

**Psychological Characteristics and State Integration of a Persistent Altered State of
Consciousness Following an Eighteen Week Self-Development Course**

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Abstract

The Finders Course (FC) was an 18-week online self-development course that utilized techniques, methods of meditation and positive psychology to help participants shift into an altered state of consciousness characterized by high levels of well-being and deep inner peace (Finders Course, n.d.). Two online studies were conducted. The first study was designed to examine the psychological characteristics of the FC alumni, and the second study to investigate the ability of the FC alumni to integrate this transcendent state of consciousness into various aspects of their lives. Participants were 55 and 27 members of the FC alumni, respectively. In both studies, FC alumni participants were asked to complete a survey that included a measure of altered states of consciousness and a questionnaire created by the researchers. The first study also asked participants to complete a measure of well-being and a measure of motivation. The first study found that the FC alumni experienced a lack of negative emotions, low levels of mental chatter, apparent lack of a sense of self, focus in the present, and a deep sense of fundamental well-being that was not necessarily characterized by positive emotions. The second study found that FC alumni experienced various positive fundamental life changes and benefits as a result of this transcendent state. However, individuals further on the continuum appeared to sometimes experience difficulties with socialization, cognitive-based tasks, and relationships. Many individuals noted how a shift in priorities altered their behaviour. Implications for the use of self-development courses within a counselling context are discussed.

Keywords: altered states of consciousness, transcendent states of consciousness, Finders Course, self-development, fundamental well-being

Psychological Characteristics and State Integration of a Persistent Altered State of Consciousness Following an Eighteen Week Self-Development Course

The Finders Course (FC) was an 18-week online self-development course created by Dr. Jeffery Martin that was designed to help participants shift into an altered state of consciousness that was characterized by high levels of well-being and inner peace through the use of different techniques, methods of meditation, and positive psychology (Finders Course, n.d.). This online course was held for the first time in February of 2014 and had run 16 times as of May 2018. The Finders Course, which is secular and suitable for individuals of all faiths, requires participants to spend approximately 1 to 2 hours a day practicing techniques involving mind training, meditation, and positive psychology, as well as requiring participation in weekly group sessions with other members of the course. However, the details of these techniques are unavailable to the public as the course is proprietary. The course website acknowledges that the time required to complete the course is a large commitment, however, it also cites a 70% success rate of shifting individuals into a persistent transcendent state of consciousness within four months (Finders Course, n.d.).

The creation of the Finders Course is a result of research done by Martin (2014), which had taken him to different parts of the world where he administered psychological measures as well as conducted interviews with individuals who had achieved an altered state of consciousness that is commonly referred to as enlightenment, awakening, or non-duality. However, Martin (2014) does not use these terms but instead refers to this state as “persistent non-symbolic experience” (PNSE). A transcendent state is characterized by high levels of fundamental well-being and is considered superior to the ordinary waking state by those

experiencing it. Martin's (2014) definition of PNSE includes the criterion that this state has been experienced at all times for at least one year (Martin, 2015). Finders Course alumni who have shifted into this transcendent state have reported high levels of emotional and mental well-being, a deep sense of inner peace, a focus on the present, a sense of connectedness to all, and lessened mental chatter (Finders Course, n.d.).

Psychological Characteristics of the Finders Course Alumni Members

In his recent book, Martin has stressed that PNSE does not exist in an all-or-nothing manner, but rather that it is experienced on a continuum (2019). Within this continuum, Martin (2019) has identified markers, which he has referred to as "locations." Locations are labelled numerically, with locations 1 through 4 being the most common, and subsequent locations being referred to as "beyond location 4" or, more recently, "location 5+". While there are common psychological characteristics among the locations, each location contains different nuances, which are described below.

First, Martin (2019) found that people in location 1 felt that everything was fundamentally fine and happening as it should. Due to this change, individuals may have stopped making goals, as everything already felt perfect to them (Martin, 2019). While individuals still experienced both positive and negative emotions, negative emotions had less of an impact on the individual. Regardless of one's emotions, a deep sense of inner peace was experienced at almost all times (Martin, 2019). This peace could be disrupted by external triggers but was quickly resumed. Additionally, there was a greater focus on the present in location 1, with fewer thoughts of the past or future (Martin, 2019). A sense of connectedness to all began to form and individuals started to feel that their physical self extended beyond their bodies (Martin, 2019).

Individuals may have begun to feel that they were now experiencing the “Truth.” Generally, individuals reported a reduction in a narrative self – which refers to the psychological construct that serves as a representation of the person themselves in stories that they tell about themselves – in location 1 (Martin, 2019). This led to a sense of silence or stillness at all times, as it caused a reduction in self-related thoughts or what Martin (2019) referred to as “mental chatter.” Lastly, individuals in location 1 were likely to become less interested in stories; both fictional stories within TV shows or movies, as well as stories from friends, family or coworkers. This may have led to less interest in social interaction, given that, according to Martin (2019), social interactions are based around stories. However, due to social conditioning experienced over the course of their lives, social difficulties at this location are not likely to be severe. Despite all these internal changes, Martin (2019) stated that others, such as friends or family members, will not notice changes in an individual experiencing location 1.

In location 2, Martin (2019) found that little changed from the experiences of location 1; instead, the experiences of location 1 were simply felt more deeply. For example, individuals reported feeling a greater sense of fundamental “okayness,” a lessened sense of having a narrative self, and had less of an emotional range, with more positive emotions being present and fewer negative ones ever arising (Martin, 2019). Any sense of connectedness that was experienced in location 1 deepened, making some things, such as one’s body, feel less personal due to feeling a greater sense of unity or “oneness” with everything. Lastly, according to Martin (2019), any social or psychological conditioning that an individual experienced began to lessen, leading to less of a need for approval from others in social settings.

Individuals in location 3 reported, again, a deepening of their prior experiences, but to a larger extent. Instead of fewer negative emotions, negative emotions were gone altogether, and emotions as a whole were replaced by one constant emotion that combined feelings of joy, love, and compassion (Martin, 2019). However, love felt much less personal and more universal within this transcendent state compared to the normal waking state (Martin, 2019). Psychological conditioning was all but gone at this location as well, although individuals in location 3 were at times willing to play along in social situations as they enjoyed helping and being with others. According to Martin (2019), individuals experiencing location 3 are nice to be around for these reasons. Martin (2019) found that individuals in location 3 more frequently reported a feeling of connectedness to something greater, but explained this connection differently depending on their religious affiliation. For example, a Christian may report that she felt closer to, or even one with, Jesus. Finally, there was, once again, a deepened sense of both inner peace and well-being, and increased focus on the present moment (Martin, 2019). Well-being at this location was so intense, individuals often felt that they were impacting the well-being of those around them (Martin, 2019). Additionally, as well-being is so high, often individuals felt that everything was perfect to a greater extent than they did in prior locations; individuals in this location who previously advocated for different social, political or environmental causes may no longer feel it necessary, as according to them, everything is as it should be (Martin, 2019).

While the first 3 locations tended to be a deepening of each previous location, location 4 differed by introducing more extreme experiences. At this point on the continuum, narrative thought, a feeling of being unified with all, and all emotions were gone (Martin, 2019). Individuals at this location often described their actions or words as not feeling as though they were their own; consequently, they felt they lacked agency and were unable to make decisions or

plan things in the future (Martin, 2019). Within this location, individuals stopped needing any type of approval from others. Due to this, individuals experienced problems with social interaction (Martin, 2019). Although this location may sound unappealing, even to those individuals in this location prior to their transition into it, individuals reported an even deeper sense of peace and fundamental well-being and often stated that this location was the best out of all the locations on the continuum (Martin, 2019).

In addition to the 4 locations outlined above, Martin (2019) explained that the continuum of PNSE continues beyond location 4, however much less is known about these further locations. Generally, beyond location 4 is not a location that one enters initially, but rather a location individuals can progress to after already being elsewhere on the continuum. These locations are much more dangerous than the previous 4, as Martin (2019) reported life support functions, such as breathing, can be affected. Beyond location 4, individuals sometimes experienced a return of a narrative self again, however, Martin (2019) explained that this sense of self was different from the one previously experienced in the ordinary waking state. Similarly, new forms of emotions may be experienced, however, these will differ depending on the individual. According to Martin (2019), individuals may have experienced changes to the visual system or other sensory changes, as well as experienced intuition, premonitions or the ability to move things with one's mind. However, Martin (2019) admitted that the latter three are difficult to confirm. Lastly, as to be expected, a deepening of well-being in these further locations was found (Martin, 2019).

Research on State Integration in the Finders Course Alumni Members

Research about the Finders Course alumni and their specific state of consciousness is limited. Within his 2014 paper, Martin placed a heavy emphasis on the psychological

characteristics of those experiencing PNSE, without going into great detail regarding how this state directly affects one's everyday life experiences. While this original paper does not discuss the everyday functioning of those living in a state of PNSE extensively, Martin (2014) did mention a problem that largely affects daily life: impaired short term memory. Martin (2014) found that individuals within locations further along the continuum, namely location 4, had the potential to experience short term memory problems, especially related to out-of-routine events. Things such as appointments or one-time schedule changes were difficult for these individuals, and they were often required to rely on aids like post-it notes or electronic reminders to help navigate these situations (Martin, 2014).

More recently, Martin (2019) has written a book that discussed various topics surrounding the Finders Course alumni, which provides greater insight into how daily life is affected for those living in PNSE. Generally, he explained that if one completes the Finders Course, his or her life will stay very much the same, with the exception of experiencing fundamental well-being at all times (Martin, 2019). Martin (2019) also stated that individuals will exhibit more altruistic behaviours, more creativity, increased confidence in oneself, better self-control, enhanced coping abilities, experience less stress, and get sick less often.

More importantly, Martin (2019) specifically examined how PNSE positively or negatively affected various aspects of an individual's life. For example, he noted that individuals may be inclined to drastically change their health for the better, or may also continue to maintain bad habits, now exhibiting a non-caring attitude towards any severe health consequences that may occur (Martin, 2019). In regards to employment or work-related activities, Martin (2019) stated that individuals will not experience negative effects, if any at all, but only increases in

performance, productivity and overall work quality. This differs from Taylor's (2017) report that many individuals will quit their jobs upon entering a persistent transcendent state.

In regard to romantic relationships, Martin (2019) noted that relationships often worked well when two partners shared similar views. On the contrary, divorce was often seen when conflicts regarding religious or existential beliefs arose due to one's new state of consciousness, or when the Finders Course alumni member experienced a suppression in inner peace as a result of engagement with his or her partner (Martin, 2019). Although the Finders Course alumni experience inner peace persistently, Martin (2019) explained that this peace can be pushed down or lessened due to triggers ignited by an individual's partner. Martin (2019) also explained how partners can be affected by this transcendent state of consciousness, highlighting that divorce often occurred when an individual living in an ordinary waking state experienced an absence of feelings of love or emotion from their Finder Course alumni partner (Martin, 2019).

As previously mentioned, locations, or markers on the continuum of PNSE, are identified by Martin (2014) and appear to be very important to the individuals who complete the Finders Course. Due to their importance, Martin (2019) discussed how the various locations will affect an individual's experiences in multiple aspects of one's life. However, these discussions can easily be broken down into a single main point: the further one moves along the continuum — essentially deepening the altered state of consciousness one experiences — the harder it is to integrate one's state with one's life. Overall, more research is needed to determine the level to which daily life is impacted for those that take the Finders Course.

