefulness and feelings of oneness that at times implied a fateful aspect to the relationship. This sense of fate was connected with a mystical experience for one person:

Yes, after a physically relaxing morning on the beach [and] afternoons spent making love. All sense of time forgotten, my body was without dimensions, weight, just a merging but it did not seem of bodies more of souls. It was a merging which is difficult to describe. Almost like levitating, a lightness, of feeling totally merged with my lover but without any sense of either his body or mine. Connected totally, emotionally, spiritually, with intense physical, emotional
pleasure and release. Sometimes followed by high waves of emotion and …….

This was not an isolated experience and both of us felt a sense of total rightness and belonging that we could experience this unique joy to-gether (sic). Although I knew he sometimes had another partner there was no jealousy as I felt so linked and connected with him that I knew nothing could change that. Both of us felt blessed that we experienced this degree of joy and pleasure and oneness, which we felt sure not many others experienced. Certainly, for me, I have never had that experience with anyone else and remain a soul mate after more than twenty years of knowing one another.

Another participant described how significant their mystical experience was to their feeling about the relationship.

Several times since October last year our love-making has moved me to tears of great happiness. The experience is overwhelming. I am totally focused on my husband and there is a sense of “time has stopped.” There is a blending of the physical, mental and spiritual in a very special way. I feel as I move “out there” that there is someone or something very beautiful “out there”. Afterwards I feel very loving and close to my husband and part of something very special in the universe. I feel as if we have been given a great gift!

*Well-Being and Peak/Mystical Experiences*

Table 2 shows the mean scores on age, length of relationship and eight well-being scales of those who reported peak or mystical experiences with those who did not. Older participants were significantly (*p*<.005 to account for the multiple tests) more likely to have peak experiences and mystical peak experiences. Also those reporting peak
experiences were significantly more likely to be in a longer-term relationship, experience passion, identify being sexually aroused by a series of stimuli, and were less likely to experience negative affect. Those reporting mystical experiences were more likely to feel a sense of connection with, and shared responsibility towards, other creatures (universalism) and report having transcendent experiences through meditation or prayer (prayer fulfillment). This latter result provided validity for raters’ classification of mystical peak experiences, since the items used for Piedmont’s (1999) Prayer Fulfillment factor were consistent with the criteria for mystical peak experience classification.

Not all results were significant. All results (with the exception of one comparison where the means were equal), however, were in the expected direction (i.e., greater well-being with peak experiences).

Discussion

This research indicates that peak experiences and mystical peak experiences in relationships are a promising and overlooked phenomena. Together they are associated with a number of significant positive relationship, spiritual, and personal outcomes. Some peak and mystical peak experiences seem to hold special meaning for couple members and are interpreted as indicating the relationship is fated and meant to be. We suspect that such beliefs contribute to relationship resilience.

Participants who felt that they had had a peak experience were significantly older and more likely to be passionate, sexually responsive, in longer term relationships and were significantly less likely to experience a range of negative feelings. When participants identified themselves as having had peak experiences, there was repeated reference to a sense that the relationship was fated, meant to be or that couple members
were soul mates. The sense that a relationship is meant to be may bestow a sense of sanctity and whatever the difficulties, the person is living with the “right” partner. Our society is increasingly secular with fairly low rates of religious observance (as is represented in the current sample where 61% did not nominate a religious affiliation). Yet many people believe in some sort of higher power or laws of nature which order our world and feel a drive to find meaning in their lives and in their relationships (Tacey, 2004). If people sense that their relationship has some sort of divine or spiritual underpinning or is based in fate, they may have a greater sense of purpose in their lives or find their relationship more purposeful. Such a sense of meaning may help explain the association of peak experiences with lower levels of negative affect.

Interestingly, those who reported having had peak experiences (according to their own criteria) were much more likely to feel passionate about their beloved. Sternberg (1986) proposed that the basic components of a fulfilling relationship are commitment, passion and intimacy. This study confirmed that people self reporting peak experiences are more likely to perceive their relationship as passionate. It was not clear that relationship satisfaction was related to peak experiences, however, peak experiences may influence relationship resilience, perhaps via a sense that the relationship is fated (an important criterion for some participants’ open-ended responses). Perceptions that the relationship is meant to be may be related to relationship commitment.

The present research explored experiences which hold personal meaning for the participants. Such experiences seem to reveal less rational, more emotional, interpretations of experience. Some of this feeling-level material is difficult to penetrate with relationship therapy (Roberts, 1992) and yet, we speculate it may influence
relationship commitment (to) and resilience. We propose that when a therapist wants to build a bond between couple members, it may be useful to enquire about the couple’s past peak experiences. This requires considerable tact, as some couples may not have experienced these experiences. If they have occurred, however, their reconsideration may help reorient the individual or couple to their relationship commitment and the sense of the rightness. Such memories may provide a fillip to passionate feelings.

Mystical peak experiences were clearly identified in this research. The process of categorizing peak experiences received validation since those identified as having mystical experiences were significantly more likely to endorse transcendent items on a soundly developed psychological measure of spirituality.

The relationship between age and mystical sexual experiences is consistent with Schnarch’s (1991) hypothesis that “wall socket sex” is more likely to occur when people are older. The question remains whether this finding emerges from personal maturity or simply older people having lived longer. Past results suggest that mystical experiences are associated with increased personal and relationship well being. The present data, however do not support the notion that older people are more likely to have mystical experiences due to greater maturity.

