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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by John Michael Trembley entitled "Mysticism and Mystery Moves: An Examination of Flow Theory." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Recreation and Leisure Studies.

Steven N. Waller, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

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(Original signatures on file with official student records.)

Mysticism and Mystery Moves:

An Examination of Flow Theory

A Thesis Presented for

The Masters of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee

John Michael Trembley

May 2010

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my dad, JT, who many years ago taught me how to roll a whitewater kayak. His vision that I would fall in love with whitewater, in many ways saved my life. This work is also dedicated to my friend Paul Schreiner, whose artistry and craftsmanship is a testimony to his love for this sport, and for all its participants. This work is also dedicated to anyone who has ever spent time underwater… and loved it.

Abstract

This study takes a phenomenological approach to squirt kayaking. It looks to examine mystical states of consciousness, as defined by William James, and flow theory, as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and focuses on what these experiences mean for participants of the squirt kayaking community. The study poses three research questions. (1) Do squirt kayakers experience mystical states of consciousness through squirt kayaking, and what does this experience mean? (2) Do squirt kayakers experience flow states of consciousness through squirt kayaking, and how was this experienced? (3) What is the *mystery zombie* or the *mystery trance* state, and how is it experienced?

By posting messages on online message boards dedicated to squirt kayakers twenty participants responded to the post and were then contacted by telephone for an interview based off of an original questionnaire created for this study. The results show that mysticism and flow does occur through the squirt kayaking medium. Four primary themes emerged from the data about the experience and are as follows: defies expression, serious leisure, different realm, and the trance.

Results indicate that there is not a distinctive difference between mysticism and flow, although further research should be done to support this. Also this study would suggest that further research be conducted concerning the build-up of carbon dioxide in the brain and its effects on mystical experiences. Implications of this research to look to challenge the concept of mysticism and flow by broadening what recreation offers its participants.

Keywords: *charc, flow, mystery trance, mystery zombie, mysticism*

Preface

This entire project is doomed. It sets out to do something it can never accomplish. It seeks to describe mystical states of consciousness and flow states, both of which are incommunicable for those who experience each state. Each can only be experienced, as their essence lies in the feeling of each state. Even before the project begins, it is doomed for failure. Luckily failures can teach just as much as accomplishments. This catch-22 of a project seeks to be a perfect example of that. Joseph Heller (1955) explains in his novel *Catch-22*:

> There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. (p. 63)

The previous example highlights the circular logic that can be employed when trying to describe indescribable phenomena. It was presented to illustrate how difficult it will be articulate the feelings and experiences that create the phenomenon to which they relate, and how hard it will be for the reader to have an authentic understanding of said phenomenon without a direct experience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"*Human beings were invented by water as a device for transporting itself from one place to another*." -- Tom Robbins

Thales of Miletus was thought to live in the early part of the 6th century. Of his many contributions to philosophy, one stands out above the others. For Thales "the basic stuff of the universe was one thing, water, by which he meant either that everything is really water in one form or another or that everything comes from water" (Cohen, et al, 2000, p. 9). Thales was one of three pre-Socratic philosophers known as the Milesians, concerned with material monism, "that the cosmos began as a single stuff that changed to become the universe as we see it today" (Cohen, et al, 2000, p. 8). Because no known text can be attributed to Thales we must rely on Aristotle's comments on the philosophy of Thales. In Book I of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle links Thales' claim that the world rests on water with the view that water was the *archē*, or fundamental principle. According to Aristotle, Thales "reached this judgment from seeing that what nourishes all things is wet and that the hot itself comes from the wet and is kept alive by it" (Cohen, et al, p. 695). Aristotle continues by explaining "what all things come to be is from their principle" (Cohen, et al, p. 695).

Fifteen centuries later can Thales' philosophy be dismissed? Masaru Emoto (2001) points out in his book, *The Hidden Messages in Water*, "to understand water is to understand the cosmos, the marvels of nature, and life itself" (p. xix). As fetuses, humans are 99% water. After birth, infants are about 90% water. As adults, humans are down to about 70% water, and if a human is lucky enough to die of old age, their body will probably be about 50% water. (Emoto, 2001, p. xv) In a sense, life is a drawn out dehydration process. Death is nothing more than the absence of water. Thales and Emoto (2001) both acknowledge the fundamentality of water for

the cosmos and for the human body, respectively. Although Thales' claim does refer to the entire cosmos, it does not seem too farfetched when considered physiologically as Emoto does.

The importance of water is not a unique phenomenon to philosophy and biology. Many religious traditions including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism incorporate water into their texts as well, as is found in Taoism. Gia-Fun Feng and Jane English (1989) explain in their commentary on chapter eight of Lao Tsu's *Tao Te Ching*:

> He who lives the Tao acts in his life and dealings as water acts in nature. Water does not resist, yet it conquers all; it is tasteless – suggesting the invisibility of the Tao – yet life-giving. It moves through all that lives and in movement remains clear and pure. It is supple, flexible, and humble; it does not compete; it flows naturally to the lowest places. All things arise from water and return to water. (p. 89)

Water and the river appear a number of times throughout the *Tao Te Ching.* Lao Tsu continues by saying, "The highest good is like water. Water gives life to the ten thousand things and does not strive. It flows in places men reject and so it is like the Tao" (p. 10). For the present inquiry it will behoove readers to be familiar with water, and more specifically rivers; now the operational definitions.

Operational Definitions

The operational definitions are terms that will appear throughout the document. These definitions include all terms of interest for the reader. These terms can be divided into three distinct groups: river talk, squirt talk, and terms for the present study. Terms will be listed in alphabetical order.

River talk.

C.F.S.

Cubic feet per second; “the total volume of water passing an established point of reference on a creek or river” (Nealy, 1986, p. 152).

Drop:

“Any vertical change in the riverbed. A vertical drop higher than six feet is usually referred to as a waterfall” (Nealy, 1986, p. 154).

Eddy:

“The relative calm spots found on the downstream sides of rocks, pilings, ect. Eddies are to boaters what trenches are to soldiers, sanctuary for resting or scouting” (Nealy, 1986, p.155).

Gradient:

“Refers to the steepness of the riverbed. Expressed in feet per mile” (Nealy, 1986, p.159).

Hydraulic:

“A.K.A. ‘hole’. Hydraulics are caused by water passing over an obstacle and creating a recirculating upstream flow below. Hydraulics come in an infinite variety and are a source of amusement, and/or fear for boaters” (Nealy, 1986, p.160).

Put in:

“The place where you get out of the car and get into your boat” (Nealy, 1986, p. 163).

Rapid:

“A.K.A. ‘rapids.’ A section of the river characterized by increased gradient, fast water, waves, holes, and assorted other obstacles” (Nealy, 1986, p. 163).

Surf:

"To ride a wave on its upstream face or to get stuck in a hole (intentionally or unintentionally)" (Nealy, 1986, p. 166).

Take out:

"The place where you get out of your boat and into a car" (Nealy, 1986, p. 166).

Wave:

"The direct expression of the river's energy. Waves come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes" (Nealy, 1986, p. 168).

Squirt talk.

Back Cut:

"Any squirt move done against the grain or whirlpool alignment" (Snyder, 1987, p. 157).

Blast:

"Surfing a slide-type or pourover hole straight on, like a wave" (Snyder, 1987, p. 157).

Cartwheels:

"To flip a kayak end-for-end continuously" (Snyder, 1987, p. 157).

Charc:

"Charging arc. The angle of attack of a boat's long axis as it encounters local currents/features. Directly related to strategy or lack thereof in river running. A broad charc is perpendicular to the current; a steep charc is toward parallel. Also used in reference to people's attitudes, i.e., bad charc" (Snyder, 1987, p. 157). Please refer to Figure 1.1—Charc Diagram, for a visual reference on the nature of charc.

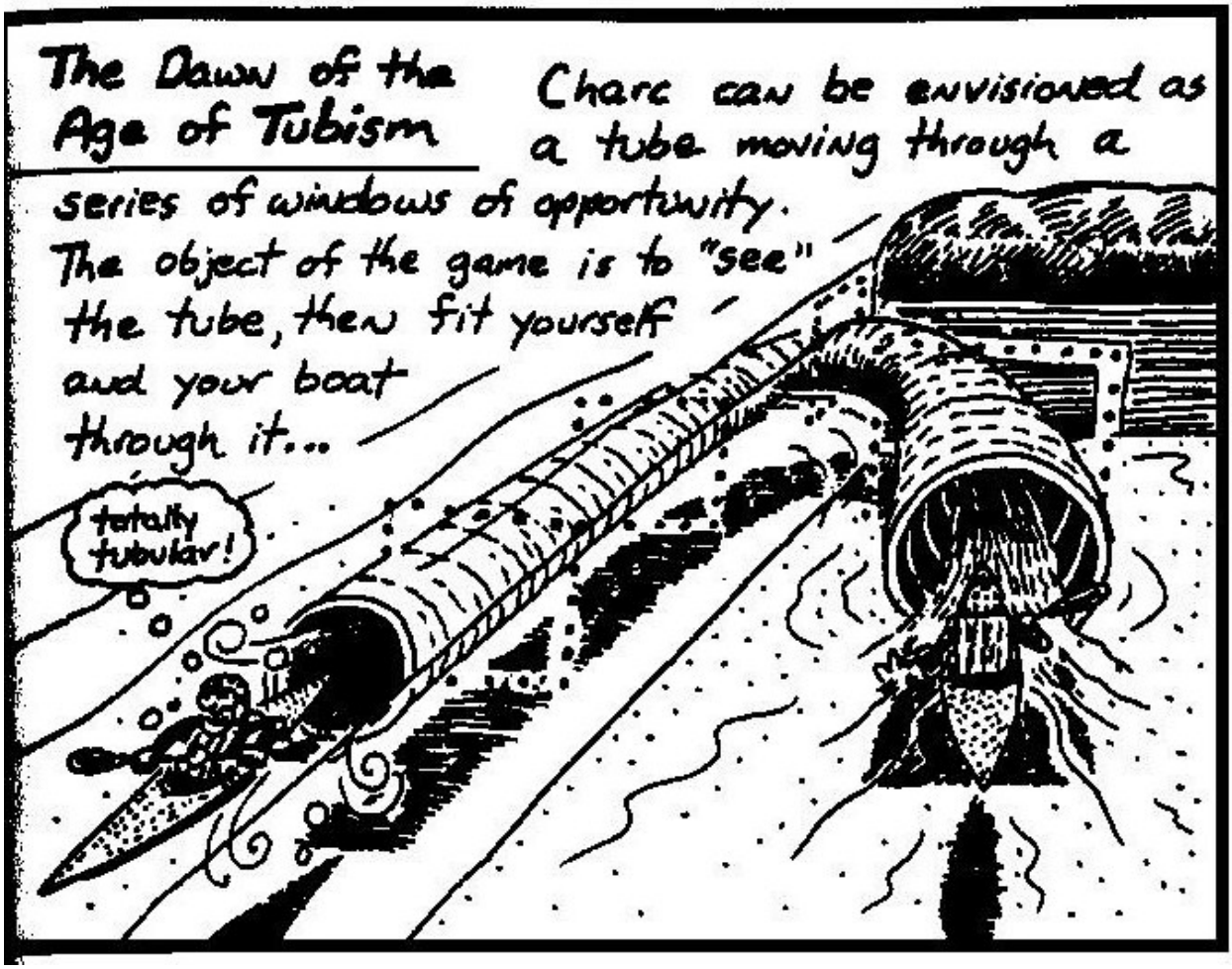

Figure 1.1—*Charc* Diagram (Snyder, 1987, p. x)

Chop:

> "To reduce the volume of any boat by cutting out material from the seam area" (Snyder, 1987, p. 158).

Cluing:

> "Blasting performed with the entire boat submerged in the green water" (Snyder, 1987, p. 158).

Future Water:

"The water you will reach at some future moment while riding a kayak that is spinning" (Snyder, 1987, p. 158).

Grain:

"Direction of the flow of the current. Charcs can be with, or against, or even across the grain" (Snyder, 1987, p.158).

Greenwater:

"The portion of a hole that passes below the foam pile; a.k.a. greenwater slab" (Snyder, 1987, p. 158).

Meltdown:

"To sink below the foam pile of a hole during a downstream run" (Snyder, 1987, p.159).

Mush Move:

"Dropping completely underwater on an eddy line, parallel to the grain, on a downstream run" (Snyder, 1987, p. 159).

Mystery Move:

"A bow and stern squirt done in close succession so that both ends of the boat sink completely underwater almost simultaneously. This is an entry technique for whirlpool rides" (Snyder, 1987, p. 159).

Splat, Rock:

"A squirt done in front if or near a rock so the boat passes over or lands on the rock" (Snyder, 1987, p. 160).

Squeeze:

> "An underwater feature of an eddy line. The area where eddy currents are pitted most directly against the downstream currents" (Snyder , 1987, p. 160). Please refer to Figure 1.2—Squeeze Diagram, for a visual understanding of the squeeze, and the hydro morphology of an eddy.

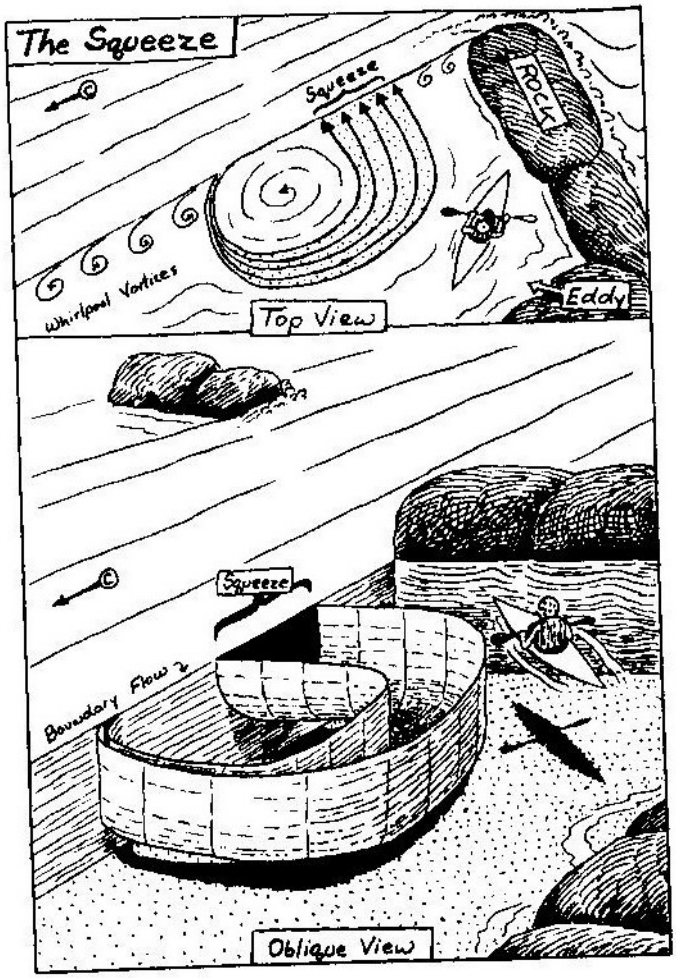

Figure 1.2—Squeeze Diagram (Snyder, 1987, p. 22)

Squirt:

"Sinking all or portions of a boat by using currents and strokes in order to accomplish hot-dog maneuvers" (Snyder, 1987, p. 160).

Squirt boat:

"A low-volume fiberglass kayak designed to have little volume above the water in order to facilitate its submersion in the act of squirting" (Snyder, 1987, p. 160).

Stern squirt:

"A controlled sinkning of a boat's stern in order to stand it on end and perform hot-dog maneuvers" (Snyder, 1987, p. 160).

Terms for the present study.

Catch-22:

A novel by Joseph Heller; also a term to refer to circular logic.

Destination squirting:

When a paddler travels to one specific spot on a river in order to play at a specific feature and do mystery moves. Features are often referred to as a sink spot, or an arena.

Downriver paddling:

Paddling a section of a river between a designated put-in and designated take-out.

Flow:

A state of consciousness marked by total focus and awareness; often athletes generically refer to flow as "being in the zone." Flow usually occurs when the challenge and one's skill level meet.

Mystery Circle:

The continuous flow of mystery moves that occurs when a group of squirt boaters take turns dropping into a seam, or squeeze. The circle flows as *squirtists* drop into the realm, resurface, and re-enter the eddy, while waiting for their next ride.

Mystery Move:

The entire submersion of paddler and kayak underwater, by using the features of a river at a sink spot. Big mystery moves are typically defined as rides when the kayaker is underwater for at least twenty seconds.

Mystery Trance:

The mystery trance is what happens to a squirt boater after many mystery moves. This state is often referred to as the mystery zombie state, and these terms will be interchangeable from this point forward. The zombie state can be best understood by the words of a fifty-one year old male destination paddler with twenty-four years of squirt boating experience. "The mystery zombie state for me is just getting into this flow of mystery moves. I come out of a mystery move and all I want to do is get myself back into position to do again. It is a repeating cycle. I don't usually talk much to the people around me, but sometimes I am still in a trance and can hold conversation. Not a lot of conversation, seeking one mystery move after another."

Mysticism:

This study will restrict mysticism to the definition of mystical states of consciousness as defined by William James. Mystical states are marked by four characteristics. (1) They defy expression. (2) They are full of significance and importance. (3) They cannot be sustained for long. (4) They can be manifested through trance.

Roaming:

Navigating underwater while engaged in a mystery move; resembles flying, by using the squirt boat as a wing, but happens beneath the surface of the water.

Up button:

The purposeful exit from a mystery move; this can be done with style and fluidity or can resemble an out of control mad scramble for one's life.

Squirt Kayaking: Origins and Today

In the early 1970's slalom racing gave birth to squirt boating. As slalom racers looked to decrease the time it took to make big turns, they began slicing the stern under water. The boat then squirted out, much like a seed can squirt out when squeezed between your thumb and finger. Some paddlers started to enjoy the squirt sensation, and the newly dubbed stern squirts began to get more and more vertical. As squirts became more vertical, other moves started to appear such as: *splats*, *enders*, *blasts*, *cartwheels*, and *surfs*. Jim Snyder, Jeff Snyder, and Jesse Whittemore were the early pioneers of squirt kayaking. Currently the sport continues to evolve while, "modern day three-dimensionology has gone far beyond the horizons set by its early pioneers. This is largely due to a catalystic character by the name of Jesse Whittemore. His timely influence on the sport cannot be overestimated. He has spoon-fed the sport from its infant days to present" (Snyder, 1987, p.4).

Boat designs started reflecting the desire to throw the boat around, and as boats became shorter and lower volume; different paddling styles followed. Dave Savage from Downtime Kayaks explains, "The deviant underbelly subculture of whitewater kayaking, squirt boating's deepest roots are set in West Virginia in the 1980's. Paddlers were *splatting* and *cartwheeling* decades before today's plastic freestyle boats. Leading the way was Jim Snyder – the godfather

of squirt – whose radical boat designs and cubic approach to paddling have since been fundamental to squirting" (Savage, 2009). If it was not the birth, then it was definitely the catalyst for play boating and freestyle kayaking. Of course, now modern day freestyle kayaking is marked by aerial maneuvers. Squirting however, has remained lurking in the flow, committed to the river.

Today squirt boats are composite boats that float at about a neutral buoyancy. The boats are extremely low volume in order to help the boat be able to engage river currents below the surface, as well as surface currents. While a number of different designs are available; some are better than others for the many different aspects of squirt boating. Designs and paddling styles have changed over the years, as Dave Savage explains, "But some things are still the same. We're still a tiny subculture of whitewater paddling: some say 'lunatic fringe'. We're still overlooked by the masses, and we're still privileged to enjoy a three-dimensional freedom on the river that eludes the masses" (Savage, 2009).

