Abstract

Close encounters with charismatic wildlife (those with widespread popular appeal) produce psychological benefits (Curtin, 2009; Muloin, 1998; Muloin, 2000; Neil, Orams, & Baglioni, 1996), peak experiences (DeMares & Krycka, 1998; DeMares, 2015; Smith, 2007; Vogler, 2012) and/or mystical experiences (Knoll, 2006). Research indicates that encounters with whales in particular, can elicit emotional responses of awe, spiritual feelings of the ineffable, and an alteration in time (Curtin, 2008). A review of literature indicates that no study to date has qualitatively examined the presence or absence of transformative and mystical aspects of close encounters with whales. This study aims to address this gap.

Method

This study employed a mixed method design for the purpose of examining lived experiences. Data collection included semi-structured interviews and a 30-item self-report scale (McLean, et al., 2012).

Semi-structured interviews were transcribed and the narrative data were analyzed using content analysis that uses deductive approach for the purpose of theory building (Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999) and NVivo software for further content analysis.

Preliminary Themes

Background

“What is the subjective experience of having a close encounter with humpback and/or grey whales?”

Subjects

8 subjects
Age range: 29 to 69 years
Gender: 25% male | 75% female
Race: 25% Filipino | 75% white

The primary criteria for inclusion in this study was willingness to participate in an 1.5-2.5 hour interview about their experiences with whales and respond to the 30-question self-rating scale.

Preliminary Findings

Transformative Experience
Eye Contact with the Whale
Whales’ Enormity, Gentility, Intelligence, and Consciousness
Memory/Connecting to a Diseased Loved One
Peacefulness