

**ENCOUNTERS BEYOND THE POND:
THE LIMIT EXPERIENCE
OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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Introduction

As a High School educator I've been privileged, as have many others, to have been extremely close to the lives of young people. As a principal of schools I always appreciated being at the cutting edge of young people's lives at different stages. Much of the time has been spent with senior students, living cheek by jowl with them for many years in the boarding school environment, working with them in their religious education classes and laughing and crying with them at the deep joys and sorrows they experienced as they prepared for the next stage of their lives.

A few examples come to mind. First, in Karratha, away on the remote coast of Western Australia, in country unimaginable to most of you, was an area reminiscent of old-time American Westerns. Here in an environment where people came to make money, certainly not to pray, I ran the Catholic school and taught my religious education and maths classes, as usual. It was pretty tough going. There's not much faith among the young people, or certainly there wasn't in those times, in the environment of a mining service town. It was tough going in every religious education class. It is from this experience that the title of this presentation comes. The Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu says, "How shall I talk of the sea to a frog that has never left its pond?" Talking of religion and spirituality to young people who, apparently, had not allowed themselves to experience the spiritual was a daunting challenge.

Then we had Michael. Michael was a very well liked young fellow, a good sportsman, good academic. One day he felt a pain in his left leg while playing football and had to leave the field. He simply could not go on, and within a few days was diagnosed as having a particularly virulent strain of leukaemia. To cut a long story short, we all saw Michael battle through a little over twelve months of illness before he finally went very peacefully to God. At the time of his going, we had the luxury of being able to plan for this critical incident well in advance. So we arranged for some religious symbols and a few small candles to be placed in a darkened and fairly quiet classroom. We invited any of our students who were upset, and there were many, simply to visit the room to sit and think and to be in touch with the spiritual side of life. Here were numbers of young men, in particular, professing no belief at all in what we had been doing as part of religious education, but with tears in their eyes sitting quietly, being with themselves and, I've no doubt, being with Michael in their hearts. The frogs had left the pond, to be changed, I believe, for life. Certainly they were for the remainder of that year.

The second incident occurred when I was working from our Darwin Catholic Education Office. One of the more enjoyable tasks that I had was visiting a number of Aboriginal

schools and working with principals and staff there. Aurora, the Aboriginal lady who used to keep the books at Bathurst Island, was talking to me one day about her life. She shared with me where she'd been born, how she'd grown up on the Island and how she had come to have the husband and family she now had. In all of this she worked slowly backwards towards her birth date. As she got closer to telling me about where she was born, her eyes somehow glazed over and having said who her mother was and where she'd been born, she looked either through me or past me, I'm not sure which, and said simply "I'm not sure where I was before that". For traditional Aboriginal people, there is no concept that they were born, died and rose again. In some way in that very ancient culture they have always existed in the universe.

These types of experiences gave me a passionate interest in the subject of religious experience and the Alister Hardy question. It made me want to ask our young people about the experiences they had had because I was totally convinced that there was so much of it out there. It was also clear that it did not relate well most of the time to much of what we older people might term formal religion.

The fascinating thing about the group of senior students in this research is not so much that they too responded overwhelmingly that they had had spiritual experiences, but that we may as well have phrased the question quite differently. We may as well have looked, for instance, at those who responded "certainly true" to other questions that were based on their values and attitudes to life. For instance, we could have asked them "Do you try to be friendly and helpful to others who feel lonely or who are rejected?" or we may have said "Does it concern you that a large part of the world suffers from hunger or malnutrition?" or again "Do you think it's all right to do something if everyone else is doing it?" If they responded very positively, or for the last question negatively, then for this group, in this research, I believe we would have been able to tell most of them whether they had had one of the experiences we were researching and indeed probably classify the type of experience it might well have been.

The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research was to ask senior students at a number of our Catholic high schools the Alister Hardy question – "Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your every day world?" (Hay, 1987, p. 114)

The foundation of what we did was to separate the concept of religion from the experiences about which we were asking. We called them "limit" experiences. "Limit" experiences were simply every day experiences that were extended beyond the normal. They're experiences in which I expected students would sense an ultimate limit to their horizon of existence or to their horizon of understanding. For instance, take this example from the written accounts of the students. In fact around half of those who responded to the survey questions also wrote, some at length, of their experiences.

I was sitting by myself, in my room one night, several years ago doing nothing much but typing up some things for someone who I felt close to. For no reason at all I realised my mind wandering, and something else. It was as if someone was talking to me, in my head in private without my knowledge. When I realised this it was as if the thing fled and disappeared leaving me with an overwhelming feeling of sadness and loneliness. I just sat there with tear filled eyes till dismissing it and continuing.

This was a specifically auditory experience and something which, no doubt, some of you, like me, have experienced yourself or at least been aware of from reading many of the accounts of experience in the Alister Hardy collection. However, there is nothing specifically religious about it. It's not interpreted as such nor did I attempt to interpret it in any way beyond the way in which the student had written about it.

On the other hand such experiences and religion are surely connected. The original research definition came from Tracy (1975, p. 93) who believes that "all significant explicitly religious language and experience," what he terms the religions,

and all significant explicitly religious characteristics of our common human experience will bear some resemblance to either articulating or implying a limit experience, a limit language or a limit dimension.

What we were looking for was the recognition of this limit dimension to our human existence.

In this way our definition of limit experience kept away from the issue of interpretation of particular experiences as being religious. In essence we defined such experiences as "an experience that reveals the reality of life beyond the self, beyond the here and now. It may be recognition of our own fragility and vulnerability as much as a joyous awareness of a reality beyond our normal encounter with life." Just as an aside, sometime after making this definition, I realised that Andrew Greeley (1996, p. 113), in the United States, also following in the footsteps of Tracy (1975), had made a similar definition for a limit experience. Although no-one will ever believe that my definition was arrived at quite independently, I offer in my defence that Australia is a long way from most places, and thus it was entirely possible for me to have had no access to Greeley's work.

Beyond that, what we did was to be very objective and in the best traditions of Alister Hardy, scientific, in our investigations. The task was simply to collect, record and classify experiences and to contribute to the knowledge in this area by doing so. Our means of doing it was by way of a survey of Year 12 students, followed by an invitation to write and share their experiences if they so wished.

In essence the purpose of the research was three-fold. First, it tried to determine the extent of recognition and reporting of limit experiences among senior high school students in some of our colleges. Next it attempted to confirm or deny five hypotheses that had been framed with particular reference to the work of Hay (1987) and also Robinson and Jackson (1987) in Britain and Flynn (1975, 1985, 1993) in Australia. Finally, the research intended to explore possible links between these limit experiences and other circumstances peculiar to these students, but in apparently unrelated areas.

The research used a sampling technique by means of a questionnaire administered to senior students in their final year at four secondary colleges administered by the Archdiocese of Brisbane. To allow for comparisons to be made among different types of schools, the schools chosen included one all girls school, one all boys school and two co-educational schools. The school populations were drawn from mid to lower socio economic backgrounds. In fact, it would be true to say that the majority of these students were from reasonably poor socio economic circumstances.

To achieve all the things that were wanted from the survey, it was designed in six specific segments. The first three collected basic information about the students: whether they were male or female, which school they attended, their ethnic background, whether they were

happy at school and which subjects they did. The fourth segment was more important. It set out to ask questions about the values and attitudes of the group. Many of the questions had been asked by Flynn (1975, 1985, 1993) in his three major surveys of some Australian schools, each about a decade apart over the past thirty years. Others had been asked by Robinson and Jackson (1987) in some of their work with students in Britain. These are the key values and experience questions to which I will often refer.

