A MIXED METHOD EXPLORATION OF UNUSUAL SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IMMIGRATED FROM AN INDIAN CULTURE TO THE UNITED STATES

by

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I certify that I have read and approved the content and presentation of this dissertation:

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Abstract

A Mixed Method Exploration of Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences of Women Immigrated From an Indian Culture to the United States

by

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Mixed method under feminist ideology explored the Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences (USRE) of 30 adult women immigrants, ages 24-93 (average 47), in the Bay Area of California, from an Indian culture, shifting in focus from the phenomenon of Spontaneous Spirit Possession (SSP). Narratives were analyzed by grounded theory, psychological test scores were correlated, and the data triangulated by the Classification and Regression Tree (CART). Seven themes emerged from the narratives from which 3 phenomena, Connection with the Divine, Ritual, and Ambivalence formed the backbone of a theory. Twenty (65%) women reported USRE, 9 of which were conceptualized as SSP-like due to its defining feature of trance. Results suggested that USRE had religious roots, correlating with religiosity, r(28) = .40, p < .05—only religious women, with high conventional spirituality scores, reported USRE. USRE could also be associated with trauma—83-100% of women who reported USRE also reported having experienced trauma and all reports of USRE were associated with low stress-related spirituality. Theme “Transformation” suggested that women first turned to religion or spirituality, habitually or when traumatized, and the practice triggered USRE; trauma was not implicated as a direct trigger. A healing role for USRE was thus, proposed. Data integration gave 3 unexpected results: (a) level of education primarily divided the women—less-educated women, all of who had USRE, had very low stress and dissociation, and more-educated women had very high dissociation in cases of reported USRE; (b) less-educated, religious women grouped with more-
educated, nonreligious women who meditated and did social work; and (c) more-educated women who were ambivalent in their religious views had high sociostress and concomitant weak or no USRE. A new typology of USRE dependant on cultural factors and vis-à-vis the variables studied herein would be of clinical benefit in understanding the subjectivity of such women immigrants.
Dedication

In memory of my parents

and for my daughter

Ye bhajanti tu mām bhaktyā
mayi te teṣu cāpy aham
(God Krishna to Prince Arjuna, Bhagavad Gītā, 9.29)

Those who worship me with devotion,
They are in me, and I in them.
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magical insight for, and in life around, this project for 8 years; I am proud to call you friend.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Those who witnessed the possessions spoke about the erratic and violent actions of those possessed. The women’s voices would change and they would sob, laugh, and shriek. --Mary Keller (2002, p. 1)

This study was intended to explore the phenomenon of spontaneous spirit possession (SSP), distinguished from ritualized spirit possession by its spontaneity where spirits are not invited. Both are ubiquitous phenomena found in all cultures since recorded history, and some of their introductory aspects apply to both; their differentiation is integral to this study. Literature on SSP helped understand an alternate but mother phenomenon that actually emerged from the data namely, Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences (USRE), and was tailored to USRE as the chapters and study evolved.

From the Greek oracles at Delphi to present-day in some segments of the US and certainly all indigenous cultures, SSP’s dramatic manifestation and defiance of daily so-called normality has compellingly interested researchers for a century. The result has been a body of classic studies that are seminal in a variety of aspects, including works by Bourguignon (1976), Cohen (2008), Kakar (1982), Keller (2002), Lewis (1971/1989), McDaniel (1989), Nuckolls (1997a, 1997b), Obeyesekere (1971/1981), Oesterreich (1921/1966) and Seligman (2005). In this phenomenon, one or more spirits of ancestors or deities take over the body and mind of the individual, resulting in a trance state that most scholars of the phenomenon claim is the defining feature of spirit possession (Coons, 1993; Keller, 2002; Lewis, 1971/1989; Ram, 2001).

Descriptions of spirit possession are found in all major and primal religions, and this religious foundation, plus an a priori belief in spirits by the group of adherents, places spirit possession in the realm of transpersonal phenomena definitive by its exceptionality from daily life experiences (Grof & Grof, 1989; White, 1993). Further, trance is an altered state of consciousness that is implicated in spiritual transformation (Albert, 2004; Tart, 1972). Research has linked spirituality
with well-being, but few have explored spirituality’s healing process toward well-being (Hefner & Koss-Chioino, 2006).

Distinguishing Spirit Possession

Schmidt and Huskinson’s (2010) recent statement that spirit possession has eluded definition is reinforced by the broad discrepancy between Carpanzano’s (2005) definition in the Encyclopedia of Religion that excludes the element of trance and anthropological and theological depictions of religion that recognize trance as its defining feature. An important aspect of the difference between Western depictions of spirit possession and what spirit possession means to the cultural milieu within which it occurs is pathology versus union with a divine figure such as a god, deity, or saint (herein called the Divine or Divinity in certain instances)—the former properly being the realm of psychiatry and psychology and the latter being a state recognized by scholars of culture and religion. Whereas in primitive cultures the worship is to, and union is with, nature spirits (Geertz, 1973), religious practice for the purpose of union with the Divine is prominent in Indian religious texts (Harvey, 2002). However, unlike in the Tibetan medical system in which all illnesses have a cosmic attribute, in the Indian Ayurvedic medical system, SSP is considered a mental illness when it is dystonic and troublesome. In that case, family or priests consider it as possession by a malevolent spirit and necessitating exorcism. Kakar (1982) calls this dichotomy “an uneasy meeting between medical and priestly concerns” (p. 248).

Spirit possession is an outcome of religious practice for purely devotional reasons, undertaken when union or connection with the Divine is sought; it is a “possession by the gods” (Kakar, 1982, p. 248). Religion is also an avenue for obtaining comfort, in which undertaking there can be an outcome of Divine union, or spirit possession, that is healing. On the other hand, SSP, as the name implies, occurs spontaneously, and the literature largely considers that
phenomenon to be a result of oppressive etiology (Keller, 2002; Seligman, 2005). In either case, the present study considers trance as the prominent characteristic of all spirit possession states.

**Significance of the Study: Feminist and Clinical Advocacy**

The ample research on spirit possession lacks an exploration of the presence of SSP for women immigrants to the US from Indian cultures, namely, Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Fiji. The present study builds upon only two previous studies of spirit possession namely, in women who immigrated to the US from Vietnam (Fjelstad, 1995) and Nigeria (Ezeobele, 2008). As a woman born and raised in India, I consider the genesis of the present study to be grounded in my overall curiosity about SSP, at both subjective and objective levels, within the US where I have lived as an adult. Considering SSP’s etiological dichotomy in the literature between psychopathology and religious and cultural expression, the present study included the psychological correlates of spirit possession. With the literature showing a preponderance of SSP in oppressed women, exploring it subjectively, as a healing phenomenon, also necessarily presumes an a priori traumatic etiology.

The opening quote shows three important aspects of SSP: (a) Women are overrepresented in SSP (Gellner, 1994; Keller, 2002); (b) SSP is reported only by persons other than the one possessed (the person possessed is in a trance and claims no memory of the event), in a manner similar to that found in descriptions of pathologic dissociation after trauma; and (c) the nature of SSP is dramatic and embodied, leading to its being often labeled as *hysteria* (interestingly, in Greek, a derivation of *uterus*, indicating that it is essentially seen as a female phenomenon) or psychosis (Al Sughayir, 2005). These features compel a feminist study because feminism advocates for women and attempts to normalize rather than pathologize women’s subjectivity.
This paper may reinforce the research that SSP is at the same time an expression of oppressed women’s suffering and an avenue for their healing within the safety of their own culture’s and religion’s sanction (Govindama, 2006; Obesekere, 1971/1981; Ram, 2001). The problematic aspect that then needs to be addressed is its acceptance within mainstream American culture. Hence the question is, as narrowed for my research: How indeed do women immigrants from India cope in a new culture? Those women who are accustomed to becoming possessed by spirit to cope with trauma, upon emigration to this country, would have to deal with an alien culture that could pathologize this phenomenon. Transpersonally speaking, the question became one of whether or not a woman experiences a spiritual transformation during, due to, or after the manifestation, in which case, the ensuing wellbeing of the woman could alter a clinician’s perspective from which are viewed the symptoms of SSP. The following discussion focuses on this problematic aspect of SSP as a subject of modern discourse.

The esoteric nature of SSP and its prevalence in India among women of rural or urban lower socio-economic status has made it difficult for researchers to study it from what feminism calls an insider status (Reinharz, 1992). The focus in the literature has been on a theorizing about the behavior of the possessed woman and the culture’s beliefs, either in anthropological and ethnographic terms or using theoretical analyses and explorations of women’s subjectivity to such phenomena that have been done from case studies. In contrast, there are several current studies of SSP that explore its relationship with modern-day human and human-rights questions such as power relations and gender inequality. These bring SSP out of the anachronistic realm and place it into the world of current relevance and possible utility (Gellner, 1994; Joshi, 2004; Keller, 2002). This form of research shows that, of the two basic forms of spirit possession, spontaneous and initiated, women report spontaneous possession as occurring without warning
or invitation and often as unwelcomed by the women. Even women’s initiated spirit possession has underpinnings of a patriarchal-dictated cultural practice, often coerced, where the women feel an obligation to their family and community to allow spirit possession because spirit possession has the implied communal role of conflict resolution (Kakar, 1982; Keller, 2002; Nuckolls, 1997a, 1997b; Obeyesekere, 1971/1981); a study of the women in these sociocultural situations revealed oppressive circumstances or traumatic events that, as mentioned, researchers have implicated as triggers of the women’s openness to SSP (Akhtar, 1988; Gingrich, 2005; Keller, 2002; Majumdar, 1996; Moore, 1993; Ram, 2001). From this perspective, it is understandable that some disciplines find its features similar to certain forms of mental illness, such as psychosis, hysteria, somatic disorders, and dissociation. For SSP to be professionally accepted if it is proposed subjectively as a religious and healing phenomenon, a comparative objective study is necessary. The following section discusses what we could expect of such subjectivity, given that it involves trance.

*Dissociation and Trance Defined*

Literature on spirit possession uses the words *dissociation* and *trance* synonymously, although they are distinct concepts in the broader psychiatric and psychological literature. For example, amnesia and fugue, which are categorized as dissociative disorders in the fourth edition of the *American Psychiatric Association’s* (2000) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV)*, do not necessarily involve trance, which is an altered state of consciousness and not a term used in the *DSM-IV*. However, the term, concept, and subjectivity of trance are widely used in transpersonal, hypnotic, and paranormal literature without reference to any particular cultural context. In a cultural and religious context, spirit possession is related to the religion or cosmology of that specific culture, as well as how that particular manifestation is subsequently
interpreted by that cultural milieu. In such a case, spirit possession is an avenue along which a
culture can make meaning of its people’s daily existence and problems (Nuckolls, 1981).

Research shows that many dissociative disorders have a traumatic etiology (Cheng,
Mallinckrodt, Soet, & Sevig, 2010; Giesbrecht & Merckelbach, 2009; Löffler-Stastka,
Szerencsics, & Blüml, 2009; Marlatt & Kristeller, 2005; Ross, 1989). Their clients’ dissociation
may also have a religious or spiritual basis dependent upon the person’s worldview, but it
remains true that such dissociative disorders do not necessarily involve possession by spirits. The
spectrum of dissociation encompasses a range of conditions from the pathological to benign
experience of it as a protection against painful memories or stress (Loewenthal, 2007; Van der
Kolk, Pelcovitz, & Roth, 1996; Van Duijl, Cardena, & De Jong, 2005). Nuanced differences
between the DSM-IV categories of dissociative disorders, multiple personality disorder, and
depersonalization, all of which terms have also often been used to label spirit possession, are not
recognized by possession cultures. Considering the similarities between Western definitions of
dissociation and trance as conceptualized in spirit possession cultures, the present research may
expose the sensitive distinction between pathological dissociation and psychosis as opposed to
SSP as a religious and cultural manifestation. This would reinforce the concept that dissociative
states can serve a positive psychological function for people whose culture values nonordinary
experiences that cause mental states similar to the dissociation that mainstream psychology
pathologizes.

**Do Spirits Exist?**

This research assumes the esoteric notion that spirits exist. What then, is their power, and
how are the women they possess empowered to heal? There is a tension between the implication
that those who become spontaneously possessed by spirit are victims who are helpless in
oppressive circumstances as opposed to Keller’s (2002) depiction of the empowering aspect of the agency of possessed women. Keller resolves this tension by addressing the largely overlooked existence and role of the spirits themselves as subjective entities. Postmodern argument (which has transformed the problematic notion of modernism’s identity formation and unity into a glorification of difference) can be deconstructed by integrating women’s different experience, that of SSP, within religious context, wherein the agencies of both the possessed women and the spirits are in a mutually beneficial relationship. Of course, it is within this relationship that women function externally in their daily mundane yet oppressive or traumatized lives as healers or as being revered by their culture. This relationship is also the chief way in which they cope interpsychically, that is, in an arena in which they additionally deal with their gender status and the impact—a burden, if you will—of being surprisingly chosen by the spirits.

Postmodern philosophy originating from Foucault (1969) suggests a social constructivist lens through which everything we perceive and how we interpret it and behave is influenced by our gender and culture (Keller, 2002; Mertens, 2005). Contemporarily, spontaneously spirit-possessed women can be considered to create their own identity within which allowing a spirit to embrace them is a personal choice. Ritualized spirit possession is dominated by men in India and, thus, considering SSP rather as a choice unconsciously shifts the dynamics within gender inequality and power relation (see Keller, 2002; Seligman, 2005). This deconstruction of spirit possession as being a personal choice is paradoxical—when SSP occurs under the protection of their culture’s beliefs, manifesting SSP may be obligatory and may not be a true choice. Herein lies an empowering embrace of both religious belief and the unconscious motivation to heal, that is, until one questions the problematic notion that such healing also needs to be from the double-
bind cultural norms that have distorted the egalitarian aspects of the very religion that prescribes spirit possession.

With awareness and education, women who experience unusual manifestations such as SSP can re-move themselves from the role of being helpless in the spontaneity of the spirit invading their bodies and instead give meaning to a creative transformation of their personal identity from a powerless woman prior to being possessed by spirit into the role of a revered and spiritual community healer who is in touch with the supernatural, an asset valued in her culture (Courtney, 2008; Keller, 2002; Ram, 2001). In this process, the status of the spirits is reinforced within the cultural milieu and continues the established social norms of interdependency that are essential in community-oriented cultures (Kakar, 1982; Roland, 1989). SSP then has a dual transformative potential of being transpersonal and healing for the women, as well as healing of communal conflict. It is the understanding of this healing capacity that can empower future acceptance of SSP in the west and provide for the mental health of these women in their new identity as a conduit between their community and the realm of spirits. This consideration adds a new dimension to the types of spiritual transformations that have been proposed by transpersonal theorists (Albert, 2004; Hefner & Koss-Chioino, 2006; Seligman, 2005).