Squirt boaters, like other whitewater enthusiasts will often run rivers. Putting in at a given point on the river and paddling downstream to a given take-out is what defines the sport for some participants. Others focus on the flat-water discipline, the act of dancing the boat across the surface performing tricks. Freestyle and downriver paddlers alike would acknowledge that the mystery move is what distinguishes squirt boating from other styles.

The marquee move of squirt kayaking and its number one differentiating factor from other forms of kayaking is the mystery move. By using features in the river as well as utilizing the boat design, the paddler and boat are able to descend under water. By engaging the boat, *charcing in*, the boat acts like more of a wing than a boat. The paddler is able to sink boat and paddler to any number of depths from two feet to fifteen feet, dependent on the given sink-spot

or arena. *Charcing in* is done by leaning an edge of the boat into a current feature and using a spinning motion to sink. The river is not two dimensional, but is three dimensional. By *charcing in*, the paddler is able to tap into currents and whirlpools that allow a window into the depths of the river. Some mystery moves are merely quick dunkings, with the paddler's head barely below the surface. Other mystery moves can be very committing, as the paddler descends ten to fifteen feet below the surface. A spinning motion, either clock-wise or counter clock-wise, coupled with proper boat angle will help sink the paddler. It is important to flatten out. To keep the boat level will help smooth out and lengthen the ride. Often these rides will leave the paddler flying around under water for a while; except with a boat for a wing and water for air. Every *squirtist* has their own little frontier, but in general big rides fall between the twenty to thirty second marks. In the end, one thing drives participation in squirt kayaking, the ride. "Squirt boating is a dynamic, athletic art form, lending itself to creativity and exertion. It has as inherent discipline which has a powerful incentive – a good ride" (Snyder, 2001, p. 182).

The sport remains young, still under thirty years old. New frontiers will be crossed in squirt boating and whitewater kayaking in general. The "cutting edge" of the sport will continue to get pushed, as paddlers redefine their sport and themselves. Today there are three squirt boat manufacturers worldwide. Downtime Kayaks, are built by Dave Savage, and is the United Kingdom's and Europe's only squirt boat manufacturer. In Ontario, Murkey Water's Kayaks are built by Ed Skrypkowski. PS Composites, is the only American manufacturer whose boats are built by Paul Schreiner. These boats are often custom ordered, are built with custom graphics, are custom chopped, in order to satisfy the individual paddler's style and purpose.

Rationale, Significance, or Need for the Study

Philosophy, biology, and religion all share a common thread with the importance of water. The relationship water shares with these disciplines and my own empirical observations and experiences with whitewater are behind the rationale and need for this study.

Kayaking, like many sports, arts, and activities, have different forms of participants. The different levels of participation for leisure activities are broken down into three categories: serious leisure, casual leisure, and project-based leisure (Russell, 2005). For the purpose of this study, it will be important to understand serious leisure. The term was first used by sociologist Robert Stebbins (1982) to describe the intermediate area of a person's life that lies between casual leisure and work. "Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (Russell, 2005, p. 62). Because of the specialization of squirt boaters, this study will assume that it is likely that most subjects will fall into the serious leisure category.

Squirt boaters, like many kayakers, seek out a lifestyle that helps perpetuate their involvement in the sport. Lifestyle is, "a distinctive set of shared patterns of tangible behavior that is organized around a set of coherent interests or social contributions or both, that is explained and justified by a set of related values, attitudes, and orientations and that, under certain conditions, becomes the basis for a separate, common identity for its participants" (Russell, 2005, p. 77). Whether influencing ones geographical location or profession serious leisure influences its adherent's lifestyle, and in doing so generates a sense of identity for its participants.

William James (1963) wrote, “Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else. In this, as I have said, it resembles the knowledge given to us in sensation more than that given by conceptual thought” (p. 405). When compared with the words of Jim Snyder, who is attributed with “discovering” squirt boating along with his brother Jeff Snyder and Jesse Whittemore, the rationale for this study should come to light, as both are feel oriented. “Remember a move is a series of feelings and squirt boating is a way of feeling a river. In a squirt boat you are deeply involved in hydrodynamics to such a degree that you should probably be committed. It’s cool to be at one with the currents, but only if it’s the right currents” (2001, p. 184-185). Mysticism, flow, and the mystery move are all deeply personal endeavors that must be experienced and defy expression. All exist in the realm of feel, yet offer significance and importance that extend beyond the experience. Research has been conducted in regards to mysticism, flow, and kayaking, although no research has been done using the squirt population as its sample.

The significance of the study is to broaden the paradigm of mysticism. Mysticism exists in everyday life, and mystical states of consciousness occur regularly throughout waking life. There is a need to question the status of flow theory as existing outside of the paradigm of mysticism. Flow, and the *mystery zombie* and the *mystery trance* state, look to fall under the umbrella of mysticism. Flow and the *mystery zombie* and the *mystery trance* state look to be instances of mysticism.

A need for this study is to understand what the mystery move and squirt kayaking mean to its participants. How do squirt kayakers experience their sport? The need for the study is to better understand how mysticism interacts with the leisure pursuits of recreationists. Has mysticism been written off as a type of taboo from our leisure lives? It is important to

understand mysticism, and its full definition, to better understand the nature of recreation and its importance for recreationists.

It is important to note that this inquiry will use two interludes that are excerpts from Jim Snyder's books *The Squirt Book* and *Squirt Boating and Beyond*. Permission has been granted to use these lengthy pieces; please refer to Appendix A. It is important for this project to draw upon the writings from *The Squirt Book* and *Squirt Boating and Beyond* for a number of reasons. These writings allow insight into the squirt world; the language, the attitude, and the magic. These pieces are written in a way that is not academic, having a fun, even inviting feel to them. Hopefully this style of writing will allow the reader to come on in and play for a while. These pieces look to entice the reader to jump on in, and enjoy the ride. For the ride is what drives *squirtists* and kayakers alike. In a sense, both pieces take the reader on a ride. They offer insight into the essence of the artistic sport that has intoxicated a small number of paddlers with its whirlpools and bubbles. The intoxication only comes with the experience itself, and reading a passage cannot substitute an authentic experience. No, in order to understand what the mystery move is all about you have to *charc in*. All you have to do is *charc in*, and hold your breath. Understanding of the mystery move and its meaning cannot be grasped without spending time underwater, the experience itself is a priori.

Statement of the Problem

This study is a phenomenological inquiry into the realm of squirt kayakers. Through their eyes the study hopes to examine mystical states of consciousness and flow states as reported by squirt kayakers. The mystery move is the marquee move of squirt boating. This entire project is experience driven, and with the respective experience comes the challenge of relating squirt kayaking to someone who has never performed a mystery move. In that regard,

this project is circular and is a type of catch-22, a conundrum that attempts to describe the indescribable.

This project looks to examine the experience of a small group of athletes dedicated to their sport. Across the world people are engaged in a number of obscure sports, and unique hobbies. Many of these activities draw a very small crowd, but one that remains dedicated to their cause. As recreational interests vary among individuals and across the world, there must be some common link that promotes participants to embark on a leisure career. This study looks to redefine what recreation can do for individuals. It seeks to broaden the perspective of mysticism, and seeks to challenge the definition of flow. Mysticism no longer exists only for the mystic, but permeates recreational and leisure pursuits.

Research Questions

RQ1: Do squirt kayakers experience mystical states of consciousness through squirt kayaking, and what does this experience mean?

RQ2: Do squirt kayakers experience flow states of consciousness through squirt kayaking, and how was this experienced?

RQ3: What is the *mystery zombie* or the *mystery trance* state, and how is it experienced?

Delimitations of the Study

Two delimitations appear; surrounding: (1) sampling technique and (2) mysticism. The first delimitation of this study centers on the sampling technique used by the researcher. Online message boards were used in order to attract respondents to the study, as participants responded to a post and were later contacted by telephone. While the online message boards are dedicated to everything squirt related it is quite possible that users of the message board only mark a fraction of the community, and in fact, create a special niche that does not fully represent the

entire population. While the researcher acknowledges that the message boards may or may not fully represent the community, it was necessary to use the boards as a means of communication to reach a small and dispersed population.

Delimitations were placed on the notion of mysticism. Extensive writings have been done on mysticism, but for the purpose of this study the researcher has limited the understanding of mysticism, especially mystical states of consciousness, to the definition presented by William James. James posits four characteristics that accompany mystical states of consciousness which are as follows: *ineffability, noetic quality, transiency*, and *passivity*.

The first mark, *ineffability*, is that mystical states defy expression, "that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced" (James, 1963, p. 380). The second mark, *noetic quality*, is that mystical states are states of knowledge. "They are insights into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time" (James, 1963, p. 380-381). The third mark, *transiency*, concerns the point that these states cannot be sustained for long. While the final mark, *passivity*, is that often "the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power" (James, 1963, p. 381). Often this can manifest itself through trance.

Limitations of the Study

Two limitations appear; surrounding (1) the incommunicable nature of both mysticism and flow (2) the nature of squirt kayaking. The major limitation of this study is the fact that it seeks to have participants describe an indescribable phenomenon. Mystical states of consciousness, flow, and the mystery move all exist in this realm of feeling, one where the direct

experience is paramount. It is the meaning of these experiences that drives participants; it is the experience itself that keeps them coming back for more. But to describe any of the experiences to a "non-experiencer" is near impossible and if attempted will often involve the circular logic that the preface presents.

The squirt community has its roots in mystery and seclusion. Often the features that *squirtists* seek out are off the beaten path. When paddling downstream plastic boater, aka surface boaters, look at squirt boaters with a confused or disinterested look. Other kayakers would float by some of the most epic squirt arenas, or sink-spots, and not even take a second look. *Squirtists* will lurk in inconspicuous places, opting for privacy over showmanship, secrecy over flamboyance. The squirt kayak population is a very small sub-culture of the overall kayak population. Nearly all squirt kayakers also belong to the general kayak population. The small size is largely due to the fact that squirting is a highly specialized form of paddling. Many paddlers do not see the appeal of painfully squeezing into a boat, which offers virtually no escape; a boat that sinks on purpose. The nature of the sport is a limitation of the project as well.

The importance of water can be traced back to some of the world's oldest religious traditions and philosophies. The fact that humans spend most of their existing life as a form of water is very intriguing. Is there some instinctual yearning that squirt boaters are filling by participating in a sport that is guided by this unique form of baptism? This submersion, the mystery move, into the substance that is essentially what humans are seems like much more than sport, art, or another form of recreation. In a way, it is returning to the source. Thus, the purpose of this inquiry; to examine what mystical states of consciousness and flow has to offer as an experience. Mystical experiences just may have their root in mystery.

It is to the mystery that the focus will now turn. The history of the mystery that is, and all the wonders and fascinations that can only be found under the surface of the water. The following passage is the preface to the book *Squirt Boating and Beyond*. It appears in this document as a type of portal; a portal for readers to *charc in* to the realm that so many *squirtists* are drawn to. The passage might allow a reader a glimpse of the magic, and the relationship that kayakers share with the river. It could fall upon blind eyes, but that is okay too.

Interlude 1

Preface to *Squirt Boating and Beyond*, by Jim Snyder

Charc in equals charc out – times *variables*. And these variables are where the history of the mystery resides. These variables are the blend of the infinite detail and the perfect flaw. They are what lead us where we've never been. The variables are ever present and exist on the horizon with ambiguity, indecision,… and magic. They are the river's way of talking to us and teaching us. Our interaction with the river can perceived as a conversation of action. And, as in most conversations, the outcome is a question of style. You have a unique style. But the river keeps hammering it and cajoling it into a better form. Your relationship with the river is an endless continuum of evolution and you must find your pace somehow. Once your pace is found, *everything* is a question of style – even the variables – even the magic.

So what can I tell you about this…style? Nothing. I don't want you to be any different and if you were to become "better," what good would it do? The answer escapes me. But I suggest you do what you can to leave your baggage on shore and lighten up and play a bit. Float for the joy of it. There is so much the river offers in its simplicity and each reward seems customized. It *must* be magic. Are you ready for that? It's your destiny, and how you relate to joy is a question of style. If you are to be liberated, you must be ready for the consequences. Many players arrest their progress because they can't answer the question, "What's next?" And so, many play on the temple steps, but few enter. To attain oneness with funness is inspiring. Don't look here to hone your style. This book is only a tool and a touchstone. Use it to map where you can go and to find the way to power up your charc. This way is clearly through the basics – your "stations." Your stations are a moment of poise as you perch over the end of your boat. No matter if you strive to puree a perfect hole into a fish frappe or just sublimely slide into

the Netherlands of the underworld, your only glimpse of control is through the windows of your stations. If you're not checking your stations, you're getting lost. If you're getting lost, you are flirting with "oblivion charcs" and you won't get there. You will find yourself human and fall short of amphibian status. You want style? You want stations.

Perhaps rodeo boaters will find this book in a search for clues. I do have a suggestion to offer which also applies to squirt boaters. *Good form* is the path to higher energy scenarios. Think of it as valences of energy. You can't make it to the higher levels of energy without a good solid base in the level below. And then you must explore the upper level before you can master it. Upper levels of dynamic interaction are realms of harmony and serendipity. They are a way of agreeing with your environment. They are a blending of wills. To find this realm you need some intangible tools – appetite and tenacity. These tools have nothing to do with ambition or glory, so give up on that. They are born of amphibious yearnings. I think it might be genetic. You could be a merson, a "mer" – person. So don't deny these yearnings. Fulfill them.
What if you find yourself truly amphibious? What could it mean to anyone? It's only meaningful to you. And what it means is Life is Short. I won't tell you to live every minute as if it were your last. I won't tell you that mellow is groovy either. But I will say that life can be wild beyond your imagination. And to find this realm – *beyond* – you must be hungry for it and you must hold to you path with determination. Appetite and tenacity. You can take that from his book perhaps. I hope it serves you well. (2001, p. 2-3)

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

"And maybe I spent too much time inside the water of lakes and rivers. Underwater seemed like the safest church I could go to." – Jim Harrison

Fascination followed after an introduction to the work of William James. James recognized and was able to articulate an experience that transcends so many aspects of our lives without putting any limitations on how it happens, or what it is, but still giving total authority to the experience. The work of Miyahli Csikszentmihalyi does offer more restriction to the experience, but is very similar to James's account. Are these two men describing the same experience, or do they address different phenomenon?

Theoretical Framework

Mysticism.

The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, comprises the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion delivered in Edinburg, Scotland, between 1901-1902 by William James. The book has remained in the canon of important texts of philosophy and religion for over a century. Lectures XVI and XVII are important for this study, as they focus on mysticism. For James it is important to clarify what a mystical state of consciousness is, and therefore; he proposes four characteristics which, when an experience has them, it may be called mystical. These four marks are as follows; first *ineffability*.

> The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than states of

> intellect. No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists. (James, 1963, p. 380)

The second mark is that the mystical state has a *noetic quality*, or exists as a state of knowledge. James (1963) posits that "they are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illumination, revelations, and full of significance and importance" (p. 380). The previous two marks will entitle any state to be called mystical, although two other marks are less sharply marked, but usually found. Thirdly, *transiency* marks a mystical state of consciousness, in that the mystical state cannot be sustained for long. Fourthly, *passivity*, where "the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes held by a superior power. This latter peculiarity connects mystical states with certain definite phenomenon of secondary or alternative personality, such as prophetic speech, automatic writing, or the mediumistic trance" (James, 1963, p. 381).

James (1963) also acknowledges that "the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, as by fixing the attention, or going through certain bodily performances" (p. 381). For the purpose of this study it is important to examine parallels with the mystery move. What we see when a group of paddlers are at a destination sink-spot is the repetitive, flowing continuum known as the mystery circle. The repetition of numerous mysteries coupled with fixing the attention could be acknowledged by James (1963) as some preliminary voluntary operation that could facilitate the oncoming of mystical states. What follows is the *mystery trance* or *mystery zombie* state that the respondents were asked to describe. By fixing the attention and by the repetitiveness of the mystery circle the paddler can help facilitate this level of consciousness, which James acknowledges cannot be sustained for long. Nor can the mystery move be sustained for long. Physically the arena has its own limitations.

Often paddlers will max a sink-spot out, by getting the longest possible ride the arena will allow. Or skill may limit the potential for the biggest ride possible. Skill limitations manifest themselves in the physical and mental states, as often fear plays a large part in our limitations as well. Physiologically humans have limitations on how long they can hold their breath. While David Blaine may be able to hold his breath for 17 minutes and 4.4 seconds, most people fall well short of that mark. (Sharples, 2008) In fact, most of the longest documented mystery moves fall between the twenty-five to thirty-five second range. While the individual move has its physical, skill-oriented, mental, and physiological limitations, what limits the *trance* or *zombie* state?

A parallel between James' second mark and the mystery move can also be made. At what point, if ever, does a mystery move offer insight into depths of truth? Are mysteries, or their associated *trance* and *zombie* states, illuminations, revelations, or full of significance and importance? On the surface it would appear not, but when does fun become inspiring? When does happiness transcend fun and reach into the realm of personal revelation? Is there significance and importance in the twenty seconds spent in the champagne world, with the intoxicating bubbles of air surrounding us that do little for an appetite for oxygen? Maybe these questions will be answered through this study, or maybe these questions will never be answered. Maybe they do not even matter, and maybe they do. "The mystery of caring unfolds the flower of experience and, eventually, lets it pass away. The mystery endures, the river endures – we don't. If you really know how to spend time, you will never have enough. This is the only true blessing life gives – the fact that all this really matters. It's your charc, don't waste it" (Snyder, 2001, p.192). But the fact that people continue to squirt, and continue to seek out a lifestyle that promotes participation in this sport is a testimony of its importance for its participants.

Finally we reach James' most important mark of the mystical state and its parallel with the mystery move, the fact that each defies expression. As this research will likely show, describing the mystery move is a catch-22, as respondents have basically been asked to describe the indescribable. Where the parallel is clear is that each is more like a state of feeling than a state of intellect. The mystery exists in the realm of feel, like mysticism.

Flow.

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) quickly defines flow as "the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.36). For Csikszentmihalyi, activities conducive to flow, more often than not, must be *autotelic*, in that the person often seeks the activity for itself and not some extrinsic reward. The activity offers intrinsic motivation and satisfaction as Csikszentmihalyi (1975) explains:

> In many cases, the importance of this experience is blurred by what appears to be the external goals of the activity – the painting that the artist wants to create, the theory that the scientist strives to prove, or the grace of God that the mystic seeks to attain. On a closer look, these goals lose their substance and reveal themselves as mere tokens that justify the activity by giving it direction and determining rules of action. But the doing is the thing. (p.37)

It is the action itself that holds the key to unlock the door of flow. Csikszentmihalyi offers four main elements of the flow experience, with the most prominent being that flow is the merging of action and awareness. "A person in flow has no dualistic perspective: he is aware of his actions but not of the awareness itself" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 38). It should be pointed out that flow states cannot be sustained for long without at least momentary interruptions. This heightened sense of consciousness where awareness and action merge can only last for short

periods of time. For action and awareness to merge the task must be within one's ability, and the activity must have clearly established rules for action. "This merging of action and awareness is made possible by a second characteristic of flow experiences: a centering of attention on a limited stimulus field… Ideally, flow is the result of pure involvement, without any consideration about results" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 40). Pure involvement allows the precipitation of flow states. Results become irrelevant as the action itself becomes paramount. Interestingly enough, the results produced from flow states seem to be at the upper end of one's ability, and at times even exceed one's typical ability.

