

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 experiencer.



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

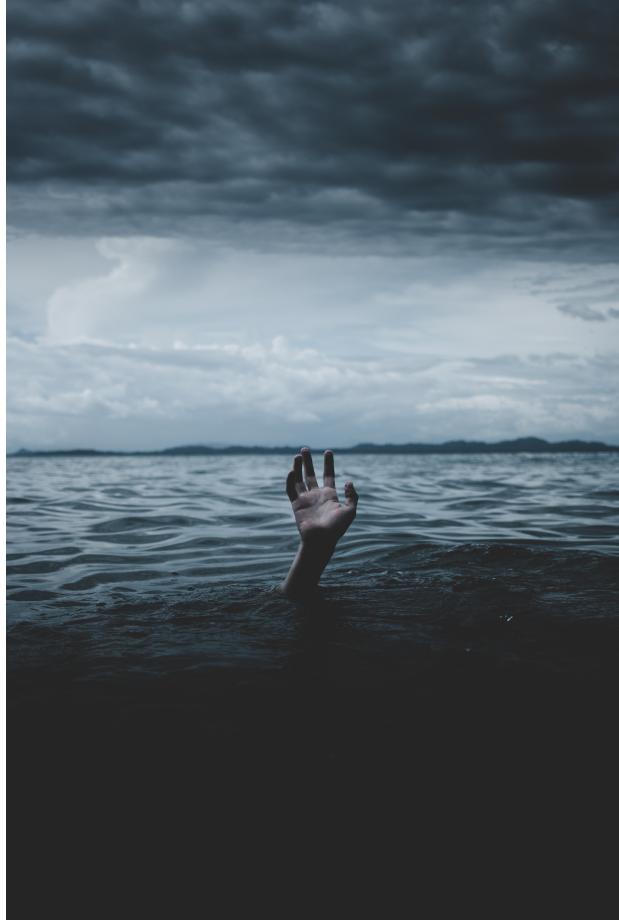
SCRC – Spiritual Competency Resource Center

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

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



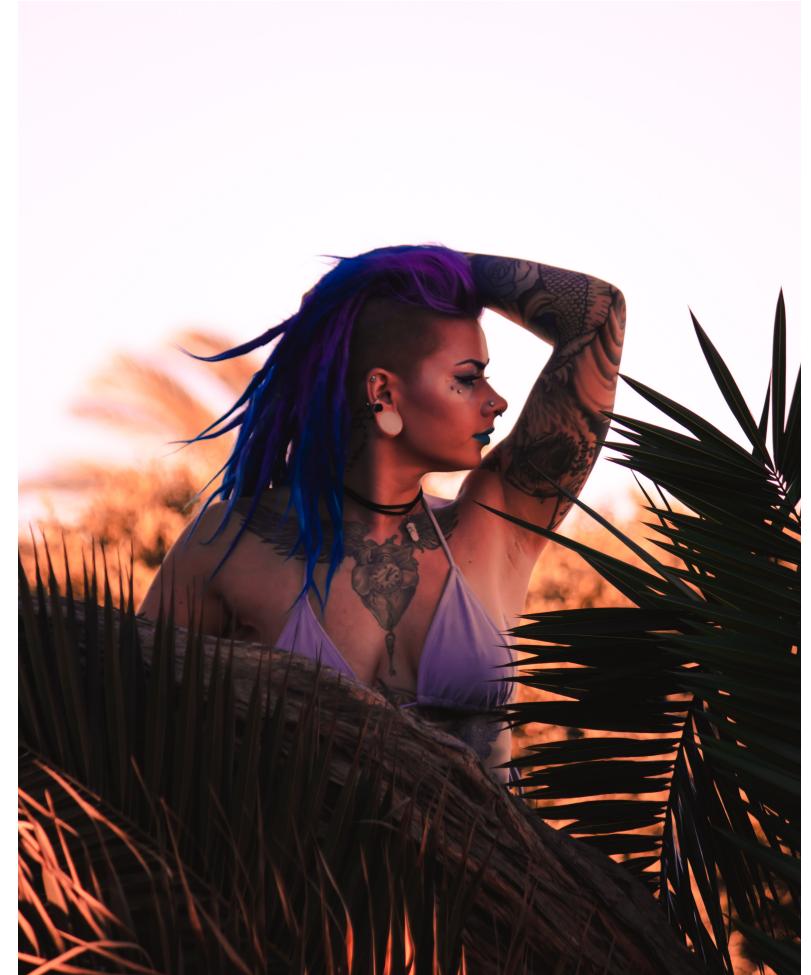
Lifestyle challenges

- 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)

