

Spiritual Awakenings; Thematic Analysis of Formative Experiences in Alternative Spirituality

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Background

- Major themes; growth, transcendence, finding meaning (Russo-Netzer & Mayseless, 2016)
- Stressful events, major life changes, lack of satisfaction with organized religion
- Times of crisis or questioning (Aupers & Houtman, 2006)

Research Questions

How do people become involved in alternative spirituality?

What have been their most influential experiences?

Methodology

- Participants found through convenience and snowball sampling
- Requirements; must identify as primarily spiritual rather than religious
- Interviews conducted asking about their first and influential experiences with alternative spirituality
- Interviews were analyzed qualitatively through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013)

Themes

- Lack of connection to organized religion
- Working through difficult times
- Self improvement and understanding
- Supernatural experiences
- Meditation as an introduction

Lack of Connection to Organized Religion

Participants might have grown up participating in more traditional religion but did not feel spiritually connected

“I don’t think the way I view things can be answered by common religions”

Working through difficult times

Participants began their spiritual practice during or after difficult and traumatic periods

“I started early on because I was depressed as a young person”

Self Improvement and Understanding

Participants turned
towards spirituality as
a way to better
themselves

“For me it was a way to
regulate myself”

Supernatural Experiences

Participants had experiences that felt unexplainable or beyond a physical realm

“I had this dream before my parents told me she passed away....It still gives them chills”

Meditation as an Introduction

Participants started
their practice with
meditative experiences
sometimes
unintentionally

“It was being able
to be in a calm
environment where
I can be reflective
with my own
thoughts and be in
the present”

Results

- Participants became interested in alternative spirituality in early teen years
- Participants had not felt fulfilled with the religion they grew up in
- Participants found alternative spiritual practices when in distressing situations
- Participants used spiritual practices as a way to better themselves and regulate mental processes

Discussion

- Findings connect with previous research in many aspects
(Russo-Netzer & Mayseless, 2016) (Aupers & Houtman, 2006)
- Provided examples of specific introductory moments in people's spiritual journeys
- Possible limitations with demographics of participants
- People turn to alternative spirituality when they are looking for a sense of guidance or comfort that they have not experienced in organized religions
- Implications; spiritual practices can be helpful as a tool for growth and regulation

References

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