

# **Spiritual Direction for Spiritual Emergencies**

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# Spiritually Transformative Experiences that can trigger Spiritual Emergency

*intense mystical experiences*

*near-death experiences*

*conversion experiences*

*kundalini awakenings*

*shamanic initiations*

*childbirth*

*shared crossings*

*paranormal experiences*

*meditation or yoga related*

*extreme trauma or illness*



# Definition of Spiritually Transformative Experience (STE)

... a discrete experience of an altered state of consciousness that brings about a profound transformation in the spiritual identity and life expression of the experienter.



# Definition of Spiritual Emergency

. . . a crisis that occurs when emerging spirituality happens faster or more powerfully than is possible to gracefully integrate. This can create imbalance or cause disturbing psychotic effects until the person is able to adjust to grounding this new awareness.



# **Historical Spiritually Transformative Experiences (STEs) and Integration of them (Spiritual Emergence)**

- Jesus – 40 days in the desert
- Apostle Paul – conversion experience on road to Damascus
- St. Teresa of Avila – the Interior Castle
- John of the Cross – Dark Night of the Soul
- Muhammed – mystical experience in the cave, Hira
- Buddha – under the Bodhi Tree

# Auto-biographies of more recent STEs and Spiritual Emergence

- Carl Jung – *Red Book & Memories, Dreams and Reflections*
- Yogananda – *Autobiography of a Yogi*
- Mother Teresa – *Come Be My Light*
- Gopi Krishna – *Kundalini*
- George Ritchie – *Return From Tomorrow*
- Yvonne Kason – *Farther Shores*

# Research in Spiritual Emergence

IONS – Institute of Noetic Science

IANDS – International Association of Near Death Studies

ACISTE –American Center for the Integration of Spiritually  
Transformative Experiences

KRI – Kundalini Research Center

ATP – Association of Transpersonal Psychology

SCRC – Spiritual Competency Resource Center

# Common Problems of Spiritual Emergence: psychic gifts and nervous system sensitivities



- Sudden awareness: compassion, suffering, vulnerability
- Hypersensitivity: to other people's feelings and inner sensations
- Paranormal abilities: telepathy, clairvoyance, and seeing, hearing, or sensing non-corporeal beings.
- Environmental hypersensitivity: noise, odors, artificial light, electromagnetic fields, toxic chemicals.

# Physiological and psychological distress



- Fear, disorientation, resistance, embarrassment.
- Disorienting sense that the past is disintegrating faster than the future can take its place.
- Adrenal states of 'fight-flight'
- Sleep deprivation, manic episodes, debilitating fatigue, mental confusion
- Energetic or mood swings and inner psychic confusion, possible temporary psychosis.



# Lack of support in our culture

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- Mystical experiences labeled pathological or demonic.
- Few mentors for spiritual transformation.
- Spiritual commercialism growing





# Lifestyle challenges

- Relational strains, including divorce
- Intolerance of work situations including losing or quitting jobs.
- Craving to “return” to mystical states of consciousness may drive some people to withdraw from society, jump into spiritual cults, take drugs, or commit suicide.
- Psychiatric treatment may exacerbate the problems.



# Spiritual Bypass

- bypassing personal emotional self-reflection and development
- chasing the blissful experience
- self-aggrandizement, spiritual pride, narcissism
- potential to misuse one's power
- lack of humility needed to keep ego in check



# 1980 ~ My first Spiritually Transformative Experience (STE)



Mystical experiences, rapid sequence of revelations, telepathy, clairvoyance, energetic openings, shifting paradigms of reality

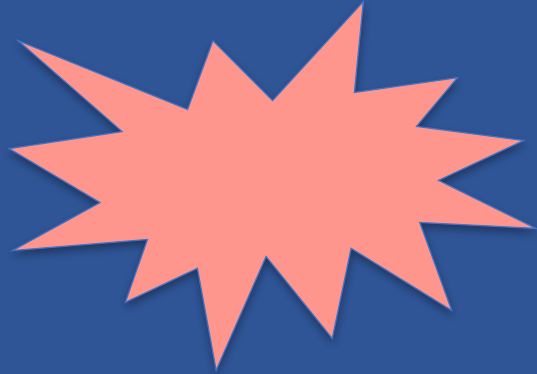


# Sept 1980-Aug 1981

## Beginning of my Spiritual Emergency

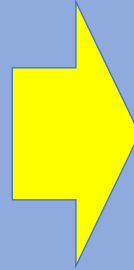


Sept 1981 . . .  
How long did integration take?