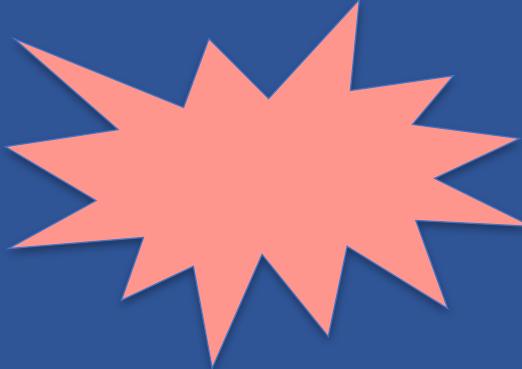


Mystical experiences, rapid sequence of revelations, telepathy, clairvoyance, energetic openings, shifting paradigms of reality

Sept 1980-Aug 1981
Beginning of my Spiritual Emergency



Sept 1981 . . .
How long did integration take?

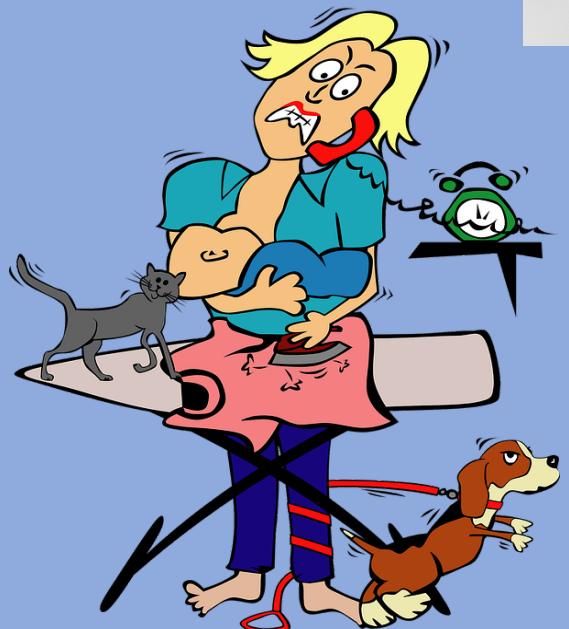
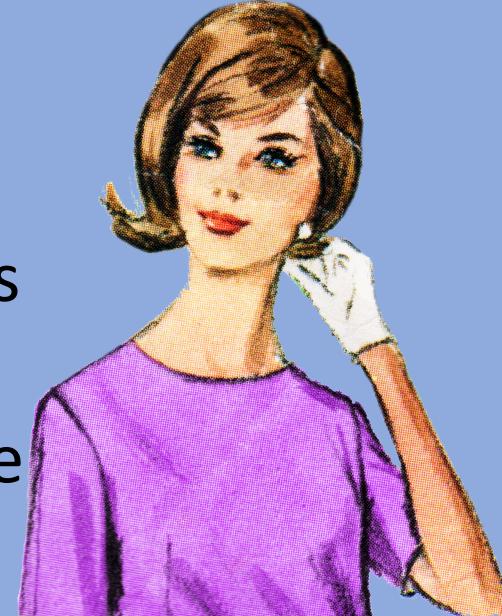


1981 to 2022

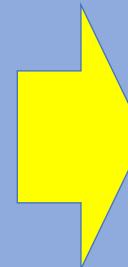
Failed relationships, divorces, highly sensitive to crowds, EMFs, sounds, bright lights . . .



becoming a calm, resilient, less high-maintenance wife



Overwhelmed mother



becoming a graceful grandmother

And more to look forward to . . .

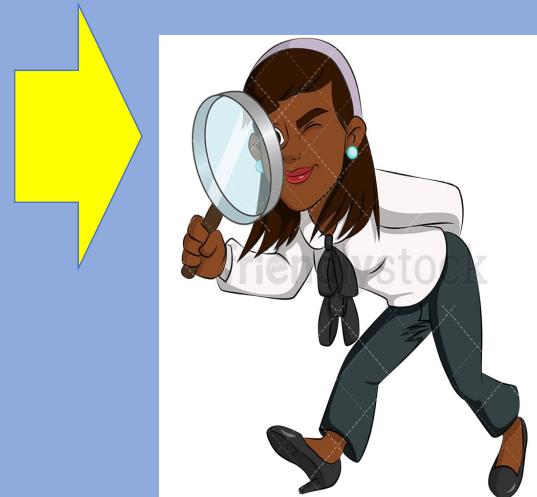
Multiple part-time jobs, getting fired, moving on . . .