The significant relationship between mystical peak experiences and universality suggests that those who have these mystical experiences have a different spiritual orientation when compared with people who do not. Items in this scale include feeling a bond with, a concern for, and responsibility towards other creatures as well as having a sense that consciousness or natural law gives order and meaning to, and underpins, life.
Such endorsements are consistent with Maslow’s (1973) notion that mystical experiences are intrinsically transcendent, unbounded and unifying.

Open-ended descriptions highlight the importance of the mystical experiences to the sense of relationship closeness and bond. Participants’ descriptions of mystical experiences include a sense that the relationship is fated. The connection between knowing one loves, or is in love, and a sense of fate is represented in popular romantic conceptions. Tzeng (1993) found in a series of studies on love, that fate was an important conception of love and that people placed spiritual or religious meanings around the formation, maintenance and enrichment of long-term love.

Limitations and Future research

It is not possible to infer causality between peak experiences and positive spiritual, personal, and relationship outcomes. There is some evidence, even under fairly stringent statistical criteria, that peak experiences are associated with personal, spiritual and relationship well being.

Relatively few participants reported experiencing mystical peak experiences, hence some comparisons with considerable mean differences did not reach significance level. Determining whether or not a person had a mystical experience was difficult. Since participants were not interviewed, greater clarity concerning the actual nature of their experiences was unavailable. Hence, categorization may have underestimated mystical peak experiences.

Given that the data gathering method may have introduced sampling bias, a larger, more representative sample would be preferable. It would be useful to determine
whether there is any relationship between peak experiences and both intimacy and commitment in relationships.

**Conclusion**

People’s perception that they had peak experiences was associated with positive personal and relationship outcomes. This may partly be explained by people finding meaning and a sense that their relationship is fated and meant to be in such experiences. These results indicate that relationship peak experiences are associated with a deeper couple bond for some partners. Mystical peak experiences were more prevalent among older participants. Those identified as having mystical experiences had a more universal spiritual orientation and some participants reported that these mystical experiences deepened their sense of belonging or the sense that the relationship is fated. These findings indicate that relationship peak experiences and mystical peak experiences are an exciting and potentially fruitful area of research that may help to explain why some couples’ bonds remain strong. The authors believe that exploring peak relationship experiences in individual and couples therapy may potentially strengthen the felt commitment and sense of belonging.
References


Table 1:

Peak Experience Themes with Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Reported experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Mystical Sex</td>
<td>* During sexual contact and intercourse we frequently both experienced what we describe as a melding, as if we have both become one and lose the sense of having outer limits of our own bodies. We have also experienced times when we have both felt as if our souls have left our bodies and while our physical bodies make love so do our souls above us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mystical Love</td>
<td>* I was thinking about my relationship...when I started to experience an intense feeling of bliss slowly surge through my body... I was so overwhelmed that it brought tears of joy and happiness streaming down my face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sexual Oneness</td>
<td>* During orgasm with my current partner, when climaxing together, after intense foreplay felt a sense of unity, ecstasy and joy being united emotionally &amp; physically as one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Passion</td>
<td>* The first night I slept with my partner it was magical, intense &amp; for the first time I was completely at ease with myself, my body and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
all the fantastic sensations that went through me. My partner & I have been like that every day after.

5 Special sexual event
* When I lost my virginity to my partner. It felt the most right thing in the world, that it was the right time and place and to be done with nobody else.

6 Closeness and Belonging
* After having intense personal dilemmas for the past few years, finally sorting things out a little a year ago, when I broke down and confided in my partner..., I felt intense love for him when he understood, that he loved me so much after what we had been through before...... that I felt we were meant to be together and knew we always would be.

7 Positive feelings
* Sometimes I feel so happy about being loved that I feel that I want to burst. I feel so amazingly complete.

8 Special event or time
* After fighting and then coming back to each other – feelings were intensified – acknowledging a loss – or having emotions reinforced by the feelings of loss – we both felt when separated.
Table 2:

*Means of Personal, Spiritual and Relationship Variables for those with and without Peak or Mystical Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Peak Experience</th>
<th>No Peak Experience</th>
<th>Mystical Experience</th>
<th>No Mystical Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 190</td>
<td>n = 62</td>
<td>n = 34</td>
<td>n = 264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>43.30</td>
<td>33.64**</td>
<td>45.62</td>
<td>38.68**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment</td>
<td>27.68</td>
<td>26.94</td>
<td>27.76</td>
<td>27.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eros</td>
<td>28.64</td>
<td>25.66**</td>
<td>27.97</td>
<td>27.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Relationship (years)</td>
<td>14.31</td>
<td>8.57**</td>
<td>15.12</td>
<td>11.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Affect</td>
<td>38.81</td>
<td>37.12</td>
<td>38.97</td>
<td>38.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Affect</td>
<td>18.21</td>
<td>21.23*</td>
<td>16.71</td>
<td>19.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Arousal</td>
<td>63.85</td>
<td>58.63**</td>
<td>66.06</td>
<td>61.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>26.12</td>
<td>24.17</td>
<td>26.06</td>
<td>25.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer Fulfillment</td>
<td>30.15</td>
<td>26.70</td>
<td>35.74</td>
<td>28.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universality</td>
<td>39.34</td>
<td>36.64</td>
<td>44.03</td>
<td>37.55**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *p < .005  **p ≤ .001.*