

Peak and Plateau Communication Experiences (PCEs)

An International Call for Inquiry

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Maslow's landmark conception of the generalised "peak experience" is revisited. Next the concept of "peak" communication experiences (PCEs), originally derived four decades ago from the generalised Maslow model, is reviewed. PCEs are defined as our times of highest happiness and fulfilment arising from our communication with others. While "peak" communication experiences have received scant conceptual and empirical attention, the work that has been done is briefly surveyed. The under-told story of Maslow's significant end-of-life conceptualising of "plateau" experiencing is then highlighted, and it is recommended that "plateau" communication experiences be included within the upper-distribution PCE domain going forward. The development of a "positive communication" paradigm within the communication discipline is traced, and it is suggested there now exists a foundational knowledge structure to provide conceptual home for inquiry into PCEs. Lastly, suggestions for the exploration of both "plateau" and "peak" communication experiences (PCEs) are offered.

Keywords: peak communication experiences, plateau communication experiences, peak experiences, plateau experiences, self-actualisation, positive communication, Abraham Maslow

Introduction: Peak experiences

More than sixty years ago Abraham Maslow (1971; 1970; 1968; 1959) introduced to the behavioural sciences the concept of the generalised "peak experience", a term which he coined (Hoffman 1988: 223). Maslow called upon data from 80 interviews, 190 survey respondents, 50 unsolicited reports, and the literatures of philosophy, aesthetics and

spirituality to generate an overall description of peoples' highest moments of happiness and human fulfilment (MASLOW 1968: Ch. 6). Maslow was at that time the first major psychologist since William James (1902) to explore the heights of human consciousness. Ever since Maslow, researchers have attempted to map these "peak experiences", psycho-physiological states activated during peoples' most positively-valued heightened states of awareness and being. Such elevating and memorable moments are usually triggered by an acute stimulus event such as a deep personal experience with nature, creativity, music, painting, sacred literature, visual art, solitude, shared love, childbirth, meditation, prayer, athletic endeavour, travel, and so on (e.g. SENEAL 2021: 295–313; HOFFMAN et al. 2020: 608–628; SOLBERG–DIBBEN 2019: 371–389; WHITEHEAD–BATES 2016: 1577–1598; MORGAN–COUTTS 2016: 202–217; HOFFMAN et al. 2010: 67–76; HOFFMAN–MURAMOTO 2007: 524–540; DEMARES 2000: 89–103).

During reported "peak experiences", emotions of happiness, joy, appreciation, awe, love, appreciation and unity typically occur, and a momentary phenomenological transcendence of one's normal role-situated functioning (YADEN et al. 2017: 143–160). It is as if "new horizons" are sensed, and there is a temporary sensation of standing outside normal time, place, role and structure. There are modifications in sense-of-identity systems, alterations in allocation of attention, a relative unloading of standard linguistic structures, and other baseline operations are destabilised (MASLOW 1968: 71–102). These special "peak experiences" tend to be perceived as among life's most precious moments, a conviction that what is happening is elusive yet meaningful and valuable, as if one has been at least momentarily uplifted to "higher" levels of feeling, perceiving and being, and there is often a strong sense of "uniting" with vast cosmic life forces (MASLOW 1968: Ch. 21; LOSONCZ 2023: 117–132; KELTNER 2023: 242–252).

Self-transcendent experiences (STEs) including "flow", "mindfulness", "gratitude", "awe", "peak experiences" and "mystical experiences" have each been the subject of over 1,000 research reports, and are posited as falling along a single spectrum of intensity (YADEN et al. 2017: 143–160). STEs share in common a relative dissolution of the sense of an egoic "separate self", i.e. boundaries of an isolated and skin-encapsulated "separate self" seem to fall away, and feelings of greater connection and oneness with something larger tend to occur. STEs are typically associated with positive outcomes, including emotional well-being and prosocial behaviour (KELTNER 2023; KAUFMAN 2020; YADEN et al. 2017: 143–160; FUKUI–TOYOSHIMA 2014; ATCHLEY et al. 2012; RUDD et al. 2012: 1130–1136; WILSON–SPENCER 1990: 565–573; OLSON et al. 1998: 13–24; WUTHNOW 1978: 59–75). Of the "peak experience", Maslow (1968: 154) said: "And once we have been in it, we can remember it forever, and feed ourselves on this memory, and be sustained in times of stress." Significant meaning, depth and resilience is added to the lives of those who have had such expansive experiences, for as William Blake famously put it: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be seen as it is, infinite" (as quoted in HUXLEY 1970: 189).

Peak communication experiences (PCEs): Pioneering foray

Even as of four decades ago there had already been many generalised “peak experience” studies (stemming from exposure to nature, the fine arts, prayer or meditation, sports, etc.), but glaringly absent from the “peak experience” literature were specific examinations of *interpersonal communication* as a pathway to elevated moments of human feeling and functioning. Gordon (1983) then presented a convention paper in Washington, D.C. entitled *Greatest Moments in Interpersonal Communication: Peak Communication Experiencing*, later published in truncated form (Gordon, 1985). Since this was the pioneering exploratory foray into “peak communication experiences” (PCEs), we shall attend to its method and results. Each of Maslow’s 19 descriptors of the generalised peak experience were semantically tailored specifically to the interpersonal communication context. A technical Maslow descriptor such as: “Perception in the peak moment tends to be strongly idiographic and non-classificatory” was translated to read: “It’s as though I compared this person with no other person – as we talked this person became more and more special and not interchangeable with anyone else.” The 19 items were then assembled into a simple Likert-type survey instrument.

The prompt was as follows: “Will you think of the greatest moments in communication that you have ever had in your entire life? The peak moments in communication, the times when you felt that you and another person most got on one another’s wavelength, when you most fully got through to the other, and the other got through to you. These times were probably within the upper 5 to 10% of all your experiences in communication in your life, the most positive communication encounters you have ever had, of the highest happiness and fulfillment. Will you check each of the following items that in fact applies to these rare peak communication experiences? Maybe none of these items will apply, maybe some will, maybe all will. Please be as accurate as you can in your responses.” The aim was to discover how respondents might apply these Maslow-derived nineteen items, or not, to their “peak” communication experiences (PCEs).

A convenience sample of 86 Texas A&M University students served as respondents. The resulting data indicated that for a majority of the respondents (>50% of both females and males), 15 of the 19 descriptors did in fact apply to their PCEs. These data will be overviewed; the following percentages were unreported in the published factor analysis, as were item-by-item gender differences.