The Design of the Research

Six segments:

- background information (“B”)
- family details (“F”)
- school life (“S”)
- values and attitudes (“V”)
- experiences in living (“E”)
- descriptive passages on personal experience (“P”)

The final two segments were the key to the research. They consisted of direct questions on the types of experiences that the students had and of descriptive passages on various types of experiences. The intention was to focus the students on the experiences themselves and to encourage them to write an account of the experience at the end of the survey. To a large extent this was successful. Around 40% of those who completed the survey also chose to write an account of their own experience.

The experience questions, preceded by an “E” or a “P” in the questionnaire, were chosen so as to have at least one question that paralleled one of the types of experience identified by Hay (1987) in his monumental work in the U.K.

Hay’s Categories of Religious Experience

Types of experience:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Patterning of events | 29% |
| • Awareness of the presence of God | 27% |
| • Awareness of receiving help in prayer | 25% |
| • Awareness of a guiding presence not called God | 22% |
| • Awareness of the presence of the dead | 18% |
| • Awareness of a sacred presence in nature | 16% |
| • Awareness of an evil presence | 12% |
| • Experience that all things are “one” | 5% |

Hay (1987) had identified these eight types of experiences as being characteristic of the general population in his surveys here. This gave a framework in which to set the questions and also enabled later comparison of the results.

Administering a survey of this type in schools is no longer a simple issue. First one has to negotiate with the Australian Catholic University Ethics Committee to provide clearance, allowing administration of the survey in the first place. Next all parents have to sign and return a permission note in order to allow the data to be used. Only those surveys with a valid permission note can be used in the final data analysis. Next the anonymity of individuals has to be assured by the way the questionnaire is designed and the way the data is collected.

Once all of this has been done, you hope that enough students, and their parents, will be interested in what you are doing to allow you to gather reasonable results. The students themselves were the key. The survey was administered in the early part of the year and at the convenience of schools. Some chose to administer it with a large group gathered together in one place, while others chose to do it class by class as part of their normal daily routine. In each case in each school, the survey was administered on the same day. All Year 12 students did it. However, not all of them (and those of us who have been in schools for quite a while realised this would happen) had a valid permission note from their parents to allow the survey to be used.

It is fascinating that the topic itself was of such interest to students that many who did not have a valid permission note went to the trouble of then getting one and returning it to the school to enable their data to be used. Around 25% of our survey data has come from students who returned their permission note after the event. They were simply, it seems, interested enough in the topic and in wanting to see what they had written actually being used that they went to great lengths to ensure that it was.

The Results

The results are the most fascinating part of the work. They give an interesting picture of just who these students are, in the year 2000, in Australia, in very ordinary secondary colleges along with some of the experiences to which they can attest. Having looked at the characteristics of the group I will then examine some of the connections that might be made between the experiences of this group and some of the research work that has already gone on here and elsewhere.

The sample was heavily Catholic in origin. They themselves attested to a response rate of around 70% Catholic with a further 10% saying they had no religion and the rest distributed among a number of other faiths. It is interesting that the 70% is less than the rate that was reported in our annual collection of statistics from the schools. The school administration believed that the Catholicity of these students was around 80%. However, of the usable surveys, the Catholic ratio had dropped fairly significantly below this. This may be because we were indeed unable to use all the surveys. Perhaps those who had no interest in handing them in were also Catholic. On the other hand, perhaps while the school and their parents regarded them as Catholic, in the context of an open-ended survey, the students did not classify themselves this way.

An interesting comparison, at least to those of us in the Australian context, can be made to the major surveys undertaken by Flynn (1975, 1985, 1993) in different Catholic schools

around our nation. Flynn had sampled some thousands of Year 12 students, at ten-year intervals, in selected Catholic schools. He was working with populations that regarded themselves as over 90% Catholic for each sample. We just did not have that church allegiance with this group, which makes their personal experiences even more interesting.

This survey opened with questions on the students' happiness at home and school, where there wasn't much to report, as basically they were quite happy. They professed to being somewhat happier at school than at home, which, as a school person, I would have expected to be the case. However, there was not a great deal of significance in the two results.

Church attendance was an area that provided a major contrast to some of Flynn's (1975, 1985, 1993) earlier work in our country.

Frequency of church attendance at home	FO7 Mother/ Female Guardian	FO8 Father/ Male Guardian	FO9 Self	F10 Older Sibling	F11 Younger Sibling
Never	17.8%	21.6%	15.5%	13.1%	11.7%
Rarely	12.2%	12.7%	19.7%	12.7%	9.4%
On family occasions only	19.7%	20.7%	16.4%	11.3%	10.8%
About once a year	11.7%	9.4%	10.8%	8.0%	5.6%
About once a month	9.9%	4.7%	14.1%	4.2%	6.6%
About weekly	11.7%	10.3%	9.9%	4.2%	8.9%
Every week at least	15.0%	13.1%	13.1%	8.5%	10.8%
Not Answered or Unknown	1.9%	7.5%	0.5%	38.0%	36.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Flynn (1993) had documented that weekly attendance had fallen from 83% in his early 70's survey gradually down to 66% by the early 90's. In our group it was closer to 13%. There has been an amazing decline in the last decade in weekly church attendance among both families and students in our schools. Coupled with this fall in church attendance their personal faith patterns had also changed over the last twenty years.

Positive Response (%)

		Flynn 1985	Flynn 1993	Survey
42	"I believe in God"	85%	81%	64%
44	"God loves me very much" – (Flynn "God is a loving father who loves me very much")	76%	75%	52%
48	"I have experienced times in my life when I have felt close to God"	63%	63%	44%
40	"As far as I can, I tend to base my life on Christian values" – (Flynn "I intend to base my life on the teachings of Christ")	44%	37%	41%
37	"Religion helps me answer real questions about the meaning of life"	42%	41%	36%

39	“You don’t need to go to church to live a good and meaningful life”	N/A	N/A	75%
51	“You can be religious without belonging to any religious organisation”	N/A	N/A	69%
49	“I believe there is a pattern and purpose to human existence”	N/A	N/A	68%
47	“I experience times when I am uncertain about whether God exists or not”	N/A	N/A	57%
31	“The way most religious people talk today does not mean much to me”	N/A	N/A	30%
50	“Religion today has nothing to say about the most important issues in life”	N/A	N/A	19%

Only 64% said they believe in God, around half of them believed that God loved them very much and only 36% believed that religion helped them to answer real questions about the meaning of life. On the other hand, more than two-thirds of them believed that you can be religious without belonging to a religious organisation and that there is a pattern and purpose to human existence. In fact the numbers who could claim these responses were slightly higher than those who believed in God.

So there seemed to be a continued interest among this group in spirituality. This has been borne out by other surveys of the Australian community where again around two-thirds see spirituality as important or very important while less than 30% of the population attended church in any way on a regular basis.

The moral values that these students affirmed, and which our schools certainly aim to teach, were remarkably strong. There is a remarkable level of similarity between Flynn’s (1985) cohort and these students.