For an immigrant woman, identity transformation reveals another tension, between the lived experience of the individual and her religious and cultural obligation. The resolution of this tension also lies in the ability of the community to integrate and accept the woman’s new role of embracing spirit possession, if she so chooses for personal reasons. Feminist theory specifies a woman’s using her own voice as the vehicle for normalizing her experiences rather than being culturally normalized by accepting externally judged concepts of either pathology or spirit possession as it is negatively viewed by nonbelievers. Ironically, tension between the sometimes
feminist reduction of spirit possession to antifeminist ideology and the psychiatric labeling of it as psychopathology can be alleviated only by validating subjectivity as the true measure of an adapting process chosen perhaps because transpersonal transformation (or SSP) is the only method of choice for these women available within their culture. Feminist supporters could instead understand SSP as one valid process of self-empowerment, and psychiatry could value the phenomenon as benefiting mental health because it is valued by the women and their culture as a healing and transformative process. To consider such a positive outcome of SSP necessitates a theoretical weaving of subjectivity and religious expression with objective test results.

**Overview of the Method**

The concepts delineated in this introduction were studied well herein by means of mixed methodology (Mertens, 2005; Reinharz, 1992; Schatz, 2003). Qualitative and quantitative designs provided cross-validation and, with added triangulation, results were shown to benefit the study of exceptional spiritual experiences (Kohls, Hack, & Walach, 2008). Two features of SSP, namely, the esoteric nature of spirit possession and the literature-based stigma attached to what is often construed as mental illness, justified a strong qualitative aspect to the research from a solidly feminist theoretical stance. Additionally, quantitative psychological scales for dissociation, perceived stress, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), spirituality, exceptional experiences, and a biopsychosociospiritual scale that also measures functionality helped to evaluate the psychological correlates of the participants’ experiences.

The recruitment of participants was based upon three criteria: (a) age over 18 years, (b) living in the Bay Area of the US, and (c) born and raised in an Indian-culture country. The research followed these steps: (a) women were recruited in a variety of public events and via the internet; (b) open-ended interviews were conducted, and the discussion of spirit possession and
SSP was encouraged, because the women had not experienced this phenomenon themselves—and, in lieu of directly narrating possession, they narrated their Unusual Religious and Spiritual Experiences (URSE); (c) for the quantitative part, the women answered the questions on the six psychological tests; (d) per grounded theory, iterative questioning ensued with appropriate participants who would add to the analysis that was emerging from the initial narratives; (e) the qualitative and quantitative data were triangulated by the statistical method Categorical and Regression Tree (CART); and finally, (f) the data analysis was discussed in the conclusion.

**Concluding Highlights**

Keller’s (2002) quote (see below) emphasizing her theoretical deconstruction of SSP into modern utility for women’s wellbeing while simultaneously honoring the esoteric religious aspect of the power of gods and deities, was the foundation for this study; it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss *instrumental agency* as conceptualized by Keller (2002):

> I propose the concept of instrumental agency as a corrective framework for interpreting the agency of possessed bodies, which are not conscious agents but instead are functioning as instrumental agencies for the ancestors, deities, or spirits that possess them. . . . rethinking the relationship of religious bodies to power, and finally approaching the possessions without erasing the agency of the ancestors, deities, or spirits (p. 22)

This introduction gave an overview of the vast topic of spirit possession from the extant literature as it relates to women of Indian cultural origin. Changes in cultural setting require for an immigrant woman a refocus on SSP that considers both local and imported cultures. Whether in India or the US, the difficulties women face include any trauma and/or acculturation stress experienced in the new country, and, if they experience trauma by their liaison with spirit, that has to be understood as it manifests under prevailing patriarchal, cultural, and psychiatric norms. The reframing of identity and the formation of a hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994) to resolve these difficulties involves viewing the centuries-old understandings of SSP with a different lens. In all,
the present study attempted to honor both this deconstruction of anthropological accounts of SSP and the religious beliefs involved in spirit possession as secondary to the overriding consideration for the women’s views. The following literature review chapter expounds on these features and on some additional nuances of SSP.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

What do you mean, “Possession by Spirits”!

Definitions, Semantics, Typology

“When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less,” said Humpty Dumpty (Carroll, n.d., p. 214). Spirit possession, to a spirit possession culture and believers, means exactly that a spirit possesses a person. Although, when only rare cases of SSP were found during recruiting and the focus phenomenon from the data became the women’s Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences (USRE), the study was proposed with literature on SSP; the retention of SSP in this chapter was effective for USRE rather than creating a new research study, as ongoing writing will reveal.

Spontaneous Spirit Possession (SSP) differentiates from ritualized spirit possession. Although found in every culture and religion since time immemorial, any spirit possession as a phenomenon defies definition due to its highly specific cultural contextuality. However, at a primary and behavioral level, people who believe in this phenomenon say that a spirit of a deity or deceased relative enters the mind and body of a person who then acts like the spirit. Non-invested observers describe the behavior of the person as hysterical or erratic. In either event, the behavior of the person possessed is altered from her daily, normal behavior and is indeed reminiscent of hysteria or psychosis. Most experts on SSP claim that it is different from hysteria (Keller, 2002; Obeysekere, 1971/1981; Oesterreich, 1921/1966; Ram, 2001).

Impressive is that, besides behavior, there often is a change in voice of the person possessed to that claimed to be of the spirit—a woman possessed often talks in an angry male voice, demanding offerings. SSP is treated with awe and reverence and so the woman is given these demands. In mainstream psychology, such a change of voice is sometimes seen in a
diagnosis of pathologic multiple personality disorder. However, the outstanding feature and
supposed sin qua non of SSP is trance—the woman possessed has no memory for the event. It is
easy to see merely from this introduction was SSP has always been a compelling phenomenon to
study. The following literature review will reveal aspects of SSP that have been rarely studied or
aspects where no literature was found and which formed the bases of the research question.

**Subtypes.** A study of the literature revealed several types of spirit possession depending
on the process in which spirit enters the person, with unlimited subtypes based on subcultural
features, some of which are as follows: (a) Voluntarily initiated by ritual as in religious ecstasy,
to obtain Nonduality; or for dream travel, to prophesize, or for healing purposes as in shamanism;
(b) initiated by ritual by family or community coercion for various cultural reasons with
involuntary participation on the part of the person who gets possessed as a result of the ritual; (c)
SSP that is sudden, often surprising, and welcomed by the person possessed; (d) transformative,
and transformative when a first manifestation of SSP is subsequently habitually ritually initiated;
and (d) SSP that is unwelcomed by the person possessed and whose outcomes can be exorcism,
psychological distress, forced psychiatric care, and so on.

**Etiological definitions.** Hypothetical causes of SSP outstanding in the literature are (a) a
religious expression; (b) trauma, resulting in SSP, often suggested as a coping mechanism; and (c)
strength of the ego. As a corollary to Peoples and Parlee’s (1991) hypothesis that SSP is due to a
porous or flexible ego, Huskinson (2010) suggested the lack of a porous or flexible ego when a
woman is distressed due to her SSP. Huskinson used the ego’s strength to hypothetically
evaluate SSP—a strong ego meant a reason to change the evaluation of SSP from a diagnosis of
a potential mental disorder because the recipient has the capacity to endure it and especially if it
results in her transformation. For the recipient, a strong ego means spiritual wellbeing instead of a fear of the manifestation.

*A cooperative definition.* As previously noted, SSP’s defining feature of trance means that the manifestation is described by outside observers. In this respect, trance can be considered an outward quality that defines SSP only at a certain level of observed behavior. Keller (2002) questioned analysis of SSP based on behavior because that would involve the ego whereas, notwithstanding the strength of the ego, persons possessed claim that their will (ego) has been taken over by spirit. Any definition of SSP is necessarily a contradiction because a woman who is spirit possessed and thus definitively in a trance state “remembers” only after the event that she cannot remember. Thus, current definitions of SSP are based on both, the narration of the individual possessed and the observations of those witnessing the SSP; both agree that the speech, altered voice, and actions of the possessed individual are attributable to the spirit. Keller seminally introduced the entity of the spirit into this equation, giving it a cooperative role and solidifying the body of work, especially Indian religious texts, in which SSP has been given a theological stand.

*Definitions of SSP are necessarily culturally contextual.* Attempts to remove SSP’s esoteric nature by giving it objective reasons are confounded by its culturally contextual nature. Explaining the nature or epistemology of a particular SSP is based on understanding the worldview of the particular subculture, or village, in which it occurs. Worldviews explaining who is the possessing spirit and why it possesses a particular woman vary considerably. However, an a priori belief in spirits is necessarily a part of its definition (Lewis 1971/1989) and Lewis used this criterion to place spirit possession in the esoteric realm of religion.
Western and indigenous classic works on spirit possession starting from 100 years ago reveal the influence of psychological theories that prevailed at that time in history as scholars attempted to understand and explain the phenomenon. Although based on religious figures and myth, because possession stories have a socioculturally contextual background, they cannot be generalized to other times in history. Accordingly, the seminal studies have been anthropological and ethnographic, detailing the description of the phenomenon within specific cultures or by case studies (Bourguignon, 1976; Lewis, 1971/1989; Obeyesekere, 1971/1981; Oesterreich, 1921/1966). Thence, SSP’s defining feature of trance is described as possession in the subculture in which it occurs, dissociation in psychiatric terms, or an Altered State of Consciousness (ASC) in transpersonal psychology—Tart (1972) first coined the term ASC as an integral aspect of the definition of transpersonal mind states.

Similarly, different schools of study have made SSP their own based on the sole criterion of trance, as follows: Scholarly scientific works on spirit possession have attributed to SSP the diagnoses of multiple personality disorder, pathologic dissociation, or psychosis; anthropological and ethnographic studies have focused on spirit possession with alternate terminologies of trance possession or even simply trance (Coons, 1993), again emphasizing the unusual behavioral aspect of spirit possession; and psychological studies have justified SSP with a (communal and familial) conflict etiology and conflict resolution role (Obeyesekere, 1971/1981). Such handling of SSP dilutes its spiritual or religious background and role suggested by other authors mentioned, such as Keller (2002) and Ram (2001). Further, although anthropological and ethnographic studies do give the cosmological context in their descriptive reports of SSP, and transpersonal studies are phenomenological, less of the present research formats cross-validate the subjectivity of women who manifest SSP against objective tests.
Who Manifests SSP?

For several years, SSP in India has been shown to largely occur in rural, uneducated, young women (Teja, Khanna, & Subrahmanyan, 1970). In empirical studies, Varma, Srivastava, and Sahay, (1970) and Rao, Young, and Rāgurām (2007) also showed a correlation between the lack of formal education and SSP in Indian patients; patients who are “more Westernized present a balance of symptoms that is more psychological” (Rao, Young, & Rāgurām, 2007, p.354). These authors implicated a secondary gain in SSP where somatization, the acceptable form of expressing distress in India, for example, conceals the fear of stigma that the person woman feels.

The problematic of trance. In an overlap of terms, Coons (1993), in his discussion of possession cults, focused on trance as an ASC. However, overlapping of terminology based on only one feature, trance, is problematic because, at a broad level, trance is also a defining feature in spiritual ecstasy, in the trance feature of rituals of male priests in India, and in shamanism. In India, SSP is differentiated from ritualized spirit possession in terms of gender, power, and status; SSP is predominant in oppressed women and ritualized spirit possession is dominated by men in power such as temple priests and is often likened to spiritual or religious ecstasy because their behavior is not akin to hysteria. Unlike religious ecstasy, SSP can be acceptable or not acceptable to any society, including India, and any ASC that is suspected of being psychopathologic or part of a psychiatric diagnosis is not acceptable. One factor that could well-judge an ASC and the difference between SSP and religious ecstasy is the initiation aspect which implies that there should be no personal distress in ritualized spirit possession unless the initiation ritual is coerced.

In India, trance is induced in a variety of religious rituals where it is a culturally accepted mind state (d’Aquili and Newberg, 1999; Hogue, 2003; McDaniel, 1989). The methods to induce
trance, as also in the western transpersonal milieu, include chanting (Kakar, 1982), drumming (Walsh, 1996), intense meditation (Kakar), and holotropic breathwork (Grof, Yensen, & Dryer, 1996). The use of drugs or herbal substances to induce ASC is also well-established in indigenous cultures, particularly in the initiation and reenactment of shamanism (Walsh, 1996). Illegal drugs and some prescription medications can produce ASC; some psychiatrists often term ASC as a psychosis unless the cause is known, such as drug-induced. However, even in possession cultures (Lewis, 1971/1989), when an ASC causes distress or confusion, or behavior contrary to cultural norms, it is considered abnormal, although it is critical to remember that, in possession cultures, behaviors affiliated with any spirit possession are culturally accepted.

Trance has always been a part of all cultures and its presence in SSP needs a feminist study to avoid both, its collapse with different form of ritualized possessions, which are more male-oriented, or its label of a female psychopathological diagnosis. However, the similarity of trance and dissociation and its sometimes interchangeable use in the literature does brings us to the semantics of western psychiatry and the question arises whether SSP is a psychiatric illness in a spiritual, religious, or cultural guise. This is addressed next.

The Paradox of Madness

“In ancient India, both physical and mental diseases were understood to come from outside the person, due to possession by a spirit or revenge by a ghost” (McDaniel, 1989, p. 11). As shown, possession states have been challenging to represent, define, or classify. One problem in providing clear-cut categories of understanding and definitions is because, when it is initiated in the service of ecstatic union with the divine the outcome can be either calm ecstasy or it can also cause, what McDaniel (1989) calls, madness of the saints. Naturally then, when a spirit
possession is additionally spontaneous, and occurs concurrent with unusual behaviors and change of voice, it has more chance of being placed in a psychiatric category.

_The Psychiatric Question: The Overlap of Religious Manifestations and Mental Illness_

Sered (1994) says that understanding SSP needs cultural prowess, not a label of psychosis.

The healing function of spirit possession should not be taken to mean that female-dominated religions are havens for maladjusted, neurotic, or psychotic women. . . . Overtly wild behavior is seen as a sign that the person is . . . insane, not possessed. Because a spirit must make sense to those whom it encounters, “successful negotiations of the possession context requires the [woman as well as observers] to have or develop considerable cultural awareness . . . .” (Boddy, 1989, p. 146).