The four items that >75% of both females and males indicated as applying to their PCEs were as follows: “I was completely absorbed in the other person I was communicating with, and in what we were talking about – my total attention was present” (92% of females, and 94% males); “It’s as though I compared this person with no other person – as we talked this person became more and more special, and not interchangeable with anyone else” (90%/89%); “I saw the beauty of the person I was communicating with, and the beauty of our communication itself, just as it was” (90%/78%); and “My listening seemed so open, so receptive, and the words just flowed in upon me without me grabbing or straining to understand” (80%/78%).

The other 11 items that at least 50% of both females and males indicated as applying to their PCEs include the following, and with five significant gender differences: “I felt very accepting and loving of the other person during our communication” (94%/69%, $p < .05$); “I saw the other person and our communication together in a richer way, a newer way, a more exciting way” (90%/67%, $p < .05$); “Our communication felt incredibly significant, as if it were somehow all there was in the universe” (68%/75%); “I would lose track of the passage of time, and of our physical surroundings” (68%/69%); “Our communication was valuable in and of itself, regardless of what it would lead to – it was enough, just the way it was, as an end in itself” (68%/67%); “During our communication I gained insight into a true level of truth than I usually see; my eyes were opened in a fresh way” (72%/61%); “I became more spontaneous, effortless, more myself, more whole in my communication” (88%/69%, $p < .05$); “I began to feel more childlike, in a healthy kind of way, in my communication – more freely playful, expressive, creative” (78%/53%, $p < .05$); “During our communicating my fears, anxiety, inhibitions and defenses all fell away” (72%/54%, $p < .05$); “The communication with this person moved me to awe, wonder, humility, reverence – there was something almost sacred about our act of communication” (60%/58%); “Everything somehow became more One, and I became more One with it all, through our communication” (54%/51%). The majority of the respondents were business and engineering students, yet they were willing to apply relatively rhapsodic descriptors to having entered through doors of expanded consciousness via interpersonal communication episodes with their fellow human beings.

Review of subsequent PCE research

When the term *peak communication experiences* is today entered into the standard databases one is struck by the paucity of theorising and research across the subsequent decades in this exciting and potentially useful area of human communication studies. We shall briefly overview this literature.

Goodall Jr. and Kellett (2004) entered the PCE arena two decades ago with their conceptual chapter *Dialectical Tensions and Dialogic Moments as Pathways to Peak Experiences* in an edited volume on human dialogue theory (ANDERSON et al. 2004). They suggested that quite often high-quality dialogue itself can constitute a form of “peak” communication experience, an “immersion experience” that is “beyond words”. Goodall Jr. (in Goodall Jr. & Kellett, 2004: 160) recalls an extended conversational encounter with a friend back in his high school days, held under the shining night stars and moonlit sky, that provided a special opening and uplifting to which he had been seeking to return ever since. Goodall Jr. and Kellett write (2004: 174): “It is as if the ordinary everyday self left the body (hence the experience of selflessness) and then returned to that body changed by the extraordinary experience in the dialogue zone.” Dialoguing is depicted as an energising form of human discourse in which creative dialectical tensions can arise, including tensions between competition and communion, problem solving and mystery, skill and surrender, seriousness and playfulness. More

than this, there is a fusion of self and other into a larger “we” that then becomes “the primary organic structure out of which dialogic communication emerges” (GOODALL JR. – KELLETT 2004: 173). This quality of dialoguing can constitute a PCE.

When Chad Edwards (2010) and his Western Michigan University research team turned to PCE research just over a dozen years ago, Edwards was still able to claim that: “To date, there has been only one published empirical study examining the possibilities of individuals having peak experiences in communication.” He and his research assistants conducted 76 interviews using 12 questions to elicit PCE memories, descriptions and reflections from their respondents. Seven themes emerged from the response-coding: *transpersonal unity; humanistic spirituality; time and space distortion; enriched perception; receptive non-judgmental openness; spontaneity; and changes in worldviews*. Such PCEs go beyond our more mundane daily small talk exchanges, and lead us into another realm of intensity and meaning.

While autoethnography has often been used to record narratives of hardship, loss and pain, Torrens (2010), also a member of the Western Michigan team, wrote an autoethnography of her own recollected and ongoing PCEs and found the Gordon (1985) dimensions of “loving acceptance”, “open-minded insight” and “spontaneity” to be clearly emergent. Here is a short excerpt from one of her entries: “It was like everything in my peripheral vision blurred and Jack was visible in high definition. It’s so hard to describe because the word ‘connection’ isn’t strong enough to represent what was happening between us. It was like everything that Jack was, and is, and will be, was colliding with everything that I am, have been, and will be. Time didn’t matter, space didn’t matter. On some level, our words didn’t matter. What we said was not as important as what that conversation was creating” (TORRENS 2010: 22).

Autumn Edwards (2010), also a leader on the Western Michigan PCE team, offers a creative and rich attempt to generatively theorise about PCEs. She notes that: “Despite early and groundbreaking work on ‘Being’ in peak communication experiences, the Communication discipline has largely neglected serious study of these intense, powerful, and deeply meaningful experiences. Taken as a whole, the scholarship has focused predominantly on what Maslow termed ‘deficiency needs’ to the neglect of human potential, growth, and the fulfillment of highest purpose.” She then argues that “PCEs challenge the pillars of mainstream communication ideology”, especially standard reductive notions that communication is primarily about individual goal-seeking, planning and the delivery of strategic outcome-directed messages in concrete time-bound and space-bound situations. A. Edwards points out that PCEs are not about effectively attaining instrumental objectives but rather they tend to be unplanned emergent encounters rich with intrinsic rewards and a strong unfolding sense of connectedness and even transcendence. She writes: “It is striking that when participants in [Chad] Edwards’ (2010) investigation of PCEs were asked to describe their ‘greatest moment in interpersonal communication,’ none depicted an interaction that resulted from careful planning, produced some desired effects, realized pre-existing goals, or involved artfully crafted strategic messages. Nor did participants focus on elements of what we traditionally term ‘communication competence.’” She concludes that PCE research might call for a “radical recalibration” of communication conceptualising.

In a master's thesis study of PCEs under the direction of both Autumn and Chad Edwards, Beals (2011) held 12 semi-structured interviews to examine the role of PCEs in friendships. Three major PCE themes emerged: the sharing of a difficult or traumatic experience, a sense of companionship and a sense of helpfulness. Outcomes of PCE episodes were increased self-disclosure, depth of friendship and new perspectives, and the "results demonstrated both personal and relational growth for friends".