Flynn Survey

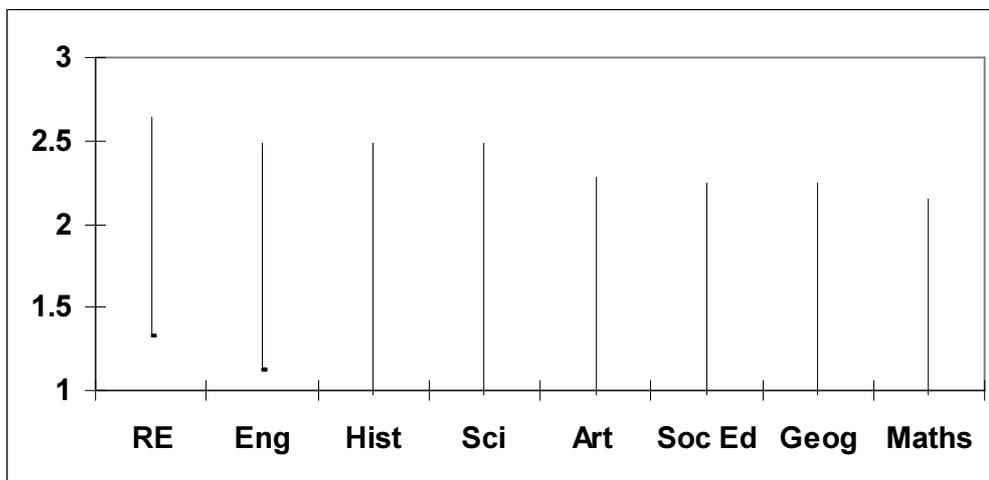
Flynn Question	It is alright to take something from a large department store if everyone else is doing it	Disagree 86.0%	
Survey Question – Q 38	It is alright to do something if everyone else is doing it		Disagree 81.6%
Flynn Question and Survey Question Q 41	I am concerned about justice to the poor and disadvantaged people in our society today	Agree 77.0%	Agree 76.8%
Flynn Question and Survey Question Q 45	It concerns me that a large part of the world suffers from hunger and malnutrition	Agree 77.0%	Agree 88.2%

They simply disagree with statements such as: “It is alright to do something if everyone else is doing it”. Three-quarters of them are concerned about justice to the poor and disadvantaged people in our own society, while virtually all are concerned that a large part of the world suffers from hunger and malnutrition. Of course, being concerned and actually

doing something are different things, but as a religious and school educator I felt quite affirmed by the extremely strong response on these questions.

Most of the time in secondary school, of course, is spent teaching and learning in specific subject areas. Robinson and Jackson (1987) had proposed that schools or teachers that encouraged students to be in touch with spirituality through various subjects, might provide a basis for better spiritual awareness among these students. In reading their research, it appears that they were interested in, but often disappointed with, the results that they achieved. They did not find evidence, for instance, that the religious education programs offered in British schools at the time of their survey were significant in fostering spiritual awareness.

Whether it is a difference in the programs or a difference in the cultures, it was clear that, for this group, religious education was a subject that made them feel deeply about life. These simple whisker plots show the range of response one standard deviation above and below the mean for each subject. The question had been scored on a scale from 1 to 3 only, 1 being “very little”, 2 “slightly” to 3 being “very much”. I had posed the question in a similar way to Robinson and Jackson (1987) and yet we seem to be getting a different response. While I’m not an expert in what happens in religious education in various countries, it does seem that the approach that we have taken in our own schools which combines the factual with the experiential, has borne fruit. Later on I’ll mention that religious education also had some significant relationship with the types of limit experiences these students reported.



Reports of Limit Experience

The reports of limit experience were, as I have pointed out, the key questions. They were asked in two ways. The “E” questions were direct, such as: “Sometimes I have felt a guiding presence from a friend or relative who has died.” Students were asked to respond on a one to five scale that ranged from “certainly false” through to “certainly true” at the top of the scale.

The descriptive passage questions were ranged on a scale from one to four: from “never – no I’ve never had such an experience” to “yes, definitely, I have had such an experience” at the top of the scale. The passages used came from some of the descriptions available through the religious experience research centre here and, as I have mentioned, were intended to cover a number of different types of experiences as identified by the Hay framework.

It is standard practice when using scales like this to regard as a positive response either a four or a five on a five point scale, or the three or four on the four point scale. In most surveys these questions would be taken as “yes” if either of the top two answers were selected on the scale. So the first attempt at analysis did this. But it also created results that were quite unusable for further work. I was astounded to find for instance, that over 93% of the students actually responded positively to at least one of the eleven items we had included on limit experience in the survey. Such a high response rate, for practical purposes virtually the whole of the cohort, was simply remarkable.

So, I had to take the unusual step of tightening the criteria to accept only those responses which were at the top level for either type of survey item. That is, I accepted a five – “certainly true”, or a four – “definitely, yes I have had a similar experience” as the valid answers for the purposes of further analysis.

These strengthened criteria gave a response rate close to 76% of the cohort. That is, almost 76% of these students had responded at the highest possible level to at least one of the eleven questions on limit experience in the survey.

The Hay Framework

It is interesting that the rate of 76% positive response that we achieved with the strengthened criteria is virtually the same result as Hay and Hunt (2000) achieved in Britain among adults. Next I compared our sample with Hay’s (1987) categories of religious experience. This was no simple task, as we have to make certain assumptions about the way in which students have interpreted the written passages. Simply because we provide a passage that we believe describes an experience of seeking help in prayer, for instance, does not mean that it is interpreted in that way. In fact it is quite possible that a particular student, in answering the survey, may well say that they have not had such an experience simply because they do not relate to the particular description supplied.

Most experiences had been explored via both a direct question and a descriptive passage. However, in some cases there was no choice. I had actually included only one survey question which was related to the experience of receiving help in prayer and that was a descriptive passage. In hindsight, I may well have asked the question directly as well. I had also included only one descriptive passage on the experience that “all things are one”. If anyone here can suggest to me how we can directly ask about this type of experience in simple words in one sentence, then please tell me. I believe the only way is to use a passage to describe such an experience and so it was left that way.

Given all of the above, what I then decided was that where we had a choice between a statement and the descriptive passage for the same type of experience I chose simply to count the direct question response. My belief is that this is less open to misinterpretation than the descriptive passage.

This becomes clearer when we look at the way I have compared the Hay framework with survey responses. You will see that for things such as the “patterning of events” at the top of the table and the “awareness of the sacred presence in nature” towards the lower part of the table, the response rates from our students and the Hay (1987) adult population, data collected almost fifteen years ago, are remarkably similar.

Hay Category	Experience Item
Patterning of events	E06 and P05
Awareness of the presence of God	E07 and P04
Awareness of receiving help in prayer	P01
Awareness of a guiding presence not called God	E04
Awareness of the presence of the dead	E09
Awareness of a sacred presence in nature	E10 and P03
Awareness of an evil presence	E03
Experience that all things are "one"	P04

There has been a drop, it seems, in those who would relate their experience to the presence of God. There is a marked drop in those who have experienced receiving help in prayer. However, this particular result should be taken with some caution since it is based on a descriptive passage and I have already pointed out the dangers of accepting the passage itself as providing a definitive response to this type of experience. It is interesting that a significantly higher number seem to have experienced an evil presence in their lives. Perhaps the spate of movies and television shows relating to the occult and other strange experiences has had some influence on this.

The Six Hypotheses

Six hypotheses were formulated to inform the research. Only the first of these was posed as a positive hypothesis. It was that we would get a significant number of reports, in excess of 30%, from students who could claim to have had a limit experience of some type and were able to recognise it as such. I have already pointed out that the remarkable result of 76%, with much strengthened criteria, confirmed this hypothesis in spades.

The rest of the hypotheses could be considered as rather timid. They were all posed in the null form. For instance, the second one: "That there will be no significant difference in the number of reports from different types of schools: all girl schools, co-educational schools, and all boy's schools". Although it is fairly standard practice in the education and social science fields, to pose hypothesis this way it is hardly a bold claim. The theory is that one proposes such a hypothesis in the negative form in the hope that there will be one or two bold examples in the data that will simply disprove it. The fact that they do, of course, does not mean that the opposite is then proven to be true, that is, that a particular type of school would make a difference in the number of reports. In putting the hypothesis in this way I was hoping that, essentially, I would be able to say there appears to be some sort of difference, but we are not sure just where it is.

The data was such that I could not even get that far. There was no significant statistical difference between any of the types of schools. In other words, for these students, in Australia at this time of history, it makes no difference to their experience of limit whether they attend single sex or co-educational schools or, for this group, where they attended.

To cut a long story short, for this group participation in an organised religion was no more likely to bring reports of limit experience than non-participation. In addition, students with a happy and stable home background didn't report any more than those who don't have such a home background.