Transcendent states other than PNSE

Despite various anecdotal accounts on the Finders Course website, as well as information provided by Martin in his 2014 paper and 2019 book, there is little statistical information or research about the FC alumni available, and little research available about persistent transcendent states overall. Furthermore, a review of the available literature indicates that studies concerning persistent or permanent transcendent states typically focus on the psychological characteristics of the state rather than the impact the state has on the experiences of the individual. However, while few other researchers have described their experiences, or their participants' experiences of living in a persistent transcendent state, the accounts that have been reported often contain similar features to those of the Finders Course alumni that were mentioned above.

Not unlike Martin's (2014) continuum of locations, researchers have frequently noted that, while living in a persistent transcendent state may not look the same in all individuals, common experiences have often been described (Ferrucci, 1982; Merrell-Wolff, 1994; Taylor, 2017). Experiences such as high levels of well-being and peace (Ferrucci, 1982; Taylor, 2012a; Taylor & Egeto-Szabo, 2017), changes in perception (Merrell-Wolff, 1994; Taylor, 2012a; Taylor & Egeto-Szabo, 2017), less thought chatter (Merrell-Wolff, 1994; Taylor, 2012a; Taylor & Egeto-Szabo, 2017), changes in one's sense of self (Merrell-Wolff, 1994; Taylor, 2017), including less self-interest (Ferrucci, 1982; Merrell-Wolff, 1994; Taylor, 2012a), a feeling of connectedness to all (Ferrucci, 1982; Taylor, 2012a; Taylor & Egeto-Szabo, 2017), fewer negative emotions (Taylor, 2017), and experiencing more of a present focus (Taylor, 2012a) have all been reported. Furthermore, it has often been noted that individuals experiencing a persistent transcendent state felt that everything was as it should be (Merrell-Wolff, 1994; Ferrucci, 1982; Taylor, 2012a), mirroring that feeling of fundamental okayness that is so

common in the Finders Course alumni. Negative experiences, including difficulties with automated tasks (Merrell-Wolff, 1994), motivation for necessary tasks such as eating (Merrell-Wolff, 1994; Taylor, 2017), physical issues such as pain or exhaustion (Merrell-Wolff, 1994; Taylor, 2017), cognitive problems, including trouble with thinking clearly, focusing on tasks or conversations, and memory problems (Taylor, 2017) were all noted as results of the state as well.

In addition to alterations in psychological characteristics, researchers also addressed how these changes impacted various aspects of an individual's life. Miller (2004), who interviewed 55 individuals who were experiencing an altered state of consciousness, referred to this state as a "quantum change", which included "sudden, dramatic, and enduring transformations that affect a broad range of personal emotion, cognition, and behavior" (Miller, 2004, p. 543). Miller (2004) found that individuals who were experiencing quantum change were less materialistic, more spiritual, and had positive alterations in their relationships, including helping some individuals to leave relationships that involved abuse (Miller, 2004). In a 2017 study that looked at 90 written reports of awakening experiences from 68 individuals, Taylor and Egeto-Szabo found similar positive impacts including higher levels of consideration, empathy, and compassion.

Additionally, Taylor (2012a), in a study that involved conducting interviews of 32 individuals who experienced transformational or spiritual experiences, found that individuals exhibited less materialistic attitudes and experienced better relationships.

Once again, negative experiences that occurred as a result of the state have been reported as well. Difficulties in social interactions, including problems within close relationships, offending people after being blunt or overly honest, refraining from 'faking' emotions or

reactions to please or satisfy others, engaging in “selfish” behavior, including taking more time for one’s self or opting out of experiences one does not feel would be beneficial or important, have all been reported (Taylor, 2012a). Additionally, individuals have reported quitting their jobs due to a newfound disinterest in them or separating from romantic partnerships upon entering this new state (Taylor, 2017). However, despite any issues that one may have during a persistent transcendent experience, Taylor (2017) stressed that these issues can be eliminated as time passes and one learns to better integrate their transcendent state with everyday living.

The Finders Course within a Counselling Context

Martin has stressed that a person is only to take the Finders Course if they are generally mentally well and do not have any severe psychological problems (Finders Course, n.d.). However, in video testimonies on the Finders Course website, participants often cited moderate mental health issues and general emotional issues prior to taking the course, all of which dissolved upon entering a state of PNSE. Upon considering this fact, the question of the benefit and efficacy of using the Finder Course within a counselling context arises. If the state of PNSE alleviates moderate mental health issues, this course could be an effective way to treat treatment-resistant patients, especially when considering the 70% success rate within the short span of 4 months (Finders Course, n.d.). Learning more details about PNSE and understanding the value of a self-development course such as the Finders Course may allow us to examine the possible use of this or similar courses within a counselling context.

Study 1

Study Rationale

The purpose of the first study was to try to verify the claims made about the psychological characteristics of being in a state of PNSE as achieved through completion of the Finders Course. Given the information presented in the literature review, namely Martin's (2014; 2019) reports, as well as information provided through videos on the Finders Course website, there was an expectation that participants would overall provide self-reports that were positive in nature. However, this was an exploratory study and there were no formal hypotheses.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 55 members of the Finders Course alumni (23 women and 30 men, $n = 53$), with a mean age of 54.9 years ($SD = 12.7$; age range: 27-78 years; $n = 53$). The sample was highly educated; 33 participants stated that they had a post-graduate degree, 13 reported that they had a college degree, 5 reported having a high school diploma, and finally, 2 participants reported having none of these levels of schooling ($n = 53$). Participants reported a variety of occupations, including various types of spiritual work, work in counselling or psychology, and work related to the technology sector. Additionally, many of the participants reported that they were retired. In regards to religious affiliation, 21 participants reported that they did not have any religious affiliation, 15 participants reported "other", 9 participants reported having their own beliefs, 4 participants reported being Buddhist, 2 participants reported being Judaic, 2 participants reported being Christian, and no participants reported being Muslim ($n = 53$). Furthermore, 23 participants reported daily religious practice, 2 participants reported weekly religious practice, 1 participant reported monthly religious practice, 5 participants

reported “hardly ever” engaging in religious practice, and lastly, 19 participants reported never engaging in religious practice ($n = 50$).

Lastly, participants were asked to report which location on Martin’s (2014) continuum of PSNE they believed they occupied; 13 participants stated location 1, 11 stated location 2, 6 stated location 3, 6 stated location 4, 9 stated their location was beyond location 4, and 8 stated that they had not transitioned to one of the locations on the continuum ($n = 53$). Participants were not compensated for their participation in the study.

Materials

Online survey. All contents of the study were included in an online survey which was created on the software Qualtrics. The survey could be accessed by any device that has an internet connection, but participants were asked to refrain from completing the survey on a mobile device, due to formatting incompatibility. The Qualtrics site included a consent form, the survey, and a debriefing form. The consent form described the study and required participants to provide their name and click to consent before being able to continue with the survey. The survey included three psychological measures: the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (Pekala, 1986), the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989) and The Global Motivation Scale (Guay, Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). The survey also contained a 40 item questionnaire written by the researchers that included both written and Likert scale questions, as well as a set of demographic questions. A debriefing form was provided at the end that reiterated the purpose of the study. At this time, participants were able to provide their names and email

addresses if they wished to receive the results of the study or if they wished to take part in future studies regarding the Finders Course alumni.

Measures

The Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (PCI). The PCI is a self-report measure containing 53 items that span multiple dimensions of a recent subjective experience (Pekala, 1986). These dimensions include altered states of awareness; self-awareness; altered experiences; volitional control; rationality; internal dialogue; positive affect, which includes joy, love, and sexual excitement; negative affect, which includes anger, sadness, and fear; imagery; attention; memory; and arousal (Pekala, 1986). More specifically, the PCI contains 21 scales. Body Image refers to how much one feels one's body diffuses into the space around them. Time Sense refers to the speed of time as well as if time is sped up or down according to the individual. Perception assesses any changes that occurred in one's perception of colour, shape, or size of the world around oneself, as well as one's perspective of the world. Unusual Meanings looks at experiences and how they may be categorized as being religious or spiritual in nature. Imagery Vividness assesses how realistic one's visual imagery is. Direction of attention looks at whether or not one's attention is directed inward or outward. Absorption refers to the degree to which one is absorbed in what one is doing or if, instead, one has been distracted. Self-awareness looks at the awareness of an individual and whether one is aware of oneself or if one is not conscious of oneself. Altered state assesses whether the experience was outside of one's ordinary experience. Rationality looks at the clarity of thoughts of an individual. Volitional Control looks at how in control one is of one's thoughts and if thoughts or images pop into one's mind without

control. Lastly, Arousal refers to how tense one's muscles were. The scales that fall under the positive and negative affect dimension that were already mentioned are self-explanatory in nature, as is Imagery Amount, Internal Dialogue, and Memory (Pekala, 1991). The PCI is scored on a 7-point scale and includes wording such as "I felt ecstatic and joyful" and "my perception of the flow of time changed drastically" (Pekala, 1986). The norms for each scale of the PCI were found in a study done by Pekala et al. in 1986 with 217 university students. The study contained 3 conditions: eyes open, eyes closed, and hypnosis and asked participants to complete the PCI after sitting in silence (Pekala et al, 1991). Scores of the Finders Course alumni participants were compared to scores obtained in the eyes open condition, as it most resembled the instructions given to the participants of the current study. Scores are computed by summing the scores within each scale and dividing by the number of items within each scale.

The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB). The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being is a self-report measure containing 42 items that examine multiple factors of psychological well-being. These factors include self-acceptance, the establishment of quality ties to others, a sense of autonomy, the pursuit of meaningful goals and a sense of purpose in life, and continued growth and development as an individual. This measure is scored on a 6-point scale and includes items such as "in general, I feel confident and positive about myself" and "I have a sense of direction and purpose in my life." The norms for each scale were found in a study done by Ryff in 1989. Scores of the Finders Course alumni participants were compared to the scores obtained from the total sample of the study (Ryff, 1989).

Global Motivation Scale (GMS). The Global Motivation Scale is a self-report measure containing 28 items that examine multiple factors of motivation. These factors include different types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as amotivation, which was of particular interest. The measure is scored on a 7-point scale and includes questions such as “in general, I do things in order to feel pleasant emotions” and “in general, I do things because I force myself to do them” (Guay, Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). To evaluate participant’s scores on the GMS, a Self-Determination Index was computed. To compute this index, scores of the GMS were standardized by dividing by the number of items within each scale, and then placed into a formula that gave a single Self-Determination Index score. This index ranged from -18 (very little self-determination) to +18 (extreme self-determination), with 10 being the average score obtained in prior research.

Finders Questionnaire (FQ1). A self-report questionnaire was created for study 1 to allow for investigation of topics frequently mentioned by individuals who have completed the Finders Course. In general, the questionnaire asked questions about non-duality, emotion, and thoughts. The questionnaire contained items with bivalent and Likert scale responses, as well as written responses. Likert scale responses ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” and included items such as “I feel that I have stabilized in the location that I am in” and “I have very little idea about what is going on.” The questionnaire included reverse-worded items. Response times varied greatly depending on the individual. Psychometric properties of the questionnaire are unknown, however, reliabilities for scales created from the questionnaire will be included in the results section.

Demographics Questions. A set of demographic questions were used to collect basic information about participants, including age, gender, religious affiliation, frequency of religious practice, occupation and education level.