Yet another characteristic of flow is a type of transcendence; "a third characteristic of flow experiences has been variously described as 'loss of ego,' 'self-forgetfulness,' 'loss of self-consciousness,' and even 'transcendence of individuality,' and 'fusion with the world'" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 42). Through total immersion, focused attention, and the blending of action and awareness one loses sense of the self-construct. Does one lose the self, or transcend the self? The self is left behind as a higher level of consciousness is reached. The entire model of flow builds upon itself and cannot exist without all the aspects. It is energy driven. The interaction of total immersion, attention, and the blending of action and awareness blends yielding this experience, this flow. Often another perspective helps to shed light on a topic as Snyder (2001) explains:

> Good form is the path to higher energy scenarios. Think of it as valences of energy. You can't make it to the higher levels without a solid base in the level below. And you must explore the upper level before you can master it. Upper levels of dynamic interaction are realms of harmony and serendipity. They are a

> way of agreeing with your environment. They are a blending of wills. To find this realm you need some intangible tools – appetite and tenacity. (p. 3)

This 'blending of wills' marks an element of the flow experience, allowing the individual to reach upper levels of dynamic interaction.

The final characteristic of flow experiences is their *autotelic* nature, in that flow states need no goals or rewards external to the activity. "You don't conquer anything except things in yourself… The act of writing justifies poetry. Climbing is the same: recognizing you are a flow. The purpose of the flow is to keep on flowing, not looking for a peak or utopia but staying in the flow. It is not a moving up but a continuous flowing; you move up only to keep the flow going" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.47). The flow experience may be a higher level of consciousness, but it is not a means to an end, rather the end itself. Athletes and artists will often become 'better' as a result of immersion in an activity, but that results from the many hours dedicated to the activity. This improvement is just extra baggage to the flow experience as what is important is the continuum of flow. The manifestation of flow can be seen through an individual's style. Here a return to the words of Jim Snyder (2001) will help further illustrate our point:

> So what can I tell you about this…style? Nothing. I don't want you to be any different and if you were to become "better," what good would it do? The answer escapes me. But I suggest you do what you can to leave your baggage on shore and lighten up and play a bit. Float for the joy of it. There is so much the river offers in its simplicity and each reward seems customized. It *must* be magic. Are you ready for that? It's your destiny, and how you relate to joy is a question of style. If you are to be liberated, you must be ready for the consequences. Many players arrest their progress because they can't answer the question, "What's

> next?" And so, many play on the temple steps, but few enter. To attain oneness with funness is inspiring. (p. 2)

Becoming 'better' is not the end, but merely a product of immersion. To get 'better' is not the goal, only to remain in the flow. Flow marks liberation, as we have seen it is liberation from the self, or transcendence of self. The question of 'What's next?' is irrelevant. What is paramount is the flow… and the fun. Another vital element to the flow experience is happiness.

Before further developing aspects of flow it is important to understand how flow happens. For Csikszentmihalyi Flow can be illustrated by the diagram below. See Figure 2.1 – The Flow Model. Figure 2.1 represents a specific activity. The two most important dimensions of the experience, challenges and skill, are represented on the two axes of the diagram. The letter A represents our participator. Early in the activity (A1) A is in the flow state as the challenges and skill level correlate. As A remains a participator in the activity A's skill increases, but will be bored if the challenges do not increase with A's skill level (A2). Conversely, if A's skill level does not increase, but the challenges do, then A will end be filled with anxiety (A3). As skill progresses and challenges increase A will remain in flow (A4) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 75). The flow experience is a dynamic model, allowing individuals to flourish and develop in their respective pursuits. With no limiting factors "it is this dynamic feature that explains why flow activities lead to growth and discovery. One cannot enjoy doing the same thing at the same level for long. We grow either bored or frustrated; and then the desire to enjoy ourselves again pushes us to stretch our skills, or to discover new opportunities for using them" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 75). It should be noted that just because one's skill correlates with the challenges at hand flow does not always follow. Other factors are present in order for flow to be achieved, especially enjoyment and happiness.

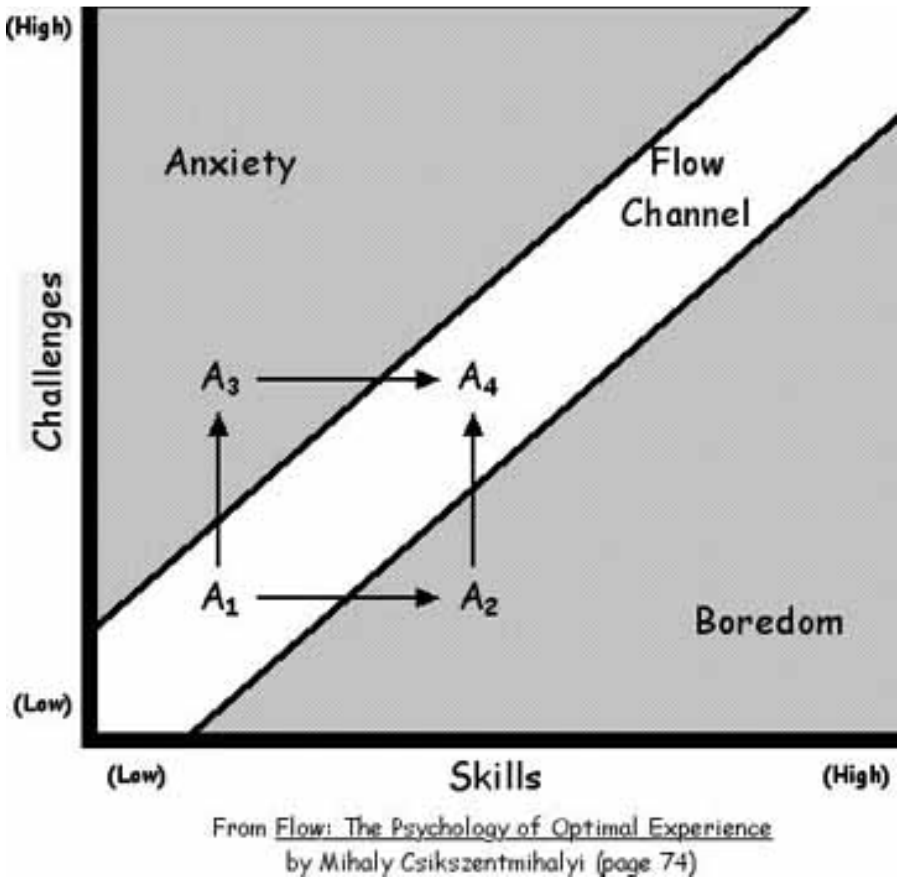

Figure 2.1 – Flow Model (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 74)

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) notes that flow, optimal experience, happens in many different mediums, but throughout all the differences in activities there remains one constant, fun. The phenomenology of enjoyment is essential to the flow experience. First, the activity must be challenging that requires some skill. It is meaningless when the individual does not have the right skills, or it is not challenging. Enjoyment usually occurs when tasks have a chance of completion. "Enjoyment comes at a very specific point: whenever the opportunities for action perceived by the individual are equal to his or her capabilities" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 52).

Second, for enjoyment to occur we must be able to concentrate on what we are doing, with the merging of action and awareness. This merge allows one to act with a deep but effortless involvement that removes one from awareness of the everyday worries and feedback of everyday life.

Third and fourth, concentration is usually possible because the task undertaken has clear goals and provides immediate feedback. Because of the nature of flow, in that what is truly important is to remain in flow, the kind of feedback itself is often unimportant. The feedback is important because it is a sign of attaining a goal (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 57). Fifth, enjoyable activities require concentration on the task at hand. One's focus is important and central to the flow experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) points out that "what is even more important is that only a very select range of information can be allowed into awareness" (1990, p. 58). Sixth, enjoyable activities and flow have this element of the paradox of control. Typically a sense of control is present throughout enjoyment and flow. "What people enjoy is not the sense of being in control, but the sense of exercising control in difficult situations" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 61). Seventh, the loss of self-consciousness is present.

> And being able to forget who we are seems to be very enjoyable. When not preoccupied with ourselves, we actually have a chance to expand the concept of who we are. Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward. This feeling is not just a fancy of the imagination, but it based on a concrete experience of close interaction with some Other, an interaction that produces a rare sense of unity with these usually foreign entities. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 64)

Here it is appropriate to return to a passage by Snyder. "Upper levels of dynamic interaction are realms of harmony and serendipity. They are a way of agreeing with your environment. They are a blending of wills" (Snyder, 2001, p. 3). This blending of wills is a real system for Csikszentmihalyi (1990) that gets its energy from the person's attention.

> One could treat these testimonials as poetic metaphors and leave them at that. But it is important to realize that they refer to experiences that are just as real as being hungry, or as concrete as bumping into a wall. *There is nothing mysterious or mystical about them*. When a person invests all her psychic energy into an interaction – whether it is with another person, a boat, a mountain, or a piece of music – she in effect becomes a part of a system of action greater than what the individual self had been before. This system takes its form from the rules of the activity; *its energy comes from the person's attention.* But it is a real system – subjectively as real as being part of a family, a corporation, or a team – and the self that is part of it expands its boundaries and becomes more complex than what it had been. (p. 65)

Flow is a many faceted experience that may be some kind of escape that is made possible by this blend; a blend that can be very disorienting as far as time. Finally, the sense of the duration of time is altered. Or what James Harrison (1978) refers to as continuous time, "a wonderful illusion for those addicted to notions of yesterday, right now, and tomorrow" (p. 147).

The eight components of the phenomenology of enjoyment help create happiness, fun, and flow. "Enjoyment, as we have seen, does not depend on what you do, but rather how you do it" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.99). A piece of fiction will further illustrate the importance of the style of one's actions:

> The most important thing in life is style. That is, the style of one's existence – the characteristic mode of one's actions – is basically, ultimately what matters. For if man defines himself by doing, then style becomes doubly definitive because style describes the doing." Amanda expounded upon this at some length. "The point is this," she said eventually. "*Happiness is a learned condition*. And since it is learned and self-generating, it does not depend on external circumstances for its perpetuation. This throws a very ironic light on content. And underscores the primacy of style." After nearly an hour's monologue, she summed it up by remarking, "It is content, or rather the consciousness of content, that fills the void. But the mere presence of content is not enough. It is style that gives content the capacity to absorb us; it is style that makes us care. (Robbins, 1971, p.12)

While happiness may be a learned condition, in that squirt kayaking makes one happy, there is more to the story. What defines the action? Style becomes important as it describes the doing. As this inquiry has attempted to show, the action is paramount for mysticism or flow. It not only acts as a medium for the experience, but gives it authority. The mystery is merely the content, but style allows the mystery move "the capacity to absorb us; it is style that makes us care."

Related Literature to the Topic

Jackson (2009), author of "Mystery Moves: Squirt Boaters are Dialed into the Immanence of the Way," makes parallels between the squirt boater and the Taoist, one who practices the Taoist philosophy, especially between the words of Jim Snyder and Lao-Tzu. Jackson (2009) claims *The Squirt Book* to be an unintentional river translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. The *Tao Te Ching* is the fundamental text for Taoism, written by Lao-Tzu sometime

during the 6th century. The similarities between the two texts are striking, as many of their guiding principles, such as approach humility, and control, are very similar.

Jackson (2009) points out that "Snyder's guiding philosophy is what he calls charc; the angle of one's approach to the current dictates the outcome. Charge in and we will be rejected; look at the current and work with it, and we find the 'power to apprehend the slipperiness of freedom for those few fleeting moments and to let it soak into our souls'" (2009, p1.). Similarly, "the *Tao* writes of this, but refers to an approach towards life: *Rushing into action you fail. Trying to grasp things, you lose them. Forcing a project to completion, you lose what is almost ripe.* Ultimately, squirting is about humility and respect" (Jackson, 2009, p. 1). The similarities continue for Jackson (2009) as he notes that "Snyder writes, 'Our attitudes are putty in the hands of the river… almost everyone went through the stage of being an expert-turned-beginner. Expertise re-emerges as an ability to learn, to listen to the river and our friends.' While Lao-Tzu wrote simply: *All streams flow to the sea. Because it is lower than they are. Humility gives us power"* (Jackson, 2009, p. 1).

The approach of the *squirtist* towards the river, life, and the universe mirrors that of the Taoist in many ways. The writing of Snyder and Lao-Tzu continue to have similarities. "'The best way to affect the outcome of an event is through its beginning.' (Snyder) *The master takes action, By letting things take their course. He simply reminds people, Of who they have always been* (Loa-Tzu)"(Jackson, 2009, p. 1).

Robert Orsi's (1997) article, "Everyday miracles: The study of lived religions" is an examination of what religion is, and looks to blur the definition of religion. Orsi (1997) is especially concerned with how people experience religion in their daily lives. It is important for

Orsi (1997) to acknowledge that lived religions do not separate the sacred and the profane, but rather religion exists where the sacred and the profane intersect.

> Nor can 'religion' be separated from the material circumstances in which specific instances of religious imagination and behavior arise and to which they respond. 'Lived religion' is an awkward neologism, but I like it because it recalls the phrase 'lived experience' used by existentialists for men and women 'everywhere *where (they are),*' as Sartre has written, 'at…work, in (their) home(s), in the street.' Workplaces, homes, and streets – as well as churches, temples, shrines, class meetings, and other more immediately recognizable sites of religious activity – are the places where humans make something of the worlds they have found themselves thrown into, and, in turn, it is through these subtle, intimate, quotidian actions on the world that meanings are made, known, and verified. 'Religion' is best approached, according to scholars in this collection, by meeting men and women at this daily task, in all the spaces of their experience… Religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life. (Orsi, 1997, p. 7)

Religion does not happen only in the sacred realm, but happens in the profane realm as well. Lived religion cannot be segregated into different aspects of one's life, but rather permeates all aspects of life. It is the practitioner who is able to erase the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, as a more dynamic integration of religion and experience is lived.

Taylor (2007) also looks to rework the conventional understanding of religion and ultimately discern the question: "Where does religion end and phenomena that are not religious

begin?" Taylor's (2007) interest lies where spirituality, nature, outdoor experience, and lived practice intersect, as he adopts two closely related dimensions of 'nature' religions.

1. A perception that nature is sacred (in some way) and worthy of reverent care. Such perception is usually expressed using religious terminology and metaphors, and often is reflected in practical, ethical behavior. Conversely, damaging nature is considered to be an unethical and desecrating act.
2. Feelings of belonging and connection to the earth – of being bound to and dependent upon the earth's living systems. Such feelings and perceptions are closely connected to beliefs in which the purpose of life is understood to foster positive transformation, well-being, and healing, for the individual persona as well as for society and the natural world. (p.867)

Taylor (2007) acts as the preface for three separate studies on lived religion. The common link between the three studies is the aquatic nature of them. It will be important to revisit one of those aquatic based studies.

Sanford's (2007) examination of whitewater kayaking as a religious experience looks to take a different approach in regards to religion, but building upon the work of Taylor (2007). Instead of 'fitting' whitewater kayaking into the molds of what we call religious, Sanford (2007) looks to challenge what we call religious by 'fitting' religious around the whitewater kayaking experience. Sanford (2007) also hopes through this approach an appropriate environmental ethic will emerge. This approach leads Sanford (2007) to acknowledge the body as the locus and medium of the religious experience. "In whitewater kayaking, ritual is performance, the lived practice in the water, and the physical negotiation of the frightening and the powerful that has largely been erased from our religious lives. And it is precisely in negotiating this juncture that

paddling becomes a religious performance and binds the paddler to the sacred as manifest in the natural world" (Sanford, 2007, p. 889). Sanford (2007) identifies whitewater kayaking as training in mindfulness, and identifies it as a religious experience on the water, largely through the following themes: intimate connection with immensity or perceiving something greater than the self, mindfulness, and risk and fear. For Sanford (2007) whitewater kayaking constitutes a religious experience because, "the paddler does not merely consider these ideas but performs them… As religious experience, paddling is an orthopraxy, in which correct performance of these ideas embodies or manifests the religious experience" (p. 881).

For Sanford (2007) it is the everyday practice that constitutes whitewater kayaking a religious experience; an experience that is largely built upon the relationship with the water. "The immersion – even while remaining in the boat – leads to a sense of closeness if not relationship with the water, and this connection can invoke the feeling of connection with and participation in something far greater than oneself" (Sanford, 2007, p.882). The immersion is important for Sanford as it circles back to this question – "How far must one go to experience the sublime?" To experience the sublime deals with the paradox of control. "The thin line, or luminal realm, between control and chaos accentuates the boater's awareness of the river's often terrifying power" (Sanford, 2007, p. 884). For Snyder, and the *squirtist*, the paradox of control is dealt with through one's *charc*. "Let me harp on the power of the charc. If your charc lacks power, as they all do, think about it. It must be a balanced affair. Not too timid, not too pushy. Hunt the ride" (Snyder, 2001, p. 192).

Of the ideas presented by Sanford (2007), some are strikingly similar to those ideas of Jim Snyder. Sanford (2007) acknowledges "the whitewater experience – with its inherent risk – embodies the notion that experience of the sacred is dangerous, or at least frightening,

proposition. God or deities may or may not be your friend" (Sanford, 2007, p.884). Snyder (2001) remarks on this same point, "it's just you and the river, and the river doesn't care a fig about you or the yak you rode in on. So, *you* must. The river is stark, lonely, and above all, just" (p. 192). The River has no intent or malice, but rather is what it is. It is neither good nor bad, neither good nor evil. It just flows downstream. "But there's never any malice in the water's action. It just is, and it can't be anything different. If you find yourself wishing it were something different, you have more to learn" (Ammons, 1999, p.259).

For Sanford (2007) the confluence of emotion, performance, and ritual helps to understand how whitewater kayaking can be religious. Sacredness is not an inherent quality in an object or activity, but rather is infused by the participant. One's attitude or perception determines whether a ritual to be sacred or not (Sanford, 2007, p. 888). Bread is sacred because the Christian says it represents the body of Christ, just as the river is sacred because the paddler says it is so. As the transition is made from mysticism and religion towards flow, the work of Maslow (1964) will be helpful.

Maslow (1964) identifies peak-experiences, which is essentially what Csikszentmihalyi identifies as flow. Practically everything that happens in the peak-experiences, naturalistic though they are, could be listed under the headings of religious happenings, or indeed have been in the past considered to be only religious experiences. The following lists will present characteristics of peak-experiences that are of interest to the present study:

1. For instance, it is quite characteristic in peak-experiences that the whole universe is perceived as an integrated and unified whole.

2. In the cognition that comes in peak-experiences, characteristically the precept is exclusively and fully attended to. That is, there is tremendous concentration of a kind which does not normally occur.

3. The cognition of being (B-cognition) that occurs in peak-experiences tends to perceive external objects, the world, and individual people as more detached from human concerns.
4. To say this in a different way, perception in the peak-experiences can be relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless, unselfish. It can come closer to being unmotivated, impersonal, desire-less, detached, not needing or wishing. Which is to say, it becomes more object-centered than ego-centered.
5. The peak-experience is felt as a self-validating, self-justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it. It is felt to be a highly valuable – even uniquely valuable – experience, so great an experience sometimes that even to justify it takes away from its dignity and worth.
6. Recognizing these experiences as end-experiences rather than as means-experiences makes another point.
7. In the peak-experience there is a very characteristic disorientation in time and space, or even the lack of consciousness of time and space.
8. The world is accepted. (Maslow, 1964, p. 59-63)

Maslow (1964) continues, but the previous eight listings are the most relevant to this study. Whether Maslow's (1964) peak-experiences are religious or are analogous to flow, their content is very similar:

> These experiences can come from different sources, but their content may be considered to be very similar. To sum it up, from this point of view, the two religions of mankind tend to be the peakers and the non-peakers, that is to say, those who have private, personal, transcendent, core-religious experiences easily and often and who accept them and make use of them, and, on the other hand, those who have never had them or who repress or suppress them and who, therefore, cannot make use of them for their personal therapy, personal growth, or personal fulfillment. (Maslow, 1964, p. 29)

Jones, et al (2000), set out to validate flow theory in an on-site whitewater kayaking setting. By having kayakers respond at eight different intervals down the Cheat River in West Virginia, the research was able to examine the four-channel model of flow. While the research validated flow theory, it did show that both flow and anxiety are experienced positively in the whitewater setting. Residual effects of flow were shown to exist, although the researchers may account that to reflecting upon previous flow experiences. Either way, participants were able to, in a sense, take flow with them.