Five years later, in a conference paper by Socha et al. (2016), it was reported that when reflecting back upon childhood and adolescent "peak interpersonal communication experiences" respondents used such terms (in alphabetical order) as "acceptance, connectedness, encouragement, feeling heard, feeling special, love, inspiration, openness, relief, security, success, truthfulness, and validation". Topics broadly tended to revolve around one's future, one's past, a life stressor, or the mutual sharing of fun. During their "peak" communication episodes participants felt (in alphabetical order) "appreciated, cared for, challenged, connected, excited, happy, hopeful, inspired, joyful, loved, pleased, positive, relieved, special, supportive, transformed, and understood".

Mirivel (2019) in a recent book chapter entitled *On the Nature of Peak Communication* notes that "the concept of peak communication has received little attention from scholars across the discipline". Mirivel and his graduate students then interviewed fourteen respondents for an average of 25 minutes each, asking each interviewee to share three of their "peak" communication episodes. The resulting transcribed data were coded using the Mirivel (2014; MUÑIZ-VELÁZQUEZ-PULIDO 2019) model of "positive talk" that includes "greeting and creating, asking and discovering, complimenting and affecting, disclosing and deepening, encouraging and giving, listening and transcending". Mirivel posits that these "positive communication" behaviours can serve as catalysts for "peak" communication experiences. Although no numerical data are presented, Mirivel concludes that "the act of disclosing is the most dominant speech act in peak communication narratives [...]. The point is that peak communication moments are created by the willingness and courage to speak up, to reveal who we are and how we feel. And when people do that, they can create peak experiences" (MIRIVEL 2019: 56). Mirivel also goes on to say that "receiving encouragement was at the heart of our participants' peak communication experiences". Mirivel's "positive communication" behaviours provide useful direction for focusing future PCE studies.

The "peak communication" studies to date are informative, intriguing and a fine beginning, yet the bottom-line unquestionably remains that far more exploration remains to be undertaken by other motivated scholars from around the world. Such inquiry should also include "plateau communication experiences", and this takes us back once again to Maslow.

Maslow's "post-mortem" discovery: The plateau

An abrupt and dramatic event occurred late in Maslow's life that somewhat suddenly affected his view and valuing of "peak experiences". Maslow discovered what he called "plateau" experiences that were less emotionally intense than "peak" experiences, but

more available and lasting, and could also be better integrated into the rest of daily life. In spite of a couple of dissertations (CLEARY 1996; HEITZMAN 2003), limited journal attention (KRIPPNER 1972: 107–120; CLEARY–SHAPIRO 1995: 1–23; GRUEL 2015: 44–63), and less than a half-dozen pages within a recent book chapter (KAUFMAN 2020), Maslow's late-life recognition of “plateau cognition” remains an under-told story. Some of this story will be told here, largely drawing upon the words of Maslow himself from the final months of his life as to his newfound appreciation of “plateau experiencing”.

On 6 December 1967, Maslow suffered a near-fatal heart attack. This initially put him in hospital intensive care, and then in a recovery wing, for a total of three weeks. Maslow's physician told him that he must take it easy going forward, and that he was at major risk for yet another, and possibly fatal, coronary failure (HOFFMAN 1988: 303–309). When released from the hospital and on medical leave from Brandeis University, Maslow was unable to summon the energy to give his address as incoming president of the American Psychological Association. But as the months progressed he did manage to conduct the duties of his APA office, and in 1968 he also completed a revision of his landmark *Toward a Psychology of Being* (originally published in 1962).

In early 1969 Maslow left Brandeis and accepted a corporate fellowship in Menlo Park, California. There he worked on more than a dozen articles, book chapters and gave talks at conferences and universities. He also revised his classic work *Motivation and Personality* (1970b), and then began assembling papers and articles that would appear as his final book, which appeared posthumously, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (MASLOW 1971). Maslow also did some revising of an earlier work, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* and wrote a new introduction to this small volume less than a month prior to his death (1970a).

On 8 June 1970, thirty months following his initial coronary, Abraham Maslow, slowly jogging beside his backyard pool in Menlo Park, experienced a second and this time fatal heart attack at the relatively young age of 62 (HOFFMAN 1988: 333–334).

Within that concluding two-and-a-half year period of his life, Maslow underwent a personal transformation. In mid-April 1970, less than two months before his death, Maslow participated in a conference in Kansas on “the voluntary control of internal states”. The views expressed by Maslow there in a tape-recorded conference discussion seven weeks in advance of his death, and later edited by Krippner (1972), are the single richest source of Maslow's conception of “plateau” experiencing. Maslow said that he had been given a “bonus” with his added time of life since his first heart attack, and spoke of a readily accessible “heightened state of awareness” that he referred to as “the plateau experience”. He fully knew he could die at any moment, and referred to this final period as his “post-mortem” life: “I've already gone through the process of dying, so everything from then on is gravy” (KRIPPNER 1972: 119).

In informal discussion with Drs. Charles Tart, Andrew Weil, James Fadiman and Stanley Krippner at this 1970 “voluntary control of internal states” gathering, Maslow told of his own paradigm shift. He regretted that his earlier writings had unwittingly contributed to the desperate quest among some of the young in the 1960s for ecstatic “peak” experiences of orgiastic proportions. Maslow had come to a clear realisation that “some people run the danger of turning away from the world and from other people to

search for anything that will trigger peak experiences. This type of person represents the mystic gone wild” (KRIPPNER 1972: 107). Maslow was aware that for every “Mount Everest” peak experience there would also be a steep descent down into the valley, and that this dramatic ascent and then rapid downturn was usually not easy on the mind–body system. The seeking of “peaks”, Maslow had come to see, was fraught with demands, dangers and even the devaluing of everyday life: “Too many young people delude themselves with the ‘Big Bang’ theory of self-actualization. One of our tasks is to communicate better with young people and give them a greater appreciation of patience and for the miraculous elements in ordinary existence” (KRIPPNER 1972: 120). Maslow (1968: 154) felt that emphasis could more productively be shifted to less intense forms of self-transcendence, “little moments of Being”, including “foothill” or “plateau” experiencing.

In his own personal transition from “peak” to gentler “plateau” experiencing, Maslow found that: “I now perceive under the aspect of eternity and become mythic, poetic, symbolic about ordinary things. This is the Zen experience, you know. There is nothing excepted and nothing special, but one lives in a world of miracles all the time. This is a paradox because it is miraculous and yet it doesn’t produce an autonomic burst” (KRIPPNER 1972: 113). Maslow argued that we need another model that would include “plateau” and “high plateau” experiences: “It is to live at a constantly high level in the sense of illumination or awakening or in Zen, in the easy or miraculous, in the nothing special. It is to take rather casually the poignancy and the preciousness and beauty of things, but not to make a big deal out of it because it’s happening every hour, you know, all the time” (KRIPPNER 1972: 113–114). Other identifiers that Maslow (1968; 1970; KRIPPNER 1972) applied to prominent aspects of the “plateau” experience are “serenity”, “calmness”, “peacefulness”, “self-forgetfulness”, “letting-be”, “giving up the future in this moment”, “transcending conventional time and space”, “dropping masks”, “appreciating”, “becoming fascinated”, “savoring”, “enjoying”, “non-judgmentalism”, “non-evaluating”, “Taoistic” and “non-interfering”, “witnessing”, “reverence” and “fusion”. Maslow said that he could enter “plateau cognition” whenever he wished, and greater richness of the percept would be experienced (KRIPPNER 1972: 116).