There were, however, two significant results arising from the hypotheses. The first concerned involvement in the types of activities that our schools normally run in the way of "co-curricula" activities. It had been proposed, in the standard, although somewhat "wimpish" fashion, that such programs would not make a difference. While this was confirmed to be true, there were reservations with sport and involvement in artistic performance. Those involved with sport tended to report a little less than those who were not highly involved with competitive sport. Those involved in artistic performance tended to report a little more than those who were not involved in such activities.

I have, from a Catholic school educator's perspective, left the good wine till last. It had been proposed that instruction in particular subjects that had stirred deep questions about life, would make no difference to the reporting of limit experience. I have already mentioned the work of Robinson and Jackson (1987) in Britain which asks similar questions. I found, as they did with much of their data, that teaching in particular subjects, although it may have stirred the questions about life, did not necessarily facilitate openness to limit experience.

		SO2 Influential subject: RE			Total	
			1 Very little	2 Slightly		3 Very much
LIMBIN Limit Experience Binary Form	Count	No	13	37	1	51
		Yes	34	79	42	155
		Total	47	116	43	206
	% within LIMBIN Limit Experience Binary Form	No	25.5%	72.5%	2.0%	100.0%
		Yes	21.9%	51.0%	27.1%	100.0%
		Total	22.8%	56.3%	20.9%	100.0%

In this table you see 'LIMBIN'. It is a variable created during the analysis of the results. Essentially it measures a 'Yes' or 'No' response to any one or more of the Experience, (E and P) items. The one most significant exception was religious education. The numbers who claimed religious education had made them feel very deeply about life, around 27% of the students, and of those, a further 51%, who had said it had had a slight effect, could hardly be taken as a resounding affirmation of religious education as a subject, but they are significant. There was a statistically significant relationship between these students and the reporting of limit experience. It was clear that religious education had made a significant difference to the levels of reporting of religious experience. Those who had a negative approach to their religious education instruction and claimed it had nil or very little effect on how they felt about life, tended to report less than those who were more positive.

Interestingly enough, the same was true, to a slightly lesser extent, for history. However, while every student surveyed took religious education as a subject, since it is compulsory in all of our schools, only a minority actually took part in history as a subject. The conclusion from all this is that instruction in particular subjects in our schools did not seem to make a difference to reports of limit experience with the clear exception of religious education.

Factor Analysis

In survey analysis Factor Analysis is a particularly useful statistical technique. Its most distinctive feature is its data reduction capability. It clusters responses into various “factors”. Thus it tends to “clump” questions together into groups. Within a particular group of questions every individual respondent would have given an answer in some form to each question. The secret of factor analysis is that it tends to group the questions together. Each item within a factor has a ‘loading’ on the factor measuring its relative importance. Because the values questions (Questions 30-51) formed an entirely different set to the 16 items on religious and “limit” experience (Questions 52-67) the factor analysis was done in separate groups.

First, the experience questions were deleted from the run of the analysis, leaving the values clusters. Next the values questions were deleted allowing the experience questions to be grouped together. The values factors clustered as in the table below.

	Component 1	2	3	4
V13 Believe in God	.78			
V11 Live Christian values	.74			
V15 God loves me	.71			
V19 Felt close to God at times	.58			.51
V02 Religious language lacks meaning	-.57			.32
V08 Religion answers questions	.58			
V21 Religion not relevant	-.57			
V10 Church unnecessary	-.51			
V14 Help lonely		.80		
V16 Concern for world poverty		.80		
V12 Concern for poor		.78		
V09 Majority rules		-.45		
V22 Church not relevant	-.39	.40	-.37	
V01 Enjoy RE		.36		
V03 Science will control world			.76	
V05 Believe with proof only			.69	
V07 Important things not proved			-.45	
V20 Pattern and purpose to life				.77
V17 Life not faith important		.44		-.49

The first values factor is detailed in column 1. Those who scored highly on the questions within this group had a strong belief in God, tended to live by Christian values and a belief that God loved them as individuals. Those who scored highly on the previous questions also, perhaps with less certainty, state that they had felt close to God at times and that religion does answer questions relevant to life. The negatives in front of individual items within this component are those items that would have merited a negative response from those scoring

highly on this factor. For instance the high scorers would have rejected the idea that religious language lacks meaning or that it is not relevant. They would also have rejected the idea that the church is unnecessary and, somewhat less strongly that the church itself is not relevant. Because you could almost have referred to this group as somewhat traditional to their approach to religion, we use the Robinson and Jackson (1987) classification of “Expressed Faith” for this group.

The second group of questions (column 2) centred on social concerns. Those who scored highly on this factor had stated strongly that they tended to help the lonely and rejected, that they were concerned for world poverty and that they had a concern for the poor in our own society. The high scorers would have responded, as a group, slightly less strongly that they believed the church was not relevant and that the way you live your life not the particular religious faith you espouse is the important issue. Interestingly enough, these were the students who could also respond that they enjoyed their classes in religious education. They were also strongly against the idea that it is alright to do something if everyone else is doing it. Because of the way in which these questions centred on social issues, we called this factor “social awareness”.

The third factor (column 3) had high scorers who believed that science would eventually control our world and who also believed that you should not accept something as true unless it had been proven to be so. At the other end of the scale they tended to reject the notion that the important things in life were perhaps not able to be proven. Because of their total belief in the rationality of proof we labelled this component “scepticism”. Interestingly enough they rejected the notion that the church was not relevant, phrased as “you can be religious without belonging to a religious organisation”. Perhaps their rational approach to life led them to believe that if you were, indeed, going to be religious then you had best join and then profess that in a formal grouping. It is questionable whether they, as sceptics, would have regarded themselves as particularly religious.

Those who scored highly on the final factor (column 4) appear to have an implied or implicit faith. They believe there is a pattern and purpose to existence, have experienced some closeness to God but, to a lesser extent, see that religious language is not meaningful for them. They also reject the idea that the way one lives one’s life, not religious faith, is important. This group was christened “implicit faith”.

Almost all values questions are included on a Factor scale. With the exception of very different opinions on the relevance of church, most items are included on one Factor only.

In the experience items there were three factors that were identified and these are shown in the table below.

	Component 1	2	3
E05 Felt no purpose in life sometimes	.88		
E08 No meaning for life sometimes	.82		
E02 Experienced loneliness or depression	.66		
E11 Found joy and meaning for life	-.53	.44	
E06 Sometimes there is a pattern to events	.39		
P04 All things are one		.83	
P03 Sacredness in Nature		.66	
E09 Felt presence of deceased friend or relative		.60	
E10 Recognised a sacredness in nature		.59	
P05 Pattern to events		.46	
E07 Close awareness of God sometimes			.89
P01 Help in Prayer			.85
E03 Experienced evil presence	.51		.57
P02 Presence of God			.44
E04 Experienced powerful presence	.38		.41

Those who scored highly on the first component had very strong positive responses to say they felt no purpose in life sometimes or that life had no meaning for them at times. To a lesser extent they had experienced loneliness and severe depression and also both an evil and powerful presence in their lives. They agreed, but somewhat less strongly, that there is a pattern and purpose to events. On the other hand, they also affirmed that they had not found joy and meaning in their lives. Because the high scorers on this scale seemed to have a rather negative approach to life I labelled the scale "Depression". The term "Depression/Elation" had been considered since, it must be remembered, every respondent has a score and those who score low on this scale reject the very negative approach to life and in fact would tend to be elated.

The second factor identified had the high scorers on the factor responding positively to the passage description on unitive experience. They also responded positively and strongly to the passage on the sacredness in nature and affirmed that they had felt the presence of a deceased friend or relative at some time. Because of the parallels with the Robinson and Jackson (1987) classifications these were described as "Mystical" experience.