In her book, _The Madness of the Saints_, McDaniel (1989) locates the union of human and divine within religion. Although religious ecstasy is often considered the epitome of religious practice, SSP is also a union with the supernatural. A culturally based taxonomy would show how the multilayered parameters and paradoxes of Indian culture have confused the outsider in where to place spirit possession. This is because although spirit possession can be classified based on cultural aspects or its spontaneity, according to the outsider, they are all the same based on one understandably common criterion of an ASC.

When a symptom or behavior is explained or occurs under the rubric of a secular culture espousing and espoused by the psychiatric realm, it has an acceptance in a definite worldview, that of the diagnostic manual, _DSM-IV_ (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). As such, early western observers described “Indian saints . . . through the medical, not the religious, model” (McDaniel, 1989, p. 16). In the struggle to define SSP, in what direction is it appropriate to shift it, toward its cultural and religious origin with trance as an aspired unity with the divine, or toward its secular, psychiatric description of unusual behaviors and dissociation?

In the _DSM-IV_ (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), dissociation is a symptom whose pathologic or extreme form is categorized under Dissociative Disorders. Unlike
daydreaming, which is a non-pathologic form of mild dissociation, dissociation as a disorder is conceptualized as “a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception” (p. 519). This sounds like SSP. No one DSM-IV category encompasses all aspects of any culturally manifested behavior and cognition of non-western societies, be it trance alone or the totality of spirit possession (Van Duijl, Cardena, De Jong, & Joop, 2005). The subcategories of dissociative disorders namely, Dissociative Fugue, Dissociative Identity Disorder, and Depersonalization Disorder are largely defined by dissociation and limit the manifestation or inclusion of SSP because somatization is also a large part of spirit possession (Seligman, 2005) and which does not appear as a criterion in Dissociative Disorders; somatization appears as a separate category of the DSM-IV namely, Somatoform Disorders. To place SSP within western psychiatric classification would mean its inclusion in two distinct categories.

Somatization needs to be defined in the context of SSP. The DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) categorizes Somatoform Disorder as recurring somatic or physical complaints described by the individual in “colorful, exaggerated terms” (Keller, 2002, p. 486) during the often-sought medical treatment. However, a specific physical disorder cannot be diagnosed and there is little medical relief. In the transpersonal literature, somatization is a general term used for bodily awareness, the manifestation of psychological distress in bodily expression, and implying a general mind-body connection. In discussing the concept of real and pseudoselves in the context of transformation, Daniels (2005) cautions not to diminish the relevance of somatic or physical manifestations by implying non-transcendence. This is because cultures where mind-body is not a dichotomy are more somatically inclined (Roland, 1989), as Seligman’s (2005) finding of vivid hypersomatization in spirit possession implies.
The *DSM-IV* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) has a new category of *Culture-Bound Syndromes* in an appendix insertion with a variety of culture specific syndromes. However, of the hundreds of culture specific forms of SSP, there are only two mentions of SSP that are the most widely known globally due to their indigenous diagnoses of illnesses. These are defined by their indigenous names, *dhat* in India and *zar* in many Arab cultures, both spontaneously manifested, and emphasize the oddity of each of these cultures rather than placing the phenomenon in a specific subcategory under the category of SSP and which would reveal the varied nature of SSP. Whereas the inclusions in the current *DSM-IV* category may benefit a limited understanding of these two cultures and these particular forms of SSP, the first problem about this format is that it does not lend to the understanding of any other aspect of SSP (Van Duijl, Cardena, De Jong, & Joop, 2005) such as, its potential healing capacity or SSP as a religious phenomenon, two main aspects of SSP that are the basis of the present study and that this chapter repeatedly discusses. Second, *dhat* and *zar* are chosen for their pathology, as specified; they are considered abnormal forms of spirit possession even in their own cultures where they are subject to exorcism. Forms of SSP acceptable to a culture and welcomed by the individual are not included in the *DSM-IV* in a positive or comparative inclusion to enable clinicians to place all nature of expressions in perspective. Third, the term *Culture-Bound Syndromes* is a problematic terminology in defining both the phenomenon and its culture because it implicitly marginalizes a culture yet (Ranganathan & Bhattacharya, 2007), it is still used in scholarly circles (Somer, 2006).

To conceptualize the terminology of SSP in a salient manner or for clinical use, the context of either western or any indigenous culture need not be misunderstood; its religious history could be kept alive and not conflated with psychiatric disorders. Signs of SSP suspected
within the latter can be assessed subjectively, and signs of psychopathology within SSP can be studied objectively. The following studies showed that the subjectivity of women who manifest SSP is complex and also that the questioning of the women for a culturally accepted phenomenon could reveal the impact of modernity.

*DSM-IV*’s (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) psychiatric description of dissociation as the act of separation which, in psychological terms, is the subjectivity of a separation between mind, emotions, body, and one’s surroundings with a concomitant loss in memory for the event (Gingrich, 2005; Loewenthal, 2007; Van der Kolk, Pelcovitz, & Roth, 1996) is also revealed in the context of SSP. For example, an Afro-Brazilian possessed woman said: “I don’t know where my spirit goes. I only know that I switch off. I don’t remain in me” (Cohen, 2008, p. 108). Similarly, another woman said, “possession for me is a state of unconsciousness . . . in which we are not answerable for our actions, our bodily movements . . . we don’t have control of our bodies anymore. It’s the total loss of being” (Cohen & Barrett, 2008, p. 30).

These statements cannot be used to analyze SSP literally or psychiatrically without taking the specific subcultural context into consideration because literal analyses are based purely on the assumption of a global commonality of trance (in any manifestation or diagnosis)—yet, as specified previously, each SSP story is characteristic of the worldview of the culture in which it manifests. At the same time, if SSP occurs outside its cultural setting, an understanding of the impact of globalization and western idioms for SSP would be astute because that is how modernized women begin to describe their SSP. Although both women’s quotes above show the parameters of the definition of SSP, this is still not sufficient for a knowledge of the function of this phenomenon which changes historically (Spiegel, 1994). I will continue on to show the
nature of the definition of SSP as changing with modernity even within the parameters that it
defines. First, a brief history of the Indian medical system gives a clue to its historically shifting
nature.

*Indian Medicine Informs Ritual Ecstasy*

The belief, in ancient India, that all forms of illness were spirit possessions gave rise to
the Indian medical system of Āuyurveda (āyus-life; veda-knowledge). This is in contrast to the
Tibetan belief system where no nature of spirit possession is considered pathological. In
Āyurveda, there are three kinds of human symptoms/behavior:

1. Biological or nija, cured by herbs and medicines.
2. Psychological or mānasika (mental). These are due to “negative emotion, mental strain,
and an imbalance of gunas [human qualities],” and are cured by yoga and “moral action”
(McDaniel, 1989, p. 11)
3. Spiritual or āgantu, caused by “outside invasion and includes gods and ghost
possession, which is cured by sacrifice or exorcism.” McDaniel (1989) calls this “exogenous
madness” (p. 11). Although descriptions of madness in the Āyurveda compare to western
psychiatric criteria of psychotic thinking and behavior, the confusion in distinguishing between
different forms of SSP and madness is evident, even in the Indian lay-culture. McDaniel explains:

   Many psychiatric patients in India do not fit clearly into the cultural models of the
possessed or enchanted person; neither do they fit clearly into the Āyurveda medical
model. Rather, they show bits and pieces of various syndromes. . . . While Ayurvedic
psychology emphasizes individual responsibility, folk psychology speaks of madness due
to illness and the action of others . . . (pp. 15-16)

*Gendered Definitions of Spontaneous Versus Ritualized Ecstasy*

As discussed, an a priori belief in spirits is not sufficient in demarcating between
madness, religious ecstasy, and SSP and needs its cultural and historical aspects. Yet, as shown,
the mix and overlap of cultural idioms and syndromes can be confounding where understanding
the practice of inducing religious ecstasy by ritual is inherent to the understanding of SSP for, although seemingly under a different set of lay assumptions, both are a union with a spirit. Going further, ritualized spirit possession, often called ritual ecstasy, is prized, and it is practiced primarily by male priests, who are also upper class. However, in a fascinating exposé of class intermingling in and an interchange of social status by ritual ecstasy, Côté (2008) said:

Historically . . . the lower castes Sipis were more often adepts of spirit possession than any other caste and that their “profession” was even more prestigious than the sacerdotal and priesthood function inherent to the Brahmans [highest caste] . . . . The Brahmins had no choice but to adapt to local folk religion to make sure they get the respect from the so-called “tribals” and to set their authority . . . . This challenges the process of sanskritization . . . and reflects the social dynamics inherent to the ritual processes as well as in the making of (Gaddi) cultural identity. (p. 7)

Côté placed the culture of spirit possession in perspective as pre-Hinduism and pre-Brahmanism. For the sake of the present research, his exposé brings into focus the myth of the Brahmin-lower caste binary and augments the intricacies of the religious ecstasy-SSP binary, revealing the “tension between spontaneous and ritual forms of ecstasy” (McDaniel, 1989, p. 17). However, perhaps SSP is an initiation in its own right—it has been shown to have a mother-daughter transmission element that could involve modeling and internalization (Ram, 2001). Yet, in SSP’s problematic of being confused with madness, the tolerance for madness as a realm of the saints and the awe for SSP can be understood within the same time immemorial Indian practice of spirit possession. Under this premise, madness can be theoretically conflated with SSP although the tension between them can decrease when SSP is understood as a form of religious ecstasy or ritualized spirit possession.

The marriage of the supernatural and the corporeal as in all spirit possession is symbolic of the existence of spirit and the mundane elements of life. Within SSP, the mundane person has desires, not only for the divine but of the body (Courtney, 2008; Nuckolls, 1997a, 1997b; Obeyesekere, 1971). In other words, McDaniel’s (1989) tension above has been translated by
feminist authors (Courtney, 2008; Keller, 2002; Ram, 2001) to mean that the corporeal desire implicit in cases of SSP is projected onto divine union in a culture where women are surrounded by both religious monism and female oppression and where her value is measured by her marital status. This explanation is supported by the upcoming case analysis by Obeyesekere.

The spontaneity of a spirit entering a woman is revered in India specifically because it occurs without premeditated ritual. This is ironic considering that the literature says its etiology is oppression or trauma, usually by the same culture because, surely, the gods must be pleased with this woman to enter her even without her trying. But this is only insofar as her madness is temporary, as in the upcoming case of goddess Kāli possessing Durgā to give her sexual Sākti after her husband’s early death (Courtney, 2008). The decision to exorcise the spirit even when a woman can allow the spirit to leave her body (with a concomitant end in “madness” or “mad behavior”) can be coerced by any quarter—family, in-laws, an irate husband, or the possessed woman herself (Kakar, 1982)—and often a spirit is said to leave the woman once she is taken into treatment. Deconstructing this in psychodynamic terms (Kakar, 1982; Obeyesekere, 1971/1981), the coercion by family would be their projection of unconscious guilt for mistreating the woman.

The quote below implies that two gendered aspects of Indian culture enable a distinction in how SSP is viewed or accepted even within that culture namely, interdependency and ritual.

[Ritualistic] ecstasy is similar among different practitioners, who take identical paths to an identical goal. There is no room for madness here—it would be a failure of discipline . . . However, spontaneous ecstasy [SSP] is individual, different for different people. Ritual and spontaneous states tend to oppose each other, but they may meet in the middle in two ways . . . the ritual seeking of spontaneous love—bhakti yoga . . . The other approach is divine madness—divyannadā . . . In bhakti yoga . . . ritual is the trigger; in divine madness, ritual is the expression of emotion. In the former, ritual leads to spontaneity; in the latter, spontaneity leads to ritual. (McDaniel, 1989, p. 19-20)
Is any potential exhibition of independence (such as voicing oppression to translate SSP as psychological distress) by these women unconsciously subverted by societal norms by diverting to SSP a benign religious and communal or familial conflict-solving role? Such limitation on SSP can be either from the outside (community and family) or even from within the women’s psyche. In cases where SSP is accepted, does any subsequent ritual exonerate the madness? I am proposing that the ensuing ritual is, in fact, the exhibition or unusual behavior of SSP, giving SSP both an acceptance and a simultaneous title of *madness*. In other words, the literature implied that the spontaneity of the spirit overshadows the independence of the woman; is the spirit accepted and the woman’s madness merely tolerated because/when it is due to the spirit? Courtney’s (2008) upcoming case study validates this explanation. SSP can then be understood as the transformation of personal pain into a religiously and culturally accepted ritual of acting mad with spirit which Keller (2002) implied is a cooperation between the woman and the spirit.

Unfortunately, this hypothesis enables a psychiatric translation, that of accepting madness as long as it is attached with a cultural belief, in this case a belief in spirits. The delicate balancing of validating SSP in its own right as a religious phenomenon, no questions asked, against its feminist perspective of being an empowering, healing phenomenon can be given a psychological explanation of SSP being a defense mechanism. In combining SSP as a defense mechanism and as a creative, personal appropriation, Courtney (2008) reported:

> [In the case of poor, older women having the prescribed and proscribed four qualities of weakness, madness, strength, and strictness or severity]: Extant in the realm of the social, they [the qualities] cannot be obviated, but they can offer women a repertoire for coping—or, conversely, not much of a chance for coping—with the specific and delimiting cultural context of being a marginal woman in Varanasi [India]. In this manner, I show also how women there live beyond mere arrival at old age in various unique and creative ways, but also in ways that can be described only as miserable (pp. 76-77).

Among Courtney’s group of women was Durgā, possessed by Kāli, first when she was 45 years old—the standards of old age include widowhood. Kāli, the goddess of sexual energy, enabled
Durgā to obtain a young lover and, because of the power of the goddess, the community turned its head from Durgā’s transgression—and madness—as a manifestation of Kāli’s behavior.

Finally, although both ritualized versus spontaneous spirit possession occur under dynamics based on the interactions of specific sociocultural, psychological, and religious or cosmological forces, the demarcation between spontaneous and initiated spirit possession is not definitive; once initiated, the woman can subsequently get spontaneously possessed, or, once spontaneously possessed, she can learn to initiate the spirit to enter her body and psyche. However, Lewis’ (1971/1989) surveys showed that these divisions are gender based—more women get spontaneously possessed and more men get initiated into shamanism. He presented evidence for a power differential in this distinction—central cults are dominated by powerful male shamans who initiate trance states, and women form peripheral or protest cults and habitually get spontaneously possessed.

*Trauma: A Universal Etiology of Mental Illness (Madness) and SSP?*

The literature shows that trauma triggers SSP, and this is the crux of the present study’s hypothesis. As emphasized, SSP is culturally and also historically specific. Thus, from a methodological standpoint and notwithstanding Cohen’s (2008) attempts, as will be shown, at universalizing the process of SSP, its objective studies can only augment the necessary subjective accounts.

