

## Qualitative Insights into Leisure as a Spiritual Experience

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This study explored lived, leisure experiences for 24 self-selected individuals who identified having experienced leisure that was spiritual. Using a phenomenological approach, the study revealed complex descriptions of these experiences where individuals simultaneously felt, acted, thought and were aware. Analysis of the data indicated that spiritual experiences could occur in a range of leisure contexts, could be triggered by catalysts such as nature or newness, evoked responses including awe and appreciation, and led to outcomes of connection, awareness, growth and freedom. Results of the present study support previous conceptual propositions of the spiritual dimension of leisure and suggest further avenues of inquiry to explore the experiential and emotional dispositions people bring to their leisure.

**KEYWORDS:** *Leisure experiences, spiritual, meaning, phenomenology.*

### Introduction

“What is spirituality? . . . It’s the world inside my head; my reflective self, the self that is aware of being aware, that connects with my reality”—Stan.

“It’s my relationship with God; an individual experience . . . a reflection of who I am and how I fit, why I am here. It’s integral to me”—Ann.

Spirituality is difficult to define. Tied to individuals’ subjective meanings and worldviews, the term spirituality has been used to describe everything from the religious and sacred through to the personal and universal. As such it is a domain that is often used to describe that which is indefinable, immaterial and affects the core or soul of individuals.

While interpretations of what it means to be spiritual or to experience spirituality differ, this arena of life is embedded in both individual and cultural development. Throughout history, spirituality has been considered to form the lived quality of a person (King, 1985), and been identified as a defining aspect of human nature (Maslow, 1971). Similarly, leisure has been identified as a forum where people can perfect the self (de Grazia, 1962), be inspired to spiritual values and relationships with a greater reality (Schroeder, 1995), and creatively become more of who they are (Kelly, 1990). Given these interpretations, it is interesting to note that outside of religious writings, a modern setting often neglected as a source of spiritual experience is that of leisure (McDonald & Schreyer, 1991). While there are changes within

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the leisure field that redress the spiritual capacity of leisure (e.g. de Lisle, 2003; Fox, 1996; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003), the potential and lived quality of leisure experiences that are personally spiritual, remain under-explored.

Bearing these considerations in mind, this phenomenological investigation into leisure experiences was designed to further develop insight and understanding into the possible spiritual nature of the dynamic, complex and multidimensional experiences (Lee & Shafer, 2002; Stewart, 1998) we refer to as leisure. Findings presented in this paper are part of a broader study looking at the "lived experiences" of leisure that was spiritual, as described by 24 respondents. Intended to be descriptive and exploratory, the research is founded in the identified need to extend our understanding of how people experience leisure (Lee, Dattilo, & Howard, 1994), but with a primary focus on those experiences respondents also considered to be spiritual. While the larger study was wide ranging, this paper focuses on the qualitative meanings of the respondents' experiences of leisure that were spiritual.

By exploring and explicating the phenomenon of spiritual leisure experiences, we are returning to the nature of the lived experience as it is understood by individuals. Located within the interpretive paradigm, this research study recognizes that leisure experiences have the potential to engage the whole person (e.g. Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) and that there is a need to understand the nature and meaning of things as they are lived (Lavery, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). With such knowledge it is suggested that we may continue to enhance our perceptions and awareness of the leisure experience, its spiritual possibilities and implications, and further be able to apply that knowledge to develop and inspire leisure opportunities that are more holistically meeting the range of human needs.

## The Nexus of Spirituality and Leisure

### *Spirituality*

Spirituality has been variously described and attributed. While there is a sense of similarity from literature discussing various definitions of spirituality, there is also complexity as researchers struggle to delineate its meaning which is often viewed as being both noetic and ineffable (e.g. James, 1902/1958; Stringer & McAvooy, 1992). Various, spirituality has been seen as a human response to "God's gracious call" to a relationship with oneself (Benner, 1989), a subjective experience of the sacred (Vaughan, 1991, p. 105), and/or including human potential to deal with ultimate purpose, higher entities, God, love, compassion and purpose (Tart, 1983, p. 4). In a review of spirituality literature in education and psychology, Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988) defined spirituality as,

[coming]. . . from the Latin, '*spiritus*', meaning "breath of life', [It] is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent

dimension and . . . is characterised by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate. (p. 10)

Including personal responses, human capacities, and an awareness of a higher power, spirituality is consistently attributed to aspects of transcendence (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992), belief in something greater than the individual (Witmer, 1989), or a search beyond what we can explain, to the mystical and unexplained (McCreery, 1994).

While it is not the intention, nor within the scope, of this paper to review the breadth of understandings of spirituality, it is pertinent to note that many definitions of religion hold relevant and inter-related meanings to the more broadly used term of spirituality. For example, Feuerbach (1957) defined religion as a consciousness of the infinite, while from a more phenomenological perspective, Kleinman (1997) argued that "alterity", or the state of being other or different, is the phenomenological kernel of religion. Noting the ineffable quality of spirituality, Marion (1996) also stated that religion can be described as "invisible", "unconditioned", and "irreducible" to the "I", and "could not be objectivized" (p. 103).

While the relationship between religion and spirituality can be seen in theological, philosophical, and leisure literature, spirituality remains a rather tenuous and singularly undefined term. However, for the purposes of this study, and based on diverse yet essentially similar pre-existing definitions, spirituality is accepted as being a broad concept that refers to the ways in which people seek, make, celebrate, and apply meaning in their lives. This usually takes the form of a frame of reference wider than the immediate, the material, and the everyday (Hughes, Thomson, Pryor, & Bouma, 1995) and leads the believer to seek or experience a personal meaning in their own life. This broad view of spirituality was adopted so the researchers could begin with an understanding that encompassed the breadth of descriptions reflective of the leisure literature, as well as be inclusive and open throughout the investigation.

### *Leisure and Spirituality*

With a shared understanding of the possibility of spirituality, it can be seen that philosophically and functionally leisure includes the spiritual realm of life. Though leisure itself is also variously defined and examined, consistent messages of its spiritual potential and benefits can be identified in both empirical research and more speculative discussions. For example, from a philosophical perspective a number of authors have reflected on the spiritual prospects of leisure (e.g. Adler, 1970; Godbey, 1994). In the early 1950s Pieper thought leisure was "a condition of the soul" (1952, p. 45). More recently, Rancourt (1991) theorized that leisure offers an opportunity to pursue the essence of self, while Ward (1999) highlighted the capacity of leisure to refresh and renew the soul, providing the space for freedom, self-revelation and connection. Repeatedly the potential of leisure as a spiritual context is reiterated, with suggestions being made that leisure contexts provide opportunities for spiritual aspects of the self to be dealt with (Heintz-

man, 2002), may offer the life space for people to engage their spirituality (Kelly, 1990) and provides a forum to create or find meaning in life, to transcend the everyday and to connect with self and/or other (Karlis, Grafanaki, & Abbas, 2002).