The third factor consisted of items where the high scorers on the factor strongly affirmed that they had felt a close awareness of God sometimes or responded very strongly to the passage on receiving help in prayer. They responded somewhat less strongly to the experience of an evil presence or a powerful presence and the passage which was intended to ask about an experience of the presence of God. Because of the types of experience on the factor it was christened "Numinous" experience.

Again, an examination of the Factors shows that all items are included. With the exception of differing experiences with the joy of life and experiences of evil or powerful presence, none are repeated.

Correlations among Factors

The table below shows the correlations among the factor scales:

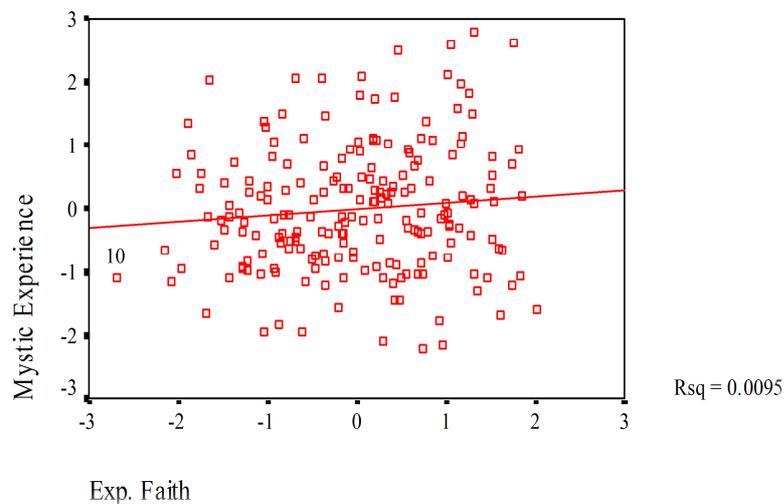
	EXP-FAITH	SOC-AWARE	SCEPTIC	IMP-FAITH	DEPRESS	MYST-ICEX	NUM-INOUS
Pearson Correlation							
EXPFAITH	1.00	.16 (*)	.16 (*)	.30 (**)	.98 (**)	.10	.12
SOC-AWARE		1.00	.50 (**)	.42 (**)	.23 (**)	.99 (**)	.51 (**)
SCEPTIC			1.00	.42 (**)	.22 (**)	.51 (**)	.99 (**)
IMPFAITH				1.00	.48 (**)	.53 (**)	.51 (**)
DEPRESS					1.00	.20 (**)	.21 (**)
MYSTICEX						1.00	.54 (**)
NUMINOUS							1.00

(* = $p < 0.05$ ** = $p < 0.01$)

While these are interesting, a visual representation of the correlations among the factor scales helps both to explain the concept and to emphasise the strong predicative relationships among some of the factors.

For instance, the correlation between the Expressed Faith and Mystical Experience Factors graphs out as below:

Correlation between Explicit Faith and
Extent of Reported Mystic Experience
Senior Secondary School Students

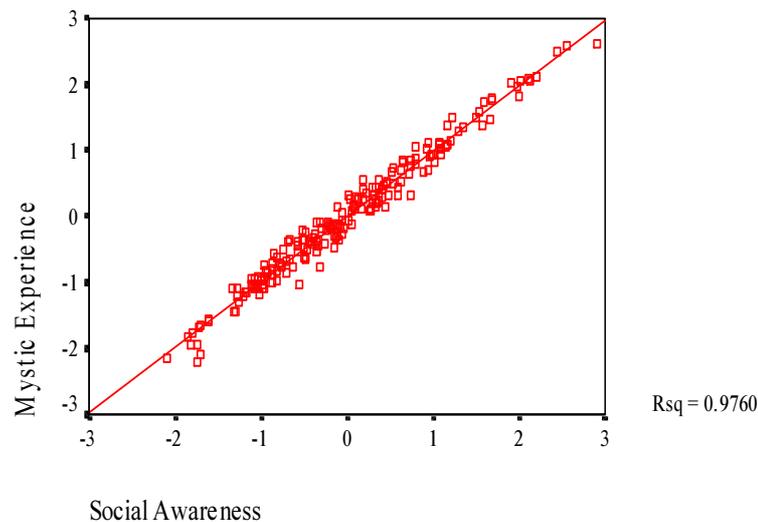


The correlation between the two is almost nil at 0.0095, in fact they are all over the shop, as you can see.

Compare this to the graph for the Social Awareness and Mystical Experience Factors, a correlation of 0.98, or close to one.

Correlation between Social Awareness and Extent of Reported Mystic Experience

Senior Secondary School Students



Such strong correlations are quite remarkable. The correlation between Expressed Faith and Depression was 0.98. This is an unusually high association by any stretch of the imagination. Who were these people who scored highly on these two factors? The Expressed Faith scale is a grouping of individual items with a high score for respondents who believe in God, live Christian values, believe in a God who loves them and to whom they have felt close at times. They reject the notion that religion does not address important issues, while a smaller number of this group reject the proposition that church attendance is unnecessary. The corresponding experience responses will have high scores from those who believe that life has no purpose or meaning for them at times and that they experience loneliness or depression. On the other hand they do see a pattern to events in life at times and had experienced either or both a powerful and an evil presence.

The correlation between the social awareness and mystical experience factors was virtually 1.00. For the sake of convenience we listed it as .99, simply because a correlation of 1 implies that I did not take the figures to the required degree of accuracy to see the difference. Again the association is quite remarkable. Who are these people? The high scoring respondents on the Social Awareness scale were strongly concerned about the lonely and rejected and world issues such as hunger and poverty. They reject the proposition that it is all right to do something if everyone else is doing it. They also believe that church

affiliation as such is not necessary in their lives and that the way people live their lives, not their religious faith, is the important issue. Interestingly though they were the only group who had a strong enough score on the enjoyment of their religious education classes to have registered on one of the factor scales.

The corresponding Mystical Experience scale has the strongest factor loading for a small group who scored highly on the item that attempted to define a “unitive” or “all things are one” experience – P04 on your questionnaire. A larger number responded positively to having experienced a pattern to events or a sacredness in nature. Their experiences may also include the awareness of the presence of a deceased friend or relative. In contrast to those on the Depression scale there is a positive factor loading for those who affirm that there is a meaning in life for them. It has to be remembered that those high on the Social Awareness scale will tend to be those who have high scores on the Mystical Experience scale. In contrast those low on the Social Awareness scale will tend to be those who are low on the Mystical Experience scale.

The final pairing of factor scales brings together the Sceptic and Numinous experience factors. Again, the correlation of 0.99 is remarkable. Those scoring high on the Sceptic scale respond positively to the statements that science will eventually give us complete control over our world and that “we should not believe anything until it has been proved to be true”. Meanwhile those high on the Numinous factor affirm that they have experienced a close awareness of God at times, although only a small number affirmed having an experience similar to the conversion experience described in the narrative question P02 on the questionnaire. A much larger number responded positively to having found help in prayer similar to the descriptive experience in P01. Again high scores on the Sceptic scale associated very strongly with high scores on the Numinous experience scale with a corresponding association for those scoring lower on these scales.

The overall comparison of the correlations among the various factors shows just how clearly these pair-wise correlations stand out. Looking at experienced expressed faith for instance, would show that it has a very low association with Social Awareness, the Scepticism factor and the Mystical experience and Numinous experience factors. But it has a very strong association with the Depression or Elation factor scale. Similar comments can be made about any of the other factors when compared with the other factor scales. It is noteworthy that both the Mystical experience and Numinous experience scales, probably the core of our limit experience type questions, do bear a strong relationship with some of the other values scales but never with expressed faith.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is used determine mathematical relationships between two or more variables. In the case of this research what we attempted to do was to compare the relative occurrence of limit experience (which I called LIMTOT for short) and the four values scales. In layman’s terms what one tries to do is to determine a mathematical relationship between an individual’s scores on the Social Awareness, Scepticism, Expressed Faith and Implicit Faith scales and determine the mathematical relationship to their score for limit experience. Remember, an individual’s score for limit experience is determined by their having responded positively, at the highest possible level only, to any one of the limit experience questions identified by the prefaces “E” and “P” in the survey data.