Procedure

Prior to conducting the study, the researchers connected with a group of three Finders Course alumni members through both email and a video call. The researchers gave a proposal of the study and the Finders Course alumni members provided feedback, which the researchers took into consideration when writing the questionnaire, as well as the email to solicit participants. The three Finders Course alumni members agreed to distribute the survey link to the other members of the Finders Course alumni. Participants were solicited through the Finders Course alumni website and the Finders Course alumni weekly email newsletter. Upon receiving approval from the ethics committee, the data were collected on an online survey from January 11, 2018 to February 9, 2018. Participants who wished to complete the survey followed the website link provided to them in either the weekly Finders Course alumni newsletter or on the Finders Course alumni website. After clicking the link, they were required to provide their full name and click ‘yes’ to consent to participating in the survey. If they clicked ‘no’ to consenting, they were taken to a page that thanked them for their participation.

After completing the consent, the participants were directed to a page on which they were asked to sit in silence for one minute. After one minute, an arrow button appeared and participants were able to move to the next page of the survey, which contained the PCI. Participants were then asked to complete the PCI based on their previous one minute spent in

silence. Following the PCI, participants were given the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being and then the Global Motivation Scale. Lastly, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire created by the researchers, as well as a set of demographic questions. Upon completing the demographic questions, participants were taken to a page that contained a debriefing form and were asked to provide their names and email addresses if they wished to be sent the results of the study or if they wished to participate in future studies regarding the Finders Course alumni. The Finders Course alumni survey takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Design

The research design of this study was non-experimental and mixed methods. The study contained a single stage where participants were asked to complete a survey. The measures within the study were intended to gather both quantitative and qualitative information based on how participants felt during the present moment as well as self-assessment of their experience.

Results

Of the 80 individuals who accessed the online survey, 55 participants were given the label of 100% completion according to the online platform the survey was hosted on. This 100% completion label meant that participants had accessed the whole survey, from start to finish, but did not necessarily mean that they answered every individual question.

Sample Characteristics

The mean scores of the Finders Course alumni were compared against the published norms of the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory. This was done by subtracting the

means of the norms from the values for each of the 21 PCI variables and running a MANOVA. The value of Roy's largest root is $\lambda_{ROY} = 89.83$ which has $F(21) = 102.67, p < .001$. Individual independent sample *t*-tests were then conducted with a Bonferroni correction for 21 variables so that only those variables with $p < .002$ are being regarded as being statistically significant.

Additionally, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality were conducted on all PCI scales. One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests, which used the mean norm values of the PCI (Pekala, 1991) compared to the median values of the scores of the Finders Course alumni, were conducted on scales that were found to be statistically significant and can be found in Table 1 below. The Finders Course alumni were significantly lower than the norms on the PCI scales of Sexual Excitement, Anger, Sadness, Imagery Amount, Imagery Vividness, Internal Dialogue, and Volitional Control. Additionally, the Finders Course alumni were significantly higher than the norm of the PCI scale of Absorption. The mean scores of the Finders Course alumni and the norms of the PCI (Pekala, 1991) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparison of Sample Means Against Norms for PCI.

	Scale	Sample		Norm		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i> test	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>				
PCI	Anger	.30	.70	1.22	1.41	5.53	85.73	.00001*	< .001
	Sadness	.46	1.13	1.64	1.66	5.30	86.03	.00001*	< .001
	Fear	.41	1.15	.86	1.32	2.22	86.03	.03	< .001
	Sexual Excitement	.26	.95	2.26	1.93	8.84	86.03	.00001*	< .001
	Love	2.52	1.89	3.20	1.89	2.12	85.73	.036568	.029

Scale	Sample		Norm		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i> test	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Imagery Amount	1.24	1.37	3.67	1.78	9.54	86.03	.00001*	< .001
Imagery Vividness	2.35	1.50	3.89	1.55	5.92	85.15	.00001*	
Altered State	1.65	1.52	2.17	1.63	1.98	86.03	.05	.004
Internal Dialogue	2.20	1.78	4.10	1.79	6.33	86.03	.00001*	< .001
Volitional Control	2.92	1.28	3.95	1.36	4.68	86.03	.00001*	
Absorption	4.47	1.27	3.58	1.56	3.86	86.03	.0002*	< .001
Rationality	4.77	1.15	4.21	1.39	2.70	86.03	.008	.001
Joy	2.19	1.77	2.68	1.79	1.64	86.03	.1	.08
Direction of Attention	3.70	1.39	3.80	1.66	.40	86.03	.7	
Arousal	.99	1.37	1.81	1.61	3.14	85.44	.002*	< .001
Perception	1.25	1.44	1.40	1.40	.61	85.44	.5	.328
Meaning	1.98	1.59	1.71	1.22	1.08	85.73	.3	.339
Time Sense	2.13	1.87	2.61	1.47	1.63	86.03	.1	.064
Body Image	3.33	1.69	2.70	1.33	2.36	86.03	.02	
Self- awareness	4.07	1.36	4.20	1.25	.57	85.44	.6	
Memory	4.35	1.31	4.25	1.06	.48	85.73	.6	.338

Note. PCI = Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory. Norms are based on n=110 sitting

quietly with eyes open for 4 minutes. All *p* values are two-tailed. Applying a Bonferroni

correction means that only *p*-values less than .002 are regarded as being statistically significant,

denoted with *.

Additionally, a MANOVA was conducted on the effects of location on all the PCI scales. Testing for violation of assumptions using Box's M could not be done given that the covariance matrices were singular. Nonetheless, the reports of the MANOVA are reported here, with Roy's Largest Root, $\lambda_{ROY} = 4.90$, $F(21) = 5.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .83$ being statistically significant. In three cases where factor levels had no variance, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used in place of F. It was found that location apparently had an effect on Love $F(5) = 3.52$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2 = .31$, Anger $H(5) = 23.96$, $p < .001$, Sadness $H(5) = 20.96$, $p = .001$, Fear $H(5) = 16.20$, $p = .006$, Body Image $F(5) = 2.98$, $p = .023$, $\eta^2 = .28$, Absorption $F(5) = 13.28$, $p < .001$, (equal variance not assumed), Internal Dialogue $F(5) = 4.07$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .34$, Memory $F(5) = 3.30$, $p = .014$, $\eta^2 = .30$, and Arousal $F(5) = 4.79$, $p = .006$ (equal variance not assumed). With a Bonferroni correction lowering the critical value of p to .002, only Anger, Sadness, and Absorption varied with location to a statistically significant degree. Despite Love and Body Image no longer being statistically significant after applying a Bonferroni correction, pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni corrections were conducted as both scales were of interest to the researchers. Pairwise comparisons for the scale of Love revealed that only the differences between scores of those not in location to scores of those in location 3 were significant, with $p = .007$. Pairwise comparisons for the scale of Body Image revealed that only the differences between scores of those not in location to scores of those beyond location 4 were significant, with $p = .017$.

Mean scores of participants were also compared against the norms for the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB). This was done by subtracting the means of the norms from the values for each of the 6 SPWB variables and running a MANOVA. The value of Roy's

largest root is $\lambda_{ROY} = 3.91$ which has $F(6) = 26.08, p < .001$. Individual independent sample t -tests were then conducted with a Bonferroni correction for 6 variables so that only those variables with $p < .008$ are being regarded as being statistically significant. Additionally, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality were conducted on all SPWB scales. One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests, which used the mean norm values of the SPWB compared to the median values of the scores of the Finders Course alumni, were conducted on scales that were found to be statistically significant and can be found in Table 2 below. The Finders Course alumni were significantly lower than the norms on the SPWB scales of Autonomy, Purpose in Life, Positive Relations with Others, Environmental Mastery and Self-Acceptance. The mean scores of the Finders Course alumni and the norms of the SPWB are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of Sample Means Against Norms for SPWB.

Scale	Sample		Norm		t	df	t test	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Autonomy	33.44	6.75	37.14	6.96	3.8506	2839.30	.00012*	.001
Purpose in Life	30.43	6.10	38.40	6.98	9.254	2839.30	.00001*	
Positive Relations with Others	34.22	6.60	40.57	6.96	6.7566	2839.30	.00001*	< .001
Environment al Mastery	33.08	6.68	38.15	7.41	5.3783	2839.30	.00001*	< .001
Self- acceptance	34.37	6.34	38.12	8.20	4.1799	2839.30	.00003*	< .001
Personal Growth	36.88	5.79	38.40	6.93	1.858	2839.30	.063272	.535

Note. SPWB = Scales of Psychological Well-Being. Norms are based on $n=4015$. All p values are two-tailed. Applying a Bonferroni correction means that only p -values less than .008 are regarded as being statistically significant, denoted with *.

Additionally, A MANOVA was conducted on the effects of location on all the SPWB scales. Testing for violation of assumptions was conducted and was found to be significant with Box's $M = 131.15$, $F(63, 2102.44) = 1.33$, $p = .046$. In spite of the lack of homogeneity of variance between the factor levels, the researchers chose to report the results of the MANOVA, with Roy's Largest Root, $\lambda_{ROY} = 2.65$, $F(6, 39) = 17.26$, $p < .001$. It was found that location had a significant effect on Positive Relations with Others $F(5) = 4.60$, $p = .007$ (equal variance not assumed), Environmental Mastery $F(5) = 5.02$, $p = .004$ (equal variance not assumed), and Self-acceptance $F(5) = 5.99$, $p = .002$, using a critical value of .008 for p after applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple tests. Kruskal-Wallis H Tests were also conducted and it was found that location had a significant effect on Positive Relations with Others, $H(5) = 16.11$, $p = .007$, Environmental Mastery, $H(5) = 16.90$, $p = .005$, and Self-Acceptance, $H(5) = 22.34$, $p < .001$, using a critical value of .008 for p after applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple tests. Additionally, pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni corrections were conducted on these three scales. First, for the scale of Positive Relations with Others, pairwise comparisons revealed that only the differences between not in a location to location 2, 3, and beyond location 4 were significant with $p < .001$, $p = .002$, and $p = .001$, respectively. For the scale of Environmental Mastery, pairwise comparisons revealed that only the differences between not in a location to

location 1 through 4 and beyond location 4 were significant, with $p = .022$, $p < .001$, $p = .002$, $p = .004$, and $p < .001$, respectively. Lastly, for the scale of Self-Acceptance, pairwise comparisons revealed that only the differences between not in a location to location 1 through 4 and beyond location 4 were significant, with $p = .003$, $p < .001$, $p < .001$, $p = .006$, and $p < .001$ respectively, as well as the differences between location 1 and beyond location 4, with $p = .035$.

In addition to the PCI and the SPWB, sample scores on the Global Motivation Scale (GMS) were examined. To evaluate participant's scores on the GMS, a Self-Determination Index was computed. To compute this index, scores of the GMS were standardized by dividing by the number of items within each scale and then placed into a formula that gave a single Self-Determination Index score. This index ranged from -18 (very little self-determination) to +18 (extreme self-determination), with 10 being the average score obtained in prior research. There was a difference found between Self-Determination Index scores of Finders Course alumni participants ($M = 8.02$, $SD = 4.98$, $n = 44$) and the typical score of 10 found in prior research with $t(43) = -2.63$, $p = .012$ (two-tailed). Participants who were in any location had higher numerical scores compared to those who were not in a location. However, pairwise comparison of values of the Self-Determination Index between being in a location and not being in a location was nonsignificant.