# 1981 to 2022

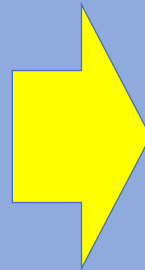
Failed relationships, divorces, highly sensitive to crowds, EMFs, sounds, bright lights . . .



becoming a calm, resilient, less high-maintenance wife



Overwhelmed mother



becoming a graceful grandmother

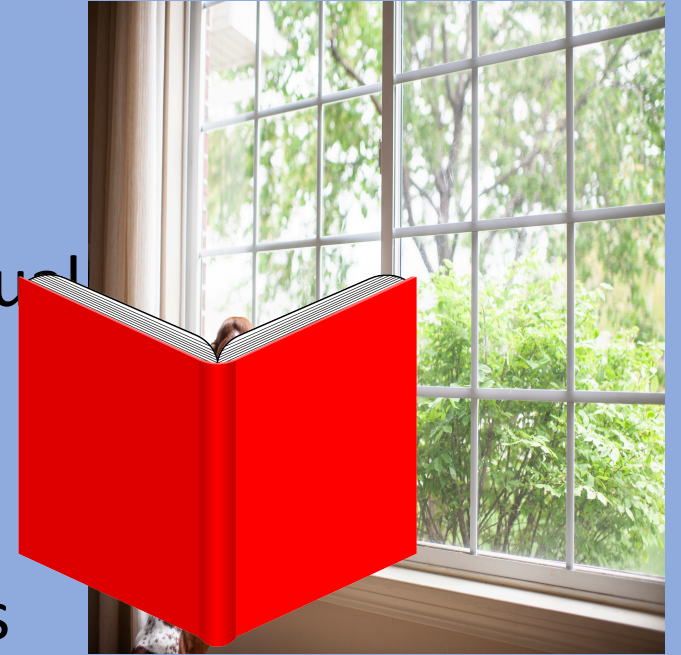


# And more to look forward to . . .

Multiple  
part-time  
jobs,  
getting  
fired,  
moving  
on . . .



Serene spiritual  
direction  
practice and  
finishing my  
Book on STEs



Tough work,  
menial  
labor, no  
future in  
sight



becoming a  
Principal  
Investigator  
for STE  
research

# Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences Inventory (ISTEI) Survey Research Study

Marie Grace Brook, PhD

Brook, M. G. (2021). Struggles reported integrating intense spiritual experiences: Results from a survey using the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences Inventory *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 13(4), 464–481. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000258>