Model		Un-standardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients			
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
4	(Constant)	2.195	.091		24.160	.000
	SOCA Social Awareness	1.052	.109	.480	9.649	.000
	IMPFAITH Implicit Faith	.483	.108	.220	4.487	.000
	SCEPTIC Scepticism	.500	.109	.228	4.580	.000
	EXPFAITH Exp. Faith	.384	.095	.175	4.024	.000

Social Awareness was found to be the strongest predictor of limit experience, on its own accounting for 51% of the variance. It had twice the mathematical weighting of both the Implicit Faith and the Scepticism factors when they were combined into the predictor and almost four times the weighting for Expressed Faith.

What does all this mean? Those who teach the religious education classes for these groups have a very diverse set of students. Significantly the Social Awareness scale is the only scale to include the item on religious education classes as a positive loading on this factor. On the other hand from these results it is those who enjoy the classes who may often seem to be precisely those who reject institutional religious affiliation. Yet they are also more likely to relate to the experience of “limit”, in particular, the strong correlation between Social Awareness and Mystical experience implies that they may relate more closely to the Mystical type of experience. It seems that any teaching that aims to foster growth of religious or spiritual awareness in the minds of young people, must relate to those experiences that mean most to them at this time of life. At the other end of the scale, the Expressed Faith factor is a weak, but still significant predictor for limit experience. Certainly many of those responding positively to the items making up the Expressed Faith factor scale, also responded positively to items on the Social Awareness scale. The contrast is that none of the items in Expressed Faith, centred on more traditional statements on God’s love, Christian values for living and the relevance of religion, has the strength of positive response of those on the Social Awareness scale. It seems that the more traditional religious affiliations are not strong predictors of limit experience for this group.

Categories of Spiritual Sensitivity

Some years ago Hay and Nye (1998) wrote an article on children’s spirituality whose title included the question, “Where do you start without a starting point?” It was the precursor to their extensive book on children’s spirituality. What they said was that there had been no framework available for them to classify many of the spiritual experiences they encountered among children. They proposed that there might be three broad categories within any such framework. First, the sense of awareness, second a sense of mystery and third a sense of value.

Category	Examples
Awareness sensing	Here and now Tuning Flow Focusing
Mystery Sensing	Wonder and awe Imagination
Value sensing	Delight and despair Ultimate goodness Meaning

Hay and Nye (1998) defined awareness sensing as being attentive to one's attention or being aware of one's awareness. There are a number of different examples of this. In the "here and now" the person is transfixed in appreciation of the intensity of the present moment. Both Buddhist and Christian spiritualities have used this concentration on the immediate as a pathway to spiritual awareness. "Tuning" is the type of heightened awareness that takes place in such experiences as the intense aesthetic pleasure of listening to music or feeling at one with nature.

"Flow" on the other hand is an experience of being involved in something so intense that other concurrent experiences become background or peripheral. The experience of professional sportsmen and women where skills become second nature for a time during an important event, are an example of this "flow". Just as an aside, we golf enthusiasts convince ourselves that we have experienced this full concentration on the game and confidence in one's ability to play it at certain stages in our golfing career. However, of course, it has happened quite rarely and only for a very short time – that's why they call it amateur golf! The final example is "focusing". This is being in touch with our bodily feelings in a holistic way; it can include awareness, rather than suppression of our whole bodily response in particular circumstances.

Mystery sensing is an awareness of aspects of life experience that are in principle incomprehensible. Mystery sensing itself might be the experience of "wonder and awe" which can encompass experiences of the mystery of the sacred or the awareness and wonder of seeing the sun rise or set or perhaps the awed fascination of a particular scientific truth. On the other hand "imagination" can be an awareness of story, symbol or metaphor to represent those experiences of our world that are, without this symbolic representation, otherwise indescribable.

Finally, there is value sensing. Value sensing can be about finding and realising meaning in life. We walk a tightrope between the reality and meaningfulness of life and the futility of it all.

Value sensing, then, is part of a progression from self-centred emotion to an experience of value that transcends our personal concerns. It can perhaps be implied in the ecstatic

experience of the religious contemplatives. Value sensing is experienced as emotion. In this context such examples as “delight and despair” are self explanatory. The meaningfulness of life is brought out by the feeling of “ultimate goodness”. This allows a sense of the trust and the goodness and purpose of life itself. “Meaning” is akin to this but can be something experienced at a much deeper level than simply the cognitive. It is a deeply sensed feeling of oneness with the whole of creation.

So, from their work with children, Hay and Nye (1998) proposed that the profound questions of existence asked since time began: “Who am I?”, “What is my purpose?” – are secondary products of deeper spiritual stirrings found within us as individuals. They categorise these spiritual stirrings as the types of sensitivity found in awareness sensing, mystery sensing or value sensing.

Now the questions that I posed in the survey to students were not designed around this framework at all. Indeed they had been designed around earlier research work from Hay (1987) which had categorised responses into a set of religious experiences. However, since the survey results were available and the spiritual sensitivity framework was interesting, it was decided to have a look at the way in which the questions might have fitted the framework.

Category	Survey Questions
<p>Awareness Sensing</p> <p>Here and Now:</p>	<p>P04 ‘I was standing alone on the edge of a low cliff, overlooking a small valley leading to the sea. It was late afternoon or early evening and there were birds swooping in the sky – possibly swallows. Suddenly my mind ‘felt’ as though it had changed gear or twitched into another view of things. I still saw the birds and everything around me but instead of standing looking at them, I was them and they were me.’</p>

This descriptive passage we classified as an example of the “here and now” experience since, as I have mentioned, this is an experience in which the person is transfixed in an appreciation of the intensity of the present moment.

<p>Awareness Sensing</p> <p>Tuning:</p>	<p>E10 “Sometimes I have recognized a ‘sacred presence’ in the patterns of nature.”</p> <p>E09 “Sometimes I have felt a guiding presence from a friend or relative who has died.”</p> <p>P03 ‘.. as I sat thinking, looking at the beauty of the valley below, I felt as if the whole scene became luminous, I was aware of the tremendous intensity of colour – I felt intensely happy, for no reason at all. I suddenly felt at one with the very life force of creation, whatever that is. I felt part of it. I felt caught up in a tremendous theme of praise ... the feeling of elation lasting for some time ...’</p>
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The two questions in descriptive passage here are categorised as an example of tuning. One example of tuning is the heightened awareness that can be experienced by listening to music or being aware of the beauty of nature. On this ground both the first statement and the descriptive passage are clearly examples of such tuning. The other question, related to the guiding presence of a friend or relative, is an example of an experience of being in touch with something outside of the self, but not the divine. Argyle (1997) classifies such experiences as “psychic” experiences along with “peak experiences which are aesthetic”, such as listening to music. The fact that these experiences are classified in this way lends support to the classification of this guiding presence under the heading of tuning, understood as being in touch with a reality outside of the self.

Wonder and Awe:

E04 “At times I have been aware of a presence or power which seems to be beyond and different to my everyday self”

E07 “At times I have felt a very close awareness of God in my life”

E03 “At times I have been aware of an evil ‘presence’ beyond myself”

P01 “At times of great difficulty or danger in my life I have felt I could always pray to God and get help. One night we were in a traffic accident and I was very frightened, and I prayed. Somehow I knew there was someone else with us, a presence of some kind; and I escaped with just a few bruises. At other times, too, when I have felt very depressed I have had this same feeling of being given strength and hope.”