The ethnographic or qualitative studies on SSP that revealed a traumatic or oppressive etiology are vast (Bourguignon, 2004; Dube, 2006; Gingrich, 2005; Ram, 2001; Seligman, 2005; Stoller, 1994; Van Duijl, Cardena, De Jong, & Joop, 2005). Undoubtedly, the nature of the trauma varies historically. For example, intergenerational transmission of memories of colonial occupation causes posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the characteristic somatization
(Stoller, 1994) that Stoller attaches to SSP manifestation. Another traumatic aspect of SSP, chronic stress as triggering SSP in Indian women was shown by Dube (2006) and Ram (2001). Freed and Freed (1990a, 1990b) furthered this and said that SSP is a response to culture-specific domestic trauma attributable to Indian patriarchal practices of arranged marriage, abuse, and domination by in-law family members, blaming infertility on the woman, and dowry shortages.

One anecdotal line of evidence is that SSP occurs in rural or the lower classes of urban society in India where cultural norms have not kept pace with the globalization of certain values on human rights. As opposed to the socioeconomic poverty of Afro-Brazilian urban shamans who are in abject poverty and marginalized and whose spirit possession is exhibitionism to gain money (Seligman, 2005), rural Indians live in their own milieu in a manner of accustomed communal harmony where religion and cultural mores are the driving forces behind SSP. Here, SSP is the scapegoat for communal conflict resolution (Kakar, 1982). Overall, the slew of contemporary empirical studies on the socioeconomic effects on individuals show that both SSP and initiation of spirit possession are sought by both genders but only when oppressed or traumatized. Then, SSP is suggested by researchers to be a culturally sanctioned manner of coping (Akhtar, 1988; Bourguignon, 2004; Gingrich, 2005; Joshi, 2004; Keller, 2002; Majumdar, 1996; Moore, 1993; Ram, 2001; Seligman, 2005; Wagner, Duveen, Themal, & Verma, 1999).

The following research implies that specifically, sexual oppression and fertility issues of women in India trigger SSP; this has not been often addressed as a research problem:

The language of possession, and more generally, the language of the particular layer of religious experience that possession belongs to, is already gender-specific. The demons, gods and goddesses, attach themselves, not to disembodied consciousnesses, but to specific smells, odours and flows of human bodies. Within this they are attached even more firmly to female bodies which are constructed primarily in terms of a field in which sexual-cum-reproductive routes to deification and into possession (p. 215). Subsequent fieldwork on possession has made me confront the prominence of reproductive disorder and irregularity in the women’s recounting of possession experiences. They point to the
centrality of reproductive sexuality in the construction of femininity . . . . Discourses of sexuality which separate sexuality from reproduction—and this includes the psychoanalytical exegeses on female possession in South Asia—fail to comprehend the specificities of this semantic field of meanings. (Ram, 2001, pp. 215-216)

More suggestive of an abusive etiology as a trigger in women’s SSP is a body of clinical studies on SSP, including of women in India (Boddy, 1989; Ervin, Palmour, Murphy, Prince, & Simons, 1988; Freed & Freed, 1990a, 1990b; Kirmayer, 1992; Sandberg & Lynn, 1992; Simons, Ervin, & Prince, 1988; Teja, Khanna, & Subrahmanyam, 1970; Teoh & Dass, 1973). Among the parameters studied were the already implied second class status of women in Indian culture, and the emphasis on the family rather than on self-absorption. This is especially so in under-educated or rural groups, resulting in silent acceptance of prolonged periods of stress (Freed & Freed, 1990b; Teoh & Dass, 1973). Other objective studies showed a higher cortisol levels, which indicates stress, during spirit possession’s trance (Ervin et al., 1988), implicating a diagnosis of PTSD (Spiegel & Cardeña, 1990); the relation between trauma, dissociation, and PTSD is established in the psychiatric field (Ross, 1989; Sandberg & Lynn, 1992).

Regarding the present research, although the exploration of acculturation is a vast topic in itself, its one outcome could be stress. In a personal communication, a staff member at a Bay Area agency for domestic violence of Indian women immigrants, Maitri, indicated a variety of stressors in Indian women immigrants, including the struggle for legal immigrant status, in addition to the domestic violence.

According to feminist ideology, placing women who manifest SSP solely in the category of traumatized individuals, while validating its healing capacity, needs to be addressed cautiously so as not to undermine the agency of the women. Authors (Creswell, 2009; Kohls, Hack, & Walach, 2008; Yang, 2008) have shown that mixed methodology in researching SSP would provide a cross-validation of the subjective voice of the women and the objectivity of their
manifestation, giving a fuller idea of the underlying psychological process while also taking women’s narratives into account. If there is a belief in spirits, then the nature of trance in SSP requires that it be studied in a manner different from the symptom of dissociation, which is a psychiatric classification and involves a disbelief in spirit entering a person to explain the symptoms diagnosed.

A Feminist Conceptualization of the Spirits Who Possess Contemporary Women

Belief (in spirits) is symbolic and can concretize a manifestation into anachronism. Contemporarily, as previously mentioned, Keller (2002) theoretically brings into question what has been largely ignored by scholars namely, the power and subjectivity of the spirits themselves. In deconstructing prevailing works, her concept of SSP is not based on belief rather, on mutual agency which considers the spirits as real as the women they possess. The questions Keller attempts to answer from a religious and postmodern theory perspective are within today’s social concerns: (a) How does one “evaluate the agency or power of a human body that has been overcome by a religious force” (p. 2); and (b) how does one reevaluate the relationship of possessed bodies to the “triple axes of power: race, class, and gender” (p. 4)? She establishes respect for possession under an overarching domain of religion and thus, I assume entitled to no analysis. She simultaneously interweaves feminist thought and religion to show the social dynamics of the relationship between (a) this culturally-sanctioned form of religious expression and (b) the social benefits wielded by the relationship between the instrumental agency of the possessed women and the agency of the spirits:

Unlike a human rights activist, a woman whose body is engaged by the nonhuman forces of religious traditions is not concerned first and foremost with human rights (which reside within the anthropologistic horizon). She does not align herself with the transformative political agency of a human rights activist because she is negotiating to various degrees with a will that is not human (Keller, 2002, p. 100-101).
Keller’s (2002) scholarship repeats that possession occurs in women (and men) who are oppressed. It is in this context that she proposes the term agency. Agency is also a metaphor for a physical commercial agency of the sort that did business with the colonists, reinforcing empirical works previously mentioned that justify the colonial traumatic etiology of embodiment and somatization as a way possession cultures express flashbacks (Seligman, 2005; Stoller, 1994).

Keller (2002) confirmed and added to the prevailing beliefs about the characteristics of SSP as well as implied the caveats in feminist theory, as follows: (a) Some women are ambivalent about being possessed since it involves foregoing one cultural comfort, that of family, with another, that of being future spiritual healers; (b) the commonality of instrumental agency in SSP and as having “theological force” (p. 101); and (c) the spirits who invade are independent entities with power yet, cooperate with the women towards socially benefiting them. After Keller, the current study will be explored also within the transpersonal tenets of religion and spirituality; feminist theory with its transpersonal aspects (Mertens, 2005); and the social constructivism of postmodern theory within which lies the epistemology of multiple realities as alternate to conventional categorical truths such as, possession being female hysteria (Mertens, 2005; Warner, 2005). Keller’s attention to the subjectivity of women and the inclusion of the role of spirits into the SSP dialogue enables a movement from absolute aspects of both culture and psychiatry towards an interweaving of contemporary issues as they inform SSP. This follows.  

The Contemporary Issues: Parameters of SSP as a Manifestation of Sociocultural Triggers

When a complex phenomenon such as spirit possession is ritually initiated, there is no doubt about its etiology. However, when it occurs spontaneously, researchers tend to study possible triggers. This is especially so when the women are ambivalent about the outcome of possession. The ambivalence implied in women’s subjectivity is the previously mentioned
tension between embracing nurturing cultural beliefs versus their inner distress which they can express only in the culturally accepted manner of SSP. In other words, a woman has to reconcile with or at least comprehend this irony in addition to being affected by the spontaneity of the spirit which may be unwelcome. It is within this interplay that the women find solace and healing. As shown previously, this healing paradigm is an irony because the culture imposes and then accepts women’s suffering by revering the SSP that results from their oppression. In their limited choice, the women’s connection to their communities and families is maintained because their resource for living independently is minimal.

Trauma is often transformative. “The therapeutic response to overwhelming stress and abuse can actually open doors to transformation when treated within an integrative, psychospiritual paradigm” (Mijares, 2005, p. 75). Albert (2004) conceptualized transformation or metanoia as a transpersonal and spiritual development when marked by acceptance, purpose, connectedness, and transcendence, characteristics of transformation that have been asserted in spirituality and healing by established authors (Koss-Chioino & Hefner, 2006). The transformation of self-identity that the possessed women undergo is the form of transformation which heals them in perhaps the only way possible within an environment of limited options. (See Courtney’s quote on page 25 of this paper). This entails a reframing of feminist ideology from a western form of overt or assertive empowerment to a change of identity embodying and embracing religion and culture. Such framing of SSP in its spiritually transforming undertones is acceptable only because their culture believes in and accepts spirit possession as a ritualistic phenomenon whether or not it is acknowledged or understood as a healing paradigm for the women’s distress. On the other hand, SSP can be acceptable in the clinical milieu under a belief in its coping and healing role.
With modernization, there may be deviations from classic SSP because education changes the cultural idioms to allopathic words such as “depression,” although research shows that it is the women’s trust in being possessed by spirit that shows the underlying trauma. For example, Hanifa, a young Muslim woman who relocated from her rural homeland to urban Kerala in South India, told her psychiatrist: “Something like a tension has come” (Halliburton, 2005, p. 133). Possession may be less the reason for her visit, yet, during psychotherapy, or with Halliburton’s suggested hypnosis, Hanifa projected onto the possessing spirit, inadvertently revealing the psychological cause of her distress. For Hanifa, away from her rural, familial environment, the conflicting causes for her distress may be two-fold: (a) A general, external cause of sociocultural inequality, the trauma of relocating to urbanity, or abuse leading to her habitual coping mechanism of SSP, or, (b) the distress of hiding SSP, unwelcome in an urban setting with less support than in her natal community. As her learned manner of coping, Hanifa fell back, unconsciously, on SSP in times of stress except she camouflaged its name in modern idioms although a lack of a supporting possession culture could potentially exacerbate the distress by either cause. Each potential cause informs the other and, in Hanifa’s case, in-depth questioning revealed that she believed her SSP was related to her distress irrespective of whether the distress was in keeping SSP a secret or in any real trauma, two causes that could be related. Similarly, because of the lack of a supporting possession culture and its anchor of a familiar cosmology, Hanifa’s reference to the spirits became more ambiguous and identity-free as in “just some spirits” (Halliburton, 2005, p. 120). The ambiguity with which a more modernized woman such as Hanifa can express her distress leaves her subjectivity open for self-expression with a simultaneous gain of modern status and spirituality. (For a discussion of modernity within Indian
unitary ideology, see Gupta, 1998; Pigg, 1996; Prakash, 1999; Ramanujan, 1989; and Sivaramakrishnan & Agarval, 2003).

Modernity is conceptualized for this study to mean that, as industrialization and urban domestic work draw women away from the possession environment, women ape western or urban mannerisms. Modernity entails a loss of connection with spirit possession rituals—SSP is not the religious or coping manifestation of choice of urban, suburban, middle, or upper class women. However, mass, public displays of SSP by lower SES people do occur during urban religious festivals—the comparison of the nature of ritualized spirit possession by priests in urban temples leading to mass SSP versus public rural rituals and rural SSP is beyond the scope of the current paper. In any event, the literature suggests that a separation from the environment where spirit possession is regularly practiced together with higher education are the factors that cause a progressive disbelief in spirits as possessing entities.

Literature was not found on the topic of modernity via immigration—with acculturation and cultural integration stresses—as a secondary trigger superimposed on a primary trigger of any abusive etiology either in the US or as memories that women may carry from their country. Naturally then, since there was no study found on immigrant women from Indian cultures manifesting SSP in the US, there was a gap in the literature regarding SSP as a coping mechanism in immigrant issues or from any trauma locally or transported from their original culture. With opportunity for individuality and sociocultural options in the US, the caveat to the clinician is to be mindful of the comfort offered by those familiar cultural norms that are not oppressive and the consequences of imposing alien norms without adequate support. With support, whether immigrant women manifest SSP in the US, or not, or whether they show psychological distress due to habitual SSP or trauma, the totality of their experiences can lead to
a spiritual opening and the fulfillment of their innate need to heal and self-actualize (Koss-Chioino & Hefner, 2006; Maslow, 1972). However, clinical, feminist, and transpersonal responsibility warrants an exploration into the question of psychiatric idioms of SSP, included in the following section.

*Changing Definitions With Contemporary Changes*

SSP is not without problems in acceptance even when it occurs in cultures that accept it because, although it is a religious expression and it could be a healing paradigm, it can be confused with mental health issues, be indicative of abuse, or reflect the pressures associated with modernization, poverty, and an additional parameter to be shown in this section namely, unequal power dynamics. Authors have discussed the diagnostic differential between spiritual manifestations such as SSP and psychosis (Grof & Grof, 1989; Lukoff, 1996; Lukoff, Lu, & Turner, 1996; Wapnick, n.d.). However, the common sense differential feature from the point of view of the possession culture is the ability of women manifesting SSP to get out of this display or trance once the spirit has left them, the ability to allow the spirit to leave, and the ability to allow the spirit to return. Indeed, possession cultures themselves consider some types of SSP as harmful when the manifestation continues indefinitely and leads to continuous psychotic-like behavior. In these cases, as previously mentioned, a shaman attempts to exorcise the spirit (Kakar, 1982) or the individual is taken to the hospital for psychiatric attention (Al Sughayir, 2005; Azaunce, 1995).

The voice of the women who manifest SSP is important when SSP is viewed as pathologic even within their own culture, as the following examples show. Some women are oppressed because of their SSP manifestation and submit to familial pressures to suppress their future SSP at the expense of their psychic pain (Chawla & Pinto, 2001). For the purpose of the
present study, the question then would be whether or not immigrant women have a cultural avenue or allowance to express their suffering, or is it labeled as mental illness. Moore (1993) showed empirically that women of low socioeconomic status in the state of Rajasthan where governing is by “powerful men” get spontaneously possessed, but it is under the guise of “stress-related illnesses” (p. 522). Similarly, educated middle class women in Patna, India revealed that frustrated desires triggered their SSP (Wagner, Duveen, Themal, & Verma, 1999). As in the case of Hanifa discussed previously, this example also shows the paradoxical effect of education on the belief in spirit possession—frustrated desires is now the cause of distress and, being unacceptable to voice it openly, SSP is merely the accepted vehicle to express it, leading to an interesting proposition that SSP is distressing in and because of a new setting. The potentiality of discomfort in SSP in an alien setting is in contradiction to the reverence to spirits as benefactors.