The reasons for these potentials are varying, but possibilities include an effect of the functional aspects of leisure, as well as the more experiential components of leisure. Regarding the former, it has been suggested that it is during leisure's discretionary time that people may seek a deeper connection with others (Propst, 1988) and leisure activity can draw people's attention to spiritual pursuits (Heintzman, 1996). In addition, the capacity of leisure to help individuals self-create has been identified (Kelly, 1990; Rancourt, 1991). In leisure individuals sample freedom (Samdahl, 1988), have the non-obligatory time to cultivate self-definitions (Haggard & Williams, 1992), and can explore their potential (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991). Not only can people actualize their social, mental, and physical skills through leisure, but they can also come to understand more of their spiritual selves. If, as has been suggested, leisure is linked to outcomes of self-discovery, authenticity, and the chance to integrate insight and experience (e.g. Kelly; McDonald & Schreyer, 1991; Rancourt), then it also offers the opportunity to explore not only what one does, but who one is.

In specifically examining aspects of the relationship between leisure and spirituality, Heintzman (1999, 2000, 2002) has repeatedly called for more research into how leisure contributes to individuals' spiritual well-being and more generally, the relationship between leisure and spirituality (e.g. 1999). Building on a review of literature and the results of a qualitative study (Heintzman, 2000), Heintzman and Mannell (2003) identified a number of potential spiritual functions of leisure, referred to as sacrilization, sense of place, and repression avoidance. In overview, sacrilization refers to the ability within leisure to nurture the spiritual dimension of life. Sense of place applies to the capacity of individual's to access built or natural environments that enhance spiritual well being. And, repression avoidance refers to our capacity to use leisure to repress our spiritual selves. Combined, this information suggests leisure can be a spiritual catalyst or suppressant as people either open to an experience or avoid one through busyness.

There is an accumulation of opinion that demonstrates, suggests, and infers the connection between leisure and spirituality (e.g. Karlis et al., 2002; McDonald & Schreyer, 1991; Zueffle, 1999). However, there continues to be a lack of empirical evidence to fully support the philosophical assumptions and optimistic intentions of much of the commentary, or the more theoretical research efforts concerned with, or open to, the spiritual relationship of leisure (e.g. Fox, 1996; Frederickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2000).

### *Spiritual Benefits of Leisure*

The relationship between the spiritual domain and leisure can also be found in leisure benefits literature especially that located in wilderness, outdoor, and nature-based research. Repeatedly, it has been found that nature-

based leisure may be tied to spiritual benefits including: inner (or self) knowledge, feelings of peace, oneness and strength, and awareness and attunement to, the world and one's place in it (McAvoy & Lais, 1996); spiritual growth (Hamilton-Smith, 1997); connection to self and others (Loeffler, 2004); spiritual inspiration (Frederickson & Anderson, 1999); spiritual empowerment (Angell, 1994) and spiritual well-being (Ragheb, 1993).

Nature-based experiences in particular, have been found to be related to the broader spiritual domain, inspiring a sense of reverence and wonder, offering an avenue to introspection, and encouraging a relationship to something other and greater than oneself (Driver, Dustin, Baltic, Elsner, & Peterson, 1996). More explicitly it has been suggested that outdoor recreation contributes to individuals' spiritual self (Driver, Howard, Tinsley, & Manfred, 1991), that spiritual experiences can be associated with wilderness environments (Fox, 1996), and that natural environments can instill spiritual values that relate to people's deepest beliefs regarding their relationship with a greater reality (Schroeder, 1995). For example, when examining college students meanings of participation in outdoor programs, Loeffler (2004) found that people experienced a "state of power", "a sense of higher purpose or power", "awe" and "beauty", and used the word "spiritual" to describe the deep connection they felt with the divine and the natural world as a result of nature based trips.

Moving beyond purely nature-based research, spiritual benefits of leisure have also been found in other leisure environments. Within tourism studies for example the quasi-religious nature of travel has been recognized along with the potential of leisure travel to afford tourists with greater knowledge about the self and the meaning of life (e.g. Allcock, 1988; Yiannakis & Gibson, 1992). In sports studies, Murphy and White (1978) described spiritual aspects of sport participation to include various "mystical sensations" such as calm and stillness, out-of-body experiences, feelings of immortality and awareness of the "Other."

Reflecting on this pool of data, it is evident there are strong indications of the spiritual possibilities to be found in leisure, as both anecdotal and empirical studies have identified outcomes that are broadly defined as spiritual. While these indicate "what" occurs for people, there is some limited research which also implicates "how" these experiences may occur. For example, building on the work of Stankey and Schreyer (1987), Stringer and McAvoy (1992) designed a mixed method study to explore the spiritual dimension of wilderness experiences. From this they recognized that descriptions of spiritual experiences usually included evidence of both cognitive processes (i.e. active contemplation), and affective dimensions (i.e. feelings and emotions, such as peace, tranquility, joy, hope, reverence and inspiration).

Also examining the wilderness experience, Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) concluded that a combination of social interactions and landscape characteristics rendered a place as spiritually inspirational. In their qualitative study of women, being part of an all women's group, group trust, emotional support, and a non-competitive atmosphere were contributors to the

women's meaningful experience. Similarly, Fox's (1996) study of women participating in wilderness experience found that nature was seen to be powerful, therapeutic, and spiritual. In both studies, solitude and time for reflection were significant contributing factors to the women's experiences.

Addressing the relationship between leisure and spiritual well-being, Heintzman (2000) identified some similar themes that offer insight into how leisure and spirituality may be related. Looking to explore "how" and "why" there might be links between leisure and spirituality, Heintzman identified themes indicating leisure could be a time and space for spiritual development; that an attitude of openness may be required for the link between spiritual well-being and leisure to be experienced; that nature settings were associated with individuals' spiritual well-being; and that settings of quiet and solitude were conducive to spiritual well-being. While his study was intentionally focused on an exploration of the potential relationship between leisure and spiritual well-being, not a more expansive view of how spirituality itself is experienced in leisure, the insights are informative to shift our understandings beyond a mere recognition that spiritual benefits do exist.