Creation of Scales of FQ1

The Finders Questionnaire (FQ1) was designed to look at the experiences and opinions of the participants regarding the state they find themselves to be in. A hierarchical cluster analysis was used with a distance measure of the absolute value of the correlation coefficient on the 18

items in the FQ1 that were given to all participants, regardless of which location they had stated that they were in. This within-group linkage hierarchical cluster analysis revealed two clusters. After evaluating each cluster, it was decided that each cluster would be used as a scale with $\alpha = .87$ ($n = 50$) and $\alpha = .85$ ($n = 52$) respectively. The first scale was labeled *Self* and included 8 items, such as the reversed scored “the further along I get, the less I feel I know anything,” “when I turn my attention to my subjective experience, I find that there is a subject for whom experience occurs,” the reverse-scored “I have very little idea about what is going on,” and the reverse-scored “when I turn my attention to my subjective experience I cannot find a subject for whom my experience occurs.” The second scale was labeled *Okay* and included 10 items, such as “I feel that everything in my life is fundamentally okay,” “I find myself in a continuous state of nonduality,” “I am confident that my understanding of reality is correct,” and the reverse scored “I seldom have feelings of joy.”

Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality were conducted on all scales created by the researchers. Of the 2 scales created, one scale was found to be statistically significant. However, upon visual observation of all normal Q-Q plots for the scales, both scales appeared to be normally distributed. For this reason, both scales were included in further analyses.

Sense of Self

It appears that a sense of self decreases as participants move further along the continuum of locations, with an analysis of variance showing that the effect of location on score obtained on the *Self* scale was significant (both an F test for heteroscedasticity and Levene's test of equality of error variances were found to be not statistically significant, so the assumptions for using

ANOVA were met). Results of the ANOVA and pairwise comparisons can be found in Table 3.

Sense of Fundamental “Okayness”

It appears that a sense of fundamental “okayness” generally increases as participants move further along the continuum of locations, with an analysis of variance showing that the effect of location on score obtained on the *Okay* scale was significant (both an F test for heteroscedasticity and Levene's test of equality of error variances were found to be not statistically significant, so the assumptions for using ANOVA were met). Results of the ANOVA and pairwise comparisons can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

ANOVA Results and Pairwise Comparisons of Scales Self and Okay.

Scale		Location						<i>F</i> ratio	<i>p</i>	η^2
		Not in a loc	Loc 1	Loc 2	Loc 3	Loc 4	Loc > 4			
Self	<i>M</i>	39.25	40.62 _a	29.11	29.67	24.33 _b	25.25 _b	4.58	.002	.34
	<i>SD</i>	11.83	8.98	7.98	7.06	4.68	14.15			
	<i>n</i>	8	13	9	6	6	8			
Okay	<i>M</i>	28.63 _a	43.31 _b	53.00 _c	57.00 _c	55.00 _c	61.00 _c	21.61	< .001	.70
	<i>SD</i>	8.77	9.22	5.66	4.34	5.51	6.41			
	<i>n</i>	8	13	11	6	6	8			

Note: Means with different subscripts differ at the $p = .05$ level using pairwise comparisons with a Bonferroni correction.

FQI Scales

Lastly, correlations were conducted between the scales *Okay*, *Self*, location, the PCI

scales, the SPWB scales, and the SDI. Some of the stronger correlations with *Okay*, *Self*, and location, can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Correlations of FQI Scales with Location, PCI Scales, SDI, and SPWB Scales.

	Okay	Self	Location
Okay	1.00		
Self	-.38*	1.00	
Location	.75**	-.52**	1.00
Sexual Excitement	-.07	.31*	-.19
Sadness	-.31*	.30*	-.43*
Body Image	.53**	-.59**	.48**
Imagery Vividness	.43*	-.11	.36*
Self-Awareness	-.10	.30*	-.18
Internal Dialogue	-.28*	.29*	-.39*
Memory	.39*	-.35*	.25
Joy	.46*	-.14	.14
Love	.51**	-.16	.21
Fear	-.28*	.27	-.37*
Meaning	.35*	-.13	.04
Environmental Mastery	.64**	-.08	.53**
Positive Relations with Others	.64**	-.04	.45*
Purpose in Life	.39*	.11	-.03
Self-Acceptance	.74**	-.12	.57*
Personal Growth	.56**	.02	.30*
Autonomy	.42*	.03	.47*
Self Determination Index	.18	.39*	-.14

Note. * denotes correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). Applying a Bonferroni

correction for 84 comparisons means that only p -values less than .0006 are statistically

significant. ** denotes correlation is significant at the 0.0006 level (two-tailed).

Written Response Results

The participants were given multiple opportunities to provide written responses to various items. At this time, there was no attempt to formally analyze these written responses. To illustrate the various types of responses obtained, a selection of these responses has been presented below.

Please describe what you mean by there being fewer thoughts present now than prior to

transitioning: “I am calmer more often. I spend less time on rumination and concern about the past or future.” (Participant 10, Location 1)

Please describe what you mean by there being fewer thoughts present now than prior to

transitioning: “There is a steady background state of things being OK, of bliss, joy and awareness.” (Participant 37, Location 1)

Please describe what you think optimal well-being would be like: “Like it is for me for the

last 2 years. I feel that everything is exactly as it is and there is a strong sense of acceptance for that. Pain or pleasure, if its there its there. I feel safe, more and more in equanimity. I don't feel so much joy, I almost never feel excitement or nervousness, but I don't miss that. I feel content, calm, non-attached. I never feel anxious, were [sic] seldom there is anger, sadness or frustration.” (Participant 50, Beyond Location 4)

Describe any detrimental effects that have occurred as a result of transitioning: “Some lack

of emotions which impacts my relationship with my wife and adult daughter. They don't understand.” (Participant 11, Beyond Location 4)

Describe any detrimental effects that have occurred as a result of

transitioning: “Forgetfulness increased significantly. And I have to pay attention to how my

neutral affect in location 4 can strike others as reptilian.” (Participant 39, Location 4)

Describe any detrimental effects that have occurred as a result of transitioning: “my partner thinks I'm sometimes not interested in personalities - mine, but also hers. So she feels a bit lonely sometimes. It's probably true.” (Participant 41, Location 1)

Discussion

It appears that many of the Finders Course alumni are experiencing some type of altered state, which is evident due to their scores on the PCI. The Finders Course alumni were lower than the norms on the scales of Anger, Sadness and Fear showcasing an alteration in the experience of emotion, however, the latter was only significant according to the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. Additionally, the Finders Course alumni were found to be lower than the norms on the scales of Imagery Amount, Imagery Vividness, and Internal Dialogue, indicating an alteration in mental chatter and focus. The latter finding is also further demonstrated by higher than the norm scores on the scales of Absorption and Rationality; however, Rationality was only significant according to the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test.

When examining the scores on the PCI scales further, it is clear that the scores on the negative affect scales decrease early on within the continuum of locations, with scores remaining low within subsequent locations. Alternatively, the scores on the scales of Imagery Vividness, Imagery Amount, and Internal Dialogue decreased incrementally as participants moved along the continuum of locations.

Interestingly, while the scores on the negative affect scales of Anger, Sadness and Fear seem to confirm reports by Martin (2019) that state that the Finders Course alumni are less likely

to experience negative emotions, the Finders Course alumni did not significantly differ from the norms of the positive affect scales of Joy or Love, which contradicts previous reports regarding the emotional experiences of those on the continuum (Martin, 2019).

Fundamental Well-Being

Interestingly, while high levels of well-being are characteristic of Finders Course alumni (Martin, 2019), participants scored significantly lower than norms on the SPWB scales of Autonomy, Purpose in Life, Positive Relations with Others, Environmental Mastery and Self-Acceptance. There are multiple reasons as to why this may be. First, low psychological well-being may be what initially leads individuals to enroll in the Finders Course, as increased well-being is something that is advertised on the Finders Course website to occur as a result of completing the course (Finders Course FAQ, n.d). However, as we do not have pre-data of participants before they entered the course, we cannot confirm this.

Second, the Scales of Psychological Well-Being may be a poor measure of exceptional well-being. In a 2009 study examining the precision of the SPWB, it was found that, while the SPWB was capable of measuring average levels of well-being, it had “low precision of measurement at high levels” (Abbott, Ploubidis, Huppert, Kuh & Croudac, 2009, p. 371), and would require the “addition of questions which tap into the more positive end of the well-being continuum” (Abbott et al., 2009, p. 371) to more accurately capture higher than average levels of well-being like those seen in Finders Course alumni.

Lastly, certain scales of the SPWB focus on feelings or attitudes that do not correspond to those that are experienced when on the continuum of locations. For example, the scale of

Purpose in Life places importance on one's future, one's direction, and making plans in advance. However, as the fundamental okayness that is experienced by the Finders Course alumni includes feelings that everything in their life just happens as it is supposed to or that they have little control over their actions (Martin, 2019), it is less likely that Finders Course alumni would score high on this scale, despite subjective feelings that they are experiencing high levels of fundamental well-being. This is reflected in participants' written responses: "[there is a] sense of peace, no matter what shows up" (Participant 7, beyond location 4), "[I have] no regrets about the past, no concerns for the future" (Participant 13, location 4), "[I am no longer] agonizing over future choices" (Participant 30, location 2), and "[I am] okay with everything exactly as it is" (Participant 48, location 3).

In addition to lower than the norm scores in the SPWB, it was found that location had a statistically significant effect on three of the SPWB scales: Positive Relations with Others, Environmental Mastery and Self-Acceptance. Within these three scales, participants generally scored numerically higher at each subsequent location, which supports self-reports from the Finders Course alumni and reports from Martin (2019) regarding the increase of well-being experienced when moving along the continuum of locations. However, only some of these differences were found to be statistically significant. For the scale of Positive Relations with Others, pairwise comparisons revealed that only the differences between not in a location to location 2, 3, and beyond location 4 were significant. For the scale of Environmental Mastery, pairwise comparisons revealed that only the differences between not in a location to location 1 through 4 and beyond location 4 were significant. Lastly, for the scale of Self-Acceptance,

pairwise comparisons revealed that only the differences between not in a location to location 1 through 4 and beyond location 4 were significant.

Additional nuanced differences can be seen upon further examination of the SPWB mean scores based on location, primarily that participants who were not in a location scored numerically low on all scales of the SPWB. However, the difference between not in a location to any of the other locations on the scales was only significant for the scales of Environmental Mastery and Self-Acceptance. These low scores for those who have not yet transitioned highlight that participants, as previously suggested, could be entering the Finders Course with low levels of well-being.

Additionally, mean scores on all scales of the SPWB had a numerical decrease between location 3 and location 4, suggesting that there is potentially something fundamentally different about location 4 compared to the other locations. However, these differences were not found to be statistically significant.

In addition to the SPWB, scores on the PCI also revealed information about the well-being of participants. The mean scores on the PCI scales of Anger, Sadness and Fear decreased to zero by the time participants were in location 2, staying at this level in the subsequent locations. This echoes Martin's (2019) findings of participants having fewer or a lack of negative emotions.

In addition to the negative affect scales, the positive affect scales were examined. It was found that scores on the scales of Love and Joy were lowest for those not in a location. Once again, this calls into question if individuals are entering the Finders Course with low levels of

well-being. However, pairwise comparisons revealed that only the differences between not in a location to location 3 for the scale of Love were significant.