At this conference seven weeks before his passing, Maslow said of his transition from “peak” to “plateau” experiencing that: “The result has been a kind of unitive consciousness [...]. I can define this unitive consciousness very simply for me as the simultaneous perception of the sacred and the ordinary, or the miraculous and the ordinary, or the miraculous and the rather constant or easy-without-effort sort of thing” (KRIPPNER 1972: 113). Maslow knew that “these plateau experiences are described quite well in many [spiritual] literatures” (KRIPPNER 1972: 115).

Maslow also came to believe that the plateau experience led to clearer, more awakened and accurate perception of the happenings of the world: “The plateau experience is a witnessing of reality. It involves seeing the symbolic, or the mythic, the poetic, the transcendent, the miraculous, the unbelievable, all of which I think are part of the real world instead of existing only in the eyes of the beholder” (KRIPPNER 1972: 115). There

is much overlap between the life-changing insights had by Maslow and the realisations arrived at by the German existential philosopher Karl Jaspers (GORDON 2021; 2000).

It was following this mid-April 1970 conference that Maslow returned to California and set out to write a new preface for his book *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (1970a), which was published months after his death. There Maslow wrote the following, less than one month before his passing: “The great lesson from the true mystics, from the Zen monks, and now also from the Humanistic and Transpersonal psychologists, that the sacred is *in* the ordinary, that it is to be found in one’s daily life, in one’s neighbors, friends, and family, in one’s backyard [...]. To be looking elsewhere for miracles is to me a sure sign of ignorance that everything is miraculous” (1970a: x–xi). This is reminiscent of the classic line attributed to Einstein: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle” (CALAPRICE 2011: 483). Maslow noted that whereas the “peak” experience is often a highly-charged and purely emotional experience, the “plateau” experience is calmer and more serene, inevitably has a noetic and cognitive element about it, and is more voluntary (1970a: xiv–xv).

The human being is born into this world with a higher transcendent dimension, as Maslow viewed it, and it is our biological nature as a member of the human species to want to unfold our “full humanness” in our lifetime. This includes our capacity for “plateau” experiencing, and “anyone who cannot perceive the sacred, the eternal, the symbolic, is simply blind to an aspect of reality” (1970a: 79). Maslow was convinced that “plateau” experiencing can be taught and learned, but that it takes discipline, study, maturity, commitment and time. He realised that his entire life, including his own prior “peak” experiences, had prepared him to now finally earn and enter “plateau cognition” and see in a Unitive way at will, a merging of the temporal and the eternal in this here-now moment.

In the very final sentence of *Religion, Values, and Peak Experiences*, Maslow challenged his readers to activate their capacity to perceive not primarily from a deficiency-needs state, but to perceive more richly from our Being nature: “In this way, the eternal becomes visible *in and through* the particular, the symbolic and platonic can be experienced *in and through* the concrete instances, the sacred can fuse with the profane, and one can transcend the universe of time and space while being of it” (1970a: 116, italics in original). Maslow taught that a motivated and creative use of attitude, awareness and perception can enable one to see and behave from the perspective of what he termed the Being-Values (B-Values). He saw the B-Values as standing beyond egocentricity and ethnocentricity, and rising to the “cosmocentric” order (1970a: 96).

In Maslow’s (1971) final posthumously published book, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Maslow delineated B-Values that tend to be especially salient during states of self-transcendence. These are also values that have been held in high regard trans-temporally and trans-culturally: *Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Wholeness, Aliveness, Uniqueness, Justice, Completeness, Simplicity, Playfulness, Order, Effortlessness, Dichotomy-Transcendence, Perfection* (MASLOW 1971: Ch. 9). In our perceiving of the world, “...the more whole the percept (the world) becomes, the more whole the person becomes. And also, the more whole the person becomes, the more whole becomes the

world” (MASLOW 1971: 167). Maslow goes on to say that: “If we were able to accept as a major educational goal the awakening and fulfillment of the B-Values, which is simply another aspect of self-actualization, we would have a great flowering of a new kind of civilization” (MASLOW 1971: 195). Maslow clearly establishes the important role of “plateau cognition” in this sentence: “The word ‘peak experience’ is more appropriate than I realized at first [...]. The climactic moment cannot endure, but B-cognition (Being-cognition) *can*” (MASLOW 1971: 38, italics in original). Neither Maslow nor many others in the history of humanity have been able to unwaveringly behave from within a B-Values perspective, yet these lofty values do offer a guiding star by which humans’ overall movements can be guided.

Meta-pathologies essentially result from B-Values deprivation, and can include *insecurity, alienation, hopelessness, selfishness, meaninglessness, indifference, anguish, cynicism, nihilism, disintegration, destructiveness, either/or thinking, confusion, chaos, fatigue, depression* and other forms of counter-valuing. These often result from frustrated idealism, and constitute a diminishment of our full humanness. As Maslow saw it, perceiving from the Being-realm has the potential for changing our personal experiencing, our life, our relationships, our relating with the world, and the world itself (MASLOW 1971: Ch. 23).

After reviewing thirty-five meanings of the term “transcendence”, Maslow then offers this condensed statement: “Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness; behaving, and relating as ends rather than as means to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos” (MASLOW 1971: Ch. 21). Maslow later goes on to say that: “Transcendence can mean to live in the realm of Being, speaking the language of Being, serene B-cognizing, plateau living” (MASLOW 1971: 275). And further: “Such an awakened person normally proceeds in a unitive way or in a B-cognizing way as an everyday kind of thing; certainly, whenever he wishes to. The serene B-cognition or plateau cognition can come under one’s own control. One can turn it off and on as one pleases” (MASLOW 1971: 276).