This research project set out to further these findings, aiming to illuminate the types of spiritual experiences that are occurring within leisure and explore how people define or characterize these experiences. Focused on the breadth of spiritual possibilities within leisure, the research explores spiritual leisure experiences through a range of locations, contexts and interpretations, but focuses on identifying the common aspects that constitute the experience. In this way it is anticipated that the subjective spiritual experience of leisure will continue to be more clearly illuminated, as shared elements of the experience are unveiled.

### Methodology

This study followed the intentions of phenomenological research. As a research method, phenomenology is located within a suite of research broadly referred to as qualitative, naturalistic, and interpretive. Within these paradigms it is acknowledged that people think, learn, have reasons for their actions, and interact with the world in order to find meaning (Neuman, 1997). Therefore to understand a social action or situation, the researcher needs to understand the motives, attitudes, and meanings individuals give to an action or situation (Schwandt, 2000). This process of understanding is based on Weber's idea of *Verstehen* or empathetic understanding (Weber, 1958) and influenced by Alfred Schutz (1967), whereby the researcher endeavors to grasp the everyday, inter-subjective world of the respondents and how that lifeworld is constituted. For phenomenologists, that process is guided by a desire to understand how the human conscious makes meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000), and how people experience things in terms of structure and essence (Patton, 1990).

Given that this study set out to examine experiences of leisure that are spiritual, a phenomenological approach was seen to be appropriate as it allowed for the conscious, lived, individual experiences of respondents to be

the central source of information (Moustakas, 1994). More specifically, phenomenology, with its focus on understanding the world from the perspective of the participant, allowed the researchers to examine spiritual, leisure experiences from a complexity of facets.

### *Data Collection*

The data for the study came from in-depth interviews with 24 respondents. The phenomenological interview is similar to other unstructured qualitative traditions in that trust, safety, and rapport need to be established to enable the respondents to openly discuss and explore the experience under investigation (Laverly, 2003; van Manen, 1997). Here, the purpose is not to just gain opinion or impersonal description; but to encourage an explicit interpersonal dialogue where the respondents share details of their experience and explore their own experiencing. As a result, the focus of the interviews was not so much on why an experience emerged as it did, but on seeking rich description of specific instances of leisure that were spiritual and the actions and contexts *in which* these emerged.

Four pilot interviews were conducted to refine the interview questions for phenomenological purposes and these revealed that the initial questions were too structured and guiding. With experience, the interviews became more unstructured with the bulk of the interviews flowing from one main interview question, namely: "When I mentioned [the study was on] spiritual leisure experiences, what sort of things came to mind?" For the majority of the respondents this led to extensive and free flowing discourse on their experiences of leisure that were personally spiritual. This initial question was followed by researcher prompts that helped to elaborate on the meanings, feelings, thoughts, and understandings of the experience. These prompts included such questions as: "What was happening during the experience?"; "How did it make you feel when that happened?"; and "Are there any other memories that come to mind about that experience?"

Efforts were made to inspire free discussion with the respondents, while also encouraging them to explore their own experiencing. As a result, rapport building both prior to, and during, the interviews was focal. To achieve this a number of practices were implemented including interacting with each respondent to clarify expectations, roles, and the opportunity of the study; making times to talk casually with each participant; and sharing a warm drink at the face to face meetings. Each interview was audio-tape recorded with the participants' permission.

### *The Respondents*

Contact was made with the respondents in a variety of ways to reach a diversity of people and experiences. A three-fold approach to sampling was used in the study. Initially, a convenience sampling technique (Patton, 1990) was implemented to identify people known to the researchers who were in-

terested and willing to talk about their spirituality, their leisure experiences, and their self-defined experiences of leisure that were spiritual. From this foundation a snowball technique was introduced whereby initial respondents recommended other people who they viewed as information-rich to contribute to the study (Patton, 1990). To refine the sampling process, a purposive approach was then taken wherein additional contributors who offered diversity were prioritized to be approached for involvement in the research. This procedure meant recruiting individuals who had experienced leisure they would describe as spiritual, whose spiritual leisure experiences were found in different ways (e.g. location, activity, social setting), or who could provide a variety of specific experiences of leisure that were spiritual which they could readily talk about (Becker, 1992; Polkinghorne, 1989).

The resulting group consisted of 13 women and 11 men who ranged in age from 28 to 68 years (28-29  $n = 4$ , 30-39  $n = 5$ , 40-49  $n = 9$ , 50-59  $n = 4$ , 60-68  $n = 2$ ). At the time of the interviews the respondents' spiritual perspectives varied, with some being active members of traditional Christian churches, while others described themselves variously as Buddhist, Born Again Christians, non-church attending Christians, Atheistic, or spiritual seekers delving into a range of indigenous or alternative understandings in their search for a spiritual path. Further, the leisure experiences described by the group were diverse and included: bushwalking, travel, reading, walking, rock climbing, being in nature, surfing, horse riding, meditation, learning to swim, SCUBA diving, and fire walking. While this is not a complete list it is representative of the experiences the respondents perceived as spiritual leisure experiences. To ensure confidentiality each respondent was assigned an assumed name that either they chose or were given.

### *Data Analysis*

Phenomenology requires researchers to listen openly and try not to interpret meaning based on their own experiences. As a result, data analysis needed to be conducted with the approach of laying aside researcher expectations and presumed meanings, and focusing on the point of view of the respondents and their personal experiences (Welch, 2001). While this can rarely be achieved completely, in practice this requirement led the researchers to become more consciously aware of their own preconceptions by endeavoring to maintain awareness of their biases throughout the analysis.

As part of this analysis the researchers engaged in continual journaling processes. The focus of this journaling was not only to reflect on the research process and what was emerging within the study, but to reflect on personal experiences of the phenomena, our understandings and influences, and how these understandings may have been changing as the research progressed. While it is not suggested that a complete setting aside was achieved, active efforts were made to be cognizant of the potential impacts these personal biases could have. As such, introspective journaling and continual checking of interpretation with respondent descriptions helped raise awareness of our



presuppositions and challenge the way we described and interpreted the findings. In keeping with the intention of the research these processes were not implemented to enhance the generalizability or objectivity of the phenomenological descriptions. Rather, they were used to focus the researchers on looking at the experiences of others with open eyes, acknowledging both the subjective nature of experience, and research in general.

With the consent of the respondents each of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher. Once this was done the individual transcripts were read and re-read in an exhaustive reductive search for the constituent parts of each respondent's spiritual leisure experience. At this stage the multiple qualities of the experience were considered and aspects were sought that were genuine to the experience, not just those aspects the researchers assumed to be key (Schmitt, 1967). Following this, it was possible to begin to look for the conditions in which spiritual leisure experiences existed (Kvale, 1996).