As just mentioned, there was a lack of significant difference between scores on the scale of Joy across the continuum of locations. That is, unlike what is to be expected based on Martin's (2019) previous findings, Joy did not increase at each subsequent location. Given these findings, it appears that emotion may become attenuated sooner than reported by Martin (2019). While one participant noted the positives of lacking strong emotion in the written responses, like not missing nervousness, other participants noted the downsides of lacking a broad range of emotions, including feeling too passive and having a "neutral affect that can strike others as reptilian" (Participant 39, location 4). Additionally, it appears that, while having an attenuation of emotions may not always affect the individuals themselves, it can result in negative social experiences with others. For example, one participant explained that he experiences "some lack of emotions which impacts [his] relationship with [his] wife and adult daughter. They don't understand" (Participant 11, beyond location 4).

While low scores and lack of significant difference between scores within locations on the positive affect scales are contrary to previous reports that note individuals feel increased well-being once they enter each subsequent location on the continuum, it is possible that these findings are due to the nature of the well-being experienced in these locations, namely, that it is potentially not characterised by positive emotions and may greatly differ from the experience of positive emotions in the ordinary waking state. Written responses from participants appeared to validate this, with individuals stating that they have a "deep love for everything that is"

(Participant 23, location 3), “background joy” (Participant 1, location 3) and an “ongoing [universal] love and/or compassion without an object” (Participant 13, location 4). This is also exemplified by the scores obtained by the Finders Course alumni on the PCI; the Finders Course alumni did not significantly differ from the norms on the PCI positive affect scales of Love or Joy and, while not significantly different, scores on the scales of Love and Joy were numerically lower than those of the norms. Furthermore, participants noted that fundamental well-being includes many other aspects outside of emotion, including freedom, confidence, and every action feeling as if it has meaning.

Lastly, the well-being of participants can also be examined in relation to their scores on the *Okay* scale. Unlike the PCI positive affect scales of Joy and Love, as well as the scales of the SPWB, the *Okay* scale created by the researchers included items that were less specific to certain emotional feelings or values that are generally associated with well-being; instead, this scale focused on feelings of general fundamental ‘okayness.’ It was found that the values of the *Okay* scale were positively correlated with location; that is, locations further on the continuum had higher scores on the *Okay* scale, indicating higher levels of fundamental okayness at each subsequent location. This finding verifies Martin’s (2019) reports stating that individuals feel greater levels of well-being at locations further along the continuum (2019).

The Notion of a ‘Self’

A large component of the state of PNSE as reported by Martin (2019) is that participants reported having a diminished sense of self or losing their sense of self entirely. Within the current study, scores on the *Self* scale do seem to suggest that participants have a lessened sense

of self; the values of the scale were negatively correlated with location, therefore locations further on the continuum generally had numerically lower scores on the *Self* scale, indicating a lesser sense or presence of self at each subsequent location. However, statistically significant differences were only seen between location 1 and location 4, as well as beyond location 4.

Similar findings were also found within the PCI scale of Body Image; the values of the scale were positively correlated with location, indicating that one feels less like their sense of self is contained within the bounds of their skin at each subsequent location. However, statistically significant differences were only seen between scores for those not in a location to those beyond location 4.

Combined, these two scales illustrate that the further participants move along the continuum of locations, the more likely their sense of self will extend beyond their physical body. Participants noted this lack of boundary in their written responses, stating things such as “[this is] a state where there is not a subject or object” (Participant 11, beyond location 4), “[there is] an inability to locate a sense of self plus major changes to visual perception such that there is a "sameness" to objects in the vicinity that previously would have been seen to have important differences” (Participant 13, location 4) and “when I put my attention on "who I am", it is everywhere, in all, not separate from anything” (Participant 29, location 2).

Additionally, it was found that the *Self* scale had a negative correlation with the *Okay* scale, which validates self-reports given by the Finders Course alumni; when scoring low on the *Self* scale, therefore having an altered sense of self, they feel a higher sense of fundamental “okayness”. However, this correlation became nonsignificant after applying a Bonferroni

correction.

Motivation

The motivation of participants was also examined as Finders Course alumni often stated that they lacked feelings of control over their actions or felt that life was exactly how it was supposed to be (Martin, 2019), therefore not requiring any action to be taken to change it. When examining the scores of the entire sample, it was found that the Finders Courses alumni scored significantly lower than the norm on the Self-Determination Index. This low score indicates low levels of motivation that may result in negative consequences for individuals. However, when examining individual locations, it seems that the participants not in a location had the lowest scores on the Self-Determination Index. When comparing the Self-Determination Index scores between participants not in a location to those who were in any of the locations on the continuum, participants were high in motivation when in a location compared to when not in a location, however, not at significant levels.

In addition to low scores in those not in a location, the second lowest group of scores was for those in location 4. Participants noted alteration in their general motivation, stating “I don’t have dreams or ambitions about the future anymore” (Participant 50, beyond location 4) and “I’m slightly less motivated to work long hours” (Participant 30, location 2). However, although it appears that motivation is attenuated in location 4, consistent with reports of Finders Course alumni who note a loss of agency, the dip was not statistically significant. It is possible that the lack of statistical significance itself is a result of the lack of power to find the difference due to the relatively small sample size.

Mental Chatter

While the Finders Course alumni often report having fewer thoughts upon transitioning to the continuum of locations, with thoughts continuing to lessen as they move further along the continuum (Martin, 2019), there were mixed findings within the current study regarding this experience.

First, the Finders Course alumni scored significantly higher than the norms on the PCI scale of Absorption, indicating that they are able to focus on what they are doing in the current moment, and Rationality, which indicates that they experience clarity of thought. These individuals may have lessened mental chatter, as they are more absorbed in the present and what is going on around them, rather than focusing on other mental distractions. Additionally, the Finders Course alumni scored significantly lower than the norms of the PCI scale of Internal Dialogue, which deals with silently talking to one's self. Written responses verify these findings, with many participants noting that they experienced a reduction in thought or, more specifically, less self-related thoughts. One participant explained that "Thoughts come and go, but they are just thoughts. Not showstoppers or grabbers that keep me enthralled the way it used to be" (Participant 12, location 4).

However, the Finders Course alumni scored lower than the norms on the scale of Volitional Control, which deals with having control over the thoughts that arise in one's mind. Furthermore, all the above scales do not appear to be affected by location, save for the scale of Absorption. Location did not affect the scores of the PCI scales of Rationality or Volitional

Control, and the effect of location on Internal Dialogue became nonsignificant after applying a Bonferroni correction, therefore failing to validate the reports from the Finders Course alumni that one experiences less mental chatter as one moves along the continuum. However, it is possible that the lack of statistical significance is a result of the relatively small sample size.

Study 2

Study Rationale

Whereas previous research has tended to focus on understanding how individuals exhibit new attitudes or behaviours after experiencing a transcendent state (i.e. becoming more altruistic), the impact of these changes on daily living has rarely been specifically studied (i.e. the specific altruistic actions an individual is engaging in). Hence, a goal of the second study was to examine how daily life, including relationships, functioning in a work environment, health habits, and social interactions were impacted by the transcendent state, as opposed to focusing more broadly on overall attitude or behavioural changes, as previously.

Overall, self-reports given by the Finders Course alumni are often overwhelmingly positive. This generally positive attitude towards transcendent states is also seen in the general persistent transcendent state literature. However, negative experiences or difficulties in relation to transcendent states of consciousness were also reported frequently in the persistent transcendent state literature. For this reason, the researchers hypothesized that the Finders Course alumni would report experiencing challenges integrating their transcendent state into various aspects of their lives including relationships, general social interactions, and work-related tasks.

In addition, the researchers wished to investigate the experiences of companions of the Finders Course alumni. More specifically, the researchers wished to gather behavioural data of the Finders Course alumni by asking a companion questions about the ability for a Finders Course alumni member to function in various aspects of their lives while experiencing their transcendent state of consciousness. Furthermore, the researchers wished to investigate how this transcendent state of consciousness in the Finders Course alumni has impacted those they frequently interact with. It was hypothesized that the behavioural data provided by the companions would differ from the self-reports provided by the Finders Course alumni and that companions of the Finders Course alumni would report experiencing challenges due to the transcendent state the Finders Course alumni are experiencing.

Methods

Participants

Participants consisted of 27 members of the Finders Course alumni (men = 14, women = 12, $n = 26$), who had a mean age of 57.96 ($SD = 12.19$; age range: 27-75; $n = 27$). The sample was highly educated, with 18 participants reporting that they had a post-graduate degree, 6 reporting that they were either a college or university graduate, and 3 reporting that they were high school graduates ($n = 27$). Participants reported a variety of occupations, including various roles in the technology sector, management, and health fields. Additionally, many of the participants reported they were retired. With regard to religious affiliation, 13 reported having no religious affiliation, 9 participants reported having their own beliefs, 3 participants reported being Christian, 1 participant reported being Buddhist and 1 participant identified as “other” ($n =$

27). No participants identified as being Judaic or Muslim. Furthermore, 13 participants reported never engaging in religious practice, 3 reported hardly ever engaging in religious practice, and 11 participants reported engaging in daily religious practice ($n = 27$).

Participants were also asked to report which location on Martin's (2014) continuum of PNSE they believe they occupied; 6 participants identified as being in location 1, 7 in location 2, 2 in location 3, 2 in location 4, 4 in beyond location 4, and 5 who identified as having not transitioned onto the continuum of locations ($n = 26$). Participants were not compensated for their participation in the study.

Materials

Online survey. All contents of the study were included in two online surveys created on the software, Qualtrics. The surveys were accessible by any device that had an internet connection, but participants were asked to refrain from completing the survey on a mobile device, due to formatting incompatibility. The Qualtrics site for both the Finders Course alumni members and the companions included a consent form, the survey, and a debriefing form. The consent forms described the study and required participants to provide their name and to click to consent before being able to continue with the survey. The survey given to Finders Course alumni members included one psychological measure: the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (Pekala, 1986), as well as a 121 item questionnaire written by the researchers that included written, bivalent and Likert scale items. The survey given to the companions included a 47 item questionnaire written by the researchers that included written, bivalent and Likert scale items. Both surveys also contained a set of demographic questions. A debriefing form was

provided at the end of both surveys that reiterated the purpose of the study. At the end of the survey, participants were able to provide their names and email addresses if they wished to receive the results of the study.

Measures

The Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (PCI). As described in Study 1.

Finders Questionnaire (FQ2). A self-report questionnaire was created for this survey to allow for investigation of the ability for Finders Course alumni members to integrate their state of consciousness with various aspects of everyday life. In general, the questionnaire asked about a specific relationship with another person, general social interactions with others, one's ability to function with work or related goal-directed tasks and one's feelings and actions regarding one's general health. The questionnaire contained items with bivalent and Likert scale responses, as well as written responses. Likert scale responses ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and the questionnaire included items such as "the way in which I empathize with others has changed since taking the Finders Course" and "I am able to easily focus on any specific task at hand". The questionnaire included questions worded in both a positive and negative direction. Response times varied greatly depending on the individual. Psychometric properties of the questionnaire are unknown, however, reliabilities for scales created from the questionnaire will be included in the results section.