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

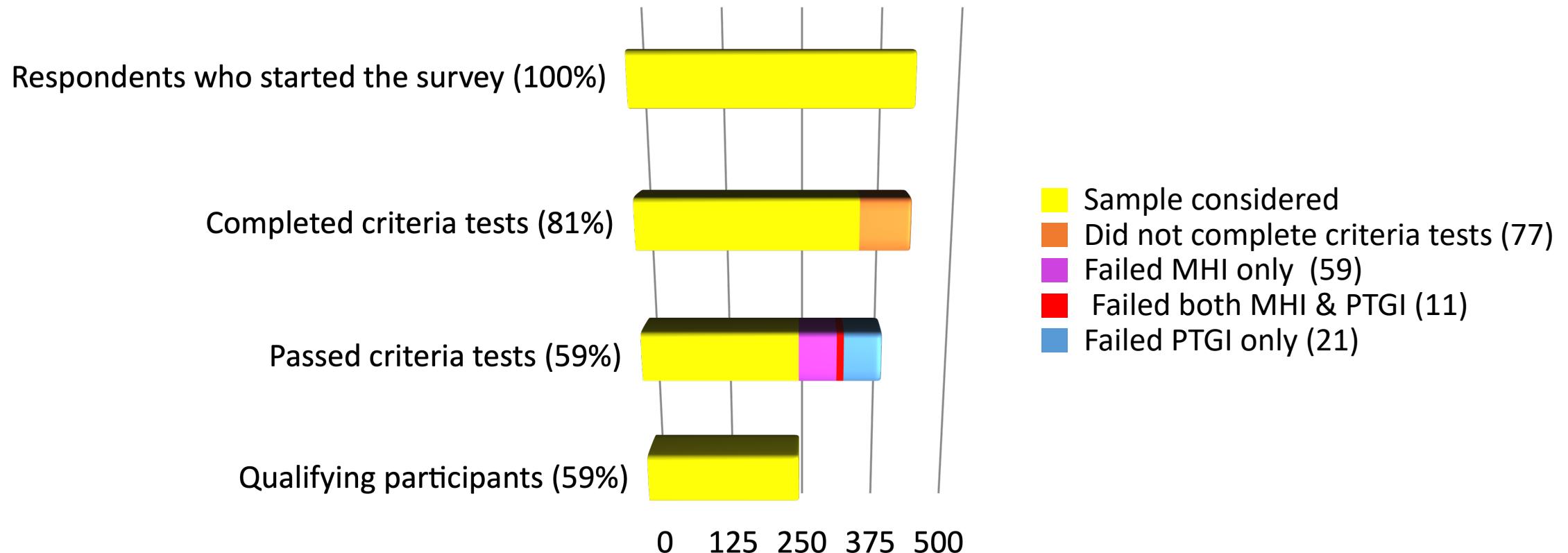
Brook, M. G. (2021). Struggles reported integrating intense spiritual experiences: Results from a survey using the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences Inventory *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 13(4), 464–481. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000258>