Kinney (1997) conducted an ethnographic study on class V whitewater paddlers in western North Carolina and West Virginia using in-depth interviewing and observation. Ideals from anthropology, recreation, and tourism were synthesized to examine whitewater boating. The development of individual identity and group formation were examined within the realm of outdoor recreation. The author also integrated theories concerning “rites of passage” as outlined by Victor Turner. The findings of this research hope to examine the following issues: 1) reasons study participants engage class V whitewater, 2) define elements participants identify as

important to their paddling experience, and 3) to summarize the social and environmental impacts that whitewater kayakers have on the resources they use. (Kinney, 1997, p. 2)

Kinney (1997) developed a model of eight aspects that create the boating experience and that dictate whether it will be an extraordinary or unsatisfactory experience. It should be noted that this is a subjective dynamic phenomenon that is constantly in flux. As Kinney (1997) notes, "to some the end result may not be nearly as important as the process of weaving the experience" (1997, p. 83). The eight aspects are as follows: individual (freedom, exercise, self-reliance), setting (distance, accessibility, type of river), nature (pollution, aesthetics, wilderness), difficulty (challenge, pushing limits, safety), adventure (traveling new places, learning/teaching, excitement), technical (skills/technique, equipment, river reading), social community, familiarity, conversation), and water (spiritual, magical, river=life). Kinney (1997) builds upon each aspect, but for the present inquiry we will further examine Kinney's last aspect, water.

Although Kinney's (1997) research instrument did not reference the metaphysical characteristics of the river, over half the respondents remarked spontaneously on this point. Many responded that there is a magical or spiritual aspect to the river. What follows are many of their ideas and beliefs:

1. The outdoors is where I feel God. It took me several years to feel this, but I now feel as if the river is my church.
2. Being on the river is it. The river is life.
3. The magic comes from the link between the river, the boat, and me.
4. Kayaking is as close as I can come to being one with the water.
5. Paddling is the ability to intimately play with a force of nature, to be in the middle of chaos and yet find freedom with a single stroke.

6. Paddling is moving through mother earth on her veins.
7. There is something magical about water.
8. Rivers are the property of fish. That is the way it should be. That should be the status quo.
9. None of this religious Zen stuff for me, the river is similar to a Lewis and Clark expedition, the adventure, the uncertainty of life and death. (Kinney, 1997, p. 90)

Even the last respondent's answer could be fit into some religious perspectives on what it means to experience the divine, such as Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, which equates the sacred with a terrifying yet fascinating mystery. Sanford (2007) explains Otto's belief:

> The element of risk and danger is an essential part of Otto's sacred encounter, whether in the context of traditional religious experience or kayaking. Otto's understanding of religion acknowledges the power and intensity – and thus the inherent danger – within the sacred encounter. For some kayakers, this encounter with the sacred can be a desired goal, an experience mediated by the river. (Sanford, 2007, p. 884)

This interaction is important as it marks a relationship with risk and danger. A relationship that is missing from the lives of most people, in this respect it is an escape from the mundane lives that lack the interaction with risk and danger. While about half of the respondents remarked upon the magical or spiritual aspect of the river, nearly all commented on the escape from daily life.

Time on the water is time away from daily life. This point is made by the following comments. "Paddling is an escape from your everyday life, from your job and from your stress… Paddling provides focus, the ability to forget about everything else. It develops you as a person and envelopes you" (Kinney, 1997, p. 91). This escape becomes a common thread linking paddlers together as they stretch the fabric of their daily lives. Aldous Huxley (1954) commented on the root of this same notion of escape in *The Doors of Perception*. "That humanity at large will ever be able to dispense with artificial paradises seems very unlikely. Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor, and limited, that the urge to escape… is and has always been one of the principle appetites of the soul" (p. 62). Kayaking fills the appetite of the soul, offering escape, bringing one to the artificial paradise that Huxley speaks of. While his words apply here, the paradise offered through kayaking is not in any way artificial, but rather is as real as a mystical state of consciousness, a cheeseburger, or a screwdriver.

Heintzman (2003) begins by defining spiritual. According to Principe (1983) "the English word 'spirituality' comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning 'breath of life' and can be traced to the Greek word *pneuma*, which is used in the New Testament to describe a person's spirit guided by God's spirit (Heintzman, 2003, p. 5). While modern researchers in the field of spirituality let participants define the term, "today, spirituality is often defined as 'a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be Ultimate'" (Heintzman, 2003, p.5). Factors that influence spiritual benefits from wilderness experiences include: sharing the experience with a group, a feeling of being there, and moments of solitude.

Heintzman's inquiry (2008) is an analysis of recent studies that hopes to explain the relationship between nature-based recreation and spirituality. Heintzman (2008) recognized three factors that help build the spiritual experience or transcendental experience, and uses them to build a model of nature-based recreation and spirituality. The three factors are: personal, setting, and recreation. Heintzman (2008) explains, "Personal factors include personal history, current circumstances, attitude, and motivation. Setting factors include nature and being away to a different environment. Why nature is important to spirituality varies amongst individuals. Recreation factors include activity, solitude, and group experiences" (p. 2). The model helps identify a number of factors that contribute to a participant's spiritual experience through nature-based activities and leads Heintzman to posit nine implications when planning for spiritual outcomes; which seems like a paradox. How is one supposed to plan for a spiritual experience? The considerations are as follows:

> Be sensitive to personal histories, circumstances, and contexts. Help participants develop an attitude characterized by openness and receptivity. Provide opportunity for interaction and immersion in nature. Introduce participants to settings different from everyday world (being away). Integrate structured and unstructured times of solitude. Provide a variety of social settings. Balance solitude and social interaction. Consider holistic impact of program components. Recognize that the type and degree of spiritual outcomes will vary amongst participants. (Heintzman, 2008, p. 7)

Planning spiritual experiences seems to degrade from the experience. Freedom and spontaneity seems like a recipe for spirituality. Spiritual experiences are freedom oriented, not planned. The

authenticity of the experience does not seem as authentic if it is planned. Something so personal should not need an outline.

Heintzman (2006) examined the spiritual benefits of a men's only canoe journey into the remote wilderness. Stringer and MacAvoy (1992) recognized that wilderness experiences were conducive to spiritual development; thus recognizing two major factors that influence the spiritual experience. For the purpose of this study the second factor is interesting in that being in a wilderness environment which did not have the constraints and responsibilities of the everyday world was helpful in facilitating a spiritual experience. Heintzman (2006) also looks to build upon the research of Fox (1997) who conducted similar studies with an all-female group, with his all-male sample group. The research shows that the wilderness and nature setting provides a helpful setting for spiritual development and growth. Respondents claimed the wilderness setting provided an escape from daily life. This finding is in line with the research of Stringer and MacAvoy (1992) who found that "the operative factor for some participants was being in a different environment, free from normal constraints on time and energy, as to being necessarily in a wilderness environment" (Heintzman, 2006, p.223).

For Hood (1977), an important aspect of eliciting mystical experiences in a semi-structured nature experience is the element of stress. Stress is an important aspect of mysticism and flow that will require further attention. Hood (1977) recognized two types of stress: anticipatory and setting. Anticipatory stress is the stress a participant feels in anticipation of a given event. Setting stress is the stress a participant fells during a given event. "It was specifically predicted that in a natural context of semi-structured stressful nature experiences persons *not* anticipating stress would score significantly higher on a measure of reported mystical experience than persons anticipating stress" (Hood, 1977, p.157). Hood (1977)

recognized that stress played an important role in eliciting mysticism, and also recognized that researching mystical states of consciousness may be easier than previously thought.

Conclusions

It is imperative before moving on that an understanding of mysticism and flow is reached. Each state of consciousness defies expression, and exists in the realm of feel. Both experiences deal with a distorted sense of time. Each state of consciousness deals with an element of transcendence. This is manifested by a feeling of being held by a superior power, or by losing awareness of oneself. Mystical states offer insight into depths of truths, while flow experiences often leave the person's sense of self stronger after the sense of self reappears. Each experience has residual effects that can influence the person's life. While these similarities can be drawn between the two states there are differences. These two elements deal with concentration and control. Concentration is a central element of flow. It could be argued that concentration is the core aspect of flow, and that flow is merely a heightened sense of concentration; one that allows a person to perform at a remarkable level. While James would likely acknowledge that concentration could facilitate the oncoming of a mystical state, it is not recognized as a fundamental characteristic of the experience.

Control marks another difference between mysticism and flow. Mystical states of consciousness often leave one with the feeling as if their own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes held by a superior power. In a sense, this marks the absence of control. Conversely, flow experiences leave a person with the feeling that the outcomes of the activity are under their own control. Through their actions they control the outcomes of the given activity, whether it is through the medium of art, sport, or work.

What begins to surface is the issue of control, or in this case the paradox of control. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) points out, "What people enjoy is not the sense of being in control, but the sense of exercising control in difficult situations" (p. 99). While kayaking, the paddler exercises a certain amount of control. The paddler is (or attempts to be) in control of his craft, and is in control of the decisions made on the water. But ultimately the river is in control. "You must dominate the boat while submitting to the river," (Snyder, 2001, p. 185) hence the paradox of control. But the river is not aware of the control, as the river just is. It is indifferent to paddlers, to everything. The river just keeps flowing downstream, endlessly driven, and always connected to its source. The river is neither good nor bad, as it cannot be qualified in any type of way, but the river is always in control. As kayakers interact with the river it is in many ways a selfish interaction, driven by fun and the search for a 'sweet' ride. Snyder (2001) explains:

> How sweet can a charc be? How earnest and pure? As sweet as air after an unsettling Mystery? As sweet as clean waters, bright sun, and sparkling serendiposity? I tell you sweetness is unlimited but personal. At least it **can** be known. So pursue it doggedly. This doesn't mean the river won't betray your sweet ambitions and martyr you, vanishing you from the earth forever in a moment. But it does mean you can reach the highest highs of amphibiosity and "mer"ciful grace. You can't guarantee your safety, and you can't fully succumb to the Trance, but you can fly and blend, if only for moments. And the shape of the ride will shape your soul. Your intent will become manifest. What shape will all this take? I would say it's a question of… style. I trust it will be a sweet style. I know it will be filled with all the implications of a soberingly intoxicating world of bubbles – the Champagne World. Remember the **real** squirt realm is one of

> **feel**. This is all you need to know. Feeling after feeling, time after time, you must trust yourself to unleash your perspective on the awesome. Are you ready for this kind of ride? I think so. (p. 190)

It is these moments of the blend that helps drive the sport, and is at the essence of the paradox of control. While never in control of the river the paddler seeks the 'blending of wills' to be a part of its flow. And with that, in many cases, follows the paddler's flow. To revisit the work of Sanford (2007) will further develop these ideas, while focusing on whitewater kayaking as a religious experience:

> Here it becomes appropriate to acknowledge the literal translation of the word religion: "to bind back." In whitewater kayaking, ritual is the performance, the lived practice in the water, and the physical negotiation of the frightening and the powerful that has largely been erased from our religious lives. And it is precisely in negotiating this juncture that paddling becomes a religious performance and binds the paddler to the sacred as manifest in the natural world. (p. 889)

The river then stands as the physical manifestation of the Divine, or the Sacred. Through squirt boating kayakers immerse themselves in the Sacred, making the experience tangible, and places the divine presence in the physical realm. "The concept of drowning in the love of the divine—always struck me as rich and evokes the question: what risks are necessary to 'plumb the depths,' or to experience the sublime? How far must one go" (Sanford, 2007, p. 889)? The answers to these questions remain personal, and will vary greatly between individuals. The answers do rely on two factors that were acknowledged by Snyder concerning the mystery move: appetite and tenacity. "Rudolph Otto's description of the divine as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that terrific and unknowable mystery, is apt when applied to whitewater kayaking, which seems to

illustrate well Otto's equation of the sacred with terrifying yet fascinating mystery" (Sanford, 2007, p.889). The mystery, as a kayaking move and as a characteristic of the Sacred, both have a degree of uncertainty; requiring those who seek it to have the appetite and tenacity (refer to interlude I) for the unknown, for what lies beyond, or within.

This study seeks to determine whether mystical states of consciousness and flow states are describing the same phenomenon. An understanding of each must be reached before moving on, especially as each relates to the whitewater world of squirt boating. It seems likely that James would recognize flow as a mystical state, but would Csikszentmihalyi recognize mysticism as a flow state? This study hopes to answer this question.

Chapter 3: Methodology

"*Turn on, tune in, and drop out*." – Dr. Timothy Leary

This study is a phenomenological inquiry that uses telephone interviews, guided by an original questionnaire, to determine if (and if so, how?) squirt kayakers experience mystical states of consciousness or flow states of consciousness through whitewater paddling. By building upon the work of previous research, Kinney (1997), the researcher created a list of questions. These questions were directly related to the eight aspects of the kayaking experience as defined by Kinney (1997). The meaning behind these experiences and how these experiences were experienced lies at the heart of this inquiry. In order to address face validity concerns a panel of five experts were sent pilot questionnaires and were asked to critique the questions, instead of answering the questions. This was done in order to determine if the language used in the questions was appropriate for the audience and to assist with content validity concerns. Also other questionnaires, particularly the work of Heintzman (2006), were consulted for guidance with structure to assist with the content validity concerns.

The questionnaire has three main sections: (1) personal beta, (2) mysticism and flow, and (3) the squirt specific questions. The first section contains descriptive personal beta about each participant. The second section uses a Likert scale to address four characteristics of mysticism and four characteristics of flow. The final section of the questionnaire is devoted to the phenomenology of squirt kayaking and what it means for its participants. The questionnaire was conducted via telephone interview.

Selection of the Study Population

Selection of the population was done by posting messages on two online message boards dedicated to the squirt community, one for the United States

(http://www.angstkayak.com/messageboard) and one for the United Kingdom (http://www.downtimekayaks.com/forum). Each of these message boards are used by members of the community for anything squirt related. Everything from boats and gear for sale, to links to pictures and videos, to making plans can be found on either board. It is a medium for the small and widely dispersed community to communicate instantly. Three messages were posted, two on the angst board (USA) and one on the downtime forum (UK). Telephone interviews were then conducted.

The study had aspirations to include European squirt boaters in the sample, although this was not the case. Due to a low response rate from the downtime forum and because of the costs to conduct an international telephone interview, the sample will only contain respondents that reside in North America.

Having participants respond to an online message board post is a type of convenience sampling. Though there are research validity concerns with convenience sampling techniques, whoever is available at the time, the nature of this study will require it (Gay, et al, 2006, p. 71) due to the nature of the squirt population. Kayakers, and squirt boaters, are nomadic by nature. Great distances are traveled for the purpose of their sport, as boaters must travel to rivers in order to paddle. Though travel is often limited regionally, paddlers are known to travel great distances; often across the country or to other countries. Through these travels kayakers have become an interconnected and well networked culture. The internet has of course aided in bringing people together from all over the world that share common interests. The researcher will also rely on snowball sampling. Convenience sampling and snowball sampling will intertwine because of the nomadic behavior of kayakers. Snowball sampling could be effective in a small community that is well networked. In the event that there was insufficient response

from the community the researcher was able to exploit his status as a member of the community and ask people to participate in order to strengthen the integrity of the project. While integrity of the project is what drives the sample number, the researcher envisioned twenty as the sample size (N=20) for completion of the project.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is an original questionnaire created by the researcher particularly for this study in order to conduct telephone interviews. The questionnaire is composed of three different parts: personal beta, mysticism and flow, and squirt specific questions. The personal beta section addresses the participant's age, gender, years whitewater kayaking, years squirting, squirt kayak style (destination, downriver, both), mode of squirting (stick, hand, both), overall whitewater ability, and home location. Style is in reference to whether the paddler prefers destination or downriver squirting, or some combination of the two. Mode is in reference to whether the paddler uses a paddle, in the traditional stick sense, or uses hand paddles, that strap onto each individual hand, or split time between the two.

The second section addresses mysticism and flow theory. Respondents were asked to use a Likert scale to specify their level of agreement with the given statement. The scale ranged from 1, completely disagree or never, to 7, completely agree or always. The four characteristics of mystical states of consciousness were given, but the phrase 'mystical states of consciousness' was substituted with 'mystery moves.' The same scale was used for the next four questions that addressed flow theory. The four statements referring to mysticism are hereafter referred to as M1, M2, M3, and M4. The four statements referring to flow theory are hereafter referred to as F1, F2, F3, and F4. The statements are as follows.

M1: Mystery moves defy expression, as no adequate report of their contents can be given in words. They must be directly experienced, and are more like states of feeling than states of intellect.

M2: Mystery moves are states of knowledge, offering insight into depths of truth. They are illuminations, revelations, and are full of significance and importance.

M3: Mystery moves cannot be sustained for long.

M4: When engaged in a mystery move, the paddler feels as if his or her own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes held by a superior power.

F1: When squirting, especially during the mystery move, I have focused concentration.

F2: When squirting, especially during the mystery move, the outcomes of the activity are under my own control.

F3: When squirting, especially during a mystery move, I experience a distorted sense of time.

F4: When squirting, especially during a mystery move, I lose awareness of myself, or experience a transcendence of self.

Finally, the last section was composed of eight questions that were created specifically for this study. The eight questions got their content inspiration from the work of Kinney (1997) as the questions relate to the eight aspects of his conceptual model, but all the questions dealt with squirt kayaking, and the mystery move. Kinney's (1997) conceptual model will be addressed further in the final chapter. After the pilot run the panel of five experts sent in suggestions on how to better reach the intended audience. The questions were revised a number of times and many questions were cut in order to shorten the questionnaire. During the interview, respondents were told to make their answers as long, or short as needed. The questions were as follows.

- How does “appetite” and “tenacity” affect your squirt boating?
- How does “fear” and “ambition” affect your squirt boating? Why would you hit the up button?
- Can you describe “the lure of the deep” and what it means to you?
- What do you focus on when you roam?
- Squirt boating is a fluid sport. What does becoming one with the water mean to you?
- What does the squirt boating arena mean to your experience? Can you describe your favorite arenas? What is an awesome arena?
- Can you describe the *mystery zombie* or the *mystery trance* state? What does it feel like? How do you know when you are “there”? How do you come back? Do you have flashbacks? Ect.
- Csikszentmihalyi coined the term flow state, a state athletes often refer to as “being in the zone.” Have you ever experienced such a state of consciousness while squirting? Can you describe it? How does this flow state correlate with the flow state of the river?

Procedures

Again, messages were posted on two different squirt-dedicated online message boards. The first message was posted to the angst board on September thirtieth, 2009, at 16:50:01. It was titled “Thesis study on the mystery move,” and was posted by John Trembley. It read, “I am doing my graduate thesis on the mystery move. If you would like to participate please send an email with your name, phone number, and the best time to call. I will then call you with a short interview. jtrembleATutkDOTedu.” The message can be found at the following web address: http://www.angstkayak.com/messgaeboard/messages/23323.html. The second message posted to the angst board was done on October tenth, 2009, at 15:59:46. It was titled “Most interesting

post ever," and was posted by John Trembley. It read, "OK… So the title may have been a lie, but hopefully you are reading this. I am still looking to conduct some interviews with squirt boaters for my thesis project. The interviews have been taking between 15-30 minutes. Email me at jtrembleATutkDOTedu with your name, phone number, and the best time to call. I can't promise you money or fame, but it will give you that fuzzy warm feeling knowing you have helped out a graduate student trying to push on through." The message can be found at the following web address: http://www.angstkayak.com/messageboard/messages/23472.html.

The message posted to the downtime forum was posted on October sixth, 2009, at 17:07. It was titled "Thesis study on the mystery move," and was posted by Johonbley. It read, "I am a graduate student from across the pond doing my master's thesis on the mystery move, mystical states of consciousness, and flow theory. I have been conducting interviews that take about 15-30 minutes. If you would like to participate please contact me at jtrembleATutkDOTedu with your name, phone number(s), and the best time to reach you. I hope there is some interest in the project. At least enough to generate a few interviews. I hope to hear from all of you and wish you sweet *charcs*. Peace, love, and bubbles. John Trembley." The message can be found at the following web address: http://www.downtimekayaks.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=589.