Based on the ideals of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994), each transcript was then readdressed to illuminate how spiritual leisure experience came to be. Searching for the structural meanings of the experience, the researchers tried to look at the experiences from all possibilities (Karlsson, 1995). Thus, spiritual leisure experiences were considered for the aspects that were figurative to their existence so that it was possible to identify the dominant themes most commonly shared and representative of the phenomenon itself.

Each of these phases was conducted individually for each transcript before an across-person analysis was sought. The results presented refer to the more common, shared themes or meanings that helped to describe the respondents' spiritual leisure experiences. These results represent the foundation of how spiritual leisure experiences are lived and help to unpack the properties of the experience.

Verification of the results occurred in three key ways. Firstly, throughout the interviews the first author clarified and affirmed the respondent's meanings by asking for further information and summarizing respondent statements to search for and illuminate meaning (Kvale, 1996). This led to greater shared understanding, rather than leaving the researchers to assume meaning. Secondly, the researchers separately refined and searched for themes before discussing or identifying potential constituents of the experience. Thirdly, through the iterative processes of phenomenology, ongoing efforts were made to consistently check the themes that evolved back through the transcripts. This led to saturation of the contexts, feelings and thoughts that accounted for spiritual leisure experience (Karlsson, 1995; Moustakas, 1994), and a reduction of possible ways the experience was commonly shared.

### *Limitations of the Study*

To explore and potentially understand the experiential meanings of particular phenomena in individuals lives requires a willingness to listen to the

respondents, to set aside researcher presuppositions of what an experience may be or mean, and to allow the emergence of a non-dualistic understanding of the mind and body, as whole experiences are recognized as sources of knowledge. With this approach come problematic issues both in terms of research process and data presentation, as (a) the depth of information gathered revolves around the subjective interpretations of both the researchers and respondents, and (b) the inter-related results are difficult to separate as distinct themes or dimensions of experience. Within these parameters however, the researchers sought to identify the shared understandings the respondents recollected as being spiritual and the meanings that lay behind those experiences. This means the data presented are largely descriptive and exploratory representations of spiritual experiences in leisure and cannot be presumed to represent more than that.

Further, the study was limited in the sampling methods. As mentioned, the respondents were chosen based on their willingness and understanding of personal leisure experiences they deemed to be spiritual. While efforts were made to seek respondents who offered difference in their backgrounds, religious affiliations, and leisure pursuits, the wide range of respondents meant individuals could enter the study with diverse personal and (at times) undisclosed predispositions. As an exploratory study this diversity was appropriate, but future researchers seeking to embark on a phenomenological investigation of individuals lived experience of leisure may wish to refine their sampling techniques to capture greater commonality and to more completely gauge the pre-existing understandings their respondents may bring with them.

## Results

The results document the nature of spiritual leisure experiences for 24 respondents, including an overview of the contexts of these experiences and the more common themes that help explain their meanings of spiritual leisure experiences. Evidently however, in any discussion of personal meanings, the underlying understandings that individuals hold is going to impact on information they share and the way they understand. Bearing this in mind, it is important to realize that a shared perspective of spirituality and leisure was not a requisite of this research. Instead, centrality of meaning and the importance of identified structural meanings emerged from the emphasis, understanding and interpretations that came from the respondents themselves.

To provide some context, the respondents' understandings of spirituality were important to gauge. Directly and indirectly influencing their descriptions, meanings and choices of stories to share with the researchers, the 24 respondents offered different interpretations, but also displayed some shared understandings. For example, for this group, spirituality related to their connection with something "other." For some this was grounded in a relationship with God ("it's an absolute faith in God . . . living my life the way God would like me to", Mary), for others, tied to energy or an unseen force

(“energy. . . a purifying process, partly perspective, partly coming to terms with mortality, partly a sense of experiencing and connecting to self”, Mark). It was simultaneously a sense of self and uniqueness (“it’s the world inside my head; my reflective self, the self that is aware of being aware, that connects with my reality”, Stan), and also connection and sharing with others as part of the broader world (“it’s a reflection of who I am and how I fit, why I am here; integral to me”, Ann). Though the respondents’ meanings were borne of varying viewpoints and religious and cultural influences, each expressed unwillingness or incapacity to clearly define something they “knew” but that was not purely understood through language. Rather spirituality was something that was personally accepted, yet not clearly defined through the spoken word (“it’s intangible”, Michael; “it’s a fuzzy thing”, Norm; “it’s difficult to express”, Val). With this in mind, the opportunity to further explore the nature of spiritual experiences in leisure through reflecting on the lived experience itself, helped to add color and detail to the ineffable aspects of spirituality.

#### *Characteristics of Spiritual Leisure Experiences*

The range of experiences the respondents called on that reflected leisure that was spiritual was diverse. As evident in Table 1, both the activities and contexts described were various and included passive or active pursuits, social or solo relationships; land, sea, or airborne locations as well as in natural or built environments.

While recognition of these ambient conditions is informative of leisure’s broad potential to engage people spiritually, the research intentions were to go beyond the functional contexts of what was experienced to understand *how* what is experienced, is experienced. Analysis revealed underlying themes or components that accounted for the meanings of the respondents’ spiritual leisure experiences (Moustakas, 1994) and the conditions in which the experiences were evident (Karlsson, 1995). Three more common shared components were identified to describe these and were broadly labeled as triggers, responses, and outcomes. As seen in Table 2, these themes were composed of various sub-themes representative of the range of shared understandings described by the respondents. Working across the three columns in Table 2, *triggers* refer to the structural catalysts that sparked a spiritual leisure experience, *responses* refer to the reactions individuals had to these triggers and within their spiritual leisure experiences, and *outcomes* highlight the significant results seen to emerge from the experience.

To explicate, it was evident in the respondents’ stories that spiritual leisure experience could be precipitated by a place (e.g. bush), by an event (e.g. festival), by novelty (e.g. new location or activity), or by a state of mind (e.g. openness); and these catalysts initially appeared to be diverse, individual and fluent. More detailed analysis however, revealed clusters of constituents relevant to the experiences described, and the category of *triggers* demonstrates the common aspects that sparked or facilitated the experience of leisure that was spiritual (e.g. nature, newness, challenge, ritual/tradition).