SSP was judged against modern beliefs in Sri Lanka, where, based on correlation evidence, an association was found between SSP aped for monetary gain with a lack of religious belief and “culturally abnormal forms of possession” (Somasudaram, Thivakaran, & Bhugra, 2008, p. 245). Although one can hypothesize that compromising cultural beliefs leaves people vulnerable to psychological imbalance, Snodgrass (2002) found the opposite where the belief in spirits among Bhatas in Rajasthan, India shifted from religious to considering the spirits fictitious; they confessed to acting possessed for status purposes with no psychological distress. The suggestion here is that different factors set the cultural norm, and education or contact with modernization could be one factor resulting in disbelief in spirits (Pigg, 1996).

As previously shown in Halliburton’s (2005) work with Keralite women, SSP manifested within cultural change can bring about subjective confusion seen by a change of idioms to express SSP and a tendency to blame the spirits, different from SSP’s welcome and reverence in
its original culture. This is also seen in Skultans’ (1991) work on women in Maharashtra, India where the inhabitants of a temple had contradictory interpretations of SSP versus mental affliction. As their village modernized, they simplistically equated voluntary (initiated) possession with mediumship and outcast involuntary (spontaneous) possession with illness. At the same time, when a community believes in spirit possession, people who are in distress, including distress due to SSP, voluntarily seek healing in temples (Kakar, 1982; Skultans)—Joshi (2004) showed this as the first form of seeking or offering treatment in non-contemporary India. Indigenous healing modalities or how a community deals with SSP often give a clue to the dilemma of spirit possession being a religious and cultural expression or psychiatric disorder.

Despite ambivalent beliefs about SSP and a change of idioms with modernization, Lukoff, Lu, and Turner (1996) remind us that with a diagnosis of mental illness the clinician can be transpersonally mindful that the same manifestation is described by mystics of great religions since time immemorial. When a culturally specific manifestation confounds a mental health issue, the cultural background gives valuable information in treating the individual. For example, the Indian sense of self is based on a community concept or interdependency (Adityanjee, Raju, & Khandelwal, 1989; Akhtar, 1988; Roland, 1989; Schweder, 1991). Gingrich (2005) suggested that this gives a self or ego which does not easily split as drastically as in the west where dissociative disorders are more difficult to treat. Her study showed that Filipino women dissociate to a mild, short-lived extent, sufficient to resolve the stress.

Further, in a community-oriented culture such as India, SSP rather than dissociation is the manifestation, or term, for mental distress because dissociation and fragmentation express suffering from within to the outside—personal expression of suffering is not the cultural norm so that SSP, which is an intrusion from the outside in, could be the accepted form of individual
transpersonal transformation because it occurs under a religious rubric and is supported by the community—the entire community is involved in witnessing the possession ritual and the possessed cathartically heals herself as well as the community and reinforces the social order at the same time (Kakar, 1982; Krippner, 1986; Obeyesekere, 1971/1981). Kakar says that of the many perspectives on mental health, in SSP, the spirit heals the individual’s alienation from the social order. How do women immigrants express their trauma in an alien country?

*Universality and Predisposition: Is There a sin qua non of Spirit Possession?*

The question is: Why don’t all women with a traumatic history get possessed by spirit? Since trance is a hallmark of both SSP and dissociative disorders, is there a universal similarity between these two manifestations or are they simply different coping expressions that each culture accepts? In this search, the quantitative method, by itself or in a mixed method, shifts the focus from the ethnographic paradigm to include cognitive tests that can objectively measure variables involved in and which form the characteristics of SSP (Abraham, 2006; Ng & Chan, 2004; Seligman, 2005; Van Duijl, Cardena, De Jong, & Joop, 2005). These studies employed psychological inventories for stress, anxiety, and dissociation together with semi-structured interviews and found that SSP had a traumatic etiology, similar to the ethnographic and empirical studies mentioned thus far.

*The Universality of the Cognitive*

So, there are the psychological characteristics of SSP, panhuman? Cohen and Barrett (2008) showed that SSP is reinforced because spirits “exploit universal cognitive mechanisms that deal with our everyday social and physical worlds” (p. 246). They use the characteristics of SSP to posit that the theory of “intuitive dualism” of mind-body would explain the “emergence, transmission and persistence” (p. 24) of widespread religious practices and thence, justify a
universality theory for SSP. The theory of intuitive dualism rests upon the findings that, from childhood, humans experience their minds and bodies as independent domains. Notwithstanding the ultimate aim of unity in Indian philosophy, Halliburton’s (2005) study on mind-body duality in his Keralite participants showed that, at a fundamental level, Indians are conscious of a separate mind and body.

Using this theory, Cohen and Barrett (2008) questioned two participants in a possession culture on various mind-transfer or “mind-migration” (p. 23) situations by offering a choice between one of two theories namely, fusion of two minds or complete displacement of one mind by another. Their results showed a “predisposition toward displacement of minds in mind-transfer situations, not fusion” explained by a “tacit, unexpressed one mind-one body principle” (p. 43). In other words, the participants considered their minds as separate from their bodies and amenable to being displaced by another person’s mind. In SSP, “possession is not normally conceived as a ‘mind’ occupying a body, but as a bodiless person occupying a body” (p. 44), as evidenced by their Brazilian medium’s own words:

Possession for me is a state of unconsciousness . . . in which we are not answerable for our actions, our bodily movements . . . we don’t have control of our bodies anymore. It’s the total loss of control of the body and the mind. Something else controls—it is the spiritual being [where] one’s own spirit is said to “lie down,” “dream,” “sleep,” “journey to another world.” The entities are said to “take control,” “dominate the mind,” or “command the body and the mind.” (A Brazilian medium in Cohen & Barrett, 2008, p. 30)

The Culture-Universality Binary

Cohen (2008) considered prevailing spirit possession categories to be a “hardening, fixing and artificial naturalization of culturally supple and dynamic phenomena” (p. 106). First, she claimed that not all possessions involve trance (see also Somer, 2006). Second, the presence of trance can be observed only by the observer. These two points indicated to her that the phenomenology of trance in itself cannot explain the theory of SSP and cannot be used as a
variable or a definitive characteristic of SSP to justify universality. On the other hand, she proposed that *explanatory theories* are suitable to explain the available evidence on spirit possession. In this explanation, Cohen fixed her theory of possession within a less arbitrarily drawn category based on cognitive processes (that she said are panhuman) to explain the recurrence and persistence of possession—although she contradicts universality by involving contextuality by saying there is an interplay of “cognition, ecology, and contextual factors” (p. 121). However, her final justification rests on an ideological note and defies contextualism—cognition is a category internal to the individual and therefore not imposed by interaction with external factors.

In an explanation alternate to trance as universal to SSP and towards a cognitive, universal theory of the nature of possession, Cohen (2008) divided possession into two basic types. Although Cohen based the difference between these two forms on cognitive evidence, I argue that her assumption is superseded by the fact that aspects of the manifestation of SSP other than cognitive in both her types can still be understood only within the religious and socio-cultural context of the particular spirit possession culture/community. She named these two types *pathogenic possession* and *executive possession*. In both types, the definitive aspect of possession is the “belief” (Cohen, 2008, p. 101) that a “person is changed in some way through the presence in [her] or on [her] of a spirit entity or power, other than [her] own personality, soul, self or the like” (Bourguignon, 1976, p. 8). Cohen (2008) proposed that the universal aspect of spirit possession is the “complete displacement of the host’s agency by that of the spirit” (Cohen, 2008, p. 117). As previously discussed with the help of Cohen’s experiment and her Brazilian medium’s quote, displacement principles prevailed as cognitive road-maps of the fusion of one
entity, the spirit, with another, the host. Following explains the bases of Cohen’s two fundamental types of possession.

*Pathogenic possession.* In this theory, contamination beliefs from childhood are universal and involve transmission, avoidance, and contact; and cure, removal, or purification. Further is the innate knowledge from childhood that contaminating agents can be “invisible.” Learned from adults are the “strong fear and disgust, or revulsion, responses” (Cohen, 2008, p. 115) to contaminants, where the contaminants can be invisible. According to Cohen, pathogenic possession, like illness or misfortune, is unfortunately attributed to evil or jealous spirits in this theory (see also Spiro, 2005), by way of contamination by an unwanted entity that takes over the mechanisms of one’s body but not necessarily the mind. Thus there may be no trance; however, trance may be initiated or induced with rituals to exorcise the spirit. The advantage of this theory is to maintain sociocultural norms of upholding various virtues to avoid pathologic possession. In this, the principles of social exchange determine who gets possessed, and why and when they get possessed.

*Executive possession.* This rests on two beliefs: (a) The belief of life after death (Sogyal Rinpoche, 2002) in the sense that the soul continues beyond the death of the physical body; and (b) the Hindu concept of mind-body unity which arises from and gives rise to the ability to comprehend its duality (Capra, 2002). These beliefs underlie the belief in spirit possession. In executive possession too, the host need not go into a trance but is yet unable to exert control over her behavior. The issue is not whether trance is present or absent rather, the issue for Cohen is the concept that a spirit can enter one’s body.

Overall, “these concepts spread successfully because they are supported by panhuman mental capacities that are employed in the resolution of everyday, common problems” (Cohen,
Cohen says that this is a salient, human reasoning that universalizes all human manifestations.

The concept of contact, contamination, and purification is universal and explains both possession and the diagnosis of obsessive-compulsive disorder in the *DSM-IV* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Again, it would not be unusual for a western clinician to confuse these two manifestations. However, the piercing ritual of men in Tamilnadu, India confounds Cohen’s (2008) theory because while upper caste Brahmin men emphasize ritual purity as a way to get fit for the deity to enter, lower caste men are not preoccupied with cleanliness but rather emphasize devotion (Kapadia, 2000).

*The Psychology of Spontaneous Spirit Possession (SSP)*

**Anecdotes of SSP to Explain its Psychology**

“There was a noon ritual for the demon Mahasona. I heard the sound of drums: then I became possessed” (a woman participant’s quote in Obeyesekere, 1971/1981, p. 24), said Karunavati after years of unhappy married life. After experiencing SSP, she led an ascetic life, converting the malevolent demon’s power into a healing power for those in her community and who she counseled.

In a cultural-psychological analysis, Obeyesekere (1971/1981) explained the psychology of SSP from case studies on the island of Sri Lanka, the “teardrop” of India and with close cultural ties to South Indians. Ethnographers attempt to study groups (rather than individuals), in which process personal and cultural symbols get divorced—Obeyesekere rejected this format for studying SSP. From his own ethnographic observations, he theorized that cultural symbols are appropriated by individuals during their experiences, and classified personal symbols as “cultural symbols operating on the level of personality and of culture at the same time” (p. 2). In this
process, the symbols an individual creates from the unconscious (that he says are our motivations) sieve through cultural practices such as SSP so that they can be transformed and be able to enter conscious understanding. In other words, possession cultures form personal symbols under the psychological concept of deep motivation. This has significance for the hypothesis of the present study that SSP in oppressed women has coping capacities—at an unconscious level, allowing SSP can be considered a motivation to heal in a number of ways including what Obeyesekere suggests is catharsis manifested as SSP.

Further, in patriarchal cultures, coping can be explained by the cognitive dissonance theory of Festinger (1962) where sociocultural phenomena actively involve the community or at least other people (Courtney, 2008)—the woman does not assertively voice distress, anger, and pain rather, she manifests a culturally-sanctioned phenomenon such as SSP which is witnessed by and often involves the participation of the community. However, SSP as a potential opportunity to voice her distress is not without drawbacks—voicing distress is unacceptable to the Indian culture and could result in being forced into psychiatric care under the guise of madness (Chawla & Pinto, 2001). On the other hand, is SSP, which can be considered an insidious marginalization into the spiritual realm away from worldly pleasures, an avenue consciously chosen by the women to cope with their pain?

*Obeyesekere’s (1971) Motivation Theory for SSP Further Interpreted*

In western psychology, public symbols, as opposed to cultural symbols, are devoid of personal emotion (Murray, 2002). This creates culture-emotion and public-private binaries not found in possession cultures in which milieu Obeyesekere (1971/1981) theorized that there is a relationship between public and private emotions and symbols. Murray (2002) analyzed that in the US, public symbols are created from the outside for manipulating the public; the fast-food
company, McDonald’s “M” is a public symbol which, paradoxically, in an individualistic society controls individual freedom. On the other hand, in Obeyesekere’s theory of possession cultures, the reverse occurs: personal symbols are transformed by the individual into public symbols which then become embodied and emotional. In “the problem of belief in the context of translation of cultures” (Courtney, 2008, p. 75), the problem of emotions is set aside by western anthropologists because the concept of belief is more rational and thus universal. However, in SSP, symbolism is emotional and defies universalization.

When personal symbols are transformed into the public symbolization of SSP manifestations, they can then be reinternalized by the individual in a more digestible manner because SSP is validated by the culture (the public). In this display, SSP is infused with unconscious motivation, from the personal emotion, to heal. Being personal in nature, we can understand it only through those possessed whose “experiences are articulated in terms of traditional symbols . . . . Unlike the European (ascetic), the Hindu’s consciousness is already influenced by his culture, facilitating the expression of intrapsychic conflict in a cultural idiom” (Obeyesekere, 1971/1981, p. 21).

Obeyesekere (1971/1981) exemplified his theory by Karunavati’s case mentioned at the start of this section. Karunavati allowed her hair to get matted as her personal symbol. Matted hair is also the Hindu (personal and public) symbol of celibacy, and this joint symbolization unites the public and personal symbols. However, in this unity essentially of the community, what is the nature of any unity felt by a distressed Karunavati or in her professed unity with the deity? In a divisive manner, at the same time as she was chosen by her deity, she was rid of her abusive husband with a new marriage to the spirit and to her new role as the village healer. As a living symbol, matted hair in both personal and public form was used or manipulated by
Karunavati. The paradox of control in having a personal, living symbol as healing both self and the community that caused her distress and thus her SSP, can overcome the seeming inability of choice in SSP. This is Obeyesekere’s explanation for SSP by the motivation theory. It is as opposed to the lack of control in myth or dream symbols or the seeming independence of individuals as they paradoxically accept McDonald’s “M.” Thus, Obeyesekere’s “link between symbol formation and personal experience, and the psychological significance of the symbol” (p. 40) is a link between the (unconscious) motivation to heal via SSP—SSP is a personal experience and a public symbol, changed from a personal symbol and a public experience.