P02 “It was about mid-morning, I came from the kitchen into the bedroom, sat at my dressing table, opened a drawer and began to do something quite ordinary, I can’t remember what, when I was absolutely overwhelmed by the presence of God. I was absolutely astounded. I hadn’t known there was a God at all ... I was pretty much an atheist or agnostic and had no interest in religion. I had no such thoughts at the time, however, I was just shattered, shaken to the roots of my being.”

The mystery sensing questions and passages seemed to all relate to the experience of “wonder and awe”. The placement of P02, within the category of wonder and awe seems consistent with the intent of the passage. Being “absolutely overwhelmed by the presence of God” certainly seems to be an experience of such wonder and awe. If we allow that this experience of the divine is a wonder and awe example, it would lend support to classifying both E4 and E7 under the same heading. The category of experience of an evil presence (E3) is one of the experiences of awe which Otto (1950) believed was one aspect of the numinous experience. Hence, it seems to fit with other experiences of the presence of God.

Value Sensing**Delight and Despair:**

E02 “At times I have experienced loneliness and severe depression”

E05 “At times I have felt there is no purpose or reason for living”

Ultimate Goodness:

P01 “At times of great difficulty or danger in my life I have felt I could always pray to God and get help. One night we were in a traffic accident and I was very frightened, and I prayed. Somehow I knew there was someone else with us, a presence of some kind; and I escaped with just a few bruises. At other times, too, when I have felt very depressed I have had this same feeling of being given strength and hope.’

Meaning:

E08 “There are times when life has no meaning.”

E11 “I have discovered a joy and meaning for my own life now and am satisfied and at peace.”

The final classifications of the experience questions within value sensing also seem quite reasonable. The first two, E2 and E5, being expressions of despair (or relation to low scores on the particular items) appear to be correctly classified within value sensing as do the questions on meaning and life (E8 and E11). The descriptive passage could be interpreted in many ways. The feeling of “strength and hope” in the passage might be a recognition of ultimate goodness and meaning for living. On the other hand, the reason it was included in the survey, was that it was seen as an example of receiving help in prayer. Hence, it could arguably be classified under wonder and awe as well as the classification given here of an experience of ultimate goodness.

If all of the relationships I have defined are accepted, then the experience scales have an interesting relationship to the categories of spiritual sensitivity.

Awareness sensing

Here and Now	MYSTICEX	P04 (0.83)
Tuning		P03 (0.66), E09 (0.60), E10 (0.59)
Not included		P05 (0.46), E11 (0.44)

Mystery Sensing

Wonder and Awe	NUMINOUS	E07 (0.89), P01 (0.85), P02 (0.44), E04 (0.41), E03 (0.57)
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Value sensing

Delight and despair	DEPRESS	E05 (0.88), E02 (0.66)
Ultimate goodness		E04 (0.38)
Meaning		E08 (0.82), E11 (-0.53)
Not included		E03 (0.51), E06 (0.39)

Provided we accept the classifications that have been outlined, Awareness sensing contains four of the six questions which are part of the mystical experience scale. The two that were not included are an experience of a patterning of events, since it was unclear just where to place these.

Meanwhile, all of the questions on numinous experience are included under mystery sensing as an example of wonder and awe. Further down, all of those questions which relate to the depression or elation scale factor are classified under value sensing, with the exception of E3, a question of patterning of events, and E6, the experience of an evil presence.

So it seems that there is a reasonably strong relationship between the questions I have used, based on a classification of experiences, and the framework of spiritual sensitivity which was proposed by Hay and Nye (1998). What this research adds to that is the strong correlation between the value scales and the experience scales for this particular group of respondents. If we realise that the values scales for expressed faith, scepticism and social awareness, correlate at an exceptionally high level with depression, numinous and mystical experience scales, then we come up with the following picture.

Values	Experience	Spiritual Sensitivity
Expressed Faith	Depression/ Elation	Value Sensing
Social Awareness	Mystical	Awareness Sensing
Sceptic	Numinous	Mystery Sensing

It is reasonable to state that a respondent who scored highly on the social awareness questions and hence the social awareness factor will have, with high probability, experienced a set of limit experiences which are akin to awareness sensing. A similar statement can be made for those who scored high on the sceptics scale and their likelihood to a set of experiences which are akin to mystery sensing. Those who scored highly on the expressed faith factor scale have an experience of life, but not necessarily of limit, which is akin to the value sensing category of spiritual sensitivity.

Relational Consciousness

The Hay and Nye (1998) research with children went further in proposing the concept of “relational consciousness”. It proposed that relational consciousness was the concept that drew together all of the different kinds of relevant data from their work with children. They saw this as a type of consciousness underlying ordinary conscious activity. It enabled an individual to be receptive to and understand their particular religious or limit experience. When I speak of “consciousness” in this instance it is more than alertness or mental attentiveness, it is discreet moments of unusual awareness. It is a distinctly reflective

consciousness akin to metacognition in cognitive psychology. We are only interested here in what I term the context in which this relational consciousness occurs. They define these, in their work with children, as being child–God consciousness, child–people, child–world and child–self consciousness. Since my own research was with older adolescents, it seemed inappropriate to continue the child connotation in these categories. Hence, I began to refer to them differently while going through the same process as used with the spiritual sensitivity categories to see if the questions that had been asked in the survey actually fitted any of these contexts.

RELATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS	SURVEY QUESTION
I – Self consciousness	
E02	“At times I have experienced loneliness and severe depression”
E05	“At times I have felt there is no purpose or reason for living”
E08	“There are times when life has no meaning”
E11	“I have discovered a joy and meaning for my own life now and am satisfied and at peace.”

The first of them was I–Self consciousness. I–Self consciousness is experienced in the context of our relationship with our own identity in mental life. There may be a realisation of the mystery of death within this context. Awareness of the self, as a recognition of the individual’s mental life, appears to have the first three questions, E2, E5 and E8, appropriately placed. E11, on the other hand, having discovered a joy and meaning in life has been placed here on the understanding that a “joy for life” may have been interpreted in a similar fashion by respondents as were the other items that state they found “no meaning” and “no purpose” in life. In statistical terms this particular question had a negative weighting on the factor scale. This implies that those who have responded positively to statements that life has no meaning or that they had experienced loneliness and depression, responded negatively to having found a joy and meaning in life. Hence it does seem appropriate to put all of these questions together as a consciousness of the self. We have very different ways of viewing ourselves which might rate with depression or elation depending on the perspective we wish to bring to a common experience.

I–World consciousness	
E10	“Sometimes I have recognized a ‘sacred presence’ in the patterns of nature”
P03	“... as I sat thinking, looking at the beauty of the valley below, I felt as if the whole scene became luminous, I was aware of the tremendous intensity of colour – I felt intensely happy, for no reason at all. I suddenly felt at one with the very life force of creation, whatever that is. I felt part of it. I felt caught up in a tremendous theme of praise ... the feeling of elation lasting for some time ...”
P04	“I was standing alone on the edge of a low cliff, overlooking a small valley leading to the sea. It was late afternoon or early evening and there were birds swooping in the sky – possibly swallows. Suddenly my mind ‘felt’ as though it had changed gear or twitched into another view of things. I still saw the birds and everything around me but instead of standing looking at them, I was them and they were me.”

The categories for I–World and I–People have perhaps some similarity. Both are outward looking situations. However, the questions in the survey seem to point to classification of most of them under the heading of I–World. In this type of consciousness spirituality is experienced through our relationship to the natural world. Hence, both the question on the sacred presence in nature, the similar descriptive passage and the experience of being swept up into a oneness with nature, would appear to be part of this type of consciousness.