*TABLE 1*  
*Respondents Spiritual Leisure Experiences*

| Respondent | Activity   | Context  |
|------------|--|--|
| Curtis     | Flying<br>Climbing<br>Meditation                           | Africa; Stradbroke Island (alone)<br>(alone and with others)<br>(part of daily life)             |
| Dianne     | Learning to swim<br>Travel                                 | River, ocean   |
| Erin       | Horse riding<br>Bush walking; Reading                      | (with partner)   |
| Elizabeth  | Travel<br>Reading  | Italy (organized tour, then alone)   |
| Fran       | Bushwalking<br>Walking in general                          | Pigeon House Mountain (with sister)<br>Daily to work, around her city                            |
| Pam        | Trekking<br>Walking<br>Travel; Beachcombing                | Nepal (part of small organized group)<br>Nature based (alone)<br>(alone)                         |
| John       | Walking<br>Men's Festival<br>Sweat lodges; Travel/learning | Coastal, anywhere (alone)<br>(with large group of men; nature based)<br>(small group experience) |
| Mary       | Walking<br>Travel  | Tomahawk Creek, (alone or special friend)  |
| Malcolm    | Travel; Reading  | Related to his family ancestry   |
| Kym        | Meditation<br>Music  | At home in early morning light   |
| Fay        | Walking<br>Roller blading; Body combat                     | Mornings; bush; beach (alone)  |
| Klay       | Horse riding ; Surfing<br>Discovery of his creativity      | (alone & with family)<br>Learn to draw (private lessons) & sculpt                                |
| Mark       | Surfing  | Riding Malibu board (alone)  |
| Norm       | Hang gliding; SCUBA diving<br>Walking                      | Observing city, nature based   |
| Rachel     | Reading<br>Travel  | Home to Brazil; occult experience  |
| Rema       | Gardening  | (alone)  |
| Ann        | Walking; Travel; Sleeping                                  | Anywhere   |
| Paul       | Bushwalking<br>Rock climbing<br>Travel                     | Australia & New Zealand (solo)<br>South- East Qld (solo)<br>International (with partner)         |
| Stan       | Fire walking<br>Game playing                               | (large structured group)<br>(alone, computer based, at home)                                     |
| Michael    | Climbing<br>Being in nature                                | Rock, indoor (with friends)<br>Beach, bush (alone)   |
| Steve      | Playing sport<br>Running; Music                            | (team sports)<br>(alone)   |

TABLE 1  
(Continued)

| Respondent | Activity                   | Context                                      |
|------------|----------------------------|--|
| Phillip    | Travel                     | Cape York, Australia (alone)                 |
|            | Family interaction         | Wilderness settings                          |
|            | Meditation; Men's festival | (at centre, guided meditation, nature based) |
| Val        | Buddhist learning          | Retreat (Vancouver, BC)                      |
| Penny      | Travel                     |  |
|            | Being in nature            | Camping overnight                            |

TABLE 2  
*Common Themes of Spiritual Leisure Experiences*

| Triggers  | Responses  | Outcomes  |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Nature</i> —space; beauty; escape; real                                | <i>Emotion &amp; Sensation</i> —awe, wonder, fear, letting go, feeling, satisfaction, tapping into emotions, release, peace, alive, pain, helplessness, gratitude<br>... | <i>Awareness</i> —world around; place in world; power greater than self; capabilities/limits/who I am/relation to world |
| <i>Newness &amp; Difference</i> —different places & activities            | <i>Struggle for Control</i> —of self & circumstance; loss of control; surrender control; illusion of control   | <i>Connection</i> —with God, energy, nature, life, self, others -> feeling of belonging & place                         |
| <i>Challenge</i> —risk; fear; emotional & physical tests                  | <i>Overcoming</i> —personal limits; fears; negative perceptions of self  | <i>Growth</i> —learning; change -> confidence; self-perception; beliefs; ways of experiencing the world                 |
| <i>Ritual &amp; Tradition</i> —leisure practice; habitual patterns; focus | <i>Reflection &amp; Contemplation</i> —in situ & post experience—of self, activity, space & place in the world   | <i>Freedom</i> —escape; opportunity; knowing  |

By extension, *responses* are representative of the actions and feelings that were caused by a stimulus, setting, or context and characterize the respondents' reactions in physical, emotional, and cognitive ways. Across all the respondents were expressions of emotion and sensation as they experienced spiritual dimensions of leisure affectively. For some there was a reactive emotional outpouring of feeling ("there was emotional release, calm, relief, phys-

ically exhausted and equally revitalized", John), for others, their senses were engaged through the awe, wonder, or fear they felt ("it's just so engaging and magnificent. You get an overwhelming feeling. . .there's a little bit of helplessness like you're insignificant in this world", Pam). Equally, the respondents struggled with control, variously experiencing a letting go, loss or surrendering, or realization of the illusion of control ("I wanted to control [my reaction] but I just couldn't. . . It was something spiritual, I can't explain, but there was something happening that I lost control", Rachel). They demonstrated efforts to overcome their fears, doubts, and negative perceptions of self and actively reflected on what was, or had occurred; how they had personally reacted; and the implications of the experience to self ("You're reflecting in a different environment . . . and ultimately it helps me realize that life is not just all these separate little bits of things").

Finally, *outcomes* represent the four composite effects that were consistently realized as a result of their experiences, namely awareness, connection, growth, and freedom. Through their spiritual leisure experiences the respondents became more conscious of themselves, others, and/or God. For example Mary found she experienced a connection with God through walking in and admiring nature ("I feel as though I'm connecting with God. He's there"), and Ann achieved an outcome of connection with God watching the sunrise over Haleakula. "It really was that sense of connection. Connection back to God, connection back to the collective harmony." They felt more attached to life, to God, to the earth, or to others and they experienced some aspect of growth as they learned, developed, or altered to some degree or magnitude. Gaining a sense of space, the respondents also achieved feelings of being freed to experience, understand, or live in a particular manner as they gained in knowledge and opportunity, and/or were freed from aspects that hampered or restrained life.

The meanings behind the three more common themes highlight the complexity of the spiritual experience of leisure in terms of what occurred and how it was experienced. Rather than unpack the minutiae of each of the sub-components, examples of how the themes compose the experience are offered in the following sections using examples given in the respondent's words. Here, the focus is on clarifying the interrelationships of triggers, responses, and outcomes to create a picture of the whole experience. Using the four more common triggers of nature, newness and difference, challenge, and ritual as the foundation, the spiritual experience of leisure is described demonstrating the structures that inter-relate in the respondents' consciousness.

### *Nature*

Nature influenced the respondents in different ways but was a commonly shared context that sparked leisure experiences that were spiritual. For some, nature was inspirational and provided a sense of connection. For others, it offered an escape from the mundanity and expectations of everyday

life. In nature, the respondents were inspired by the majesty of their environment, gained a greater sense of their place in the world, and experienced peace and wholeness.