Companion Questionnaire (CQ). A self-report questionnaire was created for this survey to allow for investigation of the perspectives of those who frequently interact with Finders Course alumni members. In general, the questionnaire asked questions about an individual's

relationship with a Finders Course alumni member, as well as questions about this alumni member's social interactions with others, his or her general health, and any life changes this individual has made since completing the Finders Course. The questionnaire contained items with bivalent and Likert scale responses, as well as written responses. Likert scale responses ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and the questionnaire included items such as "I find that my companion's state of consciousness helps me to have a good relationship with my companion" and "My companion frequently talks about his or her state of consciousness with others". The questionnaire included items worded in both a positive and negative direction. Response times varied depending on the individual. Parametric properties of the questionnaire are unknown, however, reliabilities for scales created from the questionnaire were expected to be included in the results section.

Demographics Questions. As described in Study 1.

Procedure

As in Study 1, prior to conducting the study, the researchers connected with the same three Finders Course alumni members through both email and a video call. The researchers gave a proposal of the study and the Finders Course alumni members provided feedback, which the researchers took into consideration when writing the questionnaire. As before, the three Finders Course alumni members agreed to distribute the survey link to the other members of the Finders Course alumni. Finders Course alumni participants were solicited through the Finders Course alumni website, the Finders Course alumni weekly email newsletter, and direct email if they had participated in a previous study conducted by the researchers and indicated that they wished to

participate in future research. Upon receiving approval from the ethics committee, the data were collected on an online survey from January 31st, 2019 to March 5th, 2019. Participants who wished to complete the survey followed a website link provided to them in either the weekly Finders Course alumni newsletter, on the Finders Course alumni website, or within the email sent directly to them. After clicking the link, they were required to provide their full name and click 'yes' to consent to participating in the survey. If participants clicked 'no' to consenting, they were taken to a page that thanked them for their participation. After completing the consent, the participants were directed to a page that asked them to sit in silence for one minute.

After one minute, an arrow button appeared and participants were able to move to the next page of the survey, which contained the PCI. Participants were asked to respond to the items of the PCI based on their previous one minute spent in silence. Following the PCI, participants were asked to complete a set of demographic questions, as well as the Finders Questionnaire created by the researchers. Then, participants were asked to provide their own email if they wished to invite anyone with whom they frequently interacted with to complete the companion survey. A recruitment email was then automatically sent to the Finders Course alumni participant's email inbox, and he or she was then able to forward this email to a companion. The Finders Course alumni were then asked to complete questions about the individual whom they invited to complete the separate companion survey. Once these questions were completed, participants were given the opportunity to provide their own email once again if they wished to invite an additional individual with whom they frequently interacted with to complete the companion survey. A recruitment email was then automatically sent to the Finders Course alumni participant's email inbox, and he or she was able to forward this email to an additional

companion. The Finders Course alumni were then asked to complete questions about the second individual whom they invited to complete the separate companion survey. Upon completing the questionnaire items, participants were taken to a page that contained a debriefing form and were asked to provide their email address if they wished to be sent the results of the study. The Finders Course alumni survey takes approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.

Design

The research design of this study was non-experimental and mixed methods. The study contained two stages. In stage 1, participants completed a survey that contained items relating to how their daily life was impacted by their state of consciousness. In stage 2, participants were given an opportunity to invite someone with whom they frequently interacted to complete a similar survey and were subsequently asked questions about this companion. These companion individuals then were asked to complete a survey that contained items regarding their relationship with the Finders Course alumni member. The measures within the study were intended to gather both quantitative and qualitative information based on how participants felt during the present moment; in other words, as PNSE is an ongoing and constant experience for individuals, gathering information based on their current state was the goal.

Results

Finders Course Alumni Results

Of the 43 individuals who accessed the online survey, 27 participants were given the label of 100% completion according to the online platform the survey was hosted on. This 100%

completion label meant that participants had accessed the whole survey, from start to finish, but did not necessarily mean that they answered every individual question.

The mean scores of the Finders Course alumni were compared against the published norms of the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory. This was done by subtracting the means of the norms from the values for each of the 21 PCI variables and running a MANOVA. The value of Roy's largest root is $\lambda_{ROY} = 306.56$ which has $F(21)=29.20$, $p = .034$. Individual independent sample t -tests were then conducted with a Bonferroni correction for 21 variables so that only those variables with $p < .002$ are statistically significant.

Additionally, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality were conducted on all PCI scales. One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests, which used the mean norm values of the PCI (Pekala, 1991) compared to the median values of the scores of the Finders Course alumni, were conducted on scales that were found to be statistically significant and can be found in Table 4 below. The Finders Course alumni were significantly lower than the norms on the PCI scales of Sexual Excitement, Sadness, Imagery Amount, Imagery Vividness, Internal Dialogue, Volitional Control, and Arousal. Additionally, the Finders Course alumni were significantly higher than the norm of the PCI scale of Absorption. The mean scores of the Finders Course alumni and the norms of the PCI (Pekala, 1991) are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Comparison of Sample Means Against Norms for PCI.

	Scale	Sample		Norm		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i> test	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
PCI	Anger	.80	.99	1.22	1.41	1.80	80.09	.04	< .001
	Sadness	.81	.86	1.64	1.66	3.62	80.09	.0003*	.004
	Fear	.85	1.21	.86	1.32	.04	80.09	.5	< .001
	Sexual Excitement	.96	.89	2.26	1.93	5.17	80.09	.00001*	< .001
	Love	2.31	1.56	3.20	1.89	2.54	80.09	.006	.004
	Imagery Amount	1.33	1.16	3.67	1.78	8.24	79.92	.00001*	< .001
	Imagery Vividness	2.54	1.39	3.89	1.55	4.35	79.92	.00002*	
	Altered State	1.89	1.51	2.17	1.63	.85	80.09	.2	
	Internal Dialogue	1.94	1.49	4.10	1.79	6.47	80.09	.00001*	< .001
	Volitional Control	3.01	.97	3.95	1.36	4.13	80.09	.00004*	
	Absorption	4.52	1.24	3.58	1.56	3.34	80.09	.0006*	.001
	Rationality	4.54	1.18	4.21	1.39	1.25	80.09	.1	.057
	Joy	2.42	1.53	2.68	1.79	.75	79.92	.2	
	Direction of Attention	4.10	1.02	3.80	1.66	1.18	79.92	.1	.257
	Arousal	1.04	.85	1.81	1.61	3.43	80.09	.0005*	.001
	Perception	2.04	1.16	1.40	1.40	2.43	79.92	.009	
	Meaning	2.31	1.28	1.71	1.22	2.20	80.09	.02	
	Time Sense	3.13	1.53	2.61	1.47	1.59	80.09	.06	
	Body Image	3.21	1.45	2.70	1.33	1.66	80.09	.05	
	Self- awareness	3.60	1.29	4.20	1.25	2.18	80.09	.02	
	Memory	4.04	1.06	4.25	1.06	.92	80.09	.2	.360

Note. PCI = Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory. Norms are based on n=110 sitting

quietly with eyes open for 4 minutes. All *p* values are two-tailed. Applying a Bonferroni

correction, means that only *p*-values less than .002 are statistically significant, denoted with *.

Additionally, a MANOVA was conducted on the effects of location on all the PCI scales. Testing for violation of assumptions using Box's M could not be done given that the covariance matrices were singular. Nonetheless, the reports of the MANOVA are reported here, with Roy's Largest Root, $F(17) = 7.19, p = .019, \eta^2 = .96$ being statistically significant. When the PCI scales were considered individually, it was found that location had a significant effect on Memory $F(5, 17) = 2.99, p = .041, \eta^2 = .47$ but that effect became nonsignificant with a Bonferroni correction lowering the critical value for statistical significance to $p = .002$.

In addition to the PCI, the Finders Course alumni participants were given a questionnaire created by the researchers. This questionnaire was designed in two parts. The first part of the questionnaire examined the work-related, health, and general social integration experiences of the Finders Course alumni. A hierarchical cluster analysis was used with a distance measure of the absolute value of the correlation coefficient on 56 items developed for the first part of the questionnaire. This within-groups linkage hierarchical cluster analysis revealed multiple clusters. After evaluating each cluster, it was decided that 6 of these clusters would be used as scales.

The first scale was labelled *Gint* and contained items regarding general integration, including managing one's health, finances, life commitments, and everyday tasks, as well as concentration ability and empathy towards others ($\alpha = .87$).

The second scale was labelled *Withit* and contained items involving cognitive elements such as completing, concentrating, putting effort into and remembering to complete goal-directed tasks, as well as being able and inclined to engage socially with others who are not in a similar state of consciousness ($\alpha = .86$).

The third scale was labelled *Negsoc* and contained items regarding negative social experiences, such as having difficulty interacting with others socially and feeling bored when interacting with those not in a similar state of consciousness ($\alpha = .81$).

The fourth scale was labelled *Rep* and, similar to the above scale, contained items regarding negative social outcomes. More specifically, items within this scale focused on deeper social experiences such as feeling a lack of empathy and having difficulties reading and caring about the emotions of others ($\alpha = .81$). However, after conducting multiple analyses, this scale was not correlated with any significant findings.

The fifth scale was labelled *Ncog* and contained items regarding negative cognitive experience such as increases in stress, not caring to do things one previously cared about and finding it difficult to navigate societal expectations ($\alpha = .80$).

The sixth scale was labelled *Chng* and contained items regarding fundamental changes to one's life, such as differences in the ways one experiences empathy and love as well as general life changes ($\alpha = .80$).

The second part of the questionnaire given to the Finders Course alumni examined a Finders Course alumni member's relationship with a specific companion, whom they identified. An additional hierarchical cluster analysis was used with a distance measure of the absolute value of the correlation coefficient on 21 items developed for the second part of the questionnaire. This within-groups linkage hierarchical cluster analysis revealed multiple clusters. After evaluating each cluster, it was decided that 3 of these clusters would be used as scales.

The first scale was labelled *Relsoc* and contained items regarding basic negative relationship outcomes including having difficulty having conversations, being emotionally triggered by one's companion and being inauthentic with one's interactions towards a companion ($\alpha = .82$).

The second scale was labelled *Con* and contained items regarding positive relationship outcomes including having fewer disagreements, not having problems due to one's new state of consciousness and being able to express one's feelings to a companion ($\alpha = .91$).

The third scale was labelled *Prel* and contained items regarding deeper negative relationship outcomes, including having a lessened sense of peace when around a companion, being unable to talk to a companion about difficult subjects and generally being concerned about the relationship ($\alpha = .90$).

Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality were conducted on all scales created by the researchers. Of the 9 scales created, only four scales were found to be statistically significant. However, upon visual observation of all normal Q-Q plots for the scales, all scales appeared to be normally distributed. For this reason, all 9 scales were included in further analyses.

A MANOVA was conducted on all scales created by the researchers by location. Testing for violation of assumptions using Box's M could not be done given that the covariance matrices were singular. Nonetheless, the reports of the MANOVA are reported here, with Roy's Largest Root, $\lambda_{ROY} = 361.36$, which has $F(8, 5) = 7.19$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .97$ being statistically significant. Regarded individually, it was found that location had a significant effect on the scale *Chng* $F(5,$

8) = 5.54, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = .78$, but that effect became nonsignificant with a Bonferroni correction lowering the critical value for statistical significance to $p = .005$.

However, even without the MANOVA results, the researchers were interested in examining the scales further, as they captured theoretically important aspects of a participant’s integration. An ANOVA was conducted on each of the scales created by the researchers. It was found that location had a significant effect on two scales, with both an F test for heteroscedasticity and Levene’s test of equality of error variances found to be not statistically significant, so the assumptions for using ANOVA were met using a critical value of .005 for p after applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple tests. Results of the ANOVAs and pairwise comparisons can be found in Table 6.