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

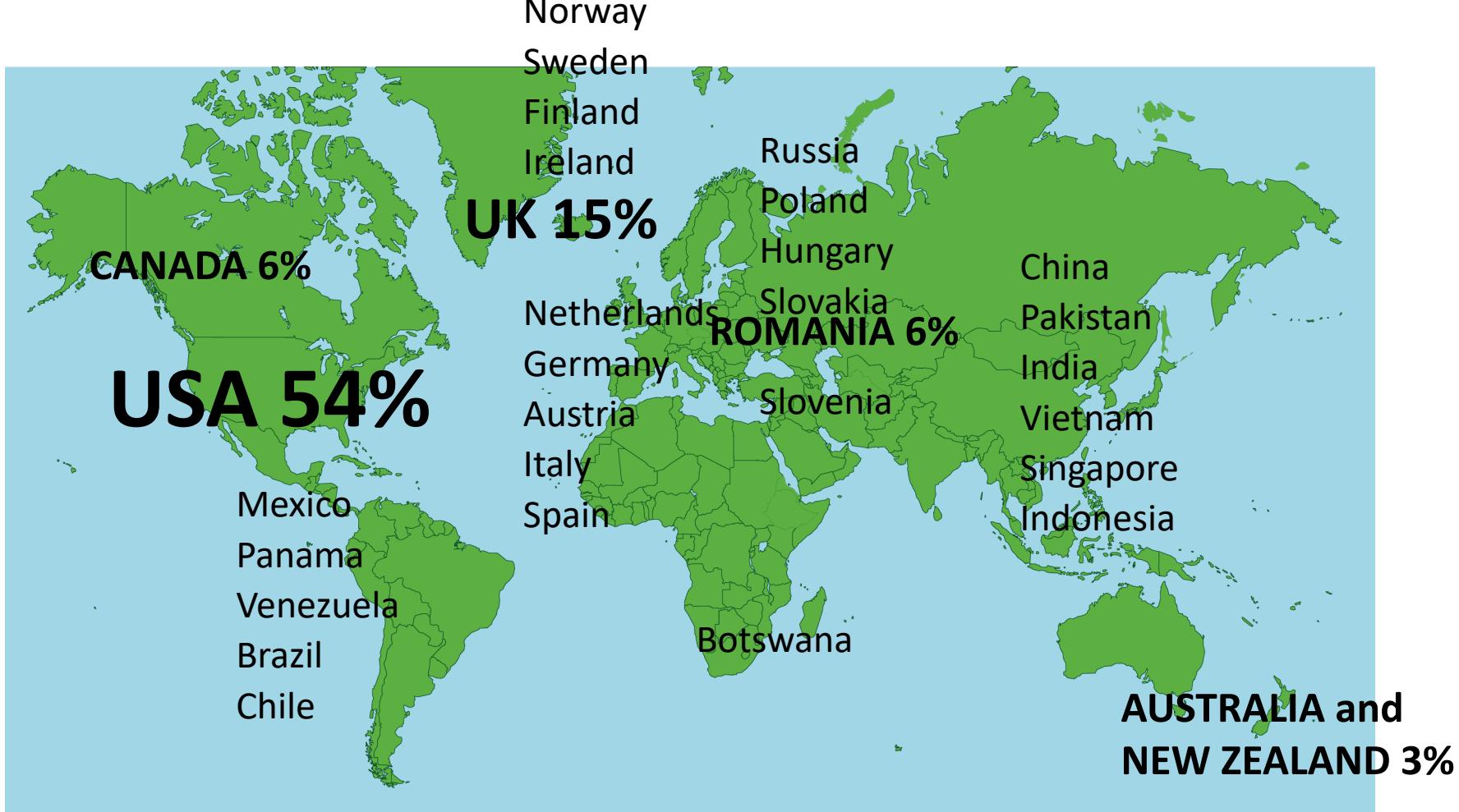
The SurveyMonkey logo is displayed on a green background. It features a white, stylized icon of a head with a brain-like pattern and a brain wave line above it. Below the icon, the word "SurveyMonkey" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

Integration of Spiritually
Transformative Experiences
Inventory (ISTEI)