Participants responded via email with their name, phone number(s), and the best time to be reached to a post and were then later called on the telephone. Personal beta was obtained, then the Likert scale questions were asked on mysticism and flow, and finally the response squirt questions were asked. During the interview the descriptive personal beta and the mysticism and flow sections were able to be recorded in a spreadsheet. All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. During the interviews notes were taken, highlighting specific comments. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected by the researcher by separating the data from the

personal beta of the respondents. Respondents were assigned a number that accompanied their statements. The respondents' confidentiality and anonymity were respected throughout the project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was composed of three main aspects that directly relates to the three different sections of the questionnaire. The personal beta section information will be analyzed in order to understand the sample's demographics. The range was provided as well as the mean for the following questions: age, years paddling, and years squirting. These data provided ways to indentify members of the sample, and to understand the demographics of the community.

The mysticism and flow section's answers were based on a 1 to 7, Likert Scale. Four questions were dedicated to each topic, with each statement being based off a characteristic respectively. Please refer to statements M1, M2, M3, M4, and F1, F2, F3, F4. These questions directly target whether the participant can relate to mystical states of consciousness and flow theory in regards to squirt kayaking, with particular attention to the mystery move. Means, standard deviations, minimum values, maximum values, and the percentage (and frequency) of respondents that scored a six or a seven on the Likert scale were used to analyze the data from the mysticism and flow section of the questionnaire.

The final segment of the questionnaire was individual responses to eight given questions. Respondents were encouraged to make their answers as long or as short as needed during the telephone interview. These questions were analyzed in an attempt to identify common themes. Once the interviews were completed, the eight questions were examined for content. Themes began to emerge. The themes that emerged were able to bridge the gap between questions.

Throughout the interviews, the interviewer was able to document the respondent's answers to the first two sections: the descriptive personal beta, and mysticism and flow. In order to be able to manage the data from the last section, the interviews were listened to again. During this process, the researcher converted the recorded data to written form, by listening to the interviews and recording the data in a written format.

Once the recorded interviews were in written form, the researcher was able to begin to analyze the data. Similar ideas began to appear. These ideas would often come from different questions, but were grouped together. Once all the related ideas surfaced, it was time to separate them thematically. Themes began to emerge, but they did not emerge in reference to a specific question. The themes that emerged came from different questions. Themes were able to transcend specific questions and apply to the overall experience. It was important for the researcher to isolate the major themes from the subthemes. Once the themes were identified it was important to isolate them and specify them in a short phrase; hence the themes: defies expression, serious leisure, different realm, and the trance.

An original questionnaire was used to interview respondents after they responded to an online message board post on the topic. The questionnaire collected descriptive personal beta, used a Likert scale to inquire about mystical states of consciousness and flow states of consciousness, and used interview questions that examine the essence of the mystery move and its different aspects. The interviews were recorded and analyzed in order to identify common themes. Themes emerged from the questionnaire based off of respondents' answers.

Chapter 4: Results

"*Come on in, the water's lovely*." – Dr. Timothy Leary

The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were calculated including: means, standard deviations, minimum values, and maximum values. Additionally, charts and tables were developed to display the descriptive beta, mysticism and flow, and thematic results. By analyzing the interviews, themes were extracted from each question to help shape an overall perspective on what and how these experiences were experienced for participants. Individual respondent's statements were used as examples to give integrity to the themes that emerged. The results can be broken down into three different categories: descriptive beta, mysticism and flow, and thematic results.

Descriptive Beta

To begin the descriptive personal data will be analyzed. Figure 4.1 – Descriptive Personal Beta provides a summary of demographical information. The youngest participant was twenty-two years old, while the oldest participant was fifty-five and a half years old. Age distribution was as follows: four participants were twenty to twenty-nine, eight participants were thirty to thirty-nine, three participants were forty to forty-nine, and five participants were fifty to fifty-nine. The mean age was M=38.23 years old. The sample was composed of eighteen males, 90.0%, and two females, 10.0%, totaling a sample size of N=20.

The participant with the least amount of experience paddling whitewater had five years of whitewater experience, while the most experienced paddler had forty-four years of whitewater paddling experience. Paddle experience distribution was as follows: three respondents had between zero and nine years experience, nine respondents had between ten and nineteen years experience, five respondents had between twenty and twenty-nine years experience, two

respondents had between thirty and thirty-nine years experience, and one respondent had between forty and forty-nine years experience. The mean for whitewater paddling experience was M=18.15 years of whitewater paddling experience.

The participant with the least amount of squirt kayak experience had two years of squirt kayak experience, while the participant with the most squirt kayak experience had twenty-eight years of squirt kayak experience. Squirt experience distribution was as follows: ten participants had between zero and nine years squirt experience, six participants had between ten and nineteen years squirt experience, and four participants had between twenty and twenty-nine years squirt experience. The mean for squirt kayak experience was M=11.00 years of squirt kayak experience.

Participant	Age	Sex	Years Paddling	Years Squirting
1	52.0	Female	20	18
2	35.0	Male	20	19
3	22.0	Male	13	2
4	55.5	Male	44	28
5	46.0	Male	16	13
6	39.0	Male	21	5
7	28.0	Male	13	10
8	37.0	Male	25	20
9	32.0	Male	9	4
10	42.0	Male	18	9
11	32.0	Male	15	3
12	50.0	Male	25	10
13	54.0	Female	31	24
14	31.0	Male	13	4
15	22.0	Male	7	3
16	39.0	Male	12	11
17	43.0	Male	13	6
18	24.0	Male	5	2
19	51.0	Male	31	24
20	30.0	Male	12	6

Figure 4.1 – Descriptive Personal Beta

Paddling style was broken down into destination, down-river, or a combination of both. Ten participants, 50.0%, classified themselves as destination squirt paddlers. These paddlers define their style as destination oriented where there is little if any downstream travel in their squirt boat, with a heavy emphasis on the mystery move. Three participants, 15.0%, classified themselves as downriver oriented squirt paddlers. These paddlers define their style by paddling down a river through rapids, using a put in and take out for access to and from the river. Seven paddlers, 35.0%, classified themselves as a combination of a destination and of a downriver orientation. These paddlers define their squirt paddling style as a mixture of downriver and destination paddling. Please refer to Figure 4.2 – Descriptive Squirt Beta below.

Paddling mode was separated into three categories: hand paddler, stick paddler, or both. Eleven participants, 55.0%, were hand paddlers. These paddlers strap paddles made of wood, fiberglass, or plastic to each of their hands (like fins) and propel their squirt boat with hand paddlers. Four participants, 20.0%, were stick paddlers. These paddlers use a traditional paddler, often made of wood or fiberglass with a shaft and two paddle blades. Five participants, 25.0%, were both hand and stick paddlers. These paddlers split time between hand paddles and a stick.

Paddling ability was classified into four categories: Class I-II, Class II-III, Class III-IV, and Class IV-V. Four respondents, 20.0%, were of a self-described Class III-IV overall paddling ability level, while sixteen respondents, 80.0%, were of a self-described Class IV-V overall paddling ability. The whitewater scale operates on a Class I to a Class VI scale. Class I water is marked by moving flat water, while Class VI rapids are considered to be un-runnable. Class VI rapids can become Class V+ if they begin to get run. A (+) and (–) system is in place to help

enrich the scale. For example a rapid might rate as a IV+ or a V-. The highest paddling ability for the present study was marked by a Class IV-V ability level.

Respondents were from Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Ontario, Montana, Oregon, and the DC area. The respondents were grouped according to region with the three regions being the Southeast (TN, VA), the Northeast (MD, PA, DC, WV, ON), and the West (MT, OR). Seven respondents, 35.0%, were from the Southeast. Nine respondents, 45.0%, were from the Northeast. Four respondents, 20.0%, were from the West.

Participant	Squirt Style	Squirt Mode	Ability	State(Region)
1	Destination	Stick	III-IV	DC(NE)
2	Destination	Stick	IV-V	OR(W)
3	Combination	Hand	IV-V	TN(SE)
4	Destination	Stick	IV-V	WV(NE)
5	Destination	Hand	III-IV	OR(W)
6	Combination	Both	IV-V	DC(NE)
7	Combination	Both	IV-V	PA(NE)
8	Combination	Hand	IV-V	ON(NE)
9	Downriver	Hand	IV-V	TN(SE)
10	Destination	Both	IV-V	DC(NE)
11	Destination	Both	IV-V	VA(SE)
12	Destination	Hand	III-IV	OR(W)
13	Combination	Both	IV-V	DC(NE)
14	Destination	Hand	IV-V	WV(NE)
15	Combination	Hand	IV-V	TN(SE)
16	Downriver	Hand	IV-V	TN(SE)
17	Destination	Hand	III-IV	MT(W)
18	Combination	Hand	IV-V	TN(SE)
19	Destination	Stick	IV-V	DC(NE)
20	Downriver	Hand	IV-V	TN(SE)

Figure 4.2 – Descriptive Squirt Beta

Mysticism and Flow

The results of the mysticism and flow section of the questionnaire are presented in the following paragraphs. Four characteristics were posited for each respective state of consciousness; M1, M2, M3, M4 and F1, F2, F3, F4. Overall mysticism and overall flow scores (hereafter MYSTICISM and FLOW) were figured using M1, M2, M3, M4 and F1, F2, F3, F4 respectively. Respondents used a Likert Scale, 1 to 7, to rate their responses.

M1: Mystery moves defy expression, as no adequate report of their contents can be given in words. They must be directly experienced, and are more like states of feeling than states of intellect.

M2: Mystery moves are states of knowledge, offering insight into depths of truth. They are illuminations, revelations, and are full of significance and importance.

M3: Mystery moves cannot be sustained for long.

M4: When engaged in a mystery move, the paddler feels as if his or her own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes held by a superior power.

Mystical States of Consciousness	M1	M2	M3	M4	MYSTICISM
Minimum	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Maximum	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.75
Mean	6.08	4.84	4.10	5.60	5.15
Standard Deviation	1.36	1.86	2.13	1.82	1.07
% that scored a 6 or 7(n)	80.0%(16)	50.0%(10)	30.0%(7)	85.0%(17)	N/A

Figure 4.3 – Statistics for Mystical States of Consciousness

The flow specific questions were generated by taking a characteristic of flow and asking the respondent to specify their level of agreement with the statement in reference to their squirt kayaking, especially the mystery move.

F1: When squirting, especially during the mystery move, I have focused concentration.

F2: When squirting, especially during the mystery move, the outcomes of the activity are under my own control.

F3: When squirting, especially during a mystery move, I experience a distorted sense of time.

F4: When squirting, especially during a mystery move, I lose awareness of myself, or experience a transcendence of self.

Flow States	F1	F2	F3	F4	FLOW
Minimum	3.00	2.00	3.00	1.00	4.00
Maximum	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.50
Mean	6.00	4.00	6.10	5.30	5.35
Standard Deviation	1.34	1.26	1.25	1.84	1.65
% that scored a 6 or 7(n)	70.0%(14)	10.0%(2)	80.0%(16)	50.0%(10)	N/A

Figure 4.4 – Statistics for Flow Theory

Thematic Results

Analysis of the interviews and data revealed four main themes. These themes are presented in the following table, Figure 4.5 – Thematic Results. For the questions and answers from the squirt specific section of the questionnaire please refer to Appendix B—responses to questionnaire.

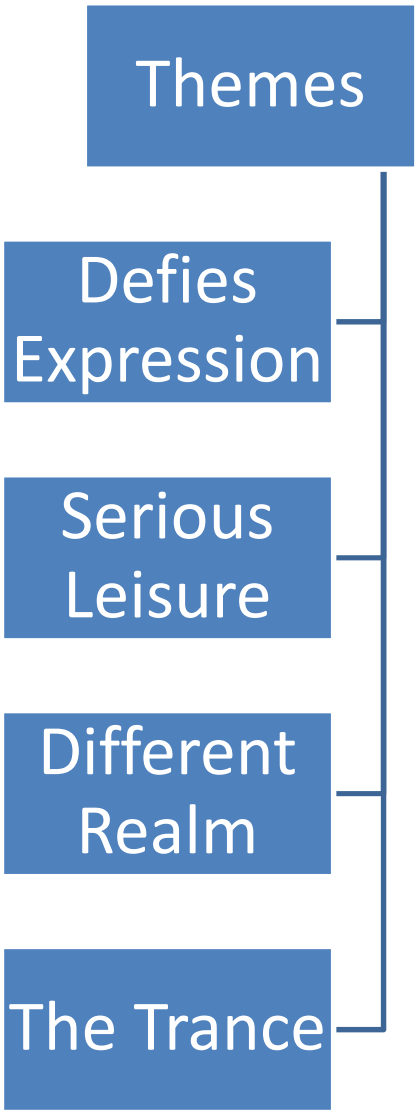

Figure 4.5 – Thematic Results

Defies expression.

The first theme that emerged was the incommunicable nature of the experience of squirt kayaking. The phenomenon under investigation, squirt boating and in particular the mystery move, was beyond description for nearly everyone interviewed. This is largely due to the fact that these experiences are bound by feel, and exist on a plane that is beyond the intellect. Their meaning and importance lies in the realm of feel. This realm of feel is bound by the experience of the sensation itself, making it nearly impossible for one who has had the experience to share the mystery move with someone who has not "been there." While the human intellect has amazing potential; the intellect cannot grasp something that can only be experienced. This was to be expected as William James (1963) warns of the incommunicable nature of mystical states of consciousness in *The Varieties of the Religious Experience*:

> No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists. One must have musical ears to know the value of a symphony; one must have been in love one's self to understand a lover's state of mind. Lacking the heart or ear, we cannot interpret the musician or the lover justly, and are even likely to consider him weak-minded or absurd. The mystic finds that most of us accord to his experiences an equally incompetent treatment. (p.380)

Without the experience or without understanding the mystic's perspective, which can only be done through direct experience, outsiders look upon the mystic absurdly. This can be tested by watching outsiders watch squirt boaters perform the mystery move. Spectators, kayakers and non-kayakers alike, will watch a mystery move briefly before moving on, often with a comment like, "That's neat," or "Why would anyone do that?" To the outsider the mystery artist seems

absurd, maybe even slightly mentally unbalanced. On the other hand the mystic, in this case the *squirtist* finds the previous treatment or response to the mystery move such a gross incompetent treatment to the experience.

William James is not alone in identifying the incommunicable nature of experience to those who have not had said experience. Aldous Huxley (1954) remarks on this notion in terms of island universes in his book *The Doors of Perception*. "Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies—all these are private and except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable. We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves. From family to nation, every human is a society of island universes"(p.12-13). Huxley's point is simple, even though humans are able to pool information concerning similar experiences, humans live very isolated lives; lives that are bound by experiences that humans experience individually and alone. An experience cannot be shared if it has not been experienced. This highlights the importance of the experience for an individual, and the importance of experience and perspective; one's perception dictates one's reality. Huxley continues by saying that "most island universes are sufficiently like one another to permit a feeling of inferential understanding or even mutual empathy or 'feeling into'" (p. 13). One female fifty-four year old respondent with twenty-four years of squirt boating experience remarked on this very point by saying, " the sensation is different from what an individual feels, different from what your friends, relatives, or any other person on the planet feels. I don't think it is an elitist thing, but it sort of puts brethren squirt boaters into a place of shared experience that is special. Not better or worse, just different."

This respondent was speaking of the bond of shared experience that brethren squirt boaters share. This empathy only exists for brethren squirt boaters. For those who have never

had a direct experience the words of a squirt boater trying to explain his or her artistic sport seem weak, like pale reflections of something that will never surface into the light. In some cases, will never see, as many island universes are separated by endless oceans of experience that isolate individual island universes. Huxley (1954) continues:

> But in certain cases communication between universes is incomplete or even nonexistent. The mind is its own place, and the places inhabited by the insane and the exceptionally gifted are so different from the places where ordinary men and women live, that there is little or no common ground of memory to serve as a basis for understanding or fellow feelings. Words are uttered, but fail to enlighten. The things and events to which the symbols refer belong to mutually exclusive realms of experience"(p.13).

It is not the focus of this inquiry to determine whether squirt boaters fall into one of the two previous categories: the insane or the exceptionally gifted, although there may be such a case to be made. The point is that the island universes that squirt boaters inhabit (concerning the mystery move) are so different from other island universes; the islands are built upon exclusive realms of experience. Thus making communication about the experience futile, and often yielding a pale incomplete picture of the rich experience.

Personal testimonies remain the only way to discuss mystical states of consciousness or flow states, even if they are incomplete and pale in comparison to the experiences themselves. Respondents overwhelmingly remarked that they could not explain in words what their experiences were like. One twenty-four year old male with just two years of squirt experience had this to say:

> You kind of know when you feel it when you feel it. It's hard to explain that, but I can describe what it looks like with other people. They come up with that thousand yard stare, like they have been somewhere they have never been before. And after you get multiple of those you get kind of numb to it. I would call the mystery zombie one that is just numb, just awestruck by what's going on.

Another forty-three year old male destination *squirtist* had this to say:

> I think I have experienced it; I don't know, it's circular, but the easiest way to describe it is being in the zone. Just that you're not having to, you don't feel like you're working or chasing an objective. It's just there; you're immersed in it. The rides are good, the rides are right, the rides are long enough. I think it has more to do with the individual's consciousness, than with the flow of the river. The flow of the river is important… If your head is clear, and you're able to let go of the daily worries and concerns, and be present in the moment, I think that contributes the greatest amount to being in the zone. Being able to transcend, if you will, your daily concerns, worries, issues. Be present in the moment and enjoy that.

Both responses show the difficulty in explaining these experiences. Often words seem inadequate, or just seem circular. Most respondents offered a simple no when asked if they could explain these experiences. Many would resort to a "well, you know what it's like;" speaking to the interviewer, who also holds a place in this community. The incommunicable nature of these experiences was to be expected and prevailed as one of the primary themes from the research. The second theme dealt with serious leisure.

Serious leisure.

The second theme that emerged from the data is that of serious leisure, which comes to light as the story behind the data. "Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge, and experience: (Stebbins, 2001, p. 3). To further develop the definition, Stebbins (2001) offers six distinctive qualities which are found in serious leisure pursuits; these six qualities are as follows:

1. One is the occasional need to persevere.
2. A second quality is, as indicated earlier, that of finding a career in the endeavor, shaped by its own special contingencies, turning points and stages of achievement or involvement.
3. Serious leisure participants make a significant personal effort based on special knowledge, training, or skill, and, indeed at times, all three.
4. Fourth, a number of durable benefits, or outcomes, of serious leisure have so far been identified.
5. Participants in serious leisure tend to identify strongly with their chosen pursuits.
6. The sixth quality of serious leisure is the unique ethos that grows up around each expression of it. A central component of this ethos is the special social world that develops when enthusiasts in a particular field pursue their interests in it over many years (2001, p 6-7).

The previous six qualities are found in serious leisure pursuits, but for this inquiry the most interesting is the fourth quality, and its durable benefits that are available for those who belong to the serious leisure group.

Before addressing the benefits it will be important to show that the present study is an example of serious leisure. The descriptive statistics will be helpful to revisit. The mean age was 38.23 years old, with the mean of squirt experience being eleven years, which is nearly one third of the participant's age. The data show that the participants are committed to squirt boating and kayaking in general. This can also be inferred from their status as a member of an online message board. The data does seem to support that most of the participants have found a lifelong leisure career.

Stebbins (2007) identifies ten rewards that exist for serious leisure pursuers and designates them either as personal rewards or as social rewards. For the purpose of this study we will focus on the seven personal rewards.