Obeyesekere’s (1971/1981) theory raises the issue of the Indian personality of ambiguity (Chatterjee, 1993; Nuckolls, 1981). Nuckolls showed that, under the Indian belief in karma, myth and dreams, just as SSP, can be interpreted according to personal convenience. He described a case where the dream-message given by the spirit of a deceased relative to a lower, female member of the family was ambiguously decoded to personal advantage by a male family member in a powerful position. Perhaps women who manifest SSP do not have the opportunity for such ambiguity because the public demand is for only one interpretation of spirit possession, namely that of the religious belief in spirits invading the human realm to resolve a particular worldview’s conflict or to make demands for cosmic benefit—women may feel that their only role is to enact that particular possession manifestation. There is no room for the alternate of understanding a woman’s underlying reasons for allowing spirit to possess, which Obeyesekere and a large part of the literature imply is the cathartic enactment of trauma.

Exploring again from a psycho-cultural rubric of personal symbols operating simultaneously as personal-cultural symbols, in the chapter “The Symbolic Integration of Personality” (Obeyesekere, 1971/1981, p. 84), Obeyesekere shows another case of how
possession heals from psychological pain. Premavati had a series of inter-familial crises her entire life. In an unhappy marriage, her first incidence of SSP was enacted hystERICALLY. The demon who entered her was *Kulu Kumara*, the Black Prince from Hindu mythology, related in a Freudian manner to unconscious sexual desires. Her unconscious drives were projected in a culturally acceptable idiom, and symptom got translated into symbol. As in the myth, Kulu Kumara seduced her in dreams. To rid her of this demon, the family took her to the temple for exorcism. “Her fits are now associated with prayers to the gods, though she cannot yet give meaning and significance to this linkage” (p. 86). However, she could interpret her possession as a powerful means of controlling her fate—she was the one chosen by the demon who she claimed also impregnated her, absolving her for the blame she carried for previous miscarriages. Since she was the demon’s consort she could not bed with her husband, and that suited her. Yet, not successfully exorcised, she followed another personal symbol with both personal and cultural meaning: she starved herself as repentance for her guilt over her conceived meaness to her family members—starvation for unspecified repentance is an idiom acceptable to that community. It helped resolve Premavati’s estrangement with her family who now revered her spiritual possession and came to help her during her anorexia.

Soon Premavati realized her new identity and was aware of her transformation as a *guru* (spiritual leader) to others in the community. Her idiomatic expressions also served as a communication with the community at large, resolving conflict and reinforcing the cultural norm.

In Premavati’s case, as in other Obeyesekere’s (1971/1981) cases, we see the psychodynamic interpretation of a healing paradigm where the women who manifest SSP utilize personal symbols in both cultural and personal forms and meaning to propagate cultural idioms as well as to benefit from them. As Obeyesekere said: “I emphasize the function of a set of
personal symbols in the objectification of deep motivations and in the integration of personality” (p. 91), and it also “effects the reconciliation of broken societal relationships” (p. 98).

The crux of Obeyesekere’s theory and significant for the present study is that an individual can choose an idiom that suits her story in a combination of and contextual with cultural sanction, acceptable symbolization, and her own personality. As such, “ecstasy and trance are modes of knowledge of both mystical and pragmatic reality” (Obeyesekere, 1971/1981, p. 179) towards the healing goal of finding “satya” (p. 179) or truth.

*Suffering and its Healing via Psychospiritual Transformation*

In a study of the nuances between dissociative disorders and possession, a Filipino school girl participant said girls are “weaker in tolerating problems” (Skultans, 1991, p. 234). “The therapeutic response to overwhelming stress and abuse can actually open doors to transformation when treated within an integrative, psychospiritual paradigm” (Mijares, 2005, p. 75).

To address the above two dichotomous situations in which women find themselves, Skultans (1991) offered an alternate theory by Susan Carol Rogers. In her theory, women’s subordination in societies such as Maharashtra, India, where she did her research, is within a “gender hierarchy” (Skultans, 1991, p. 335) where both ideology and behavior play a role, as was seen in the words of the Filipino girl quoted above. Rogers says that gender differentiation that occurs at the dual level of ideology and behavior in which there is an imbalance of power is detrimental to the woman’s possibility of healing. In comparison, when only one, ideology or behavior, exists, there is less psychic conflict. In other words, *Maharashtrian* cultural ideology is that women are of a lower status and weak and this makes them open to SSP. This is reinforced by the behavior, after belief, of the women unconsciously following the ideological expectations, as Kapferer, cited by Gellner (1994), said: “the cultural constructs which men have of women
and women have of themselves” (p. 43) need to be considered when addressing women’s transformation.

Besides absolving the woman of responsibility, the effectiveness of the trance in SSP is in the change of identity as the spirit temporarily takes over agency of the body. Following Keller’s (2002) theory mentioned previously, the highlight of the interplay between spirit and individual is the change that takes place in both personalities; there is a working relationship between spirit and the women they possess in which the needs of each are met. Perhaps this unconsciously suits a woman who cannot yet be individualistically selfish—she cannot say that she is suffering, she has to say that it is the spirit who needs or demands some offering. In this manner, the spirit offers a resolution by effecting catharsis or as a vehicle to accept the women’s projection. The women’s change of self-identity as well as the communal support dramatically affects healing akin to catharsis followed by transference; as Obeyesekere (1971/1981) theorizes, there is interpretation at some level in the women’s psyche that helps her to heal. The spirits’ get their immortality and position in the religion reinforced by showing their presence in the mortal world while simultaneously perpetuating the social order.

How will the women participants in the present study express any psychic distress? Will they use idioms and symbols different from their culture and adopted from the US?

Summary

This chapter has shown the extant literature on SSP. SSP manifests Indian cultures’ religious belief of a spirit being able to enter an individual’s mind and body. The literature showed that SSP manifests primarily in young, illiterate women under conditions of continued oppression or abuse leading to chronic stress. Thus, this scholarship informed the current research question of trauma and/or religion as a potential trigger of SSP and the hypothesis that
SSP is a coping method. More literature on SSP may be discovered and other arguments can be formed during and after data collection.

Overwhelmingly, the literature suggested trance as the sin qua non of SSP. As SSP’s main nature, trance entered into the discussion of the many aspects of SSP. These aspects of SSP were categorized into sections questioning its sometimes confusion with pathologic dissociation, hysteria, and somatization. At the same time, these were characteristics of SSP and were placed in perspective by involving cultural norms. Thence, Indian culture’s view of madness versus SSP was exposed. A resolution was attempted in the problematic that arose in the overlap of SSP and DSM-IV categories in a manner that could provide a western understanding of SSP and the women who manifest it.

From a contemporary perspective, feminist literature on SSP and the impact of modernization gave way to hypothesizing its potential manifestation in the US, and again, its healing role, this time in acculturation stress. In a feminist reframing, spirit possession when spontaneous as the process of choice for oppressed women was highlighted for its religious format in which case the spirits were given a cooperative role with the women they possessed. The reframing also provided an avenue for a change in identity from victimhood to empowerment without compromising religious beliefs.

The question of trauma was a dominant aspect of the literature review—mainstream psychology is based on the evidence that dissociation is an outcome of intense trauma and thus, is dissociation in western clients equivalent to the trance of SSP? In their questioning on how to best address SSP, many authors have proposed mixed method as the method of choice because it combines the women’s subjectivity as well as measures the characteristics of SSP suggested in
the literature. Similarly, Chapter 3 will show that the objective measurements selected for the psychological correlates of SSP also hold true for USRE.

Finally, Obeyesekere’s (1971) theory of motivation for SSP was presented by vivid case examples that exemplified his psychology of SSP. In this, an understanding of the interchange of personal and public symbols in Indian cultures explained the healing that SSP potentially affords. Based on this, the chapter ended with a proposal for SSP as a healing and transforming paradigm.

All these categories of SSP were used to generate different definitions with different perspectives for SSP presented at the start of this chapter. Chapter 3 describes the research’s mixed method that could answer the questions, true for both SSP and USRE, posed in this section.
Chapter 3: Research Method

The planned use of mixed methods to explore the intended phenomenon of Spontaneous Spirit Possession (SSP) in 30 women immigrants from an Indian culture was equally effective in exploring the phenomenon that presented itself during interviews when sufficient cases of SSP were not found, namely, Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences (USRE). Creswell (2009) defined mixed methods as “employing the combination of quantitative and qualitative research” (p. 203).

Most of the literature on SSP claimed that it is triggered by trauma and/or religiosity and with coping and healing capacities, which were the parameters of focus for the present study. As mentioned in the literature review, SSP is distinguished from ritualized spirit possession by the uninvited, spontaneous possession of a woman by a deity although the defining feature of both is trance, and thus, dissociation was also studied. The qualitative part included participant narratives from open-ended interviews following the grounded theory method of Strauss and Corbin (1998). The quantitative method involved participant answers on six relevant psychological assessments to explore psychological correlates of SSP; these held to be true for USRE also. Additionally, semistructured questionnaires gave demographic data and categorical variables. All data were triangulated by the statistical software “R” commonly called Categorical and Regression Tree (CART) analysis.

This chapter first revisits the research question to show its nature and its evolution as determined from the scholarship as well as from the gaps in the extant literature. This includes the research’s evolution as also justifying mixed method use. Two major sections of the research design, theory and method (Creswell, 2009), are then described. Theoretically, mixed methods’ opponents have questioned the validity in mixing subjective, phenomenological methods and
objective methods based on positivism, and the impossibility of triangulating these two opposing paradigms. However, when a research question can be answered by both processes, mixed methods gives a nonbiased way of gathering and analyzing data and offers an internal validation of each set of data. Mixed method is especially justified by the overlap in the two paradigms (Wadsworth, 1998), overlooked when only one philosophical stand for a research study is defined (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2005). Discussion will show the overlap in different worldviews, and this is the crux of this chapter’s philosophical exposition.

In the first section, following an introduction on SSP’s epistemological and ontological bases, the theories are discussed in the following order: (a) The aegis of Integral Inquiry, (b) feminist philosophy as the overall stance of the research determined by the nature of the research question, (c) the unavoidable contextualism from pragmatism as the basis of all qualitative methods (Strübing, 2010) and which also is the philosophy underlying grounded theory, (d) the theory behind mixed method, (e) the theory behind grounded theory, and (f) the theory of the positivist worldview underlying objective testing, and the descriptions of the psychological assessments. The second section details the method used, ending with the treatment of data including a description of CART and instructions on reading its output of trees (graphs).

*Why Study SSP? Evolution of the Research Question*

The starting philosophical stance and literature for SSP was effective even as the phenomenon of interest shifted to Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences (USRE), a shift that will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The literature’s documented issue of oppression as a trigger for SSP in women in India initiated this study’s feminist stance and that it have an advocative outcome. As the philosophical essence of this research, feminist methodology is varied and yet, all its offshoots question or address its difference in identity from other, deemed
male-initiated methods (Reinharz, 1992)—issues of difference and identity are also women’s issues. In the present research, both, embracing women’s differences and recognizing their identity formations as immigrants were a conscious part of my interactions with them and in data analyses. In this manner, the generality of essentialism (Stone, 2004) that simplifies women into one homogenous group dissipates, and differences between women then become prominent as they strive for identity within a non-essential philosophy. This feminist stance tempered my initial awe of SSP as a phenomenon into an interest in the women participants’ phenomenology and, as I stubbornly persisted in the difficulty of trying to find cases of SSP, I was inspired by Anderson’s (2009) words that a narrow, obsessive research interest may really reflect culture’s need for change.

Born and raised in India, childhood memories of mass, public frenzy during Hindu religious occasions, I realized as an immigrant, were SSP displays honoring deities. Compared to my more Westernized, Parsi background, prevalent Hinduism nevertheless surrounds women of all religions and, living side-by-side, our differences were absorbed within the similarity innocent children feel. In the US, I wondered whether non-Parsi women immigrants from an Indian cultural group experience SSP and if it helps them to cope as it does in India where it manifests under the duality of religious expression and patriarchy that prominently pervades daily life.

An overarching ethical umbrella arose from this start and lent an advocative aspect to the research: How will it benefit the participants, enhance their clinical support, and explore and promote a transpersonal aspect of SSP? Coping by women from an Indian cultural group would probably involve culturally-embedded traits and habits rather than adaptation by Western
psychiatric, or even feminist, standards (Acharya, 2004) such as, voiced depression, and rather than assume this a priori, qualitative methodology would best explore the women’s own voices. This, plus the duality in SSP of oppression and trauma as well as a religious basis, generated the following qualitative research topic: The exploration of SSP as potentially triggered by trauma and/or religious practice and resulting in coping as a transpersonal/spiritual transformative phenomenon. When framed in this manner, the qualitative part of the research question became flexible between the issues surrounding SSP in the literature, and the transpersonal in SSP as it may be played out in the women as immigrants to the US.

Concerning the quantitative part of the research question, the spontaneity of SSP, its dissociative feature, and often being unwelcome by the women raised questions about its underlying psychology. Further, women immigrants come from a culture where Ayurveda, the ancient Indian medical system with patriarchal tenets, blamed external spirit invading the body and/or mind as one etiology of mental illness (McDaniel, 1989). These aspects of SSP created the problem of its potential to be labeled as mental illness by those who do not accept spirit possession as an ancient form of religiously-oriented expression. Thus, psychological assessments were suitable for the quantitative part of the research method and the women’s scores in response gave information on the psychological correlates of SSP from the literature.

Philosophies and Theoretical Considerations

Defining the philosophy under which the chosen method was conducted shows the ontological basis of the phenomenon under study, and shows its epistemology as given by the researcher (Yanow, 2006). Fox (2008) supports Mertens’ (2005) caution: “By attending too little to philosophical ideas and traditions, many mixed-method inquirers are insufficiently reflective and their practice insufficiently unproblematized [sic]” (p. 294). The epistemological stance of
knowledge that something is held to be true is considered for the present research, as opposed to knowledge how, and this research acknowledges a priori that SSP exists. Ontology, the existence of certain truths, in postmodern discussion takes into account the social and historical nature of reality so that a reality does not exist apart from our knowledge of it. Under that premise, realism, or what I know about SSP which is what I tell you, is tested for its truth value.