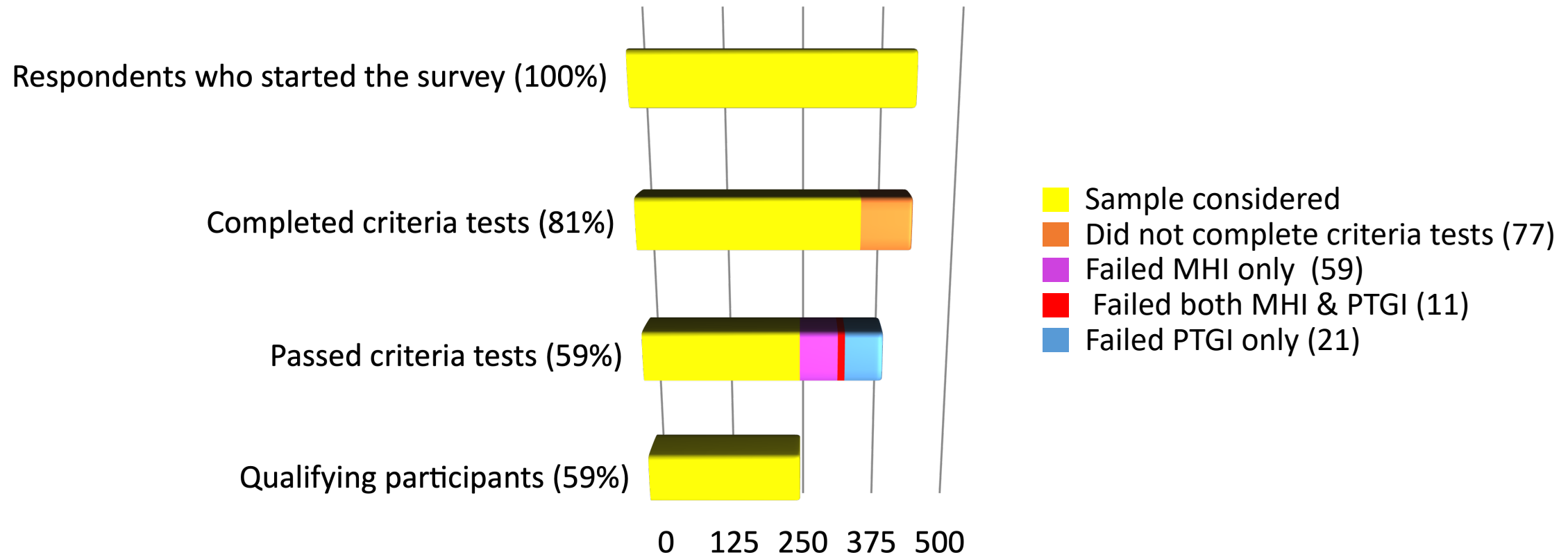


Have you experienced a spiritual event that transformed your life?  
--that took months to years to integrate?