1. Personal enrichment (cherished experiences)
2. Self-actualization (developing skills, abilities, knowledge)
3. Self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge already developed)
4. Self-image (known to others as a particular kind of serious leisure participant)
5. Self-gratification (combination of superficial enjoyment and deep fulfillment)
6. Re-creation (regeneration) of oneself through serious leisure after a day's work
7. Financial return (from a serious leisure activity) (p.14).

While the questionnaire did not directly address the reasons for participation, some reasons were brought to light. As one twenty-eight year old male from Pennsylvania remarked, "No, it's just fun," highlighting Stebbins' (2007) fifth personal reward of self-gratification.

One thirty-nine year old male with twenty-one years of kayaking experience had this to say. "(The) Spiritual aspect of squirt boating transcends all the other disciplines. I am a pretty religious person in general and there are a number of ways people can experience God and nature is a way I experience God." While this response does not fit neatly into Stebbins' (2007) paradigm it does highlight a personal reward for participation in squirt kayaking that would be classified as personal enrichment.

Stebbins' list continues to be referenced as a forty-six year old male with thirteen years of destination squirting experience commented on the self-gratification reward in this way. "It does bring on a euphoric state. As far as knowing when you are there, it is usually after. It just feels better and better, more and more focus, like clarity of focus and perception of what is going on and being able to cleanly interact with it. I feel the trance because after the session it is like a loopy feeling."

Stebbins' (2007) self-expression reward was highlighted with the following comment from a destination hand paddler with six years of squirting experience. "I'm not sure I've completely been there, I have approached that… It ties in with appetite, but transcends tenacity; I think when you're in the trance, you're not, you'll keep doing it, not because you want to do better, just because you feel like you, like every ride is there and you just want to continue that feeling."

Stebbins' self-actualization reward manifested itself through this destination stick paddler's comments:

> That is just given to you when you do mystery moves, if you get really good at doing mystery moves. You get totally focused on one aspect or another of what you're doing. It is the evolution of learning. Basically, you abandoned all your

> peripheral thought and you dive into this focus state, but it leads you into being a zombie… I think the most common denominator is that both states do flow. Your flow state does evolve, it does move along, just like the river does. And they both are single-minded, purposeful, based on intent.

Stebbins' re-creation (regeneration) reward was also present. The following comment from a fifty year old destination hand paddler highlights the regenerative reward.

> Just being out on the river, out in the moment. I think yesterday on the river I spent as much time sitting by myself in the eddy just watching… it's hypnotic, and mesmerizing… Watery dreams, the water kind of calls to me, when I am down in the realm it is just a very primordial, rejuvenating, relaxing, religious moment… It's really hard to explain it but it is a lure, part of it is a state of mind it induces when you're down there. It's like visiting another world, you know. Stay for a while, but don't stay too long.

This respondent's comment on the regenerative aspects of the immersion, of being present in the moment, on the river is important and also allows a smooth transition into our next theme, the different realm.

Different realm.

The different realm was another primary theme that emerged from the questionnaire. The attraction to water is what pulled many participants into this aquatic realm. Through their experience respondents were transported into a different realm. A stick paddler with forty-four years of kayaking experience addresses the realm. "It symbolizes entering a realm and trying to keep your shit together. It reminds me of an old saying, 'To see the kingdom of heaven is like touring a great palace, but you have a little spoon filled with oil, and you have to see all the

wonders of the palace and not spill a drop of oil.' You've got to keep your focus, but not miss any wonders of this new realm."

This realm was often compared to outer space, relying on the sense of weightlessness as a means of similarity. A fifty-two year old female said, "It's a combination of enjoying the feeling of being underwater and being weightless, coupled with the occasional ability to get into that trance that allows me to block out everything else in my life." A twenty-two year old downriver and destination paddler continued with the outer space reference. "Getting down there where you are totally away from everybody. It's like being an astronaut, getting into outer space, where nobody else is. Being down there, by yourself, trying to be calm, and not freak out every time." Another downriver and destination paddler from the DC area agrees:

> It's kind of like a sense of weightlessness, kind of experience like what astronauts experience on the moon, bouncing around without gravity. It's like being in another world. Everything is kind of loud on the surface, you drop in and hear bubbles; you can see the bubbles, besides that everything is just really quiet. It is amazing to know that there is this turbulence up top, but there can be this transcendence peace right under the water.

The peaceful theme continues as a hand paddler with twenty-five years of kayaking experience from Ontario says, "It's a different realm. You're by yourself, it's quiet. It's very relaxing."

A downriver paddler with eleven years of squirt experience had this to say. "Wanting to put myself in a spot where I can be enveloped by the forces of the river, the force of our world. I feel like I got a certain peace out of it, it's almost like experiencing another world… The lure is the ride itself, just flying around. The sense of being wrapped by the arms of whatever river it is."

One aspect of this new realm is the notion of the blend, of merging with greater powers, the powers of the river. A hand paddler from Oregon said, “Be the ball; it’s like be the water. It’s melding with it. And cleaning up everything as far as charc, boat attitude, and drag. Somewhat getting out of the way of the process.” A hand and stick paddler from the DC area continued on the notion of the blend. “In a squirt boat more so than surface boats you don’t have to worry, or think about, anticipating as much as you do in a surface boat, because something is going to do something to your boat. In a squirt boat you’re in it, so you can manage it. It is almost mindless to manage features you’re in the middle of, because you’re just there.”

A downriver paddler from Tennessee spoke on the love for downriver paddling. “Going with the flow. You are never going against the current. You are going with the flow. You are kind of at its mercy. You can kind of play around with it and enjoy it, but in the end it’s taking you.” It is important to remember that the river is taking you; that you are entering its realm. And that this realm is a dynamic and potentially deadly environment. A West Virginia paddler explains:

> I feel like I am merging with greater powers than myself and still negotiating a sense of balance and I think it teaches a lot about dynamic environments to do that. It’s helpful in life and other aspects. It’s kind of like training for being cool under pressure and it underlines how important it is to stay balanced, to stay over your wing. Maintain your center, not to let your focus alter, except inside for what you’re trying to do. The focus is anchored in being centered and balanced in a seriously dynamic environment.

The realm, while intoxicating and fascinating, can be deadly. It is a hostile environment that is not fit for someone without gills. It is imperative to remember that it is a dynamic environment that can kill you, especially when the trance sets in.

The trance.

In order to address the trance, specifically the *mystery trance* or *mystery zombie* state we will resort to another piece written by Jim Snyder, entitled "The Mystery Trance:"

> I think, in a way, the Trance is at the heart of this sport and I don't trust it. The deep is NOT a compassionate arena. A squirt boaters' visibility underwater is low and his speed can be high. I think the Trance brings on a cozy lull. This is because it is extremely amphibious and it fires up primitive nerve centers of the brain. When the amphibious part of your soul understands its playground like this you start waggin' yer tail and flappin' yer flippers and holding yer breath like you never missed a millennia. You can lose your urge to breath when you go underwater by taking just the right size breath and relaxing- more Trance-inducement. And at some point in the splashy sparkly mess you realize.....nothing. Not a single thing. Not your last ride. Not the day of the week or your name. You will have only charc and its twisted weavings. (2009)

While not every respondent had experienced the trance, seventeen of the twenty respondents have experienced the trance, or 85.0%. A forty-two year old destination paddler from the DC area was familiar with the trance:

> Definitely been there. It's sort of an unconsciousness. For me I don't realize I am actually there until someone points it out to me or something happens, either below the water or above the water; that points it out in that certain point of time.

> It feels like a time when you lose track of time, and you're kind of in a day dream. People can be speaking to you and you can be looking right through them, it's like a long distance stare. It's interesting too, I think, because when you're in that zone, the water and the air kind of meld into each other. Before you're in that zone, when you start your mystery move session it's very obvious when you're breathing and not breathing. But when you're in that zombie zone, everything seems to meld together, and you get into this long distant stare. When you're pulled out of that, it's like when you're pulled out of sleep.

The zombie zone is one where everything melds together, water and air, paddler and river. Interestingly enough, most respondents could not identify when they were "there," but could only identify the trance after they had returned. It is reminiscent of Michael Stanley's song lyric from *Let's get the show on the road*, "How can you come back, if you've never been away"(Stanley, 1973)? Another DC area paddler commented on returning from the trance:

> I don't think you do know when your there because I think you lose track of yourself while you're there, and you don't realize you were there until you're back… It's one of those states of mind when you are not really paying attention to yourself, I'm not thinking in a very conscious way about what I am doing. I am just doing… I guess I can compare it to being on a long road trip. And all the sudden you realize ten or twenty miles have gone by and you have no idea what happened, but suddenly you are farther down the road.

The sensation of not knowing, and loosing track of time is found throughout testimonies of the trance as a destination and downriver paddler from Tennessee remarked, "There have been times where I will sit there and I don't even realize I have been in my boat for an hour. Because I can't

remember every single ride. Going from one ride to the next. Almost like staying drugged out. You are just so entranced with the fascination of being hugged by water."

Many paddlers had tendencies to attribute animistic characteristics to the river, as paddlers spoke of being kissed by the river, or being hugged by the river. One downriver Tennessee hand paddler even referred to the sensation as being "embraced by the arms of God." While it may be that paddlers attribute a personality or a soul to the river this should be done with caution. Jim Snyder (1987) explains:

> Any soul we attach to the river is only our failing to appreciate the awesome power we witness in rivers. We "wish" the river to have a soul and then, maybe, compassion. The river is mere fact, as simple and difficult as things get. The river is beyond "soul" and yet, has the charm to make one misty gazing at its eternal lines at dusk. Somehow, it is essential to maintain tremendous respect for the river, just to stay small enough to make a life-saving decision some day. The smallness comes, gracefully to some, in lumps to some, but surely to all. There is an esoteric concept of blending wills with the river, meshing our curiosity with the river's power of alignment with gravity. Just rubbing elbows with such a powerful energy source is a privilege. (p.152)

While paddlers may have a tendency to identify a soul or a personality of the river, it should be done so with caution. The river can give paddlers gifts, like a wet kiss, a big hug, or an unforgettable experience. It can offer experiences that cannot be found any other way, but it can also take it all away. One paddler from West Virginia commented on the origins of the trance as a gift from the river, continuing with the river's animistic personality:

> It is like a gift of the arena, and it has to do with your charc. You tend to go into a trance when you're trying to make progress in an arena, but the trance is not progress oriented. You don't have to make progress. The trance is its own little gravity thing that draws you in… The antidote for the trance is obviously focus and concentration. If you had equal parts of focus and concentration you would be in some kind of optimal state.

It is this optimal state that is of interest. Throughout the interviews one paddler with eighteen years of experience spoke on the nature of the trance and flow. The trance is a type of unawareness, while flow is a type of awareness; similar but unconscious. Another paddler with thirty-one years of experience built upon the same notion. Mysticism, in this case the zombie state, is event related or process related, and can exist independent of time. Flow, on the other hand, is bound by time and movement. Flow is not necessarily trance like, as a thirty-two year old Virginia paddler points out. "It doesn't have to be necessarily trance. I have had flow across different sports; flow is something I recognize across different sports."

Identifying flow, and the zone, across different sports was evident as one twenty-two year old paddler with seven years of paddling experience explains:

> Definitely a zone for squirt boating. You find yourself in a zone running rapids because running big rapids in a squirt boat is extremely dangerous, I think that is common knowledge among squirt boaters and kayakers, but a lot of times I find myself at the top of the rapid really worrying about the outcome of the run and then later, however long it takes to run the rapid, I get to the bottom of the rapid and obviously everything is o.k. I look back upstream, and I have no idea what just happened, all I know is that I reacted and the outcome was good. While I am

> running a rapid, it is one of those things where reactions take place and there is not too much thought going on… It just comes natural at that point… When hitting mystery moves one after another I think it is the same zone as any other athlete.

Similarities exist for the trance and flow. Participants were able to identify each state after the fact. The essence of each is found in the ride. To keep the ride going, the continuum of flow, or of the trance, is all that is important to one immersed in awareness, or unawareness. It is the process that is important, not the outcome.

While the quantitative data may tell a story, it is the testimonies from respondents that give shape to the squirt experience. These testimonies reveal a variety of different perspectives on what shapes the experience. These perspectives allow insight into flow as a phenomenon, or insight into what respondents have described as the *mystery zombie* state. Four themes have emerged. (1) The experience defies expression. (2) The participants would be classified as serious leisure pursuers. (3) Respondents enter a new realm. (4) This realm has physical characteristics, in being underwater engaged in a mystery move. It also has a consciousness characteristic, as participants identify the trance and flow states of consciousness. Interestingly enough, these themes show a remarkable similarity to James' characteristics of mysticism. Each defies expression. The serious leisure theme could be a parallel with the significance and importance theme that James acknowledges as the second characteristic of mysticism. The different realm's element of not being able to identify it until after the fact could be equated with James' account of the distortion of time. The trance is in accord with James' fourth characteristic, the manifestation of a mystical state of consciousness in the form of a trance, in this case the *mystery trance*.

From the physical realm and the mental attitude of squirt boaters emerges a unique philosophy. It is to this philosophy that is now of interest. This inquiry has been laced with philosophy throughout, from Thales, to Aristotle, to William James, to Lao Tzu, to a paddler maker from West Virginia, Jim Snyder.

Interlude 2

"Philosophy and Our Fellow Man" from *The Squirt Book*, by Jim Snyder

As a conclusion to this book, I wanted to write a chapter on river philosophy – no easy task. For years, man has attached spiritualness to riverness. To me, the highest good is what I call "River Livin'." It means living like the river, endlessly driven and just getting by, always connected to your source and finish. It's easy to talk along such lines. Reality is a different matter though.

Reality involves our fellow man. Our fellow charcists have a super strong effect on our charcs. I believe life tends to moderate and balance us but we go too far each time we are nudged. Our friends are some of our most constant nudgers. My idea is to brace for the nudges and just go with them a little bit. Someone who can't blend with your charc will perceive you as being towards oblivion and either try to cheer you on (over the edge – jump, jump, jump), or call you back (are you sure you wanted to do that?). The solution is to expect their charc and respond happily believing they may be as centered and glowing as you are. We should observe each other's frantic antics with rock-steady attitudes so as not to hype up the vibes. Let the river be the judge. Accepting someone's charc does not force you to follow it. It just keeps your ego off their shoulders and out of their ears.

Every river holds the potential for a mysteriously beautiful experience. The things we do tend to detract from the probability of such times. Respect for the river lets us listen well enough to see through the maze. Think about the ride. Its quality is paramount. The river is a major contributor to the blend. We must negotiate. Every experience on the continuum from survival to perfect timing depends on what we bring to a current situation, our charc. From the beginning

of time, the fastest way to get rid of something has been to throw it in the river. The stakes are highest, and so the reward.

Let me harp on the power of the charc. If your charc lacks power, as they all do, think about it. It must be a balanced affair. Not too timid, not too pushy. Hunt the ride. It's just you and the river, and the river doesn't care a fig about you or the yak you rode in on. So, *you* must. The river is stark, lonely, and above all, just. In the long run, the arena you set for experience (fun, competition, adventure, challenge, etc.) will yield victories and defeats in the name of the cause. Be bold enough to be small enough to let the world be awesome, and it will. You have my word on it. The mystery of caring unfolds the flower of experience and, eventually, lets it pass away. The mystery endures, the river endures – we don't. If you really know how to spend time, you will never have enough. This is the only true blessing life gives – the fact that all this really matters. It's your charc, don't waste it. (1987, p. 155-156)

Chapter 5: Conclusions

"I've walked through the Halls of Karma – I shook hands with both the Devil and God – They turned my eyes to the inside to see – Where my energies have gone." – Black Oak Arkansas

The conclusions will address quantitative data first and use the qualitative data to build a case that will satisfy the research questions. Findings will specifically target the research questions. Discussion will attempt to further develop themes and offer explanations for the phenomenon. Suggestions will address future research ideas.

Before addressing the research questions, it is important to address another question. Can the mystery move manifest a characteristic of mysticism, or mysticism itself? The work of Sanford (2007) and Taylor (2007) would support this, as lived religions exist in the realm where the sacred and profane interact. Sanford (2007) posits whitewater kayaking to be a lived religion. Kinney (1997) also suggests whitewater kayaking to have spiritual aspects for some participants. James (1963) would have to agree that the mystery move can be a physical manifestation of mysticism, and its characteristics. James (1963) explains, "In India, training in mystical insight has been known from time immemorial under the name of yoga. Yoga means the experimental union of the individual with the divine. It is based on persevering exercise" (p. 400). One participant used yoga as an analogy for the mystery move when discussing the lure of the deep and becoming one with the water. Persevering exercise can be likened to squirt kayaking, while this union with the divine has many faces as the interviews show.

Findings

Do squirt kayakers experience mystical states of consciousness through squirt kayaking, and what does this experience mean? Yes, some squirt kayakers experience mystical states of consciousness through squirt kayaking. The quantitative data suggests this, while the testimonies

from participants would also support this. When reviewing testimonies with what is known about mysticism in mind, it is evident that there is an element of mysticism in squirt kayaking. It is important to note that only some experience mysticism. For many respondents, there was not even a trace of mysticism. Squirt kayaking is not some activity that will produce these mystical states of consciousness merely through participation. This is not to say that squirt kayaking is not magic, because it is, for those who allow it to be. Squirting becomes so dynamic and flexible that it is able to be molded into whatever its participant wants or needs from it. While this study is focused on the phenomenology of the experience, the participants themselves are the vehicles for this experience. Some participants are more receptive to different types of experiences, and different states of consciousness. It will be helpful to return to the work of Kinney (1997) and the conceptual model of what creates the boating experience. Given the model it is likely Kinney (1997) would acknowledge mysticism as an aspect of water in the conceptual model. Please refer to Figure 5.1 – Kinney's (1997) Conceptual Model.