Maslow postulated early that we humans are born with an inner biological urge to self-actualise. Later in life he also learned that beyond the self-actualising of our potentials alone, many humans come to aspire to yet another level of “transcendence”, to rise to a “higher” and even more “awakened” dimension of human functioning, beyond the “humanistic” level to the “transpersonal”. In his introduction to the revised edition of *Toward a Psychology of Being* Maslow (1968) argued that the “Third Force” study of human beings (the humanistic model, subsequent to behaviourism and Freudianism) would need to become a “Fourth Force” directed towards greater “transcendence” of the egoic small ‘s’ self, and union with the *Good, the True, the Beautiful, Kindness, Love, Wisdom, Peace* and all of humankind’s other highest universal values. The Being-Values “are perceived, not invented” (MASLOW 1968: 339), and “they command adoration, reverence, celebration, sacrifice [...]. Contemplating them or fusing with them gives the greatest joy that a human being is capable of” (MASLOW 1968: 340).

Maslow (1968: iv) did not believe in institutionalised religious doctrine or an Old Testament anthropomorphic god, but he did believe in the evolution of the human spirit

beyond self-actualisation, and “centered in the cosmos”: “We need something ‘bigger than we are’ to be awed by and commit ourselves to in a new, naturalistic, non-churchly sense.” Maslow for most of his first forty years of life had been heavily oriented by his logical and linear “conceptual” mind, likely owing in no small part to his IQ of 195 (according to his early research supervisor E. L. Thorndike, the pioneer of intelligence testing; HOFFMAN 1988: 74). But in the final third of his life it could be said that Maslow more abundantly opened into what Teasdale (2022) terms “holistic-intuitive mind”. As McGilchrist (2009: 164) has put it: “It is the task of the right hemisphere to carry the left beyond, to something new, to something other than itself.”

Especially in his final 30 months, his “post-mortem” period as he referred to it, Maslow to an unprecedented extent in his life transcended “subject-object” consciousness, “self-other” duality, and “instrumental” consciousness (i.e. emphasising “doing” as opposed to simply “being”). He largely transcended the “optical delusion” of which Einstein (CALAPRICE 2011: 339–340) famously spoke, the “delusion of consciousness” that we humans are “separate” from other living beings, the whole of nature and the cosmos. Maslow, having faced and escaped his initial brush with death, had awakened to living on a higher “plateau”: “The fully human person in certain moments perceives the unity of the cosmos, fuses with it, and rests in it, completely satisfied for the moment in his yearning for one-ness” (1970a: 95). This fusion with the larger Whole can help in making the world a better place for all, said Maslow (1970a: xii): “What I may call the bodhisattvic path is the *integration* of self-improvement and social zeal, i.e., the best way to become a better ‘helper’ is to become a better person.”

It is time to more actively explore human communication experiences that go past “competence” alone, or beyond merely “satisfying” us by meeting our routine everyday expectations. We would do well to also study the “growing tip” of our most valued and uplifting communicative encounters, those that take us from the mere “transmission of information” to the more mysterious beauties and powers of self-transcendence and human “communion” (MARCEL 2001).

A new conceptual home: “Positive communication”

For the past twenty-five years within the discipline of psychology there has been a highly successful movement to develop the sub-field of “positive psychology”, a term coined by Abraham Maslow (1968: 73). “Positive psychology” was to “undergird a new science of strength and resilience” and actualise “high human potential” (SELIGMAN 1998), and its impact has been huge (LOPEZ et al. 2018).

Within the discipline of communication there has also been a major allied evolutionary development, though far more recent than that in psychology. In his term as president of the USA’s Southern States Communication Association, Thomas Socha of Old Dominion University in 2010 established, and addressed, the conference theme of “Positive Communication” (see SOCHA-BECK 2015: 190). And much as Martin Seligman’s inauguration address to the American Psychological Association heralded in “positive psychology” and brought transformation to that discipline, Socha opened the door for

“positive communication” within our own international discipline. Shortly after, Socha and Pitts (2012) edited *The Positive Side of Interpersonal Communication*. Next, Pitts and Socha (2013) edited *Positive Communication in Health and Wellness*. Mirivel (2014) then authored the first undergraduate “positive communication” text, *The Art of Positive Communication*. Beck and Socha (2015) next edited *Communicating Hope and Resilience Across the Lifespan*, and Socha and Beck (2015) authored an article “Positive Communication and Human Needs: A Review and Proposed Organization Framework”, appearing in the *Review of Communication*. Socha and Stoyneva (2015) went on to author a chapter on “Positive Family Communication”, and Muniz-Velazquez and Pulido (2019) recently edited *The Routledge Handbook of Positive Communication*. And to further remedy the historical over-emphasis on the “dark side” in communication studies (e.g. CUPACH–SPITZBERG 2007; OLSON 2012; LIN–GILES 2013: 1275–1290; GILCHRIST–PETTY–LONG 2016; OLSON–FINE 2016), or mid-distribution studies at best, Mirivel founded the “Positive Communication Network” (positivecommunication.net) to unite positive communication scholars from around the world. At the first “positive communication” online conference in 2023 there were approximately three hundred attendees. Mirivel has also founded the University of Arkansas at Little Rock *Peak Communication Project*.

The “positive communication” conceptual frame set by these works within the past decade offers a larger organising structure within which, going forward, the study of upper-distribution communication experiences can now find meaningful home. What A. Edwards (2010) said of “peak” communication experiences over a decade ago still holds true, “the communication discipline has been slow to document or theoretically ground these powerful communication successes”. There is now a discourse-context for such inquiry. As Socha and Beck (2015: 191–192) have made clear: “In our opinion, among new and important areas for future inquiry, the topic of peak communication, or how good communication can get, is important to address [...] communication scholars have been shy about seeking to understand ‘peak experiences’ or the ‘upper bounds’ of relating.”

Yet it is not only “peak” communication experiences that can be the focus of our upper-level inquiry as we move forward; attention will also need to be paid to our more common and accessible “plateau” communication experiences. Abraham Maslow did not come to discover and appreciate the “plateau” experience until the closing 30 months of his life: let us further extend this concept to “plateau” communication experiencing, as well as studying the statistically rarer “peaks” of communication that we occasionally reach. May we include both as the study of PCEs, “plateau” and “peak” communication experiences.