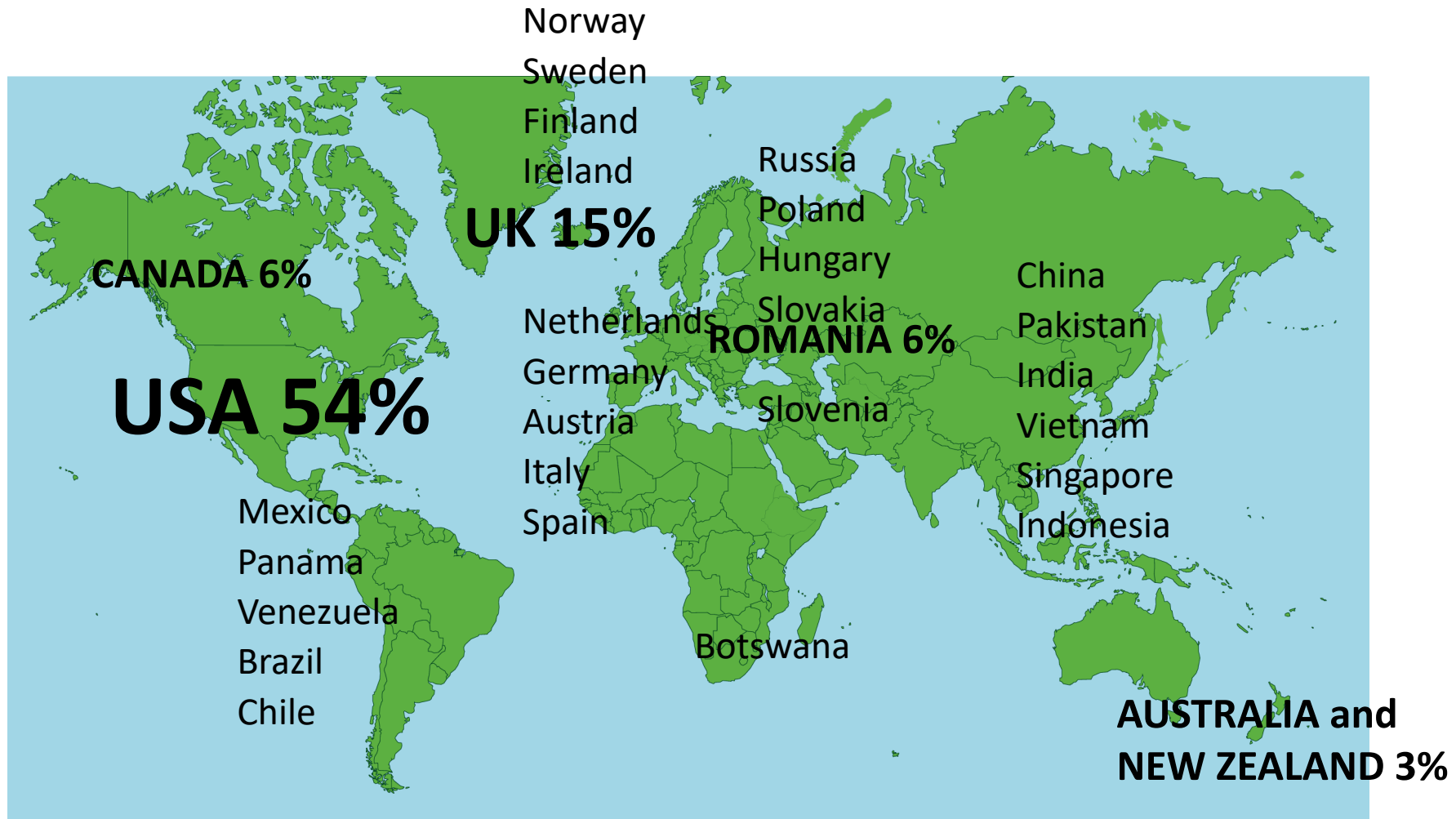


Integration of Spiritually  
Transformative Experiences  
Inventory (ISTEI)

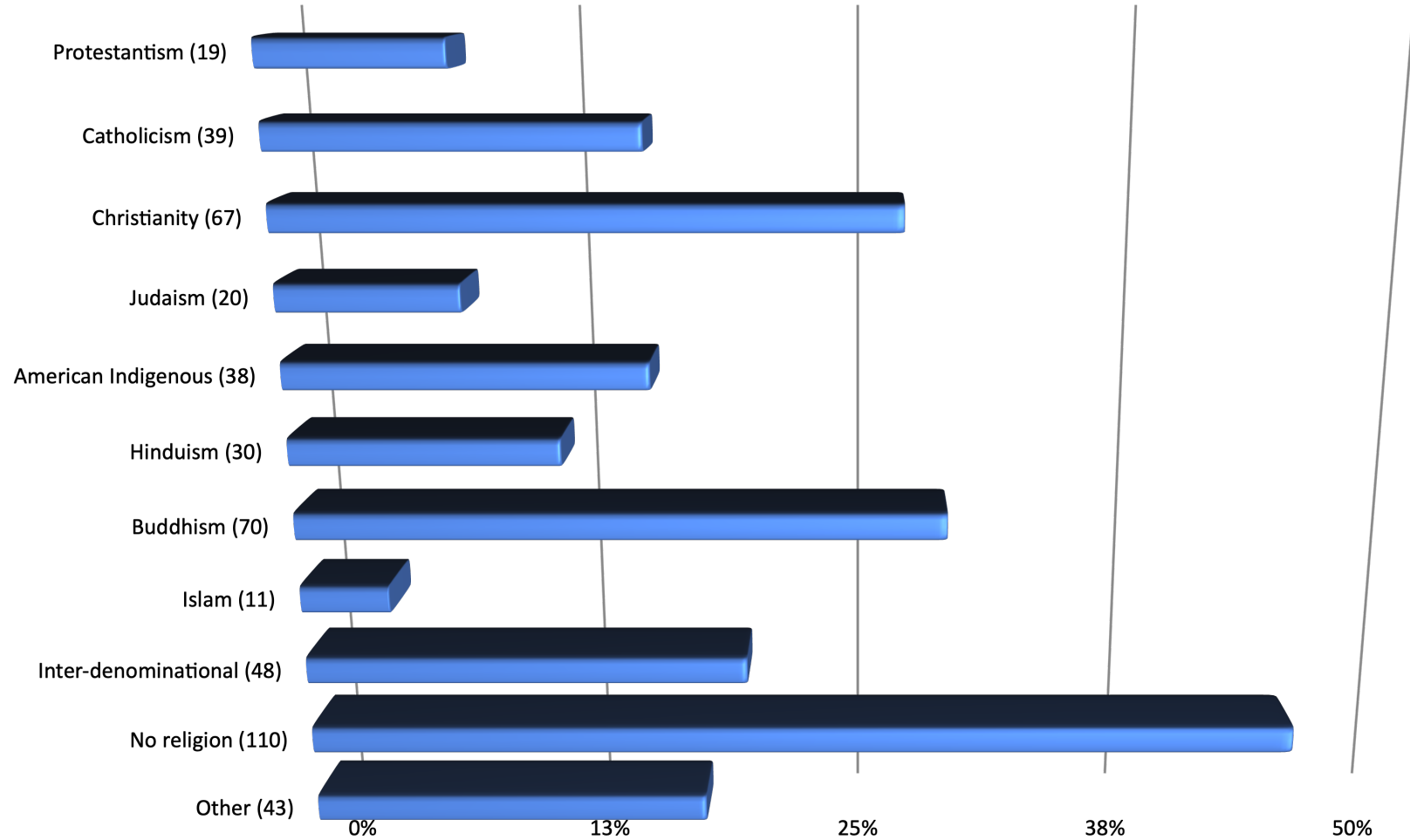
Sample from survey  
413 started survey (Respondents)  
234 met criteria (Participants)