I–God consciousness	
E04	“At times I have been aware of a presence or power which seems to be beyond and different to my everyday self.
E07	At times I have felt a very close awareness of God in my life”
P01	“At times of great difficulty or danger in my life I have felt I could always pray to God and get help. One night we were in a traffic accident and I was very frightened, and I prayed. Somehow I knew there was someone else with us, a presence of some kind; and I escaped with just a few bruises. At other times, too, when I have felt very depressed I have had this same feeling of being given strength and hope.”
P02	“It was about mid-morning, I came from the kitchen into the bedroom, sat at my dressing table, opened a drawer and began to do something quite ordinary, I can’t remember what, when I was absolutely overwhelmed by the presence of God. I was absolutely astounded. I hadn’t known there was a God at all ...I was pretty much an atheist or agnostic and had no interest in religion. I had no such thoughts at the time, however, I was just shattered, shaken to the roots of my being”.

I–God consciousness is a traditional way of interpreting the world. Spirituality is reflected in our feelings and thoughts about our relationship with God. Hence, placing the two questions which bear direct relationship to experience of God, the question on whether a descriptive passage on prayer and that on an experience of the numinous, would appear to be appropriate in this context.

If we agree that these questions, placed in the particular consciousness context in this way are appropriate, we again get an interesting pattern between the context of relational consciousness and the experience scales.

Category	Experience Scale	Individual Items
I–Self consciousness	DEPRESS	E05 (0.88), E08 (0.82)
		E02 (0.66), E11 (-0.53)
		E04 (0.38)
	Not included	E03 (0.51), E06 (0.39)
I–World consciousness	MYSTICEX	P04 (0.83), P03 (0.66)
		E10 (0.59)
		Not included
I–God consciousness	NUMINOUS	E07 (0.89), P01 (0.85)
		P02 (0.44), E04 (0.41)
		Not included

The depression/elation scale relates, in the main to I–Self consciousness. The questions on the depression factor scale not included relate again to a patterning of events or an experience of an evil presence.

The mystical experience factor scale includes three out of the six items under the heading of I–World consciousness. However, of these three they include three of the four most highly weighted questions on the factor scale.

The numinous experience scale includes four of the five items under this category and is related, it would appear, to an I–God context for relational consciousness.

In summary, the extremely high correlation between the value scales and the experience scales leads to a connection between the context of relational consciousness, as it did to the spiritual sensitivity categories. The strong predictive relationship of the value scales themselves for both the type of limit experience and the context of relational consciousness and preferred mode of spiritual sensitivity is perhaps the most significant finding of this particular research.

Values	Experience	Spiritual Sensitivity	Context of Relational Consciousness
Expressed Faith	Depression/ Elation	Value Sensing	I–Self
Social Awareness	Mystical	Awareness Sensing	I–World
Sceptic	Numinous	Mystery Sensing	I–God

Those who scored highly on the expressed faith scale, that is those who responded positively to such questions as their belief in God, their desire to let Christian values and their belief that God loves them, tend to an I–Self relational consciousness and a spiritual sensitivity which is value sensing.

For those in this group who scored highly on the sceptic scale, that is those who answered positively that they believed science will control the world and that their belief could only be held with clear proof, also have, interestingly enough, an experience of the numinous. They tend to an I–God type of context of relational consciousness and mystery sensing as their spiritual sensitivity category.

Finally, there is social awareness. To score highly on the social awareness questions, that is those who try to help the lonely and have a concern for the poor and world poverty, tend to the mystical type of experience. They have an I–World context for their relational consciousness and a spiritual sensitivity that tends to awareness sensing.

Summary & Conclusions

So after all of this, where are we? The research proposed six hypotheses.

1. It was expected that there would be a significant number of reports of limit experience from among the respondents. Indeed the reports of limit experience were quite remarkable, so much so that the criteria had to be significantly strengthened for further analysis to take place. To have accepted the reports at less than highest level would have given in excess of 93% response rate.
2. The school attended made no difference, although it was initially expected to do so, to the level of reporting of limit experience.
3. Subjects taken by respondents made no difference, with the significant exception of religious education. This subject is both taken by all respondents and also is the only subject that has such a significant influence on the reporting of limit experience, albeit less than we would have liked. There is also the possible exception of history, but this is not done by all students and is of much lesser significance by way of influence.
4. The type of and involvement in social responsibility programs, sporting programs and cultural program run by schools made no significant difference to the level of reporting of limit experience. There is the minor exception of those involved in cultural performance which has some positive effect on reports and those involved in sporting programs which has some minor negative effect on reports.
5. Participation in organised religion had no effect on the reports of limit experience.
6. Type of home from which students came also had no influence on the reports of limit experience.

The exploratory analysis brought together a number of significant findings from the factor scales, in particular, their relationship to the categories of spiritual sensitivity and the context of relational consciousness that has been mentioned earlier.

However, let's examine the extent of reports of limit experience in the light of what our religious education classes are trying to achieve and where, at least some, in our church believe our education system should be directing students. It is significant that social awareness as a factor is the major and most significant predictor of limit experience among these respondents. Those who scored highly on this scale began with a high degree of probability regarded as having a limit experience which is mystical in nature. Their preferred mode of spiritual sensitivity is awareness sensing and the context in which their relational consciousness is expressed could be classified as I-World. Of course, all of the other factor scales also had significant if far less strong predictive value for types of limit experience.

In a recent survey of teachers in our Catholic schools (Brisbane Catholic Education Centre, 2001) within the Archdiocese of Brisbane, teachers were asked to reflect on their personal experience of classroom teaching of religion. For this research the significant questions are those where teachers reported that frequently or often over 80% are addressing the values issues in their classrooms.

The teachers believed that their teaching was aimed at promoting students' faith development but much more strongly that their teaching was aimed at students' personal development and particularly that it was aimed at developing Christian values and developing students who will act justly. So it seems that our teachers are concentrating their

directions on teaching social awareness. If their success ratio is measured by the levels of limit experience among respondents at Year 12, then their aim has been eminently successful as those who have imbued social awareness are certainly, among these respondents, likely to be aware of their real experiences in this area. So we have come full circle.

Sr Joan Chittester (2001) a U.S. Benedictine, in an address early last year to the National Catholic Education Conference, challenged educators in the U.S. to lead the way for their students. In brief, to take them where there is no road and yet leave a path. In her own words, "It is not the catechism answers we teach them to give; it is the moral questions we teach them to ask that are the index, the measure of spiritual leadership now." She poses the question, "On what roads should we lead them now?" She has numerous answers. I will share some.

Sr Joan challenged educators to teach students to ask of their country why its borders are tight against immigrants while countries far more poor, far more crowded, are far more open to them. She challenged our educators to help students see the working poor, those who are working low paying jobs for part-time pay or, worse, who work two jobs with no benefits, no compensation, no paid vacation, no day care service, no pensions and less than full-time pay. Indeed we need to teach them that crying out for the other is, in the end, what spiritual leadership, can I say Church, is all about.

We come back to Chuang Tzu's question: "How shall I talk of the sea to a frog that has never left its pond?" I believe the results of this research give great hope for Catholic schools. We clearly have taught this group of respondents to ask the questions. We have challenged them to leave the pond. We have asked them to encounter the reality of life beyond their pond in so many ways. This has, perhaps, been focused on social awareness, but it has had the wonderful result of increasing spiritual awareness in these respondents. Certainly, in our own country I would urge our religious education teachers to keep doing what they're doing. To lead our students to question all that is best and worst in our society, much as Jesus did two thousand years ago in his own. Doing that will, I believe, produce a spiritually sensitive Catholic society of the future and provide a challenge for our church to take this further with these young adults.

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Paul's academic background was first as a teacher of Religious Education and Mathematics. In an earlier life he published two texts for the "Computer Mathematics" course in senior high schools. In later years he completed a Master's degree in Guidance and Counselling and has completed doctoral studies in the spirituality of high school students. This last, somewhat passionate interest stems from his own experience in working with senior students as teacher over many years.

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