Why has neglect of our “peak” and “plateau” communication experiences, those that bring humans their greatest happiness, meaning and fulfilment, persisted until quite recently within the communication discipline? Likely for many of the same reasons that Maslow’s own “peak experience” work initially had difficulty gaining traction within the discipline of psychology. For decades within psychology mainstream journal editors traditionally did not want to risk losses of credibility by admitting through the straight gate anything on the margins, that which would appear deviant or fringe (DEROBERTIS 2020: 8–32). Maslow was unable to get his first manuscript on “peak experiences” published by

American Psychologist, *Psychiatry*, or *Psychology Review*, all mainstream conservative journals. For more than two decades his ample research on dominance behaviours among monkeys, human motivation, the effects of environmental aesthetics on perception and other topics had been regularly published in the establishment journals, but his work on the unconventional topic of “peak experiences” barred him from entry (HOFFMAN 1988: 225). So Maslow presented his now-classic paper “Cognition of Being in the Peak Experiences” as his address as president of the APA’s Division of Personality and Social Psychology in 1956 (just over a decade prior to his APA presidency), and eventually got it published in the *Journal of Genetic Psychology* (MASLOW 1959: 43–66). Maslow never again chose to submit his work to the major APA journals (HOFFMAN 1988: Ch. 13). Relatedly, prominent psychologist George A. Miller acknowledged that he had to translate his own early research on speech and hearing into the language of behaviourism in order to get it published, and as DEROBERTIS (2020: 26) observes, “one’s reputation as a scientist could depend on how well this trick was played”.

In addition, Maslow came to see Western psychology as ethnocentric, and lamented its neglect of Eastern psychologies and philosophies (MASLOW 1968: 78–79). It has been argued that this historically has been no less the case in Western communication theory (GORDON 2007: 89–107; MIKE 2007: 272–278), and in other fields as well (LOGAN 2023; VANDERWEELE 2022: 170–180; LOMAS et al. 2022: 155–180). Many are those who have argued that there has historically been a “machismo” factor in Western communication studies, an “agentic” mindset that has disvalued “soft” topics and favoured attention to power, strategy, rules, deception, compliance-gaining, face-saving, interaction management, goal-setting and planning, and related topics (e.g. FOSS–GRIFFIN 2022; ASANTE et al. 2014; PELIAS 2004; KIM 2002; GOODALL 1996). The traditional agentic control-oriented paradigm has dominated; the strategic search for all available means of persuasion in any given case, and this too often excluded “softer” topics from our vision.

Early on, Miller and Steinberg (1975) proudly and succinctly spoke in behalf of a “control” paradigm: “From success or failure in exercising control over the environment – particularly the other people in it – a person develops a picture of himself or herself. As we see it, *the development of self-identity is not primarily a function of communication, but rather a consequence of the outcomes of a person’s communicative efforts to achieve environmental control*” (MILLER–STEINBERG 1975: 80, italics in the original). A traditional explicit and implicit “control” conception of human communication has not been cordial to the study of more positive and healthy “tender” communication phenomena. We have still not completely emerged from our residual mechanistic modelling of strategic communication messaging, and its dominant agentic (vs. communal) topics, definitions, framings and methods.

Even on the rare occasions when in communication studies we do venture into a “softer” topic area such as “interpersonal transcendence” during the listening process (GREENE–HERBERS 2011: 66–84) we do so from a cognitive science model such as “action assembly theory” where persons are primarily conceived of as sites for input-processing, representational formatting into long-term memory, output systems and not much beyond; mechanistic models applied to non-mechanical and elusive phenomenological

personal dynamics. Maslow (1970b: Ch. 13–14; 1968: Appendix A) called for more “holistic” methodologies and theorising in the study of humanistic and transpersonal phenomena, a better fit of questions and procedures (MASLOW 1970b; 1966: Ch. 2).

Perhaps also related to mainstream editorial restraint in academic communication journals has been what Maslow (1971: 35–40) referred to as the Jonah Complex, the human being’s implicit fear of his own greatness. Awe and fear are intertwined, and can result in our fleeing. We are reluctant to lose control, there is both a need to know and an existential fear of knowing.

Be that as it may, in the past quarter-century a substantial impact has at last made within the discipline of psychology by “positive psychology” that today legitimises the study of such “tender” topics as *hope, inspiration, awe, gratitude, love, well-being, forgiveness, happiness, optimism, virtue, mindfulness* and so on. And now, within our own international communication discipline, the stage has been set by Socha, Mirivel and their colleagues through introducing “Positive Communication”. A grand structural and conceptual home has been provided, and it is time to help occupy the premises. It is finally appropriate for those of us who study human communication processes and dynamics to energetically broaden our purview and turn with greater vigour to exploring the human being’s more positive and heartfelt encounters, including our “plateau” and “peak” communication experiencing.

Larger contextual developments also provide testimony as to the timeliness of the PCE research topic. In 2022 the First Global Scientific Conference on Human Flourishing was sponsored by the Templeton Foundation (LOGAN 2023), and relationships between science, the human mind, beauty and transcendence were among the many rich topics explored as 4,000 people from over 100 countries participated. Additionally, the Harvard University Human Flourishing Program has just begun conducting a \$43.4 million dollar five-phase study involving 240,000 participants from 22 different countries and investigating such areas as meaning, purpose, character, virtue, religion, spirituality and other life factors that promote human “flourishing”.

Concurrently, it is roughly estimated that 275 million members of the world’s population now practice meditation (KANE 2022), and in the U.S. the number of adults who meditate went up nearly 350% (to 35+ million) across the most recent five-year growth period for which data is available, 2012–2017, while among children aged 4–16 mediator increase was ninefold across that five-year span (CLARKE et al. 2018: 1–8). In the U.S. only between 3 to 11% of the population self-identifies as being neither “spiritual” nor “religious” (ROSMARIN 2018: 12). In the U.K. hundreds of members of Parliament have undergone mindfulness training, and it is estimated that 15% of U.K. adults have as well (SIMONSSON et al. 2023: 1362–1370). The term “spiritual awakening” entered into Google Search yields close to 39 million results, and around the world peoples’ screens and earbuds are now replete with teachings about non-duality, mindfulness, breathwork, yoga, relaxation, peace of mind, near-death experiences, consciousness expansion, and other personal growth and self-transcendence topics. A half-century after Maslow’s passing, themes pertaining to self-actualisation and self-transcendence are populating mainstream international discourse and practice at a rate that would likely stun even Maslow.

As Maslow once said, human relationships at their highest levels are about “considerably more than mere customer satisfaction”. The construction and constriction of a separate egoic sense of “self” with which we humans tend to tightly identify obstructs us from connecting in markedly meaningful and consciousness-expanding ways with others outside of our in-groups. This remains a major problem facing humanity to this day. As Herschel (1951: 211) argued, if people are not more than human then they are less than human since humanity “is but a short critical stage between the animal and the spiritual”. Or as Hyde (2010: Ch. 1) has put it: “Our passion for perfection is admirable; it defines who we are as metaphysical animals, creatures who have a longing [...] for completeness in our lives.” A century ago Martin Buber (1970) was encouraging us to raise ourselves through higher quality human communication toward greater self-transcendence and “communion”.