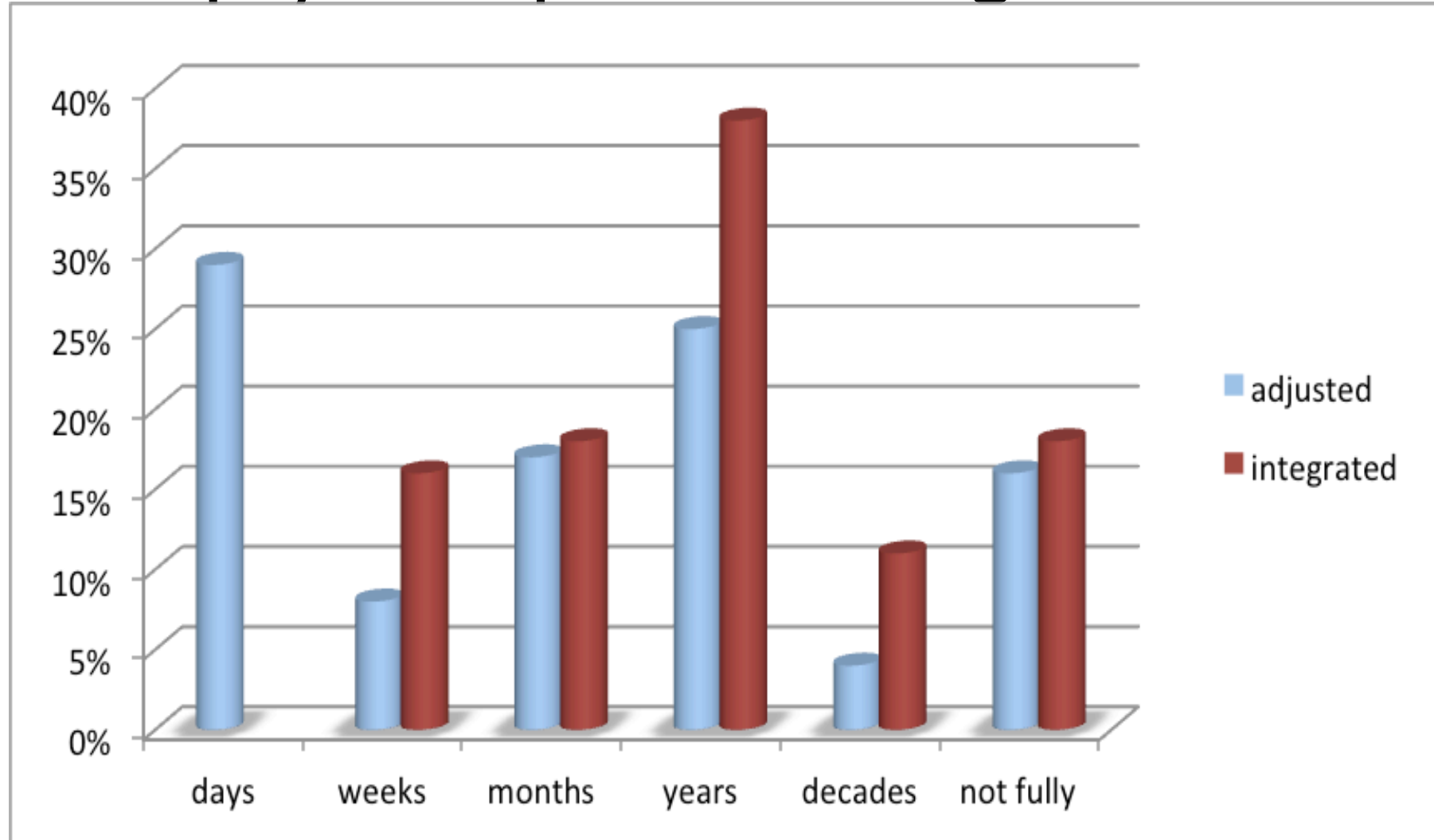
# Nationalities (33 Countries)