Table 6

ANOVA Results and Pairwise Comparisons of Scales Ncog and Chng.

Scale		Location						<i>F</i> ratio	<i>p</i>	η^2
		Not in a loc	Loc 1	Loc 2	Loc 3	Loc 4	Loc > 4			
Ncog	<i>M</i>	18.50 _a	12.60	9.28 _b	11.00	8.00	9.50 _b	5.02	.005	.58
	<i>SD</i>	3.70	4.39	2.87	1.41	2.83	4.54			
	<i>n</i>	4	5	7	2	2	4			
Chng	<i>M</i>	8.25 _a	16.00 _b	15.28 _b	17.50 _b	20.00 _b	17.00 _b	5.43	.003	.59
	<i>SD</i>	2.63	3.79	2.75	4.95	1.41	2.71			
	<i>n</i>	4	6	7	2	2	4			

Note: Means with different subscripts differ at the $p = .05$ level using pairwise comparisons with a Bonferroni correction.

Additional pairwise comparisons were conducted on the remaining scales created by the researchers, however, only one scale was found to have a significant result. Pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni corrections on the scale of *Withit* revealed that differences between those not in a location to those in location 3, differences between those in location 1 to those in location 3 and differences between those in location 2 to those in location 3 were all found to be significant, with $p = .023$, $p = .041$, and $p = .030$, respectively.

Lastly, correlations were conducted between all the previously mentioned scales, the PCI scales and the location question and can be found in Table 5.

Table 7

Correlations of Location with FQ2 Scales and PCI Scales

	Loc	Gint	Withit	Neg- soc	Chng	Ncog	Rel- soc	Prel	Con	Rep
Loc	1.00									
Gint	.13	1.00								
Withit	-.35	.48*	1.00							
Negsoc	.47*	-.29	-.44*	1.00						
Chng	.55*	.23	-.45*	.30	1.00					
Ncog	-.57*	-.43*	.04	-.15	-.57*	1.00				
Relsoc	-.07	.65*	.15	-.28	.23	-.19	1.00			
Prel	.48	.61*	.03	-.02	.31	-.74*	.40	1.00		
Con	-.01	-.45	-.20	.30	.19	.23	-.26	-.63*	1.00	
Rep	.29	-.13	-.16	.37	.03	-.16	-.49	-.104	.25	1.00
Sexe	-.02	-.43*	-.30	.12	-.01	.31	-.18	-.34	-.03	-.04
Angr	-.34	-.41	.11	-.07	-.52*	.61*	-.42	-.35	-.15	-.07
Fear	-.28	-.19	.23	-.11	-.41*	.50*	-.34	-.27	-.32	-.22
Mea	.26	.13	-.19	.19	.23	-.24	.21	.47	-.58*	-.19
Iviv	.05	.23	.44*	-.17	-.31	-.24	.32	.27	-.43	.05
Abso	.48*	.29	-.18	.22	.53*	-.70**	-.03	.37	-.18	.20
Selfa	-.25	-.00	.41*	-.04	-.16	-.03	.20	-.15	.11	.03
Intd	-.08	-.19	.16	-.18	-.15	.42*	.08	-.07	-.15	-.09
Arou	-.47*	-.24	.23	-.08	-.40*	.54*	-.04	-.41	.21	-.30

	Loc	Gint	Withit	Neg- soc	Chng	Ncog	Rel- soc	Prel	Con	Rep
Vcon	-.58*	.15	.36	-.20	-.24	.15	.46	-.07	.28	-.16
Bodi	.43*	-.09	-.35	.24	.19	-.29	-.31	.13	-.13	.22

Note. * denotes correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). Applying a Bonferroni

correction, means that only p -value less than .0002 are statistically significant. ** denotes

correlation is significant at the 0.0002 level (two-tailed).

Companion Results

Of the 9 companions who accessed the online companion survey, 7 participants were given the label of 100% completion according to the online platform the survey was hosted on. This 100% completion label meant that participants had accessed the whole survey, from start to finish, but did not necessarily mean that they answered every individual question.

In general, due to the low number of responses, the researchers had little confidence in the results of the companion survey data. The researchers attempted to create scales based on the data of the companions, however, these scales were not stable due to the small number of participants, and therefore the data were not analyzed further.

Written Response Results

The Finders Course alumni and companion participants were both given multiple opportunities to provide written responses to various items. At this time, there was no attempt to formally analyze these written responses. To illustrate the various types of responses obtained, a selection of these responses has been presented below.

What, if anything, has changed with your relationship with this companion since the Finders Course? “Less reaction to behaviors that would have previously triggered a reaction.”

(Finders Course alumni participant 10, beyond location 4)

Please explain how you think your state of consciousness affects your relationship with your companion: “My state of consciousness enables me to relate to my companion with greater ease.” (Finders Course alumni participant 11, beyond location 4)

Please explain how you think your state of consciousness affects your relationship with your companion: “I’m less interested in her stories or watching TV with her so I have to simulate interest in such things.” (Finders Course alumni participant 16, location 4)

What, if anything, has changed within your relationship since your companion completed the Finders Course? “Not much has changed within my relationship with my companion.”

(Companion participant 1)

What, if anything, has changed within your relationship since your companion completed the Finders Course? “I think our relationship, while fundamentally the same, has deepened,

become more open, honest and intentional.” (Companion participant 6)

What, if anything, has changed within your relationship since your companion completed the Finders Course? “The relationship is more relaxed and joyful because my companion is less

stressed and not angry anymore.” (Companion participant 4)

Discussion

Sample Characteristics

While study 1 focused on psychological characteristics of the Finders Course alumni, the current study aimed to examine how these psychological characteristics impacted or influenced various areas or experiences within an individual's life in a more practical sense.

Once again, it appears that many of the Finders Course alumni are experiencing some type of altered state, which is evident due to their scores on the PCI. The Finders Course alumni scored lower than the norms on the scales of Anger and Fear; however, these scores were only significant according to the Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test, as well as significantly lower than the norms on the scale of Sadness, indicating an alteration in the experience of emotions.

Additionally, the Finders Course alumni scored significantly lower than the norms on the scales of Imagery Amount, Imagery Vividness, and Internal Dialogue, implying an alteration in mental chatter and focus, which is further demonstrated by higher than the norm score on the scale of Absorption. These findings mirror what was seen in the first study, with the exception of higher than the norm scores on the scale of Rationality, which were not significantly different from the norms in the current study.

Additionally, while the Finders Course alumni report that they experience more positive than negative emotions, as well as feelings of connectedness and love towards others, scores on the PCI positive affect scales of Love and Joy were not found to significantly differ from the norms, once again mirroring the findings of study 1. While the reason for such findings is unknown, it is hypothesized that the experiences of the Finders Course alumni may not be easily captured by conventional measures of positive affect. For example, one participant explained this experience as “a sort of general love for all the humans” (Participant 15, location 1).

Alternatively, this finding could also be due to individuals having lower than the norm scores of Joy or Love prior to taking the Finders course; however, as pre-data of the participants is not available, it is not possible to verify this hypothesis.

In the current study, location was only found to have a significant effect on one of the PCI scales: Memory. However, while this finding is consistent with reports by Martin (2019) that state that memory is impacted specifically in location 4, this effect of location went away after applying a Bonferroni correction.

Overall integration

First, the researchers wished to examine the integration experiences of the Finders Course alumni generally; two out of the nine scales created by the researchers focused on general integration.

The first of these scales was labeled the *Gint* scale and was a general integration scale that focused on the ability to maintain basic things in one's life including one's health, financial matters, large life commitments, and basic tasks, as well as the ability to experience deeper emotional states such as empathy. The *Gint* scale was not found to be significantly affected by location, however examination of numerical scores revealed that scores on *Gint* were the lowest for those not in a location, as well as those in location 4, but otherwise generally increased at each subsequent location, however none of the differences between scores were found to be statistically significant. This finding mirrors reports by Martin (2019) that highlighted the difficulties people experience in location 4. Additionally, multiple participants reported in written responses that being in a location on the continuum helped them to navigate various life

experiences such as owning a business, completing schooling, or being a caretaker to various family members, all without stress or anxiety. Furthermore, it appears that participants felt more content with the current state of their lives; as one individual explained, he now has “more flexibility and capacity to accept life as it is” (Participant 5, location 2). Another noted that this state has “lessened [her] desire to acquire things. [She has] less fear of missing out” (Participant 20, location 2, edited to spell out acronym).

The second scale, labeled as the *Withit* scale, had a similar generalized integration focus, however, more closely examined the ability for one to complete daily life experiences or tasks of a cognitive nature, including the ability to concentrate, remember or complete goal-directed or work-related tasks, and engage in basic social interactions with others. Similarly to the *Gint* scale, the *Withit* scale was not found to be significantly affected by location. An examination of numerical scores revealed that *Withit* scores were the highest for those not in a location and lowest for those in location 3, with scores rising once again in location 4 and beyond location 4, however only differences between those not in a location to those in location 3, differences between those in location 1 to those in location 3 and differences between those in location 2 to those in location 3 were found to be significant. Within written responses, participants reported changes in behaviour related to goal-directed tasks; one individual explained that there is “less interest in action in [his] life” (Participant 5, location 2), and another individual noted that “nothing on [her] to-do list gets done unless it is absolutely essential. Tasks oriented towards maintenance or quality of life are not done” (Participant 16, location 4). As this scale focuses on one’s ability to engage in cognitive-based tasks, it is potentially concerning that those scoring the highest are those that have yet to transition onto the continuum.

However, one participant highlighted how the nature of the task greatly influenced his ability to engage in it, stating “I have a strong calling that keeps me highly motivated and being present and conscious makes me more productive in achieving that calling and the tasks associated with it.” (Participant 19, location 1), with another participant similarly explaining that “the whole process of awakening is priority #1 now in [her] life” (Participant 14, location 2). These responses showcase that the willingness to complete a task may greatly depend on how important the task is to an individual; that is, tasks that are no longer deemed as important or meaningful to an individual are more likely to be ignored or left incomplete.

In addition to the two general integration scales, a scale was created to examine general negative socialization experiences, including the inability to follow along during conversations and experiencing difficulty interacting with those not in a similar state of consciousness. This scale, *Negsoc*, was similarly not found to be significantly affected by location, however, scores on this scale were found to increase numerically with each location, peaking at location 4. This finding once again highlights the possibility that those on the continuum of locations may experience difficulties with general socialization. One participant even explained that they “no longer choose to go into bars, noisy restaurants, public events and avoid parties” (Participant 24, location 3), highlighting how this state can change how one navigates general social experiences.

It is important to note that while findings regarding the effects of location on the scores of the *Gint*, *Withit* and *Negsoc* scales were based on numerical scores and trend analysis only, it is likely that significant findings were limited due to the low number of participants in each location. Future studies may wish to further investigate these findings with higher participant

numbers.