Further, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) who, by calling themselves “transcendental realists” (p. 182), transcended socially constructed phenomena to include the objective world—stable relationships form the social basis of knowledge and subjective meaning-making—and SSP is a culturally-accepted phenomenon. Thus, an overlap in subjectivity and objectivity is immediately seen—can the information on what exists be apart from the knowledge (belief) that it exists? In sum, the truth and knowledge bases that underlie the present study were that, epistemologically, SSP is a culturally-defined truth that was refined by the women’s views whereas ontologically, the psychological assessments defined the existence of (certain parameters of) this truth.

The mixed method of the present study can be explained by all of the four currently popular worldviews complied by Creswell (2009): Postpositivism, Constructivism, Pragmatism, and Advocacy/Participatory. In Postpositivism—the positivist or the scientific approach—a truth on which the world works is held a priori and a hypothesis of the cause of the phenomenon under study is either proved or disproved; as specified, the quantitative part of the current method followed this objectivity where each psychological assessment answered its corresponding question. Thus, embedded in the research question would be the paradox of implied hypotheses from the literature as follows, and to be proven or nullified as objective truths: SSP is associated with dissociation, perceived stress, spirituality, exceptional experiences, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and biopsychosociospirituality constructs.
Qualitative researchers select one of the other three paradigms, based on a naturalistic worldview, namely, Constructivism, Advocacy/Participatory, and Pragmatism, as their qualitative stand—rather than based on a null hypothesis, they are exploratory in nature (Creswell, 2009). However, philosophical pragmatism historically underlaid all qualitative methods during the major shift from positivist to qualitative research, moderating the mono-philosophies or the ontological and epistemological extremes of positivism and constructivism. At a deeper level, constructionism is the basis of the current research’s theoretical paradigm of constructivism, as is discussed in an upcoming section.

All mono-qualitative methods can be distinguished by two of their nonstructural aspects, as follows: (a) The power differential between researcher and participant (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995); for example, the participatory paradigm exemplifies the extreme of egalitarian research—effective in community research, the participants determine the change in their community, making critics question its validity; and (b) the difference in whether the data are interpreted or not. The latter was instigated by the Interpretive Turn which assumes that people make meaning of their experiences only in interaction (Howe, 1998). However, this was put in larger perspective by Anderson (1998) who said that all research is interpretive in the broad sense. Whereas interpretive analysis espouses purposive sampling and a more neutral method of interaction with the participants, and feminist theory espouses an interactive stance, in the present research, these extremes and the inevitable power difference were consciously moderated.

As for the third qualitative paradigm, all research can also be tailored to be transformative and advocative—the present mixed method champions a minority group, gives transformation opportunity by empowering the participants, and may lead to social change by
way of clinical acceptance of SSP. Having discussed this overlap in worldviews, the ideology guiding this research was largely contextualism for the qualitative method.

Finally, observational notes added to the data of the present study. Variety of methods simply shows that the evolution of qualitative methods from positivist methodology was based on two historical advancements: The Interpretive Turn (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979) just mentioned, and an increasingly interdisciplinary scholarly arena (Yanow & Schwartzshea, 2006). The following quote describes the nature of the present qualitative part of the research analysis as interpretive and based on a unified or interdisciplinary, humanistic worldview.

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973, p. 5)

The mix of philosophies and nonmono gathering of data in the present research was under the auspices of Braud’s (1998a) Integral Inquiry, discussed next.

**Overarching Method: Integral Inquiry**

    Advocating an integrated method, Braud’s (1998a) continuum of quantitative to qualitative research methods encompassing the spectrum of research questions shows their overlap and that no single method may suffice to explore extraordinary, ineffable, or lived experiences that are investigated in transpersonal research because of their “interconnectedness” (p. 39) nature. Jung’s (1949/1973) ontological statement also defended the expanded philosophical stand of the current research: “Ultimate truth, if there be such a thing, demands the concert of many voices” (p. xiv). Further, aspects of Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson, 1998) provided the transpersonal and meditative tools required for compassion and resonance in my interactions with the women participants, and the intuitive and imaginative skills, as also required by grounded theory, during data analysis. Finally, Davar’s (2001) attempt to include qualitative
understanding of gender and mental health (in India) can be answered by mixed method: “We need to examine why there is a selective subjugation of non-reason by Reason” (p. 25).

As a reminder, following is a discussion of the feminist essence of the research. Next, the primarily pragmatist view as the origin of contextualism informing this research are shown. Finally, the theory behind the quantitative method ends the theoretical section, including a description of its psychological assessments.

**Feminist theory: The essence of the research method.** Feminist theory’s tenets were evident in all aspects of this research and in the created Semi-Structured Questionnaires (SSQ). Feminism honors women’s voices as a validation of their position in culture; it presupposes that women are oppressed and advocates a change (Reinharz, 1992). The current method supported this ideology by following Reinharz’ methodological tenets: (a) the research question itself can empower women participants by allowing a voice for their experiences; (b) any bias toward oppression as a feminist ideology was tempered by objective testing; (c) the reproduction of women’s spoken words rather than “rephrased as ‘correct’ English” (p. 37) respected them, validated their reality, and allowed the reader to hear what the researcher has heard, all lending to reader understanding of data analysis and to theory generation; (d) multiple forms of data enhanced credibility; (e) limited participant selection criteria embraced diversity among the women; and (f) data analysis included “interpretive” (p. 151) thematic content analysis. Finally, although the positivist position of researcher neutrality is not encouraged in feminist methodology, and Reinharz suggested first person singular in the writing, I balanced consciously the previously mentioned tension between neutrality and participation in interviewing, and between bias and nonbias in data analysis, interpretation, and writing. Again, Ram (2001), in calling for an interdisciplinary study of SSP in India, advocated for women’s voice: “The gender
specific nature of the consciousness which women bring to possession disappears under the weight of rationalism” (p. 202).

Although the present research was not approached from the perspective that the educated and functional group of women were marginalized, the radical end of feminist research namely, advocacy/participatory (Creswell, 2009) or transformative, silently presumes oppression; it cannot be ignored that the present research is based on an a priori assumption that Indian women’s internalizations may follow cultural norms at the expense of individuality (Roland, 1989). However, the edge of postmodern influence on feminism is the deconstruction of patriarchal norms, and, feminist philosophy gave the women in the present study the potential for self-actualization—simply, their words could tip the power balance and create a transformative paradigm (Van Buren, 1995).

The research paradigm: Contextualism—A pragmatic basis. At a simplistic level, a contextualist worldview best resonated in understanding the complexities of SSP and guided this research in that the women’s reality was both created by their interaction with society/culture and was in context of their own experiences. Thus, interaction with the researcher determined the creation of one reality. However, Mertens (2005) said that utilizing a limited definition such as, “reality is socially constructed” (p. 14) belies a historically complex set of interrelated philosophies in an increasingly interdisciplinary arena and which guided also the nuanced development of mixed method theory—thus, here, overlapping of philosophies was specifically addressed. Although, after Edmund Husserl, all knowledge is constructed through social interaction, following is a further discussion of the contextual paradigm.

The contextualist method arose from philosophical pragmatism (Pepper, 1942/1970), a worldview that also informed grounded theory and which will be discussed in that section. As
implied so far, the epistemology of contextualism is that what we know is dependent on its context. Although the debate between contextualism and constructionism (Fox, 2008; Jonassen, 2006) is beyond the scope of this paper, Fox (2006, 2008) claimed that constructivism is actually a form of “functional contextualism” (p. 56), the branch of contextualist methodology that is predictive; this is the paradigm for hypotheses testing and it has been shown that this category cannot be dismissed as not informing mixed method. However, the goal of Fox’s (2008) second branch, “descriptive contextualism” (p. 56) is to give “an understanding of the complexity and richness of a whole event . . . construction of knowledge that is specific, personal, ephemeral, and spatiotemporally restricted, like a historical narrative” (p. 56)—it is thus, suited for the qualitative part of the present research. If we were to not go to the roots of constructionism and merely say that SSP is socially constructed and that it is claimed to be a major research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2005), even so, the branches of social constructivism and social constructionism are based on a contextual worldview and conflate—social constructivism is based on Lev Vygotsky’s interactional learning theory and which can define a research’s epistemology, and social constructionism gives ontological answers because socially-constructed reality is based on the artifacts (for example, SSP) created by the participant-society interaction.

Again, all analysis, including objective data, is based on evidence of some sort (Fox, 2008)—contextualism’s historic relationship to behaviorism bridges qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. Thus, the multiple realities that can ensue from the multiple, overlapping paradigms of mixed method provide flexibility and opportunity for research questions to evolve and change during the research (Mertens, 2005). Underlying this statement is a major tenet of pragmatism namely, functionality. Further, a radical end of feminist ideology, as in a participatory worldview, is that the result of research is dictated by the socially oppressed group
it studies, which implies that a research question cannot be set a priori. Although this study did not set out to find socially oppressed women participants in the US, I previously noted the possible internalization of women’s role and the nuance of a culturally-dictated (contextual) phenomenon such as SSP that the women participants carried over from a patriarchal culture-of-origin. In saying this, it is critical to note that there are aspects of empirical feminist research that seem to follow a positivist stance and, in cultural studies, are, at the same time, postmodern in ideology. This means that combining feminist and contextualist paradigms enabled translation (or deconstruction per postmodernism) of this study’s validity and reliability to trustworthiness and authenticity—when a contextualist paradigm underlies cross-cultural research, cultural nuances interpreted by data analysis are considered trustworthy (Roland, 1989).

The analysis of the women’s words in the context of SSP manifested in a social setting. All research is limited to context and that narrows the generalization of interpreted data. Yet, in the present study, the context of Indian original culture and American host culture was interdependent—the women constructed their identity in shifting relationships (Johanek, 2000), and the context of both cultures created the data in the present study.

*Justification for a Mixed Method: Its Philosophy*

As mentioned, mixed method satisfied both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the present research question. Mixed method is justified if the mixed data are cross-validated by some manner of triangulation rather than presented side-by-side (Creswell, 2009; Yang, 2008) and this was done by CART in the present study. Mixed method is gaining popularity and is more adequate to address today’s complex social and health science problems in research (Braud, 1998a; Bryman, 2006; Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009; Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, & Rupert, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie,
2004; Kohls, Hack, & Wallach, 2008; Morgan, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007; Yang, 2008). Kohls, Hack, and Wallach (2008) also found that participants’ evaluation of their spiritual experiences changed positively after they answered their Exceptional Experiences Questionnaire, and they realized the importance of adding qualitative methods to quantitative measures for “inner and private experiences of transcendence” (p. 156).) Mixed method has been conducted for decades (Driscoll et al., 2007), however, Strauss and Corbin (1998) cautioned that mono-methods done side-by-side or oversimplified as complementing each other are not true mixed method; rather, integration at all stages is important (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In the present study, integration was attempted in the research question, method, analysis, and discussion.

Of the many formats that researchers follow and from the typologies organized by Creswell (2009) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), the present method was classified as follows. First, the abductive reasoning (Morgan, 2007) in grounded theory (to be discussed) occurred during the iterative phases of the present study where both sets of data contributed to the formation of iterative questions. By definition, abduction is obtained from sequential data collection whereas the present study involved concurrent data collection initially, that is, both qualitative and quantitative interviews were conducted together. However, information from the initial data generated some questions for the iterative phase which was then a sequential step conducive to abduction during analysis. This does not make it a true sequential mixed method, the iterative process inherent in grounded theory resembles sequential data collection. Rather, the further mixed method categorization of this would be multi-phase (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Further, in the current research, each method had equal weight—one method was not formulated on the outcome or data of the other method except in the method of iteration. In
addition, there was no transformation of the data of one method to the kind of data obtained by
the other method, which would have indicated bias for the latter data.

Although the meta-analysis of Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao (2006) showed a rate of
prevalence considered high, 14.3%, for concurrent design using identical samples, most
researchers consider “similar populations” not as meaning identical or the same participants for
both methods, nor an equal number of participants for each method. Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and
Jiao (2006) posed the critical question of inferential consistency that I grappled with in selecting
the participant number for my study: “Is it appropriate to triangulate, consolidate, or compare
quantitative data stemming from a large, random sample on equal grounds with qualitative data
arising from a small, purposive sample”? (p. 98). Driscoll et al. (2007) discussed the
ramifications of using a small number of participants for the quantitative part of the study to
enable similar numbers for both parts and reached the compromise solution of using simpler
statistical measures of association. As such, the present study’s test scores were analyzed by
correlations. The present study was important in its selection of an equal number and the same
participants for both methods.

Caveats for mixed method. Three core concerns, reliability, validity, and generalizability,
inherently and routinely addressed in quantitative research design, were specifically addressed by
translating to credibility, dependability, and transferability, respectively in order to ensure rigor
of the mixed method (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009). Credibility covered aspects of the
methodology discussed throughout this chapter, and was conferred through

the degree to which the findings plausibly explained the phenomenon of interest, the
extent to which findings cohered with what is already known, the attention paid to
alternate or rival explanations, and the correspondence between the researcher’s and
respondent’s portrayal of respondent experience (Curry et al., 2009, p. 1448)
Dependability was ensured in the present study by this researcher’s transparency in necessary instances. A peer-coder’s agreement in coding the narratives added to reliability. Finally, rich narratives generally allow the reader to determine applicability or transferability of the findings.

In the present study, mixed method reduced the previously mentioned potential researcher bias of presuming knowledge. This is because: (a) the data were triangulated, (b) the two sets of data and triangulation results were considered complementary, (c) the correlations showed construct validity, and (d) there was concurrent validity with respect to literature.

*Grounded Theory Method’s Theory*

Narrated data were interpreted by the grounded theory method of Strauss and Corbin (1998). Historically, the systematic data analysis of Glasser and Strauss (1967) was seminal for social science research and served as a point of departure for Strauss (1987) in leading to the contemporary grounded theory method of Strauss and Corbin (1998). Two aspects common in different versions make this method unique in the qualitative arena: (a) Data collection and analysis are side-by-side, and data and outcome at each stage of the research are constantly compared and inform each other, making for a cyclical, iterative analysis; and (b) the evolving theory, which is developed from the data and not deduced from hypotheses based on preconceived theories (the way of null hypothesis), thickens as more data are collected by theoretical sampling and supported by theoretical sensitivity. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined theoretical sampling as, “sampling on the basis of emerging concepts, with the aim being to explore the dimensional range of varied conditions along which the properties of concepts vary” (p. 73). This constituted the rounds of iterative questioning in the present study, after Charmaz.
(2009), although Strauss and Corbin (1998) meant new participants specifically selected based on the questions emerging from the data.