# Religions of participants



# length of time for societal adjustment and psycho-spiritual integration



1. *Research assumption was correct:*

Various of types of STEs have  
basic commonalities in methods  
of integration  
( $p < .0001$ )

## *2. Correspondence of Use to Helpfulness:*

People undergoing spiritual emergencies can be trusted to know best what they need  
( $p < .0001$ )

### *3. Essential practices:*

1. Compassion, forgiveness, humility, honesty, gratitude
2. Calmer environment
3. Adjust to new sensitivities
4. Find at least one person to confide in
5. Allow the unconscious to surface
6. Creatively live a revised purpose in life  
(rated essential by 100% of participants)



#### *4. Regarding psychiatric treatment:*

Be cautious with psychiatry ~  
Medication may be unhelpful  
or detrimental  
( $p < .001$ )

# Why spiritual direction for spiritual emergency?

- The need to be deeply listened to
- The need to be not judged
- The need for tolerance of stretching beyond worldly paradigm
- The need for context for mystical experience
- The need for discernment
- The need for safety
- The need for familiarity with the spiritual path
- The need to be encouraged to find guidance within
- The need for prayer

# David Lukoff, PhD

In 1994 introduced a new category to the psychiatric “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders” (DSM) called “Religious or Spiritual Problem”

allowing for diagnosis of mystical experience with psychotic features.



Lukoff, D., Lu, F. & Yang, C. P. (2011). DSM-IV Religious and spiritual problems. In Peteet, J. Lu, F. & Narrow, W. (Eds.) *Religious and Spiritual Issues in Psychiatric Diagnosis: A Research Agenda for DSM-V*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc.

# Difference between STEs and psychosis

Mystical: religious/spiritual issues

Normal subjects: practical issues and relationships

Schizophrenics: illness/deviant themes

Hallucinogenic: altered sensory experience

(David Lukoff, from ***Spiritual Competencies Academy***)

## Symptoms that overlap— psychosis with a mystical experience

- ecstatic mood
- sense of newly-gained knowledge
- seeing visions and hearing voices
- confusion
- delusions with specific themes

(David Lukoff, from ***Spiritual Competencies Academy***)

# Delusions with specific themes

## Mystical/mythical themes

death

rebirth

journey

encounters with spirits (good & bad)

cosmic conflict (good vs. bad)

magical powers

new enlightened society

## Psychotic/pathological themes

my brain has been removed

transmitter has been implanted

parents drain my blood at night

Mafia is poisoning me

my thoughts are being stolen

my wife is an impersonator

(David Lukoff, from ***Spiritual Competencies Academy***)

# Signs indicating of a positive outcome

- Functioned well before STE event
- Acute onset during a period of 3 months or less
- Something stressful happened before the STE
- Positive exploratory attitude
- No significant risk for homicidal or suicidal behavior

(David Lukoff, from ***Spiritual Competencies Academy***)

# Yolaine Stout

Leader and investigator in  
the field of STEs.  
Organizational founder of  
ACISTE

— 6 challenges in  
integration of STEs



Stout, Y. M., Jacquin, L. A. & Atwater, P. M. H. (2006) Six major challenges faced by near death experiencers. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 25 (1) pp.49-62.



# Challenges for Integrating STEs

- Processing a radical shift in reality
- Accepting the return to mundane life
- Sharing the experience
- Integrating new spiritual values with earthly expectations
- Adjusting to heightened sensitivities & supernatural gifts
- Finding and living one's purpose

(Stout, Jacquin, and Atwater, p. 60)



## **Jan Holden, PhD**

Editor and prominent researcher of  
Near-Death studies

*The Handbook of Near-Death  
Experiences: Thirty Years of  
Investigation*

Holden, J. M., Greyson, B., & James, D.  
(2009). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO

# D's (Don'ts) in Listening to STEs

- **Doesn't** recognize or identify the experience
- **Disbelieves** the experiencer
- **Denies** the possible reality and/or personal significance
- **Discourages** the experiencer from exploring the meaning
- **Diagnoses** the experience or experiencer as pathological
- **Demonizes** the experience as being somehow evil or of the devil
- **Deprives** the experiencer of information and resources

(Holden, J. M. "After-Math: Counting the After-Effects of Potentially Spiritually Transformative Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 31, no. 2 (2012): 65–78.)