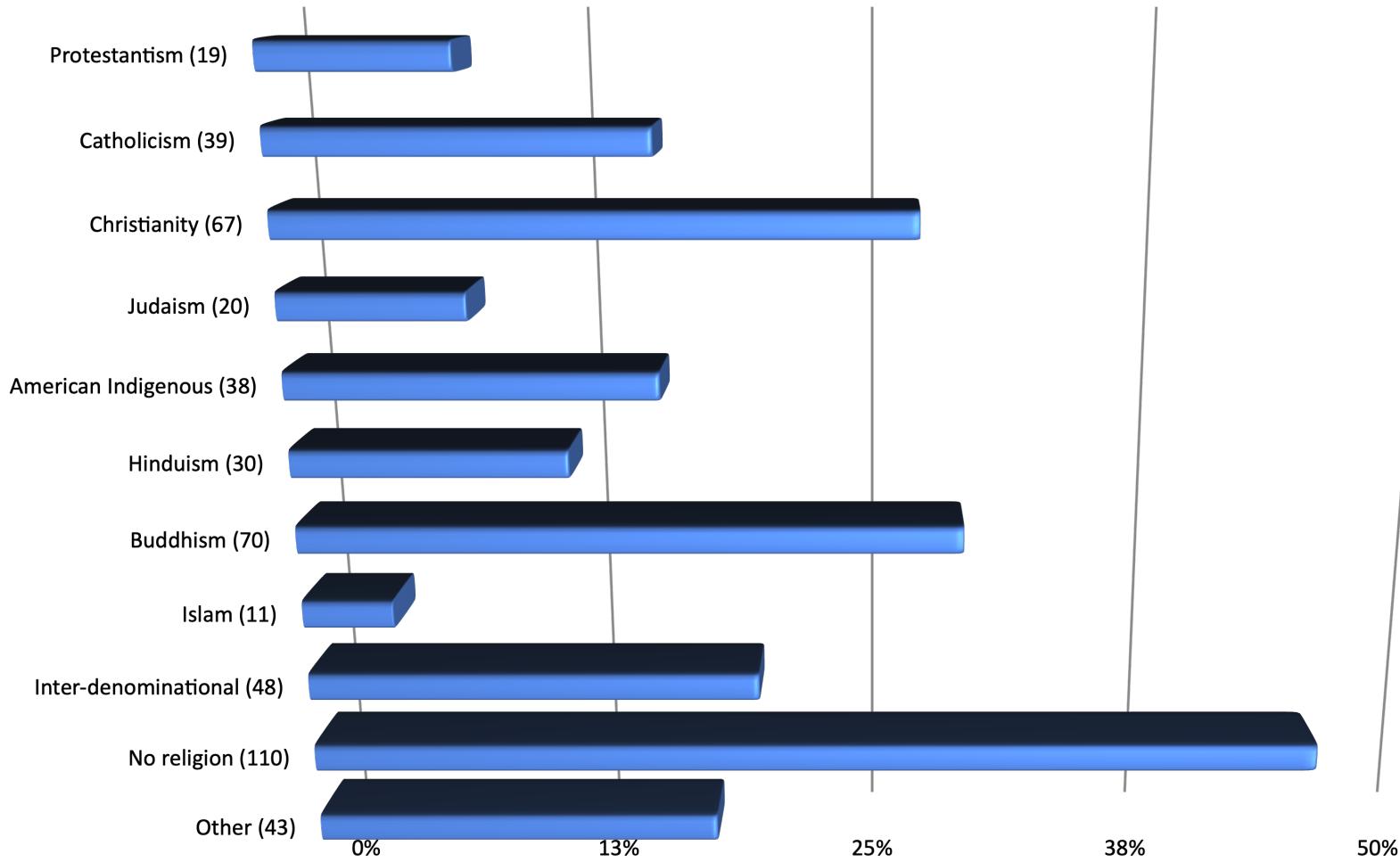
Sample from survey
413 started survey (Respondents)
234 met criteria (Participants)