Fundamental Changes

Returning to the nine scales created by the researchers, only two, *Ncog* and *Chng*, were found to be significantly affected by location. First, *Chng*, a scale that focused on changes to the experience of love and empathy, as well as large life changes, had scores that generally increased with each subsequent location. However, pairwise comparisons showed that the only significant difference was between scores of those not in a location, to scores of those in any of the other locations on the continuum. This finding highlights the importance of the changes that take place upon transitioning, regardless of which location one enters on the continuum; the shift from the ordinary waking state to that of this altered state includes the possibility that one's life will be fundamentally impacted due to both general life changes, as well as changes to the experience of deeper emotions. Furthermore, these fundamental changes are likely to have an effect on various areas of one's life, including within the areas of relationships, work and health. For example, participants noted changes in the ways they experience empathy, stating "I certainly have a greater sensitivity to peoples' feelings, but I don't tend to be as compelled by their personal narratives, or mental analysis of situations" (Participant 1, location 2), "my empathy is expressed from a wider, less personal view, so it feels more detached" (Participant 24, location 3), and "I find it more difficult to see myself from the perspective of those I am interacting with, which I find I did naturally before" (Participant 27, location 3). Additionally, participants mentioned general changes that occurred in their lives after completing the Finders Course, including quitting jobs, choosing to stop working altogether, and ending romantic relationships.

Furthermore, *Chng* was found to be correlated with multiple scales. First, a negative correlation between *Chng* and *Withit* calls into question if these fundamental changes, which seem to occur upon entering the continuum in any capacity, create problems in other areas of an individual's life, here seen as problems with work or goal-directed tasks. Additionally, *Chng* was found to be negatively correlated with the PCI scales of Anger and Fear, as well as positively correlated with Absorption, once again highlighting how the fundamental changes that accompany the entering of this state include the removal of negative emotions, as well as a more persistent present focus. However, these correlations became nonsignificant after applying a Bonferroni correction.

Secondly, location was found to affect the scores on the scale *Ncog*. As this scale focused on negative aspects such as stress, having difficulty navigating societal expectations, and feeling that one's life has remained the same even after completing the Finders Course, this suggests that higher scores may mean more problems with integration. When examining the scores on this scale, it is clear that those scoring the highest are those individuals who report not yet having transitioned onto one of the locations on the continuum. Once again, this finding highlights the shift between the ordinary waking state and entering the continuum, with fundamental changes accompanying the latter. However, pairwise comparisons revealed that only the differences between those not in a location and those in location 2 and beyond location 4 were significant.

Unsurprisingly, *Ncog* was found to be negatively correlated with both *Gint*, the overall good integration scale, and *Chng*, the fundamental changes scale. Furthermore, *Ncog* was found to be positively correlated with the scales of Anger and Fear, highlighting the presence of

negative emotions within those who have not yet entered the continuum, as well as negatively correlated with Absorption and positively correlated with Internal Dialogue, suggesting the importance of a present focus and lessened mental chatter being associated with the various positive experiences of this altered state. Once again, however, almost all of these correlations became nonsignificant after applying a Bonferroni correction, with only the negative correlation between *Ncog* and Absorption remaining significant.

Relationships

The researchers were also interested in examining the effects of this state on various relationships within the participants' lives. It was found that both the PCI scales of Love and Joy were not correlated with any of the relationship-focused scales created by the researchers, highlighting that there are no correlations between relationship experiences or outcomes and positive emotions. Once again, individuals may have alterations in the way they experience various positive emotions, therefore these emotions may not be easily captured by traditional measures. Furthermore, it is important to consider that experiencing emotions in an altered way may affect their relationships with others.

The Finders Course alumni were also found to have lower than the norm scores on the scales of Fear, Anger and Sadness. Generally, experiencing an absence of these negative emotions may help the Finders Course alumni members to have better relationships or to navigate various relationship-centered issues in a more productive and positive manner. For example, one companion participant noted that her “relationship is more relaxed and joyful because [her Finders Course alumni] companion is less stressed and not angry anymore.”

(Companion participant 4, edited for clarity).

In addition, two relationship scales created by the researchers, *Relsoc* and *Prel*, were found to be positively correlated with *Gint*, the general good integration scale. This finding is interesting, as both of these scales were negative relationship scales, focusing on difficulties with social interactions, lacking peace due to others and feeling negatively toward a relationship with a specific companion. Therefore, these correlations reveal that those who are experiencing better general integration are also experiencing more problems or negative experiences within their intimate relationships, highlighting the fact that state integration is not an all-or-nothing experience, but rather one that may play out differently in different areas of an individual's life. To take these ideas further, Martin (2019) discussed the frequency of divorce for those who have transitioned onto one of the locations on the continuum; and multiple participants in the current study explained that they ended their relationships with their partners, despite their otherwise happy and fulfilling experience with the state. However, despite some participants noting that they left relationships, many others reported that their relationships improved as a result of the Finders Course. Namely, participants stated that their ability to maintain a constant level of peace, as well as be more accepting of their partner or partner's behaviour helped to improve their relationship overall. For example, one participant explained, "In general it has made things easier. Things she might have done in the past that would have upset me don't have as much of an effect. I am calmer and can hear what she is saying more." (Participant 3, location 1). However, these correlations became nonsignificant after applying a Bonferroni correction.

Lastly, it is important to consider the perspective of these companion individuals. While

the Finders Course alumni may report that their state has a positive effect or no effect at all on their various relationships, companions not living in this altered state may have differing opinions. For this reason, the researchers wished to investigate the perspectives of companion individuals, however, due to low participant numbers and participation bias, the data was not analyzed as the results were not considered meaningful given these circumstances. In the future, studies may wish to examine the perspectives of those who are in a relationship with individuals who have completed the Finders Course to create a more complete picture of how relationships are impacted by altered states of consciousness.

Conclusions and Implications

Overall, many self-reports provided by the Finders Course alumni were validated within these two studies. First, it is clear that the Finders Course alumni were experiencing an altered state of consciousness that included cognitive differences, namely lessened mental chatter and a stronger present focus, and emotional differences, namely the attenuation of negative emotions. Secondly, it was also apparent that the experience most characteristic of the state – that of fundamental well-being – was one that was not easily captured by conventional measures. For example, the Finders Course alumni had low scores on measures of well-being compared to the norms, despite subjective feelings that they were experiencing deep fundamental well-being. Additionally, it was clear that their experience of fundamental well-being was not reliant on positive affect, as the Finders Course alumni scored lower than the norms on both the positive affect scales of Joy and Love. Furthermore, written responses from participants highlighted feelings or experiences that contributed to their fundamental well-being that were not factors

included in the various psychological measures that were used to examine well-being, including freedom, a general love for all, and an enhanced feeling of meaning. It is possible that participants may be entering the Finders Course with lower than the norm scores on multiple measures, however, future studies may wish to find well-being measures that more accurately capture the well-being that is specifically experienced by the Finders Course alumni or measures that are simply better at capturing well-being on the high end to get more accurate results.

Regardless, it is clear that the Finders Course alumni feel positive about having taken the Finders Course. Those experiencing one of the locations on the continuum often stated that they felt it was a beneficial state to live in, even despite any detrimental effects that they experienced, and many others stated that they would actively try to re-enter this state had they stopped experiencing it for whatever reason. Individuals generally felt that this state helped them in various areas of their lives, including within their relationships, businesses and family matters. Specifically, participants noted that experiencing a lack of negative emotions generally allowed them to be less triggered by emotional events and less emotionally reactive.

Interestingly, most of the negative findings within both studies were seen in those who identified as having not yet transitioned onto one of the locations on the continuum. These individuals had low motivation scores and generally scored numerically lower on scales that measured present focus and numerically higher on those that measured mental chatter, stress and having difficulty managing societal expectations.

The limited negative findings that were found in those who did transition were not treated as explicitly negative by the Finders Course alumni themselves; memory problems, the ending of

or difficulties within relationships, and motivation issues were all mentioned without any notion of sadness, regret or general negativity. These objectively negative experiences also often included reasoning as to their occurrence. For example, participants who noted issues with motivation explained that they only had issues completing tasks that they felt no longer mattered to them, and were less likely to go along with things simply ‘just because’, indicating possible alterations in priorities, rather than true difficulties with general motivation. Those who noted relationship difficulties that occurred as a result of the lack of emotional responsiveness they now experienced often explained that this was an issue felt by those they frequently interacted with, rather than an issue for the Finders Course alumni member themselves.

However, while it appears that the Finders Course alumni feel that, subjectively, they experience no negative side-effects as a result of taking the Finders Course, there were concerns regarding the accuracy of their self-reports based on previous studies. In his 2019 book, Martin discussed how one participant was not able to accurately report his stress levels after experiencing many stressful life events, instead stating that he felt at peace. On the contrary, his romantic partner reported that the participant was experiencing many indicators of high-stress levels, including a loss of appetite, inadequate sleep, and general poor health (Martin, 2019). For this reason, the researchers wished to obtain a less biased view of the experiences of the Finders Course alumni by asking the opinions of individuals that the Finders Course alumni frequently interacted with. The researchers hoped to utilize the responses from these companion participants to validate the experiences reported by the Finders Course alumni participants, as well as provide an opportunity for these companion participants to note any problems they had experienced as a result of the state their Finders Course alumni companion was experiencing. Unfortunately, low

companion participant numbers in the second study did not allow for any meaningful conclusions to be drawn. However, it is paramount that both the above issues are considered. Entering a state that has the potential to negatively impact others, as well as affect one's ability to accurately identify how one is feeling is concerning and can lead to relationship problems, health issues or difficulties in a work environment. In future research, studies should aim to replicate the current studies with a greater number of participants, including the addition of companion participants to create a more complete picture of the integration experiences of the Finders Course alumni.

Lastly, while the primary goals of both studies was to gain a deeper understanding of the state experienced by those who have completed the Finders Course generally, the researchers also wished to examine the potential benefits of this state within a counselling context. As previously mentioned, in video testimonies on the Finders Course website, participants often cited moderate mental health issues and general emotional issues prior to taking the course, all of which dissolved upon entering a state of PNSE. Upon considering this fact, the question of the benefit and efficacy of using the Finder Course within a counselling context arises. Although the current studies found generally positive psychological and integration experiences, these findings were highly biased due to the nature of the state the participants were experiencing. Additionally, while many of the detrimental effects noted by participants were not felt to be subjectively negative by the individuals reporting them, they still existed as potential problems that accompany the experiences of those who have completed the Finders Course. To recommend the use of such courses within a counselling context, issues such as these would need to be adequately addressed. Furthermore, the demographics for both studies were idiosyncratic; over

half of participants were middle-aged or older, highly educated and identified as having some type of religious or spiritual beliefs, and therefore it would be important for future research to examine if a course such as the Finders Course would still be a feasible counselling solution for a wider, more generalized population. Overall, more research is needed to determine if utilizing such courses as a form of treatment for mental health problems is a viable option.

Before closing, we have a final consideration: many participants revealed that they felt that this state or the course itself helped them to address emotional or deeper inner issues that they previously pushed away. Many participants even stated that they continued to engage in spiritual practice and emotional healing and development after they had completed the Finders Course. It is imperative to question whether this emotional ‘work’ contributes to their overall well-being. As mentioned, it is clear that the Finders Course alumni are experiencing an altered state of consciousness. However, it is less clear that their fundamental well-being is exclusively a result of this altered state. Does this shift into a persistent transcendent state ultimately cause a pervasive sense of fundamental well-being? Or is it emotional work, meditation, connecting with others, a sense of belonging, spiritual practice and positive psychology that helps to cultivate it as well? Could a similar program be created that uses like-minded practices, which may or may not lead to altered states of consciousness, but which could potentially shift practitioners into more beneficial states of being? Future research may wish to examine this possibility.

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