Kinney (1997) created the conceptual model of what defines the boating experience. While Kinney's (1997) research was focused on Class V kayakers, specifically creek boaters, its findings, especially the model for what constitutes the boating experience, can extend to the greater boating population. In this case, 80% (n=16) of the sample was found to be Class IV-V paddlers anyway; this was the upper limit to the spectrum for the purpose of this study. Kinney (1997) acknowledges every aspect of the model to play a role in determining the outcome of a given paddling experience. Kinney (1997) outlines the six characteristics of the model:

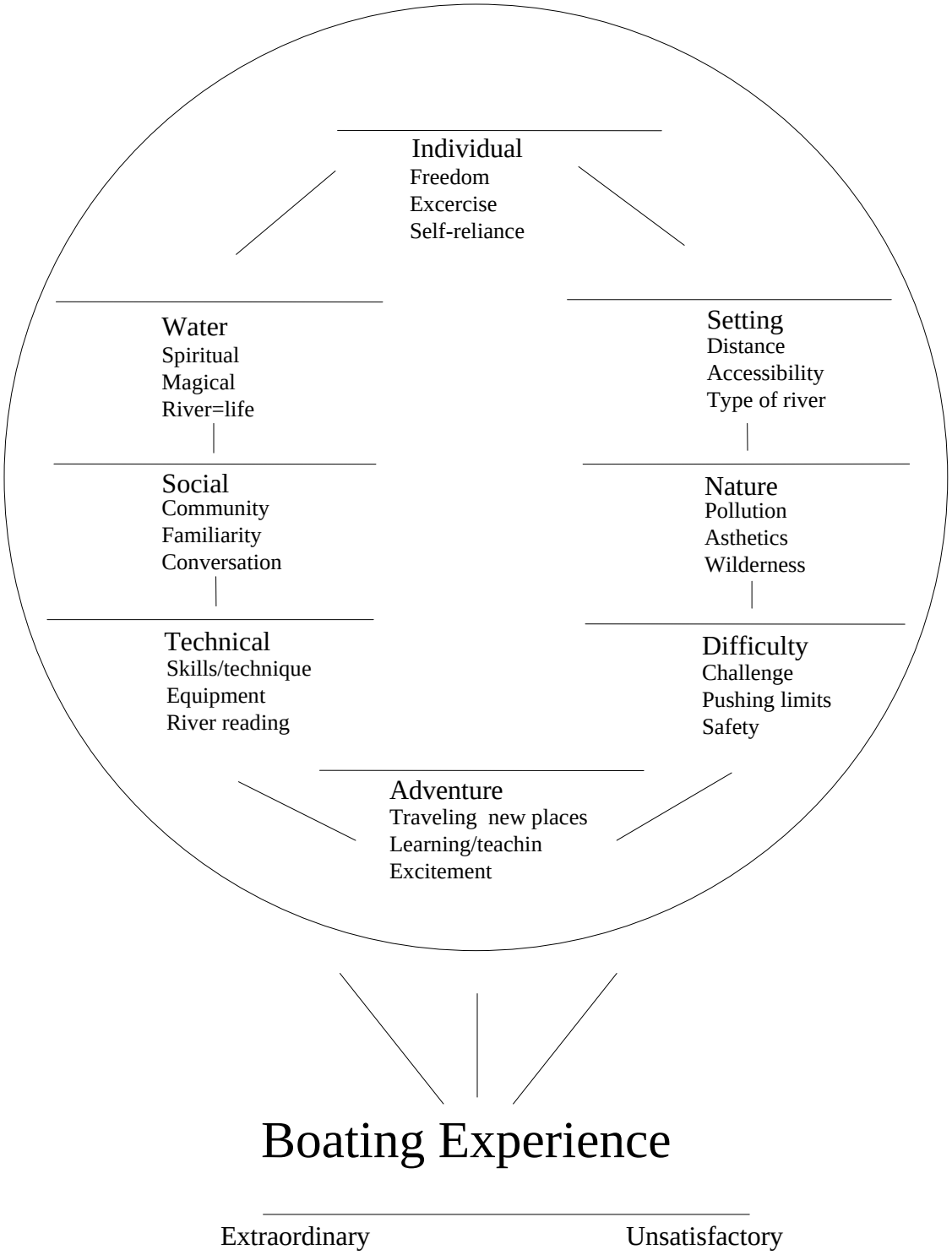

Figure 5.1 – Kinney's (1997) Conceptual Model (p. 57)

1. It is holistic- It is necessary to look at the "big picture" to recognize and examine all of the variables that may contribute to the boating experience;
2. It is an open system- The boating experience is affected by the input of all of the variables that comprise it;
3. It is a web of partial interdependencies- Each variable in the boating experience is connected to every other variable and all are partially mutually modifying. When one variable changes it may affect other variables in the web. Furthermore, it is possible to have changes in one area without affecting another part of the web;
4. It is a dynamic equilibrium- The boating experience is not static for an individual. Change is always present and it is natural;
5. It is interdeterministic- Multiple causes come together to form different outcomes. No single variable explains the event. Rather, many variables in combination influence the outcome;
6. It is qualitative- The boating experience is greater than the sum of variables examined in this model. Defining the boating experience is subjective. It is the individual's values and perceptions that ultimately define the boating experience. (p. 58)

The boating experience is a dynamic relationship that for Kinney (1997) involves eight different aspects. The variables that affect whether the experience is a positive or negative one are totally subjective. They are also constantly in flux and can shift in priority from one paddling experience to the next. Kinney (1997) elaborates on the model and the experience it looks to explain:

> Visualize the boating experience as a process where the outcome is bounded on one end by an extraordinary boating experience and on the other end by an unsatisfactory experience. There is no fixed template for what constitutes an extraordinary boating experience because boating experiences, like spider webs, are transitory. Each paddling experience is a web in process that is affected by all input, external and internal. An end product is created and perhaps judged by the individual paddler and potentially any other person who has seen or has had contact with that paddler. To some the end result may not be nearly as important as the process of weaving the experience. (p. 83)

It could be that the process of weaving the experience takes priority. Paddling is an experience driven activity. Just as mysticism and flow are experience driven states of consciousness. The model is important to note because of the variety of aspects that are important to the experience of paddling. Again, this is a totally subjective ranking of priority for the different aspects that create the paddling experience. It is up to each individual person to decide what defines their experience; to decide what their experience means to them on a personal level. Whitewater participation, including squirt boating, has limitless potential for personal meaning. This results in some *squirtists* having a deeply mystical experience when squirting. In the same breath some will never have a mystical experience in regards to their squirt boating. The mechanism to have such an experience is available, as squirting can open mystical doors, but only if the *squirtist* wants to enter those doors. Some paddlers will be on a totally different floor, which is more than acceptable. Every paddler chooses what floor they are on. Every paddler defines what aspects take priority when creating their own paddling experience. These differences are neither good nor bad, as one cannot quantify the different meanings *squirtists* seek in their experience. It is a

deeply personal experience. The mystery move is so personal that no one else is even able to watch. Maybe that is where the beauty of it all lies; that it cannot be shared; that it cannot be quantified; that it cannot be defined; that it cannot be bound. What drives one person can have absolutely no effect on another person's experience.

Do squirt kayakers experience flow states of consciousness through squirt kayaking, and how was this experienced? Yes, some kayakers experience flow states of consciousness through squirt kayaking. The study of Jones et al, (2000) suggested that kayakers will experience flow; numerous testimonies from this study addressed this directly. This was to be expected if one is able to see the parallels between squirting and rock climbing, as rock climbing is defined as an activity that is very conducive to promoting flow experiences by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), along with making music, dancing and chess:

> What makes these activities conducive to flow is that they were designed to make optimal experience easier to achieve. They have rules that require the learning of skills, they set up goals, they provide feedback, they make control possible. They facilitate concentration and involvement by making the activity as distinct as possible from the so-called 'paramount reality' of everyday existence. (p. 72)

While mysticism was able to cleanly fit into Kinney's (1997) conceptual model, flow does not; though it could be a part of individual, technical, or difficulty. Are some people more susceptible to flow states than others, or is it purely driven by experiences? As we have seen Csikszentmihalyi (1990) would definitely acknowledge some activities are more conducive to flow experiences than others. But, are some individuals more susceptible to flow states? Is flow like mysticism, in that it is its own magnetic thing that draws people in who are attracted to the pull?

A return to the work of Maslow (1964) should be helpful, as he identifies what he calls "peakers" and "non-peakers." Maslow (1964) explained that in the early stages of his research he thought some people had peak-experiences, "peakers," and others did not, "non-peakers." As Maslow (1964) became more skilled as a researcher he found a higher and higher percentage of subjects reported having peak-experiences. Eventually, Maslow (1964) expected everyone to have peak-experiences (Maslow, 1964, p. 22). Maslow (1964) continues, "Because of this experience, I finally began to use the word 'non-peaker' to describe, not the person who is unable to have peak-experiences, but rather the person who is afraid of them, who suppresses them, who denies them, who turns away from them, or who 'forgets' them" (p. 22).

There are three conclusions that can be drawn from the previous passage from Maslow (1964) in regards to the current study. (1) Maslow's first impression was correct. Some people do not experience peak-experiences or flow states. (2) Everyone experiences peak-experiences, and the reason that this inquiry did not show 100.0% of respondents to have experienced flow states is because of shortcomings in the researcher, and the questions asked. (3) Maslow is correct. Everyone experiences peak-experiences, but some people deny or suppress them. It is beyond the scope of the current study to determine which conclusion is correct, although it is within the range of possibilities that it can be found in the shortcomings of the researcher. Flow states, and peak-experiences, can transcend boundaries, cross disciplines, and be achieved in a variety of different contexts. While testimonies explain different instances of flow for squirt boaters, some were unable to identify them, or have never had them.

What is the mystery zombie or mystery trance state, and how is it experienced? What do the given testimonies tell about the *mystery zombie* or *mystery trance* state? While not every participant could relate to, or had experienced the *mystery zombie* or *mystery trance* state enough

had experienced it to be able to pull out specific characteristics. Flashbacks were common, as were dreams. There seemed to be an element of bleeding over into waking like. The zombie state was hard to explain for those who had experienced it; the zombie or trance state defied expression and must be directly experienced. For many it was a state of complete relaxation, and offered rejuvenating qualities. In this regard, it is similar to another characteristic of mysticism in that it was full of significance and importance. Another common response in regards to the zombie or trance state was that those who experienced it did not necessarily know when they were there, but only realized they had been there upon their return. In this respect, it is similar to the distorted sense of time characteristic of mysticism. Given the previous comparison, it is likely that William James (1963) would acknowledge the *mystery zombie* or *mystery trance* state a mystical experience.

After an interview one respondent referred to the flow state as one that is awareness based and the zombie state as one that is unawareness based; total awareness versus total unawareness. This dichotomy does exist in the unconscious part of our existence, as each state is a sort of unconsciousness. Another respondent similarly remarked that the zombie state was unawareness, and its antithesis was focus and concentration. In the middle lies some sort of optimal level of consciousness. Optimal experience then exists in this intermediacy. This philosophy of the intermediate is not a new one, as it was the basis of Aristotelian ethical philosophy. It is this unconscious balancing of one's awareness, with their unawareness that allows them to experience some optimal level of consciousness. The zombie state is based on these contradictions. It is being totally in the moment, but totally separate from time. It is being ever present, but unavailable. It is being tuned in, but turned off.

Squirt boaters repetitively submerge themselves underwater, and in mystery sessions this act is performed many times. There is a continuous and repetitious event of suspended breathing for long periods of time. Aldous Huxley (1954) addressed this very act in *Heaven and Hell*. "Long suspensions of breath lead to a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the lungs and blood, and this increase in the concentration of CO2 lowers the efficiency of the brain as a reducing valve and permits the entry into consciousness of experiences, visionary or mystical, from 'out there'" (p. 144). A very common response from participants was the sensation of experiencing another world. While Huxley's physiological explanation to the phenomenon is relevant, this explanation does not, in any way, detract from the authority of the experience.

Discussion

The common thread between mysticism, flow, and the zombie state is that each state is experience driven. What drives squirt boaters is the experience. It is likely that William James (1963) would acknowledge the flow state to be an example of a mystical state of consciousness. With that said, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) would probably not acknowledge mystical states of consciousness as flow states. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) explains in regards to testimonials:

> One could treat these testimonials as poetic metaphors and leave them at that. But it is important to realize that they refer to experiences that are just as real as being hungry, or as concrete as bumping into a wall. *There is nothing mysterious or mystical about them*. When a person invests all her psychic energy into an interaction – whether it is with another person, a boat, a mountain, or a piece of music – she in effect becomes a part of a system of action greater than what the individual self had been before. This system takes its form from the rules of the activity; *its energy comes from the person's attention.* But it is a real system –

> subjectively as real as being part of a family, a corporation, or a team – and the self that is part of it expands its boundaries and becomes more complex than what it had been. (p. 99)

While Csikszentmihalyi specifically remarks that there is nothing mystical about flow he does acknowledge the fourth characteristic of mysticism in his defense of flow not being mystical. The fourth characteristic being a merging with a greater power, "she in effect becomes a part of a system of greater action that what the individual self had been before" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 99). In a sense, while trying to distance himself from mysticism Csikszentmihalyi has bound himself to James' account of mystical states of consciousness.

The study has challenged the paradigm of mysticism. Flow looks to fall within that paradigm, as does the *mystery zombie* and *mystery trance* state. If flow theory is just another manifestation of mysticism, then what else is a manifestation of mysticism?

William James (1963) would also likely acknowledge the *mystery zombie* state as a mystical state of consciousness, but as respondents have illustrated the trance is not to be trusted. It is not wise to fully succumb to the trance. The total unawareness can be deadly when in the realm, where anything can happen instantly and with its happening can erase you from the earth in a second. One downriver hand paddler from Tennessee explains. "I hit the up-button when I don't have enough air. It's that natural I can't breathe water, and water is all around me, and it's all I have to breathe, and I am used to breathing air. And then getting past that, that it is just my mind telling me I need the air, not my body telling me I need the air." While the trance is an aspect of squirting (for some) it should be treated with caution, as navigating in dynamic environments, which do not offer oxygen to breathe, often should require some awareness. If the zombie state is unawareness, and flow is total awareness, where does mysticism fall on the

scale? Does it lie in the intermediate? What distinguishes mysticism from flow from the zombie state? Where does the distinction fall? Each state does have an element of transcendence of self present. Each state deals with a distorted sense of time. Each state has the ability to transform the individual who has experienced the elevated consciousness. Where ever these experiences fall in terms of classification is secondary to the experience. These experiences are freedom oriented; allowing the participants a release from their life, transporting them to another world. Maybe that is why Snyder (2001) says, "Being a *squirtist* means participating in the evolution of freedom" (p. 9).

Practical Implications

While mysticism and flow can be acknowledged as interesting, where do the practical applications of these interests lie? How can this be applied to recreation professionals? First of all, it must be stated that whitewater kayaking, especially squirt boating, will not elicit mystical states of consciousness or flow states for every participant. In fact, some participants who have embarked on a lifelong serious leisure career with whitewater will never have a mystical experience. So for those who seek out mysticism and the state of consciousness where it dwells will not find it by sliding into a squirt kayak.

This is not to say that squirt kayaking and whitewater cannot help facilitate these states. For many squirtists the mystery move is a type of portal into the realm that only the mystic can appreciate. But again where does this concern the field of recreation?

As the economy continues to decline and a career becomes a vague notion that only the previous generation can really appreciate, leisure becomes ever more important. It is through leisure pursuits where an individual now must look to for self-growth, friendships, and self-confidence. A career used to provide an individual with more than just financial security and

stability. A career acted as the backbone to the material and emotional lives for those on the career path. The landscape of our culture has changed. No longer is a career, in the sense the previous generation understood it, the norm. In order to fill this void leisure must step up to the plate. It is through art, music, and sport where the emotional growth must now emerge. Work can no longer support the core of our lives. The importance of leisure, especially serious leisure, takes precedence to enrich and develop our lives. A career no longer acts as the root system for personal development and enrichment instead leisure looks to take its place as the foundation. But where does leisure look for inspiration? Snyder (2001) points out that "to attain oneness with funness is inspiring" (p.3). Fun in all its simplicity is the temple.

Through fun and enjoyment mysticism and flow emerge. Not only mysticism and flow, but a slew of other virtues can stem from something as simple and inspiring as fun. As professionals in the field of recreation it becomes a duty to acknowledge the role that serious leisure can play in an individual's life. Fun can lead to mysticism, which can lead to a total transformation of the self. Even without the mystical element serious leisure has the ability to ground an individual, to keep them centered. It is about living in the moment, as opposed to being caught up in the moment. It is about being present, in the here and now, all the time.

Being present in the moment is something that eludes the masses. For many it is hard to turn off the chatter of everyday life. Leisure exists in a realm where individuals can and do frequently turn off the chatter. It is this escape that is so attractive for many participants; an escape that can be traced to fun. Mysticism's reach extends far beyond the realm of spirituality, religion, work, recreation, and leisure. Mysticism happens all the time, everyday. Even washing the dishes offers a medium for a true and deep mystical experience. It is about being ever present and open to the energies that create each and every experience. If a person is really in

tune then mysticism has the potential to manifest itself throughout all aspects of an individual's waking life. Being in tune is about turning off the chatter, closing out the peripherals, and staying centered in a seriously dynamic environment. That dynamic environment is life, and is not exclusive the river, to the mountain, to the office, to the court, to the playing field, to the canvas, to the stage, or to the classroom. Life is dynamic and the energies that create any given situation can seem overwhelming--thus the importance of a good *charc*.

Suggestions

Further research should be done in regards to mystical states of consciousness, flow states, and peak-experiences. What is the distinction between these three very similar states? Is it up to the individual experience to determine what is mystical and what is flow? Can research tell us where to draw the line? More research needs to be done in order to fully understand the extent of the mysticism paradigm, and to decide where flow states and states like the *mystery zombie* and *mystery trance* fall under that paradigm. Hood (1977) suggested that mystical states of consciousness are easier to research than once thought. While this topic definitely has its problems, it does require more research. Hood (1977) also stated that mysticism is far more common than once thought. More research on obscure activities, like squirt boating, might be the window needed to see into these different states of consciousness. Freedom will likely appear as a common theme across different recreation and leisure activities. Freedom from daily life, from the self, from time; these themes might surface as people search for that way to immerse themselves in something; something that allows them to be here now. Ever present and engaged in an activity is a personal and beautiful experience, offering infinite benefits for those who can do what alludes so many; to be here now.

Experience driven activities, or states of consciousness, will often be hard to describe. The experience defines the moment. The experience transcends any type of explanation or description. It is all very feel oriented. It is a deeply personal thing, yielding authority over the person that had the experience. This experience could be a form of mysticism, flow, the *zombie state*, or just fun. After the entire project, it appears this inquiry is no closer to describing or defining the respective experiences that it set out to explain; another catch-22. It does present a number of testimonies that do tell a story about the phenomenon. But without the experience itself, it is like catching fragments of the story, or missing the punch-line to a joke. Again, this highlights the importance of the experience. Mysticism and flow may be present for *squirtists*, but what ultimately matters for them is to stay in the flow of the river, as each *squirtist* will create their own reality based upon their perceptions and desires. "Somewhere there is a magic incentive that makes squirtists strive to flow like the river. No one will ever be able to put a name on it; whatever it is, you take it to the grave with you" (Snyder, 2001, p. 181).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Re: a favor to ask

Thursday, November 19, 2009 2:29 PM

From: "preferredmodes@aol.com" <preferredmodes@aol.com>
View contact details

To: j2themt@yahoo.com

Message contains attachments

Hi JT,

Yes feel free to include any excepts from the book you would like- except that bit about how I spent my youth as a chimp in the circus.

My shoulder is 99.9% good.

I'm attaching a shot of my new Slip next to my KOR

jim

-----Original Message-----
From: John Trembley <j2themt@yahoo.com>
To: jim snyder <preferredmodes@aol.com>
Sent: Thu, Nov 19, 2009 1:15 pm
Subject: a favor to ask

hi jim. i am still working on the thesis project. throughout the document i have included excerpts from your book. i feel the excerpts add to the project, giving it a type of feel that will help someone unfamiliar with squirt boating, aka my professors and other readers, a more authentic understanding of the sport. The excerpts appear as interludes on two different occasions. i need permission from you to be able to include them in the work. no is an acceptable answer, but a yes would be cool. thanks for everything, and i hope your shoulder is feeling better. sinkcerely yours. john trembley

Appendix A – Permission to Cite Lengthy Passages

Appendix B

How does "appetite" and "tenacity" affect your squirt boating?

- It affects if a lot… The experience of being able to do one well keeps me going…
- It affects it greatly… If you have more appetite it allows you to be relaxed and calm.
- It is completely based off of feel; it makes me want to get after it more and more and more.
- They help describe the limiting factors of your mystery moves. Everyone naturally becomes aware of their own appetite and tenacity. It's just what helps define the outer limits of everyone's little frontier.
- The longer I go without squirt boating the more appetite I have, particularly for big rides.
- Quality and consistency is important, not time I am down. I want to have control. A big ride is a deep ride.
- Tremendously. One big mystery move leads to thousands of others.
- Arena dependent.
- Strong impact. My appetite starts running out at 5 seconds.
- Appetite is something that seems to have lots of different variables; a lot of it has to do with just your general physical and mental well-being… With a group of fellow boaters, or a spot you know really well, your appetite can get great, it can get deep, and that's when someone gets those epic mystery moves…
- Critical, when I have them I have a great time, and when I don't I don't have a great time.
- Very much, if I have no will I am not going to push myself to do it. I have to be in the mood.

- You really have to have an appetite for it; to enjoy it, and to excel at it.
- It does require me wanting me to be there.
- You always want to get that one; one more. Just one more good one… When you end up feeling like you've been down a little longer than you want and you don't have control to come back up, it definitely affects my appetite
- Completely, that's what drives everything.
- It molds my squirt boating. I don't really have a large appetite, like some of the experts. I have an appetite, I just don't have the desire to go 30 seconds, or even close to 30 seconds.