The inspirational capacity of nature was found in various guises for the respondents. For some nature was a catalyst and they responded with awe to the beauty that it offered. Overwhelmed and immersed in the majesty of nature, some found they recognized the hand of God or a universal force, and this led to leisure that was spiritual. As Mary noted, natural spaces allowed her to “feel as though I am in a cathedral . . . I gain an inner peace. I feel close to God and I feel as though I am connecting with God.”

In nature, some respondents achieved outcomes of connection and awareness and experienced a range of emotions and sensations that were tied to their spirituality. Pam, for example, realized that for her “connection with nature and being outside is almost spiritual . . . It’s a feeling of something more powerful taking you over and having control of you. If I can touch and feel and smell nature, that’s very powerful.” Similarly, Michael found nature offered “wholeness” as he “felt the ground under my feet.” In this environment he was “totally amazed. It’s awesome, it’s creation and you get the sense of feeling part of it that is spiritual.”

The respondents described nature as a site where they felt and connected with life more readily and in that process experienced their leisure spiritually. Removed from the distractions and pace of modern life, nature offered the chance to live more simply, to reconnect with “the wholeness of the natural world” (Phillip), to gain a “sense of universality” (Penny) and “to feel more peaceful and connected” (Pam). Nature could be a space they entered which was safe because “it has a certain neutrality.” Rather than being filled with prior expectations, some respondents found it to be a freeing place that “was not judging you” (Paul) and a location with “no distractions like the ones we construct in everyday life” (Penny). In this space they found “the time of freedom away from other things and time to look at your connections” (Dianne), as well as an enhanced awareness of some force greater than themselves and the everyday. Though Dianne did not attribute her experience to the Christian God, she described an experience of learning to swim in the ocean as “feeling like there was someone underneath me, that I wouldn’t fall, that someone was holding me up there, emotionally holding me. ‘I’m there to protect you and guide you.’ That was the understanding” (Dianne).

More directly, others found their awareness of God was heightened by being in nature. Here, the simple beauty of a sunrise could be spiritual. As Ann described, she watched

. . .this great miracle being unveiled. You could feel the rays of the sun, you could fantasize that it was like God stroking your face . . . I felt very special, very loved at that moment and there was a sense of getting an insight into what eternity is about. It helped put things into perspective. I knew God in that moment and I knew I was not alone.

When describing their spiritual leisure experiences, the respondents consistently referred to nature as a context, catalyst, or forum embedded in the whole. Nature offered a reprieve from the everyday, an awe-inspiring vista, and a grounding option where the respondents felt, were aware, were freed, or gained a notion of connection with self, the living world, and/or God. For some being in nature was spiritual; for others it inspired spiritual awareness.

### *Newness/Difference*

When being in nature was combined with newness and difference the experience was further enhanced. Mary found nature inspirational but newness added to her awe and spiritual awareness as “everything was totally different and just an endless reminder of God’s hand.” Norm similarly realized that while nature was inspirational, the newness of walking in a different environment could also spark spiritual leisure experiences:

I get inspired walking, more so in the bush, but even in a new city . . . It gives you meaning and it gives you that awareness of where you are and what’s around you and that fits into my spirituality because it’s a different perspective.

More broadly, the respondents’ reflections showed that new situations, new activities, or new places could lead to personal insights and formed part of spiritual leisure experiences. Stepping into a different way of living and different perspectives Val described the impact of going on a Buddhist retreat. Feeling the need for some personal space away from the pressures of her life, the retreat was a very different experience that ultimately led to life changing decisions. As she said,

I wasn’t going there because I was Buddhist. I just wanted to go there and be. Once I was there though it was just so new and peaceful. For whatever reason I really connected with it and it turned my mind to other perceptions and ways of being.

Travel was consistently identified as a new experience in which the spiritual dimension of leisure experiences occurred. For example, Penny found her leisure travel to new lands and exploring new cultures sparked spiritual experiences for her. Confronted with different ways of living and more aware of what she had left behind, Penny found she was forced to not only experience in the moment, but to reflect afterward on her experiences. Observing the poverty of Tibet and the strength of the Tibetans spiritual beliefs she “tapped into emotions that had been lidded by modern society” and found “the time and opportunity to reengage . . . It was quite awesome to be part of a wonderful landscape and the whole experience was significant at an emotional level, at a spiritual level.”

Doing something new or going somewhere different engaged respondents’ perceptions and they looked at the world somewhat differently. Emotionally more aware in these times, the newness and difference they experi-



enced tended to challenge them to interact with life, and to reflect, connect, learn and grow, or be inspired. As Paul exemplified, the newness he experienced as he went to different places led him to reflect on the past and to grow to the future. By doing something new he reflected on his established and previously unquestioned actions and world-view to accommodate the newness that he experienced. This impacted on him spiritually:

When you're in a different environment you start to actively notice the way you might do things or the perspectives that you hold. I realized that this is about life and it's really good for me to take the time to realize that. It helps me to realize that life is not just all the separate bits of things. It's feeling a part of something, it's realizing there's more to life than the obvious, it's trusting in something that you cannot see, whether that's yourself or some God.

### *Challenge*

While newness and difference could be challenging for the respondents as they confronted the unknown or unexpected, and nature could provide the forum for that challenge, it was evident that personal challenge was a common theme in facilitating leisure that was spiritual. Whether it was through a physical test (e.g. trekking in Nepal), the extension of physical and emotional boundaries by learning something new (e.g. body combat classes; fire walking), or mastering technical abilities as efforts were exerted to achieve more complex levels of participation (e.g. climbing harder routes; surfing larger waves), the respondents spoke of the role of challenge in altering their perceptions of self, enhancing their awareness, pushing their boundaries of knowledge and perception, and triggering leisure experiences that were spiritual.

For Curtis, the challenge he faced when paragliding acted as a "tool for interpreting the self and the experience." While he saw paragliding as a risk taking activity during which he was continually "frightened, absolutely scared to death", it was in the challenge and the resulting fear that he found "a tool for knowing myself, knowing the world." That tool provided a catalyst for reflecting, being aware of his mortality, and understanding "where you've brought yourself", which for him was spiritual.