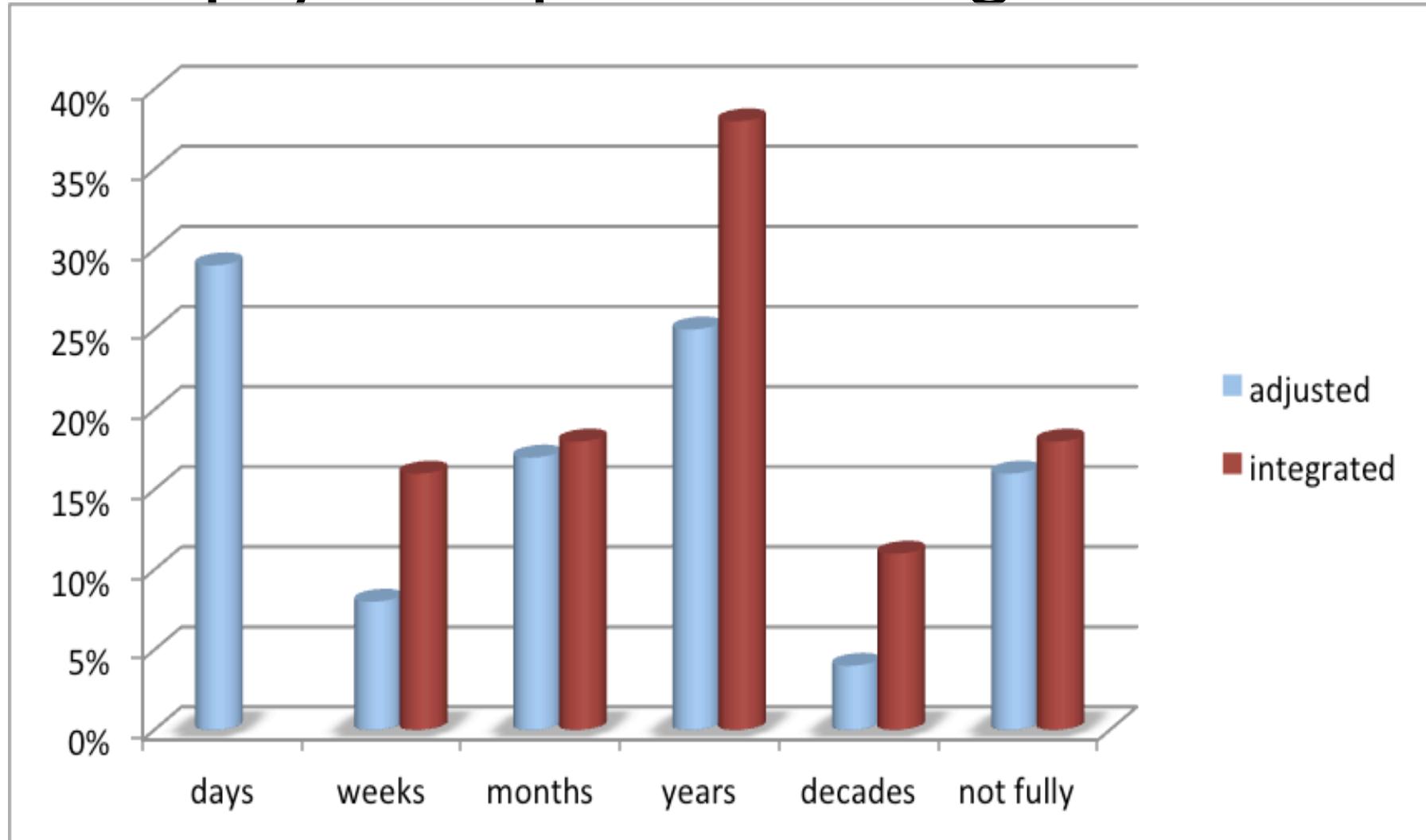
Nationalities (33 Countries)



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?

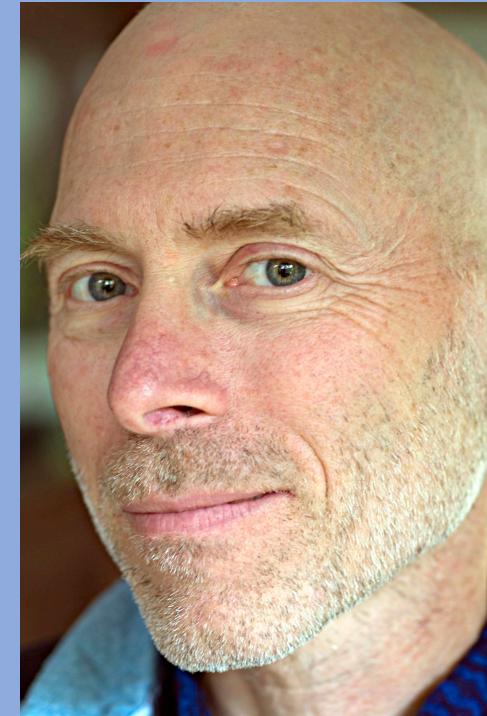
- The need to be deeply listened to
- The need to be not judged
- The need for tolerance of stretching beyond worldly paradigm
- The need for context for mystical experience
- The need for discernment
- The need for safety
- The need for familiarity with the spiritual path
- The need to be encouraged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

- **k**Nows and names the experience
- **N**aturalizes it as something others have experienced
- **N**ormalizes it as unrelated to pathology
- **i**Nvites 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

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 the 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

Professional Certifications:

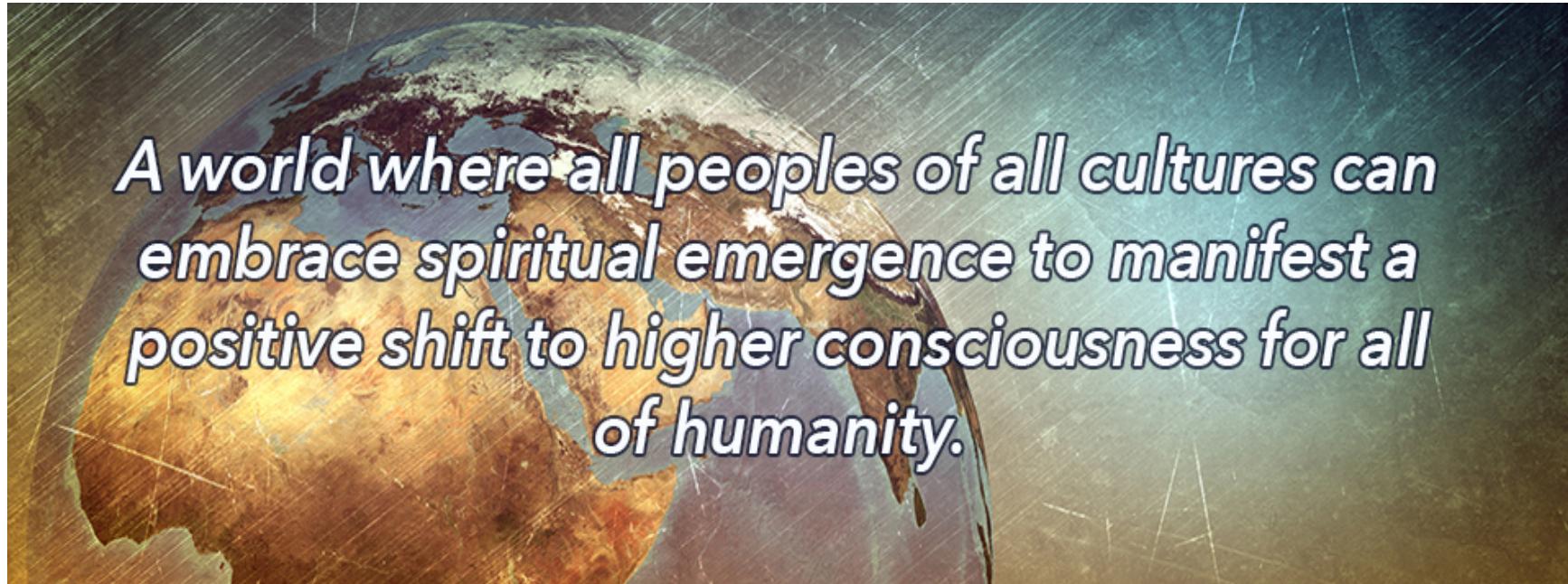
Mental Health Professionals (ACMHP)

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.SpiritualEmergencyNetwork.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

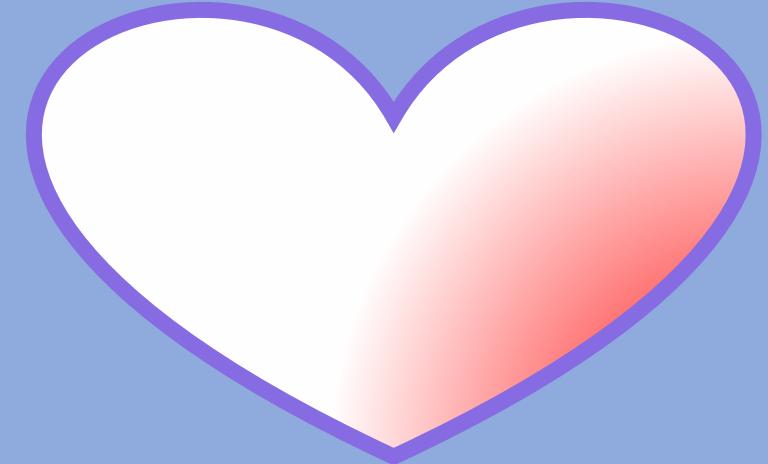


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My gratitude . . .



- 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



References

Brook, MG. (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), 464–48.

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Stout, Y. M., Jacquin, L. A., and Atwater, P. M. H. (2006). Six Major Challenges Faced by Near-Death Experiencers. *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 25, no.1