The time is at hand for communication scholars from around the world to take the next step in helping we humans transcend the socially constructed and restrictive identity states from which we typically operate. As pioneering heightened states of consciousness researcher Charles Tart summarised it: “Each of us is in a profound trance, consensus consciousness, a state of partially suspended animation, of stupor, of inability to function at our own maximum level” (TART 2001: 106, 85–129). It is time for human evolution to rapidly accelerate in areas crucial to our continued survival and well-being on our planet Earth, including within the vital arena of humans communicating.

A new horizon: Peak and plateau communication inquiry

Questions are many: what are the textures and nuances of our both “plateau” and “peak” communication experiences, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually? How exactly do we choose to empirically monitor or measure such experiences? What more can we discover about the drivers of “plateau” and “peak” communication experiences? What is the nature of verbal discourse during “plateau” and “peak” communication encounters, what gets talked about, and how, and what gets de-emphasised? What is the influence of various nonverbal behaviours on PCEs? How does physical setting affect their likelihood? What is the relationship between PCEs and physical and mental well-being? What are the benefits of “plateau” or “peak” communication experiences to the person, the pair, the triad and small group, the larger organisation, the community, the world? How might co-created PCEs be used to affect levels of interpersonal, inter-group, and international conflict and cooperation? How frequently do PCEs occur within various groups, subcultures and cultures? What are the implications of varying definitions and conceptions of “plateau” and “peak” communication experiences? Which lines of existing communication research have potential utility for PCE theorising? What ethical questions emerge related to “plateau” and “peak” communication experiences? And one could go on without limit.

A prime area for international inquiry would be to ask how the variable of culture (and co-culture) relates to “plateau” and “peak” communication experiencing. As just one example, on the Bering Sea a small island of less than sixty square miles is home to

an indigenous Alaskan tribe known to outsiders as the Aleuts, while they call themselves the Unangan people, or “the Real Human Beings”. The Unangan view human beings as intimately connected with others, nature, the universe and the divine, though not through our brains, but via our human hearts (MERCULIEFF 2016). Their greeting to one another is “Aang wann” or “Hello my other self”. One of the traditional Unangan hunting practices has been to learn to “think like a bird” which includes learning to step outside of discursive thought for hours at a time. “Plateau” and “peak” communication experiences between traditional members of this ancient tribe would likely be quite different from those within urban Budapest, Santiago and Melbourne, and across these cultures. We might wonder, within the many diverse cultures across Europe, Asia, North America, South America, Africa, Australia and Antarctica, what are the elements of what are considered to be relatively “plateau” communication experiences, what are their drivers, meanings, outcomes and overlaps, and what can be learned from these cultural differences and convergences that could then be put to good use in applied contexts?

Existing communication concepts that would seem relevant to the study of PCEs include “communicator style”, “verbal and nonverbal immediacy”, “self-disclosure”, “verbal aggression”, “supportive communication”, “perceived homophily”, “I-It” and “I-Thou”, “conversational apprehension”, “interpersonal communication motives”, “memorable messages”, “communication savouring”, “rhetorical sensitivity”, “feeling understood”, “comforting communication”, “openness to experience”, “communicative flexibility”, “fascination” and others. The aim of such inquiry, ideally, would include learning how to teach others to establish conditions for increasing the likelihood of “plateau” and “peak” communication experiencing.

Mirivel’s (2014; MIRIVEL-FULLER 2022: 216–227) model of “positive communication” behaviours is also relevant. In his thematic analysis of interviews with 30 long-term communication professors, Mirivel (2017) concludes that these communication scholars and teachers have “gradually awakened” across their careers to becoming more mindful of their own communication behaviours. They have become more “fully functioning” human beings in the ways that Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1961) long ago conceptualised. This is not to say that these persons have “mastered” communication, but they have substantially grown in their use of “positive communication” behaviours. Mirivel (2017: Ch. 8–9) also observes that behind each of his six identified “positive communication” speech acts are deeper virtues, as follows: *Greeting* (Politeness), *Asking* (Humility), *Complimenting* (Gentleness), *Disclosing* (Courage), *Encouraging* (Generosity) and *Listening* (Transcendence). He suggests that the enactment of these speech acts and their implicit virtues by his interviewees in essence constitutes a “philosophy of being” that has been actualised within them across the decades. Mirivel (2017: 44) quotes prominent communication scholar John Durham Peters, one of his interviewees, who has now evolved to the awakened view that: “The self is the other, the other is the self.” Later Mirivel (2017: 118) again quotes Peters: “I would say the ultimate thing is to love the other person. It comes down to love.” Love, of course, entails egoic self-transcendence and a shared sense of being. This is PCE territory.

Also germane to the study of PCEs are dialogical models that emphasise such core practices such as *Warmth, Empathy, Genuineness, Vulnerability, Imagination and Improvisation, Present-Centeredness, Equality of Participation and Suspending* (GORDON 2020; ISAACS 1999; ANDERSON 1994). Central generative dialogue practices can be contributory to PCEs, as Goodall Jr. and Kellett (2004) observed two decades ago.

Methodologies in the study of PCEs would hopefully be diverse, including survey, qualitative interviewing, observation, ethnography, autoethnography, content analysis, correlational research, experimentation, literary and film analysis, personal narrative, historical investigation, phenomenological analysis and philosophical reflection. Preferably our methods of study will not be emotionally “distanced” and rationally remote, for as Maslow knew well (1966; 1968: Appendix A; 1970b: Ch. 2), “cold cognition” characterised by acute subject–object split and stemming from an impersonal “scientific” attitude can yield insufficient and biased understanding when studying experiential phenomena. Maslow would counsel a more engaged, sensitive, “personal” approach to this PCE topic area.

Challenges await as to how exactly to define “plateau” and “peak” communication experiencing. Maslow’s main discriminators between “plateaus” and “peaks” have to do with frequency of occurrence, degree of emotionality and noetic quality. On their unitary continuum of self-transcendent experiences, Yaden et al. (2017) use as their two primary markers the degree of decreased self-salience (self-disappearance), and intensity of feelings of connectedness (union). Further creative conceptualisation and theorising within this upper-region of the self-transcendence experience continuum stands ahead.