It was evident that some spiritual experiences were enabled through risk as individuals learned more about themselves and their capacities. For Fran, physical challenge led her to call on her relationship with God to help overcome her fear. As she explained of a personally challenging bush trail:

It was a very hard walk, steep and what was running through my head was basically a lot of fear and a lot of nervous energy . . . All the way through the walk I was saying, "Please Lord, don't let us fall, let us get through this path." And we did. Once we got there it was beautiful and so tranquil and the day was just so perfect and blue and I thought to myself, "Lord, I'm really glad I'm here and I can see this beauty and vastness of the land." It made me appreciative and the fear I felt on the way gave an added focus to the appreciation I did feel and the connection that was there.

Though the challenge initially removed the pleasure of her leisure choice, the circumstance led Fran to directly connect with her spiritual beliefs. The result was a memorable experience where she reveled in overcoming her fears, attaching to her faith, and marveling in the physical beauty of nature. Through the challenge, the spiritual was enacted and Fran was reminded of herself and her connection to a greater existence.

In the experience of challenge respondents learned more about themselves and found the life space to understand what they could do. For some there was a vision of growth and new possibilities as they overcame challenges or saw the world in a different light. As Dianne explains, the challenge embedded in her leisure experience of learning to swim:

really open[ed] life up. It's like you've been walking down a lane way and all of a sudden you come to this open field . . . It probably makes you look for other areas in your life that you'd like to expand to the same extent. It's certainly not the case of "oh gee now I can [swim]" because I still can't, but whatever it is freed something that was tied down inside of me that was disproportionate to the actual achievement. Now there is freedom to go try other things in future years.

### *Ritual/Tradition*

The final common trigger for leisure that was spiritual reflected the role of ritual and tradition. For some, this affirmed the role that leisure practices such as meditation, yoga, and tai chi could play in creating the forum for spiritual experiences. For others, it was realized through the introduction of lifestyle habits that opened a pathway for spiritual leisure experiences. These included the ritual of morning walks or annual attendance at festivals which provided opportunity for challenge, focused attention, immersion in nature, and/or space for personal interactions.

Ritual acted as a trigger through the mundane, the simple or the planned. Kym's morning ritual of meditating provided her with the chance to spend time for herself and to seek guidance for her day. For her, this daily leisure activity provided a spiritual foundation:

It's a practice that's for me and it keeps me going and aligned I guess. I breathe, I focus, I can feel myself being wrapped in light . . . I "ask" for the energy to get through the day the best way I can. . . . It's time for me to get to know my core, to assess what has been happening and where I am going.

Ritual could act as trigger by focusing respondents and allowing them to find a different way of seeing the world. Penny found being in the bush provided space where she created her own rituals of connection. For her, "putting up the tent is like a little shrine . . . There's ritual I find in being outdoors, that draws me into the experience and away from the everyday." Whether the ritual was self-defined or entered into as part of a bigger experience, ritual impacted on the respondents' awareness and sense of otherness in life. As John explained of an annual men's festival he attended,

You are part of something that is defined. There is habit and structure and in that repetition, life is simpler. There's a timelessness, there's a stepping away from the trappings of everyday life and you are immersed in connecting to living.

Others realized that their daily walking ritual was a life space for spiritual reflection. In the repetitive focus of a morning walk Ann found she "meditates on some of the issues in my life. Depending on where I am at that particular thought process I can feel close to God." Similarly Pam explained the ritual of walking inspired her to reflect and "sort out who I am and where I am going. In that, I am being guided into the future."

Independently, the *triggers* of nature, newness, challenge, and ritual suggest how the respondents accessed their spiritual leisure experiences, and offer insight into the events or circumstances that precipitated the experience. More broadly however their *responses* and *outcomes* demonstrate that the experience was not only physical or emotional, it was spiritual. Impacting on multiple levels, spiritual leisure experiences were engaging, sparking in the respondents' consciousness a realization that the impacts were more wide-ranging than the activity they were doing or the location they were in. Rather they achieved personal *outcomes* that were tied to the spiritual nature of the experience as they learned about self and grew; experienced a freedom to do and believe; became aware of aspects of their mortality, their place in the world and their beliefs; and felt a sense of connection with self, God and others. In the cumulative nature of the experience, leisure that was spiritual was lived not simply as activity, location or time, but as a composite tapestry with multiple elements and implications.

### Discussion

The purpose of phenomenology is not to conceptualize or propose theory, but to remind us of the centrality of "lived experience" as a way to develop insight and understanding. As such, this studies contribution to the leisure field is twofold. One, it locates at the centre of investigation the conscious meanings individuals hold of an experience of leisure; and two, it intentionally focuses attention on the spiritual experience of leisure, an area of leisure research that is acknowledged as theoretically and empirically under-explored (e.g. Heintzman, 2000).

The interviews revealed three common themes indicating the complexity and multi-dimensional aspects of leisure experiences that are spiritual. For example, it was shown that experiences could be triggered by material contexts of action or location (e.g. nature) and/or subjective contexts such as challenge or newness. Further, spiritual leisure experiences engendered a range of emotional and cognitive responses as the respondents experienced some variation of sensation, a struggle for control, an overcoming of self or fears, and reflective contemplation; and identified outcomes that were personally spiritual including greater awareness, connection, growth and freedom. For these respondents, no one aspect of the experience defined its

existence; rather they described a combination of context, emotion, action, reaction, knowing, achievement, wonder, and awareness to unpack their experiences.

Consistent with the goal of phenomenology, these findings suggest a complexity of factors that inform experience. As a research method, phenomenology is grounded in an understanding of the mind/body relationship and allows us to not only recognize what constitutes spiritual experiences of leisure, but how these are lived. This study revealed that for these respondents spiritual, leisure experiences, like leisure in general, are complex, multi-faceted, subjective and value-laden (Howe, 1991). Neither singularly explained by the action or context of leisure, nor by the response engendered, the experience of leisure that was spiritual took account of the range of ways that humans perceive, and allowed that which the respondents felt, saw, did, and believed to frame our understanding of what makes leisure that is spiritual, what it is (van Manen, 1990).

It is important to point out, however, that the themes and components identified are consistent with previous conceptual discussions and empirical findings. For example, in previous leisure and wilderness research, control has been identified as a component in spiritual wilderness experiences (Fox, 1996; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992); reflection, contemplation, and introspection have been noted as components of spiritual experiences in leisure (Heintzman, 1999, 2002; Trainor & Norgaard 1999); and being in a different setting or newness (Stringer & McAvoy, 1992); being away (Heintzman & Mannell 2003); and challenge (Fox 1996; Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999) have all been identified as part of the spiritual experience. More broadly, when philosophical discussions are considered it is also evident that awareness (e.g. Driver et al., 1996), connection (e.g. Karlis et al., 2002), personal growth (e.g. Yiannakis & Gibson, 1992), and freedom (Heintzman, 2000), have been attributed to leisure experiences that are spiritual; but the complexity of ways these can evolve is less well known or recognized. The reasons for this are diverse but it can be suggested that these stem from a combination of lack of direct research and the ineffable yet encompassing aspects of spirituality itself.