# N's (Do's) in Listening to STEs

- **kN**ows and names the experience
- **N**aturalizes it as something others have experienced
- **N**ormalizes it as unrelated to pathology
- **iN**vites the experiencer to discuss and explore the meaning
- **N**uminizes the experience as potentially spiritually developmental
- **N**avigates the experiencer toward relevant resources

(Holden, J. M. "After-Math: Counting the After-Effects of Potentially Spiritually Transformative Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 31, no. 2 (2012): 65–78.)

# Ryan Rominger, PhD



Doctoral work in field of STEs.  
Researcher and former board  
president of ACISTE.

## Integrating Models for the STE

Rominger, R. (2004). Exploring the integration of the aftereffects of the near-death experience: an intuitive and artistic inquiry.  
*ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.*

# Integrating Models for the STE

1. Initial shock—"I've had this experience."
2. Initial reorientation —"I'm surviving, continuing with my (new) life."
3. Internal referencing —"Where would I fit in now?"
4. Finding identity —"Who am I now & who is my new tribe"?
5. Assertion of new self —"How can I be myself and still be in relationship?"
6. New understanding—"I now have a broader awareness of where I fit in."
7. Accepting continual growth—"I can be comfortable with continuous change."

(Rominger, R. (2014). *Integration models for the STE*. Presentation at ACISTE Annual Conference, Nov. 7, 2014 in Dallas, TX)



# Michael Garbe, PhD

## Stabilizing

### Meditation Techniques:

- 1. Merging (no)
- 2. Centering (yes)**
- 3. Grounding (yes)**



Dr. of Social Work specializing in STE integration  
[www.spiritualemergency.info](http://www.spiritualemergency.info)

**Words of Wisdom for you from  
my recent ACSGC supervision group  
(ACISTE Certification for Spiritual Guidance Counselors)**

- Be present with compassion--not believing, not disbelieving
- Do not break confidentiality with medical staff, chaplains, or religious authorities
- Encourage caution regarding who the directee shares their story with
- Recognize how fear reaction and/or diagnosing from others can cause crisis



# **More Words of Wisdom they want to share . . .**

## **Reminders as spiritual directors**

- Allow for pausing—moments of silence
- Listen to our own intuition
- Ask questions rather than make statements
- Take time to ask questions that the directee can answer themselves
- Remember that Spirit helps through us . . . it is not up to us to heal or take care of our directees. We simply hold the container.

# ACISTE

## American Center for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences



Annual research Conferences  
Groups & training  
Experiencer Forum  
CEUs  
Hot line

[www.ACISTE.org](http://www.ACISTE.org)

Professional Certifications:

**Mental Health Professionals (ACMHP)**

Psychologists

Social Workers

Counselors

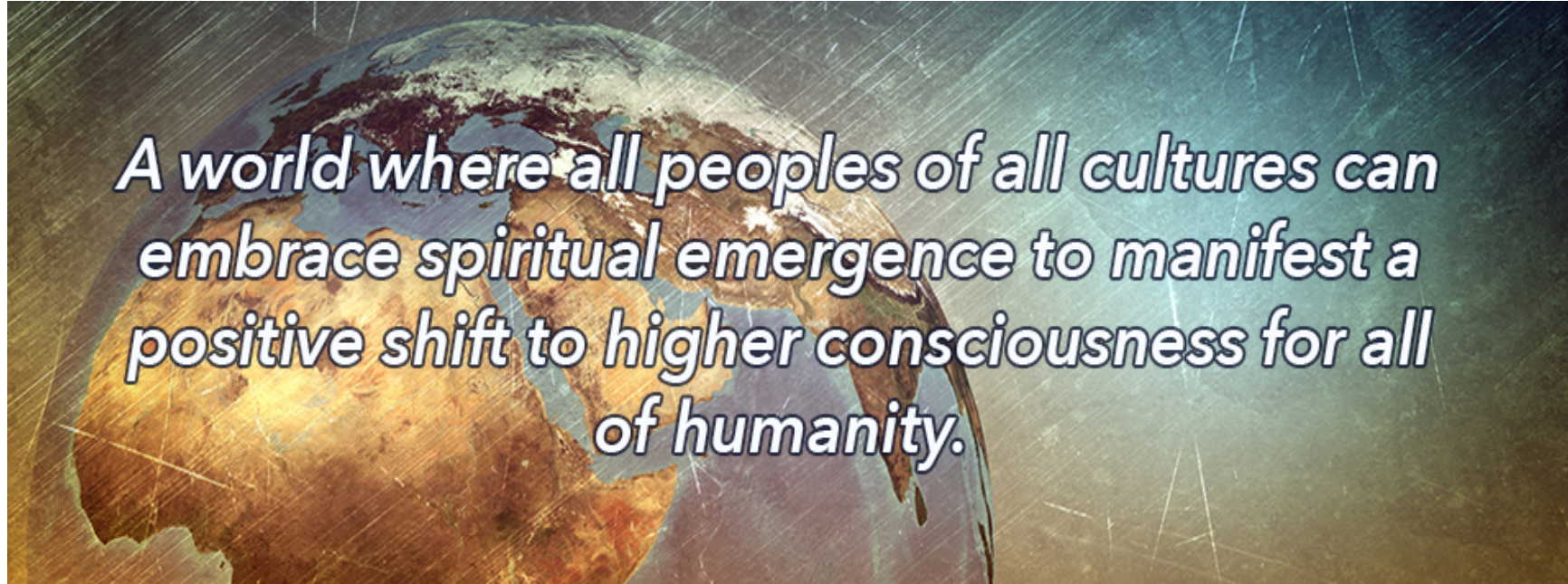
**Spiritual Guidance Counselors (ACSGC)**

Spiritual Directors

Chaplains

Pastoral Counselors

# International Spiritual Emergency Network



ISEN is a collaborative platform that connects networks around the world that offer compassionate support to those who understand their experiences to be a spiritual crisis rather than a mental illness, raising awareness of a non-pathological integral framework within the mental health field.

[www.SpiritualEmergenceNetwork.org](http://www.SpiritualEmergenceNetwork.org)

# Spiritual Emergence Anonymous

Spiritual Emergence Anonymous (SEA) is a grassroots 12-Step program adapted for Spiritual Emergence.



The purpose is to support spiritual emergence in individuals whose spiritual transformation is so powerful that they desire group assistance and support seeking stability and clarity in integrating their experience.

[www.SpiritualEmergenceAnonymous.org](http://www.SpiritualEmergenceAnonymous.org)

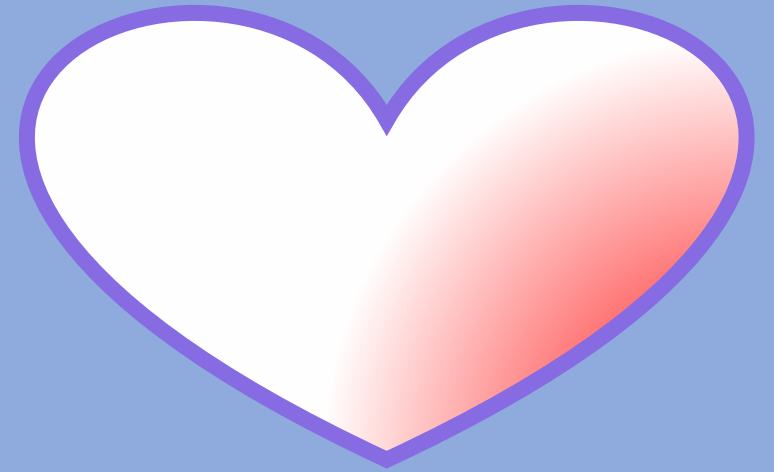


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for mental health professionals

[www.SpiritualCompetencyAcademy.com](http://www.SpiritualCompetencyAcademy.com)

# My gratitude . . .



- Spiritual Directors International
  - My spiritual directors 1992-2022
- Spiritual Emergence Anonymous (SEA)
  - Continued group support & inspiration





**And . . .My gratitude  
to you, interested spiritual directors, for**

- Showing up here
- Your sincere participation
- Bringing your presence
- Bringing abundance of divine blessings



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