Ideally PCE inquiry would not be for the sake of knowledge alone, but useful to the elevation of the human spirit and the quality of human communicating on our planet Earth. Relevant to increasing the likelihood of having PCEs, a few practical recommendations from Maslow’s personal journals and private writings (KAUFMAN 2020: 245–248) are offered here: 1. Imagine that we are seeing this person for the last time ever, that they are going to die soon, and the time to treasure their presence and communication words is now; 2. Cultivate a sense of wonder, awe and infinite possibility; 3. Contemplate good people, lovable people, human beings with beautiful values; 4. Learn to become fascinated, totally absorbed, with even the smallest of life phenomena; 5. Gaze at objects and people from different angles and elevations, creatively reframe them in our mind, and be open to experience; 6. Be among children, babies, kittens, puppies and Mother Nature in all her forms; 7. Look at familiar people as if we have never *truly* seen them before; 8. Focus on people as *ends* in themselves, rather than as *means*; 9. Minimise relying on techniques and props for seeking external validation, and instead become “ultimately naked and self-revealing”; 10. Imagine our life will come to an end within the year, and savour each and every here-now moment; 11. Cultivate times of quiet contemplation and/or meditation, away from all responsibilities and distractions. Perhaps exercises can be developed and tested from within the above and other areas to raise communicators’ probabilities of having PCEs.

Drivers, constituent features, structural elements, and immediate and delayed impacts of “peak” and “plateau” communication experiences remain to be more thor-

oughly conceptualised, theorised and researched. The world could conceivably benefit from a high-ceiling, multicultural, applied positive communication theory at this moment in human civilisation. Primatologist Frans de Waal (2005: 250) concludes that we human beings are among the “most internally conflicted animals to ever walk the earth”. We are capable of inordinate destruction, “yet at the same time possess wells of empathy and love deeper than ever seen before”. To the degree that PCEs have to do with fostering the latter, i.e. with connecting us to our common humanity, nature and the cosmos, they merit our attention.

Reminiscent of Plato’s “allegory of the cave” (LAWHEAD 1996: Ch. 4), Maslow as well as others across time and place (BUCKE 1901 [2009]; JAMES 1902 [1929]; UNDERHILL 1911 [2002]; WOLFF 1973; 1976) have experienced and reported heightened states of consciousness that have had major impact on peoples’ lives and ways of perceiving “reality”. We humans are subject to “falsely” ontologising from our “ordinary” states of consciousness (LOSONCZ 2023: 117–132), from what Tart (2001) refers to as our “consensus trance”. Encounters with nature, meditation, the sacred, the fine arts and other such precipitating events can at times enable us to step outside of our limiting default “realities”. It is argued here that our “plateau” and “peak” communication experiences are also able on occasion to transform for the better not only our interpersonal relations, but our relationship with the greater *Whole*.

Less obstructed by the reducing-valve of the egoic self-structure, and experiencing greater interpersonal merger and transcendence through PCEs, can allow us at moments to cross ontological boundaries and enlarge our conceptions of ourselves, other people, nature and Life (TRESSOLDI-WOOLLACOTT 2023: 74–86). For a variety of good reasons, PCEs are definitely worthy of further exploration.

Conclusion

Fromm (1956: Ch. 2) concluded that: “The drive for interpersonal fusion is the most powerful striving in the human being. It is the most fundamental passion, it is the force that keeps the human race together, the clan, the family, the society. The failure to achieve it means insanity or destruction.” Similarly, Katriel and Philipsen (1981) wrote that: “Communication is an act of interpenetration [...] through communication the experience of self and other are merged and intensified.” One of the founders of modern communication theory, David Berlo (1960: 130–131), saw that: “Communication represents an attempt to couple two organisms [...]. The goal of interaction is the merger of self and other [...]. The concepts of source and receiver as separate entities become meaningless, and the concept of process becomes clear.” This is precisely what PCE inquiry seeks to promote: knowledge and practice pertaining to “coupling”, to “merger”, to the transcendence of separate “sources” and “receivers”, to movement from the “transmission of messages” to the sharing and co-creation of deeper meanings and mysteries, movement from only just “competent communication” to “communion”.

As existential philosopher Karl Jaspers (1931 [1957]: 211) deduced: “In the immaterial realm of mind there are, at any moment, a few indwellers who, entering into close

proximity, strike flame out of one another by the intimacy of their communication. They are the origin of the loftiest movement which is as yet possible in this world.” Jaspers (1960: 26–27) well knew that: “Awareness of being, illumination through love, and attainment of peace” are all rooted in communication.

How can people be enabled to safely relax, to become more congruent, to share their undivided presence with other human beings on deep matters of mutual meaningfulness? Enabled to truly sense another person’s uniqueness, their non-interchangeability, their immeasurability? Empowered to feel accepting and loving toward others, to perceive their intrinsic beauty, as well as the beauty of this unrepeatable moment? To dissolve the egoic self, and to have eyes freshly opened in order to gain precious insights? How can people be given the means to touch upon the sacred, to become more *One* with the other(s), and with the *All*? This is the stuff of PCEs. It is about eventually surpassing “small talk” (pleasant as that can be), self-consciousness, conversational narcissism and strategic control, and transcending to larger awakenings of possibility.

We are living in an era of worldwide distress and dissolution, clash and chaos, divergence and divide (RIFKIN 2009). Anything that international academic theorists, researchers and practitioners might offer toward the facilitation of “plateau” and “peak” communication experiencing is worth considering. This is made even more possible since there is now an established theoretical structure for such work within the communication discipline: the study of “positive communication”. Studies of “positive communication” in general, and “plateau” and “peak” communication experiencing in particular, are still in their developmental infancy (SOCHA–STOYNEVA 2015: 386–400). We would do well to bring these high-ceiling phenomena within our range of vision and engage with them, not simply for the sake of researcher career advancement but for their potential usefulness to humankind.

Inquiry into PCEs can be of value in learning how to better create an ethic of global cooperation, caring, connection and harmony. PCEs carry the potential to change our views of self and others, our relationships, our views of humanity, our actions in life. They can result in egoic self-transcendence, interpersonal communion and enhanced alliance with the *Good*, the *True*, the *Beautiful*, *Kindness*, *Wisdom* and *Service*. We in communication studies and allied intersecting disciplines have vastly more to discover and offer within this realm of “plateau” and “peak” communication experiencing. Generalised “peak experience” research has examined such triggers as ski racing, skydiving, bicycle riding, acting, motorcycle racing, public singing, swimming with dolphins and whales, tai chi, aikido, breathwork, visiting the Grand Canyon, etc. In this twenty-first century we would be wise to more energetically bring both “plateau” and “peak” *communication experiencing* (PCEs) within our province of pure communication inquiry.

As Matson and Montagu (1967: 6) knew, “the end of communication is not to *command* but to *commune*” (italics in original). “Communion”, in its broadest sense, at times occurs most profoundly within human beings’ PCEs. The stage has arrived for motivated scholars and researchers to move toward this exciting, rich and potentially valuable cutting-edge of human communication studies.

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