The results do, however, support conceptual suggestions regarding the relationship of spirituality and leisure; and reinforce the propositions that leisure may offer an opportunity to explore our potential (e.g. Kelly, 1990; Rancourt, 1991), to attain enlightenment (Pieper, 1952), can afford a sense of connection (Godbey, 1994), and can help individuals to find the freedom to experience God (Lee, 1964). As indicated in their meanings, these respondents described thinking about themselves differently, and realized connection, awareness, and growth in their spiritual selves. As they pointed out, their spiritual experiences of leisure gave them the chance to "get to know myself a lot more" (Paul) and to "understand the connection of who I am in relation to where I want to be and what kind of person I want to be" (Penny). Equally, they found the chance to "discover and see who I am in this life" (Curtis), "connect with people . . . with myself on a spiritual level"

(Rachel), and to be "aware of something else out there" (Dianne). For these individuals, the spiritual was connected to personal meaning and purpose as they glimpsed in their leisure experiences some elusive reality of life.

Looking at some specific components, it was evident in this study of diverse leisure contexts that the environment of the natural world remained core to many of the respondents' experiences. Regardless of their leisure activity, the respondents recognized the capacity of nature to help them feel better, to connect, and/or to find a source of inspiration. For some, nature itself was described as spiritual, not just a context for activity that could be spiritual, and consistently nature provided a sense of space for spiritual experiences of leisure to occur. These findings are consistent with the results of nature based studies, which indicate that wilderness has spiritual value and potential as a site of inner peace and sacred space (e.g. Frederickson & Anderson, 1999; Trainor & Norgaard, 1999), and with more general leisure findings that nature is conducive to spiritual well-being (Heintzman, 2000). Further, religious investigations have suggested that natural beauty can be a triggering force of inspiration for religious or spiritual feelings (Hardy, 1983). In this study, the capacity of nature to be a potential catalyst was evident in the respondents' meanings.

Others have examined the role of nature, questioning whether the outdoors is more "real" and authentic (Fine, 1992) and therefore a site to come to know more of our character beyond ordinary existence (Sharpe, 2005). More mundanely, Stringer and McAvoy (1992) have suggested that it is the lack of constraints and responsibilities participants experience in wilderness that allow people to find inner peace, tranquility, solitude, beauty, and spiritual rekindling. For the 24 respondents, a combination of escape from the everyday and an authentic connection with nature and/or with a greater power, tended to predominate in their descriptions. For them, the potential of the natural environment offered a space "away from other things" (Dianne), but also to feel a relationship in nature's complexity and wholeness.

The centrality of feeling was highlighted in the individuals' descriptions. For them, responses to their described spiritual leisure contexts included both physical and emotional reactions such as a sense of awe and wonder at the magnificence of nature and/or God's creations, gratitude and appreciation, fear and elation, a sense of being released and fully alive, numbed, and exhilarated. Consistently the respondents revealed an emotional outpouring and awareness of sensation in leisure experiences that were spiritual. Again, these findings fit with previous research in leisure and spirituality. For example, researchers have often connected leisure with emotion or mood (e.g. Lee & Shafer, 2002) and studies of spiritual experiences have recognized the relevance of affective dimensions such as peace, joy, awe, reverence, and inspiration (e.g. Fox, 1996; Hardy, 1983).

While emotions have been viewed as an important component of leisure experiences (Ajzen & Driver, 1992), it was evident that the respondents also experienced a breadth of powerful emotional and sensed reactions that were

intensely lived components of the whole experience. Regardless of whether these emotions were positive or discomforting, there was consistency across the respondents of strength of emotion as they actively and consciously felt. For them, across-person consistency was found in the sense of release and recognition of the emotive self that were part of the experience of leisure that was spiritual. As such, this study affirmed the centrality and significance of emotional responses as part of the descriptions of spiritual leisure experiences.

While these findings help reaffirm previous research and conceptual discussions of the spiritual potential of leisure, the results also raise new questions. For example, to what extent might spiritual leisure experiences be influenced by individual's pre-existing intentions and belief systems? Why do some people refer to the experiences shared in this study as spiritual, where others may not? Given that there was such diversity of meaning of what constituted spirituality, is this a concept that is used by individuals when they cannot explain something that is intense and memorable, or is it because the experience is spiritual that it becomes intense and memorable? How, or does, the spiritual experience of leisure transfer or impact on other aspects of life? While Heintzman (2002) is beginning to address this latter question in his studies of leisure and spiritual well-being, there is still much that can be known and acknowledged as we unpack the experience of the spiritual in leisure.

Presenting results from a phenomenological study is a complex issue. To investigate any phenomenon from this perspective implies a desire to take account of the whole experience not just the parts (Moustakas, 1994; Willig, 2001). This subsequently leads to results that are multiple, reflective and intense. This paper addresses just one stage of the phenomenological process, highlighting the more common shared structural understandings of how people experience leisure that is spiritual. Evident even in this one phase however, are a breadth of inferences that suggest the relationship and location of the spiritual realm to leisure and, by extension, the potential of leisure to engage people spiritually. More complexly, there are indications in the results that imply the contribution spiritual experiences of leisure may have in enhancing individuals' understandings of self, their lifeworld, their humanity, and their chance to grow and be aware as humans; but further investigation is required to confirm this.

### Conclusion

This study has reaffirmed philosophical and conceptual propositions that the leisure state can incorporate the mystical (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986); can enhance the spiritual (Neulinger, 1981); can include reflection, wonder, epiphany and connection; and can be a source of inspiration and self-discovery (Driver et al., 1996).

Researching the spiritual experience of leisure revealed that leisure impacts on individuals on complex levels and can occur in a range of contexts.

Importantly, it also indicated the memorable and strongly felt impacts that leisure that is spiritual can hold for people. Physically lived and emotionally felt, spiritual experiences of leisure enabled the respondents to learn more about their self; to feel a sense of connection; and to experience a freedom to do, or to escape. While these findings are meaningful in themselves, the spiritual dimensions of leisure experiences require more detailed investigation if we are to fully understand the way they unfold in people's lives and how to potentially facilitate such experiences. If spiritual experiences of leisure are positive and offer benefits for those who acknowledge their existence, then a goal of the leisure profession should be to determine how to more ably and competently allow such moments to be lived.

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