How does "fear" and "ambition" affect your mysteries? Why would you hit the up button?

- For me it is all about control, when I feel like I am in control underwater I feel comfortable… when I feel like the river has total control and it's just spinning me down, I don't like to be super deep, that's when I would hit the up button
- Fear of not breathing. It's been twenty seconds and you're looking up ten feet at the surface. It then affects my next few rides.
- Because I am starting to almost shed a tear because my breath, it hurts too bad, or because I am too deep and the compression freaks me out.
- Fear and ambition have to be abandoned to get decent mysteries of any kind. The up-button shouldn't be a fearful or ambitious kind of decision; just a time is right kind of decision. Fear and ambition are just extra baggage that should be left at the door.
- I get what I would have to classify loosely as fear.

- I will get a little more risky in competition. (A scary arena) The arena determines my fear.
- When I feel out of control, or a lot of pressure I want to come up, and come up fast.
- I don't. I don't generally pull out of mysteries.
- (Unfamiliarity) Fear plays into it.
- For me that's the part of getting comfortable with the mystery move… If I am already at my limit of depth and I …It's a very innate fear, it's not like your trembling; it's not a very active fear… it's not so much fear as a protection measure for me.
- Not knowing what is physically there.
- Lack of oxygen.
- Fear always comes into play. Another driving force. Everyone has their own comfort zones. On those longer mystery moves, in more intimidating rapids, I am driven by fear the whole time. Fear is the number one motivator for hitting the up-button.
- I hit the up button when I don't have enough air. It's that natural I can't breathe water and water is all around me and it's all I have to breathe and I am used to breathing air. And then getting past that, that it is just my mind telling me I need the air, not my body telling me I need the air. (Oblivion charc, out of control)
- Complete control over my mysteries. Fear is what pulls you to it, but it also keeps you away… The more I am comfortable with fear I am able to take a little more and more and more.
- Fear definitely drives my up button.

Can you describe "the lure of the deep" and what it means to you?

- It's a combination of enjoying the feeling of being underwater and being weightless, coupled with the occasional ability to get into a trance that allows me to block out everything else in my life.
- It's like running Class V waterfalls, that feeling of accomplishment… That trance world.
- Getting down there to where you are totally away from everybody. It's like being an astronaut, getting in to outer space, where nobody else is. Being down there, by yourself, trying to be calm, and not freak out every time.
- It symbolizes entering a realm and trying to keep your shit together. It reminds me of an old saying, 'To see the kingdom of heaven is like touring a great palace, but you have a little teaspoon filled with oil, and you have to see all the wonders of the palace and not spill a drop of oil.' You've got to keep your focus, but not miss any wonders of this new realm.
- (Love water) That attraction and comfort with the water.
- It's kind of like a sense of weightlessness, kind of experience like what the astronauts experience on the moon, bouncing around without gravity. It's like being in another world. Everything is kind of loud on the surface, you drop in and hear the bubbles; you can see the bubbles, besides that everything is just really quiet. It is just amazing to know that there is this turbulence up top, but there can be this transcendence peace right under the water.
- No, it's just fun.
- It's a different realm. You're by yourself, it's quiet. It's very relaxing.

- It's always been about this puzzle to me… It just feels like the river is giving you a big hug. I just like that pressure all around me.
- It's trying to push the limit, getting as far down as you can.
- The visuals, the pressure. Kinescetics of body movement, being underwater and spinning.
- Just being out on the river, out in the moment. I think yesterday on the river I spent as much time sitting by myself in the eddy just watching… it's very hypnotic, and mesmerizing… Watery dreams, the water kind of calls to me, when I am down in the realm it is just a very primordial, rejuvenating, relaxing, religious moment… It's really hard to explain it but it is a lure, part of it is a state of mind it induces when you're down there. It's like visiting another world, you know. Stay for a while, but don't stay too long.
- Going down and staying down is a goal that is not too distant from anything like achieving any goal… the sensation is different from what an individual feels, but what your friends, relatives, or any other person on the planet feels. I don't think it's an elitists thing, but it sort of puts brethren squirt boaters into a place of shared experience that is special. Not better or worse, just different.
- It's like a drug.
- With depth, comes the ultimate goal of time. The deeper you go the longer you can stay underwater. Depth is another one of those places like fear, its unknown. And I guess that's the lure behind it. Because you don't know what's down there. You never know, the deeper you go; it could be your last mystery move.
- Wanting to put myself in a spot where I can be enveloped by the forces of the river, the force of our world. I feel like I got a certain peace out of it, it's almost like experiencing

another world… The lure is the ride itself, just flying around. The sense of being wrapped by the arms of whatever river it is.

- It's just quiet, it's peaceful… I compare squirt boating to bouldering, I used to boulder quite a bit, it requires this constant refinement and repetition, but you get to a point, through the repetition, through the refinement, that you are able to make it through the mystery in this almost Zen like state, a blissful like state, where everything moves and fits in to place so well and so smoothly.
- That's hard… It's almost like you're put into a different warp zone, because you don't feel like you know when you're down there. It's a constant battle with your mind, and with what you know, and with what you're feeling. And I think that's the lure.
- I'm not necessarily drawn to deep rides, again because I started such a long time ago, just getting my head under is a very good sensation for me and always has been.

What do you focus on when you roam?

- Stay underwater.
- Staying level and where I am. Using as little energy as possible… Bubbles
- I like to look around. I like to focus on the surface.
- The geometry of where I am going, and how far involved I want to get. Where that enough point is. I try to get there and leave there somewhat decisively, not just abandoned myself to the oblivion.
- (Efficient) Reading water and reading the stimuli, or eliminate a resistance or clean a boat's attitude, allow the boat to work its way into the heart of the feature. (Mapping it all out) Being aware of where I am with that feature, or with that ride, and trying to be present with the ride.

- Sometimes I am so focused on staying flat and having a good ride, I forget to enjoy myself while I am down there. (Visuals) Fascinated by whirlpool streams.
- Trying to relax mostly. The best mysteries are the ones where I do not really focus on anything.
- (Technical) (Relax) Floating, quietly turning and being really relaxed.
- Complete relaxation. Trying to do as little as possible. Letting the boat do what it was design to do. I just focus on relaxing and enjoying the ride.
- Trying to stay as stable and as calm as I can. Getting to a point where I can just relax. The coolest thing about a mystery move is just being able to relax.
- Keeping it flat and catching the current.
- I don't really focus on anything. (Visuals) I really like to look up… try to concentrate on that third spot, that moment in time your body is rotating toward. Particularly with a long ride I try to minimize my body moves, kind of a gentle steering, looking down into the depths where your boat's going, maybe that's one of the reasons it's so rejuvenating. It momentarily wipes everything out of your consciousness.
- The water, what it's doing.
- Keeping the boat flat. (Mechanics) Staying down, and enjoying the experience.
- Most of the time I focus on my lungs about to explode. If it's not that it's an absolute cool feeling, you've got pressure coming from all sides, and it's fast and slow all at the same time.

Squirt boating is a fluid sport. What does becoming one with the water mean to you?

- Enjoying the sensation of being underwater and floating, because you're essentially weightless.

- Being either completely out of control or being completely in control. I like to be hugged, hugged by the all the current.
- I feel like I am merging with greater powers than myself and still negotiating with a sense of balance and I think it teaches a lot about dynamic environments to do that. It's helpful in life and other aspects. It's kind of like training for being cool under pressure and it underlines how important it is to stay balanced, to stay over your wing. Maintain your center, not to let your focus alter, except inside for what you're trying to do. The focus is anchored in being centered and balanced in a seriously dynamic environment.
- Be the ball; it's like be the water. It's like melding with it. And cleaning everything up as far as charc, boat attitude, drag. Somewhat getting out of the way of the process.
- Spiritual aspect of squirt boating transcends all the other disciplines. I am a pretty religious person in general and there are a number of ways people can experience god and nature is a way I experience God.
- It's just fun.
- Escape from reality, it's a calming sensation.
- Going with the flow. (On the love for downstream paddling): You are never going against the current. You are going with the flow. You are kind of at its mercy. You can kind of play around with it and enjoy it, but in the end it's taking you.
- Getting to the point where you're relaxing and getting to the point where you can let the river take you.
- It's just being on. Sometimes you feel it and sometimes you are still searching for it.
- In a squirt boat more so than surface boats you don't have to worry, or think about, anticipating as much as you do in a surface boat, because something is going to do

something to your boat. In a squirt boat you're in it, so you can manage it. It is almost mindless to manage features you're in the middle of, because you're just there.

- Being able to ride the boat… Ease your effort.
- Not fighting it, getting a smooth entry, getting locked in, and just being able to not work to stay down, enjoy the spin, and enjoy the trip.
- Becoming part of it is understanding its parts. And that's why I like squirt boating, because you can feel how water is not some organism in a container; that it is actually made up of a bunch of small parts. And you get to feel every single one of them.
- It's just trying to be fluid. Using the energy of the seam, or the water, with my own energy. I am not really trying to battle the river. I am trying mold myself into the currents that I am faced with. I am trying to remain smooth and calm.

What does the squirt boating arena mean to your experience? Can you describe your favorite arenas? What is an awesome arena?

- Awesome arena is one where it is easy to get in, easy to stay down, and there are no consequences downstream… Water quality, being able to see underwater… If I feel safe and in control I can relax and push myself.
- The Weasel, in Oregon. Needs to have a great entry, a safe arena, logistic factors… The great arenas are big… Easy access, easy entry, cool visuals…
- (Scenery)I like convergence seams. Be in the mountains, clear water, and a bunch of friends.
- I tend to like fickly arenas, somewhat fickle, but still powerful. The arena is everything. The way I do squirt boating, it's all about the science of doing it.

- Alley is a gift from God. (Privacy, setting, ascetics)(Capabilities of spot, and nature/solitary)
- Easy access, powered-up, & nice rock to get on.
- Calm underwater, lack of pronounced rock, (visibility is not important) I like to turn counterclockwise. (Technique over reckless abandoned)
- (Ones) That have no limitations.
- JB/Fascination Alley. Easy entry and a slow decent.
- Is one where you have 100% probability of getting dunked.
- (Easy entry, consistent drop, not real fickle) (Visuals, forgiving, powered up enough, water clarity)
- (Clear water, visibility) (Easy entry)
- Mellow, easy to handle arena.
- Big river, with destination spots on it. There is that thrill of river running and the adrenaline buzz and getting down river, making sure you are where you need to be. (Scenic) (Gauley, Ottawa)
- (Water quality) (Gauley) Some places just have a good feel. Nolichucky's got a good feel to it.
- (Quality companionship)

Can you describe the "mystery zombie" or the "mystery trance" state? What does it feel like? How do you know when you are 'there'? How do you come back? Do you have flashbacks? etc...

- I don't think you do know when your there because I think you lose track of yourself while you're there, and you don't realize you were there until you're back… It's one of

those states of mind when you are not really paying attention to yourself, I'm not thinking in a very conscious way about what I am doing. I am just doing… I guess I can compare it to being on a long road trip. And all the sudden you realize 10 or 20 miles have gone by and you have no idea what happened, but suddenly you are farther down the road… A state of extreme relaxation.

- I have flashbacks at work, on the computer I will see bubbles suddenly, or driving… It really is a trance.
- There have been times where I will sit there and I don't even realize I have been in my boat for an hour. Because I can't remember every single ride. Going from one ride to the next. Almost like staying drugged out. You are just so entranced with the fascination of being hugged by water.
- No (cannot explain). It is like a gift of the arena, and it has do with your charc. You tend to go into a trance when you're trying to make progress in an arena, but the trance is not progress oriented. You don't have to make progress. The trance is its own little gravity thing that draws you in… The antidote for the trance is obviously focus and concentration. If you had equal parts of focus and trance you would be in some kind of optimal state.
- It does bring on a euphoric state. As far as knowing when your there, it is usually after. It just feels better and better, more and more focus, like clarity of focus and perception of what is going on and being able to cleanly interact with it. I feel the trance because after the session it is like a loopy feeling… Dreams, now it is mostly day dreaming.
- (Like a road trip)The worries of the world disappear for a time. (Communal, bonding experience, spiritual)

- I have never really experienced it.
- When I am following a circle of other zombies, around and around and around. Otherwise I don't get into the mystery trance.
- Hard to explain it. If I really start figuring it out. Entry is so key, it is always changing. For me when I figure that out that's when I get the zombie state. It's more about consistency. It's almost like a waterlogged state. You do have flashbacks.
- Definitely been there. It's sort of an unconsciousness. For me I don't realize I am actually there until someone points it out to me or something happens, either below the water or above the water; that points it out in that certain point of time. It feels like a time when you lose track of time, and you're kind of in a day dream. People can be speaking to you and you can be looking right through them, it's like a long distance stare. It's interesting too, I think, because when you're in that zone, the water and the air kind of meld into each other. Before you're in that zone, when you start your mystery move session it's very obvious when you're breathing and not breathing. But when you're in that zombie zone, everything seems to meld together, and you get into this long distant stare. When you're pulled out of that, it's like when you're pulled out of sleep. (Post interview: flow=awareness, zombie=unawareness, similar but unconscious)
- I don't know if I have flashbacks, but I have dreams. When I really know I am in the flow state it's the breathing. When I have got my breathing dialed in, I am forgetting about everything else.
- For me there are two real components of it: when you're in the water 6 ft, 10 ft, 12 ft, 15 ft down and you're roaming along, the whole concept of your mind being clear and you're totally focused on your ride and the surroundings, I think that's one element of the

trance. And your there? When, you don't know you there. You're pretty much there when you're in the move… It's a very euphoric feeling. The other aspect is the cumulative aspect of having a good set.

- I don't think I can really speak to that. I think I know what people speak of.
- I have none of that. I have never felt it, I've felt excited, and really dialed in, but I wouldn't say it is a trance, or a drug induced trance, or even a dream state, I think of it more as dialed in type of feeling.
- Just being underwater and staying to be underwater. It's addicting. You feel comfortable underwater, but there is that fear. I find myself in class, or driving, thinking about being underwater.
- Dreams definitely. It seems like my goal is almost like a hyper-focus, intent on one thing, dropping into the river and interacting with it.
- I'm not sure I've completely been there, I have approached that…. It ties in with appetite, but transcends tenacity; I think when you're in the trance, you're not, you'll keep doing it, not because you want to do it better, just because you feel like you, like every ride is there and you just want to continue that feeling.
- You kind of know when you feel it when you feel it. It's hard to explain that, but I can describe what it looks like with other people. They come up with that thousand yard stare, like they have been somewhere they have never been before. And after you get multiple of those you get kind of numb to it. I would call the mystery zombie one that is just numb, just awestruck by what's going on.
- The mystery zombie state for me is just getting into this flow of mystery moves. I come out of a mystery move and all I want to do is get myself back into position to do again. It

is a repeating cycle. I don't usually talk much to the people around me, but sometimes I am still in a trance and can hold conversation. Not a lot of conversation, seeking one mystery move after another.

Csikszentmihalyi coined the term flow state, a state athletes often refer to as "being in the zone." Have you experienced such a state of consciousness while squirting? Can you describe it? How does this flow state correlate with the flow state of the river?

- Yes. No. The river is always doing what it is meant to do.
- Yeah, it kind of goes with the mystery circle, you are basically in a slow moving, defined pattern. When I think of flow states I think of repetition, but it is very mellow, it's not structured at all. (Definite correlation).
- Yeah, I notice it when I am charcing in. I get in a zone where I am totally focused on what I am doing. I don't think of anything else, there is nothing else going on. All I can think of is dropping in, and when I am in, just flying and enjoying the ride. Being in the water and being immersed and hugged… Just trying to dance with it a little bit.
- That is just given to you when you do mystery moves, if you really get good at doing mystery moves. You get totally focused on one aspect or another of what you're doing. It is the evolution of learning. Basically, you abandoned all your peripheral thought and you dive into this focus state, but it leads you into being a zombie… I think the most common denominator is both states do flow. Your flow state does evolve, it does move along, just like the river does. And they both are single-minded, purposeful, based on intent. Flow is the common denominator.
- It all about that. It's a multi-faceted attraction: being outside, being in the water. A big part is the attraction to 100% concentration and focus in the moment…It's a feel focused

origin and it manifests itself in physical ability to perfect and refine and clean up charc, boat attitudes, mental attitudes.

- (Can do no wrong, cannot miss) (Perfect execution)
- I have never experienced it.
- Can be on and off for the slightest of reasons, and they are not explainable.
- Being in the zone is running the Gauley. Running those rapids by yourself, in a squirt boat, and knowing you laced everything, but were still at the mercy of this huge powerful river, but manipulated it in a way that allowed you to survive it. It is just having a good time.
- I haven't really experienced much of a flow state.
- It doesn't have to be necessarily trance. I have had flow across different sports; flow is something I recognize across different sports.
- The mystery move is not the same kind of adrenaline rush you get from boofing some drop or running some rapid, or doing some ski line or bike line; it's a lot more comforting and rejuvenating. The fear factor for me when I am more in the zone, when the euphoric feelings are intermingling with all the survival feelings, you stir them all up in a blender and you come up looking like a cat that nearly drowned. Things happen so quickly, you don't have a feeling of fear it's more a natural instinct takes over and you just start doing things; your body is on autopilot.
- I don't think I have experienced a flow state… Being able to explore whatever comes up, just taking everything as it comes, and not feeling like there is a schedule or anything to attend to.
- I wouldn't say I felt the flow state.

- Definitely a zone for squirt boating. You find yourself in a zone running rapids because running big rapids in a squirt boat is extremely dangerous, I think that is common knowledge with among squirt boaters and kayakers, but a lot of times I find myself at the top of the rapid really worrying about the outcome of the run and then later, however long it takes to run the rapid, you get to the bottom of the rapid and obviously everything is o.k., look back upstream, and I have no idea what just happened, all I know is that I reacted and the outcome was good. While I am running a rapid, it is one of those things where reactions take place and there is not too much thought going on… It just comes natural at that point… When hitting mystery moves one after another I think it is the same zone as any other athlete
- Mood of the day is one of the main things I pay attention to, so I know what shape I am in that day. Mood of the day crosses over to the people around you too. You want to be there and that all starts with the mood of the day… Being in the flow is working with natural forces you have no control over.
- I think I have experienced it; I don't know, it's circular, but the easiest way to describe it is being in the zone. Just that you're not having to, you don't feel like you're working or chasing an objective, it's just there, your immersed in it, the rides are good, the rides are right, the rides are long enough. I think it's more to do with the individual's consciousness, than with the flow of the river. The flow of the river is important… If your head is clear, and you're able to let go of the daily worries and concerns, and be present in the moment, I think that contributes the greatest amount to being in the zone. Being able to transcend, if you will, your daily concerns, worries, issues. Be present in the moment and enjoy that.

- Absolutely, I think it's actually a time issue for me. I also have that feeling going down river, when everything seems to click, and you can slide your boat around like you want to. Feeling what the river is doing and being a part of it, instead of fighting it.
- Flow state and zombie state. I think at times they can be one and the same, but I think flow state is more when you're hitting good rides consistently. Ride after ride after ride. You know how to set-up, how to execute. How to navigate your way into the seam and get your drop and get your spin going.

Appendix B — Responses to Questionnaire

Vita

John Michael Trembley was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, to the parents of John Francis and Joanne Madge Hogan Trembley. He is the oldest of three sons: Jeffery Francis and Joseph Lee. He attended Maryville High School, and later graduated with an undergraduate degree from East Tennessee State University, where he majored in Philosophy with an emphasis in Religious Studies. John is seeking a Master's of Science Degree in Recreation and Leisure Studies, with a concentration in Recreation Administration. John is very passionate about whitewater kayaking. It is the most fun thing he knows how to do. He can be found at any number of places where water moves downhill, often with his brown dog, Cassius. John also likes to spend time underwater.