Theoretical sensitivity is nebulously defined in the literature, and basically, it is the interaction between new literature and the data. Whereas Glasser (1978) was rigid about research starting without literature review, this eased in the Strauss and Corbin (1998) version where literature can be a theoretical, analytic tool. Charmaz (2009) looked upon theoretical sensitivity as a broad array of ways of theorizing about the data, including engaging with new literature. In the present study, additional literature was engaged with after data collection to discuss the data supporting the themes that emerged from the women’s narratives. Despite the axiom that grounded theory starts with data and not literature, separation of a priori knowledge from data is generally acknowledged as not entirely possible (Charmaz, 2009). Perhaps this led to the tenet of theoretical sensitivity because it limits researcher bias, or, as Glasser (1978) originally asked of the data in formulating theoretical sensitivity: *What’s happening here?*

*The pragmatist basis of grounded theory.* The paradigm that defined grounded theory was pragmatism (Strübing, 2010), based on the philosophies of Charles Sanders Pierce, William James, George Herbert Mead, and John Dewey (Fox, 2008; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mertens, 2005). Pragmatism asks in developing a method, *What works?* Nuances of the pragmatist stance follow and the connection between pragmatism, contextualism, and grounded theory philosophy continues. Pepper (1942/1970) observed that worldviews have pragmatism as a commonality—people discover ideas to make sense of and cope with their world. He defined a philosophical worldview as having two characteristics: (a) a root metaphor that holds its ontological assumption, and (b) a truth criterion or its epistemological assumption. Again, the paradigm of the qualitative part of the current research is descriptive contextualism and the truth
criterion of a contextualist worldview is *successful working* where analysis is true or valid if it reaches an effective goal; meaning is functional. In the present study, does SSP enable coping? The root metaphor for contextualism is *ongoing act in context*, implying the temporary, evolving nature of reality—what is the nature of SSP in the US? As a reminder, the two branches of contextualism, functional and descriptive, overlap and mixed method supports this.

Data in solitude do not represent reality according to the pragmatic roots of contextualism (James, 1907/1948). Shalin (1986) introduced the researcher in the research equation in order to reveal the nebulous reality in processes that are ongoing and creative: “The state of indeterminacy endemic to reality cannot be terminated once and for all. It can be alleviated only partially, in concrete situations, and with the help of a thinking agent [the researcher]” (p. 10). In other words, data cannot be given reality value or gain existence until they are acted upon, and Mead (1934) called this link between an individual [the researcher] and environment [the data] a social act where abstract data comes to life. Strübing (2010) translated Mead’s pragmatic roots as the thematizing in grounded theory, visible in Strauss’ (1987) manner of handling data. The concept of data as fluid and relational [contextual] leading to one of many realities was eloquently phrased by Glasser and Strauss (1967): “The published world is not the final one, but only a pause in the never-ending process of generating theory” (p. 40).

When reality is the result of constantly changing human activity, the resulting theory needs to also embody the evolution of the temporary and fluid reality it espouses. Thus, theory is process and has a temporary, situational nature (James 1907/1948). Strübing (2010) showed the impact of reality as evolutionary within grounded theory process, as follows:

Grounded theory departs from the notion that all knowledge is theoretical to the core. The purpose of grounded theory is to elaborate the abstraction level of its theoretical results to the amount needed to solve the problems defined by the respective research purpose . . . leading to plausible but testable propositions. (Strübing, 2010, p. 558)
This quote extends the pragmatic and interactional nature of grounded theory to involve utilitarian advocacy, a tenet of feminist theory.

_Abduction_. Although Strauss and Corbin (1998) limited theory generation to the inductive-deductive iterative cycle, necessary for saturation, Charles Sanders Pierce coined the term _abduction_, with its metaphor of lightening for spontaneous insight, as going beyond induction-deduction and necessary on the part of the researcher to create new knowledge (Strübing, 2010). Privileging such intuition shows the play between positivism and contextualism as it weakens the border between “scientific discovery and justification” (Charmaz, 2009, p. 122)—in the present study, the intuitive outcome of abduction was verified during iterative questioning, and by the quantitative testing.

In closing the gap between objective and subjective methods, it is often ignored that research by grounded theory leans toward quantitative research. This is implied in Strauss’ (1987) original thought: “scientific theories require first of all that they be conceived, then elaborated, and checked out . . . the terms that we prefer are induction, deduction, and verification” (p. 11) as the iterative cycle of analysis; abduction extends the iterative hallmark of grounded theory.

_Generation of theory_. Grounded theory’s origins justify theory formation, as follows. The iterative process is grounded in social pragmatism’s main philosophical proposition for a coherent theory: “If inquiry begins in doubt, it terminates in the institution of conditions that remove the need for doubt. The latter state of affairs may be designated by the words belief or knowledge” (Dewey, 1938, p. 172). Dewey (1938) defined _inquiry_ as the transformation of the tension between doubt or an “indeterminate situation” (p. 104), and belief. Interaction with the environment is undetermined until a satisfactory solution is reached by an iterative process that is necessary to resolve the tension inherent in a research question for that historical moment.
Dewey (1938) considered the indeterminate “existential” (p. 108) starting point as gaining cognition only when the researcher calls it a problem that addresses her indeterminancy about the situation: “To mistake the problem involved is to cause subsequent inquiry to be irrelevant or to go astray” (p. 108), which is echoed in the opening argument of this chapter. In sum, theory generation involves a connection between data and tentative concepts and solutions. Strübing’s (2010) statement below summed up the grounded theory process and showed its similarity with hypothesis in objective experiments, as well as with pragmatism.

Suggestions as derived from abductive processes in Dewey’s model are far from being logically well-structured and worked out, rather they are seen as the primary conceptual material for logical ideas. . . . Suggestions are checked logically for their fit with perceptual material from the perspective of a possible problem-solution. This is not only another hint at the procedural continuity of scientific reasoning and common sense problem-solving; it is at once an indicator for the place of reasoning in grounded theory and further encourages a pendular movement between data-collection, data-analysis, and theory-building. . . . It is only when a problem is settled that belief is reinstated. (Strübing, 2010, pp. 565-566)

The latter sentence is thickly nuanced for the outcome of the present research—the “settling” of a problem, or some satisfactory answer about SSP, follows systematic analysis, as shown by the following quote:

The grounded theory-oriented research process can be seen as moving in a series of loops between the empirical process under scrutiny and the stream of conceptual thinking or theorizing about it. The link between the two is enacted on the base of a general abductive attitude of researchers. They conduct repeated steps of posing questions at the empirical data (which itself is generated in this process) and interpret this material in abductive and qualitative-inductive, probabilistic inferences that, in turn, lead to provisional theoretical concepts, the validation of which is experimentally proofed by deducing expectable consequences and retesting them on the data. In this process, the conceptual level and density of the theory under construction grows. It is this repeated looping that Strauss addresses with his notion of ‘induction, deduction, and verification’ (Strauss, 1987, p. 11) as signifying the analytical process in grounded theory. (Strübing, 2010, p. 566)

Underlying this discussion supporting the iterative hallmark of grounded theory is that the regularities found in the physical and social worlds can be uncovered by, or emerge from, the
iterative process. In the present study, iteration was a built-in validation of the emerged concepts that then made the theory “probable, reasonable, or likely to be true” (Charmaz, 2009, p. 186), paradoxically adding to its generalizability. In essence, these natural regularities can be discovered by comparing the specifics that, in the present study, were the themes from the stories of women participants, compared for commonality and differences. This is what makes grounded theory “The Constant Comparative Method” (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988, p. 141)—although Strauss and Corbin (1998) coined it “theoretical comparison” (p. 67), the term constant comparison gained popularity—because, from the moment of data collection, the process was one of constantly comparing every datum in order to find similarities and differences.

**Full circle—The interrelatedness of philosophies in theory generation.** The roots of pragmatism, descriptive contextualism, social constructivism, and the postmodern, deconstructive edge of feminism, are also revealed in Charmaz’ (2009) discussion of her preference for interpretive theory and which relies on intuition to decipher symbolic interaction.

Pragmatism informed symbolic interactionism, a theoretical perspective that assumes society, reality, and self are constructed through interaction and thus rely on language and communication. This perspective assumes that interaction is inherently dynamic and interpretive and addresses how people create, enact, and change meanings and actions. . . . Symbolic interaction assumes that people can and do think about their actions rather than respond mechanically to stimuli (Charmaz, 2009, p. 7).

She distilled the many kinds of theories—positivist, rhetorical, constructivist, and objectivist—to say that Interpretive Theory “emphasizes understanding rather than explanation” (Charmaz, 2009, p. 126). Charmaz (2009) wrote: “Interpretive theory calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon. This type of theory assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual” (p. 126).
The indeterminancy of reality emphasized in the pragmatist worldview, its contextualist offshoot, and interactional research after feminist thought are evident in Charmaz’ (2009) quote. It also honors Glasser (1978), one of the previously-mentioned founders of grounded theory, whose implication of positivism in grounded theory was within the context of relationships among concepts in the qualitative analysis. However, opposed to Charmaz, Strauss (1987) considered interpretation as a limitation of grounded theory although he admitted it was inevitable. In the present study, I tempered interpretation by balancing the feminist tenet that a researcher does not speak for participants against another feminist tenet, joining their worldview in unavoidable interaction.

The generalizability of a theory grounded in data. Charmaz (2009) said that a theory grounded in data rather than based on an a priori theory is constructivist and, being situated in a context, it can be compared with other studies and then, paradoxically, the abstraction in the theory can be generalized. Similarly, Strauss and Corbin (1998) said that a theory is created by integrating all the data in a study so that rather than specific for an individual or a group, a theory is a “highly conceptual” (p. 145) reduction of all participants’ stories and all data, and applies to all in a general manner.

For us, theory denotes a set of well-developed categories (e.g., themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant . . . phenomenon. The statements of relationship explain who, what, when, where, why, how, and with what consequences an event occurs. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 145)

To add, Strauss and Corbin (1998) said that describing a social phenomenon with a theoretical concept is insufficient and a theoretical statement, which is a connection between two or more concepts, is needed to explain or predict a phenomenon. A theory also shows the pattern of relationships and gives alternate interpretations, such as, linking to “larger issues or creating
larger unrecognized issues in entirety. An imaginative interpretation sparks new views and leads other scholars to new vistas” (Charmaz, 2009, p. 181).

Not all information about a group can be available in one theory and there are different ways to different outcomes of a project where a theory that is more abstract and has a broad scope or a wider applicability is less grounded in the data. I believe the theory ending the present study is both—it is narrow in scope in the context of its unique phenomenology and it has wide applicability because of the limited selection criteria resulting in a diverse participant pool. Strauss and Corbin (1998) also said that although integration of concepts into theory starts in the Selective Coding step, the nature of the theory is a gestalt of ongoing process and interpretation of data.

The intuition and inference that goes into analysis by grounded theory was reflected in Anderson’s (2009) innovative Intuitive Inquiry mentioned earlier. Invaluable to me were Anderson’s teachings on reflective listening, indwelling, and varying my focal depth that enabled a paradoxical combination of self-consciousness in inner reflection and in participant interaction, akin to Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) theorizing.

Selection of Psychological Assessments and the Theory in Cross-Cultural Research

Within a postpositivist worldview, the selected assessments were a measure of an a priori, objective reality that, within a certain probability, SSP is associated with dissociation or trance, stress, religiosity and/or spirituality, PTSD or trauma, exceptional experiences, and/or biopsychosociospiritual manifestations. Forming the qualitative part of the research were culturally-specific personal experiences that were explained in metaphoric, somatic, or ritualistic modes and are difficult to express and explain in a universalist, cognitive manner. JadHAV (1995) says that such phenomena do not easily fit into prevailing Western classifications where
cognition is considered more than affect. Yet, in the present study, objectivity reduced a dynamic phenomenon to a “discrete set of ideas to test” (Creswell, 2009, p. 7) and helped understand a different layer of this complex phenomenon. In SSP’s dual question of subjectivity and its psychological correlates, the latter were explored by responses to psychological assessments.

The body of research on the Explanatory Model Interview Catalogue (EMIC) (Weiss, 1997), based on explanatory theory of Kleinman (1977), occurred in four cities in India during the course of fieldwork by Weiss and local researchers (Raguram, Weiss, Channabasavanna, & Devins, 1996) and offered a cross-cultural perspective on reasoning for mixed method in the present study. As an interview model, the EMIC was formulated to understand the processes that are involved in the associations between variables (Weiss, 1997, p. 250). In essence, the EMIC is a mixed method where questionnaires and narration inform each other and help to give culturally-sensitive clues for questioning during the interview and for the selection of psychological assessments. Creation of an EMIC method involved participants’ views, similar to the validation of qualitative themes by iteration in present grounded theory method, and its introductions appropriate for Indians utilizing indirect, metaphoric idioms were useful during the current study’s interviews.

The basis of most psychological assessments is the deficit model (Stephenson, 2000) where differences in individuals are measured as a deficit from the norm. This is pronounced as a problem in cross-cultural studies where assessment questions may not be universally understandable despite standardization claims, and more culturally-sensitive assessments may be required. The translation of standardized psychological assessments into the language of the participant is crucial in confidently using a scale (Stephenson, 2000; Weiss, 1997). Weiss (1997) also mandated pilot testing to “validate the questions” (p. 247). In the present study, a pilot test
performed prior to the recruitment process helped in determining terminology used in the main study for asking assessment questions to non-English speaking women.

An added confound in psychological assessment of nondominant cultures is the level of acculturation, an important variable in the study of immigrants. Although the conceptualization of acculturation suffers from a lack of formal definition, and although at a sophisticated level of definition it is an interaction between two cultural groups, at the level of dominant cultural bias it implies that a change is needed in individuals of the nondominant cultural group. This caveat needs to be considered or specified in formulating acculturation assessments. Supporting the present study’s interactional philosophy, Weiss (1997) fairly called acculturation a “complex, multidimensional process of learning that occurs when individuals and groups come into continuous contact with different societies” (p. 77).

Parekh’s (2000) Acculturation Scale for Asian Indians was initially selected for the present study because it was standardized by questioning immigrants from an Indian culture. It was abandoned because the pilot study and initial interviews showed that it was more appropriate for children of immigrants—it measured the acculturation of parents as it informed the childhood environment in Canada of the now-adult participants. Thus, in the present study, acculturation scores were not obtained as a continuous variable nor could qualitative data give a categorical figure for acculturation, although women’s answers on acculturation did partly reflect on other important variables. Further, Stephenson (2000) found that acculturation has a major role as a mediator between culturally-different groups and test results, and, in the present study, data on theme Acculturation allowed a nuanced discussion of triangulation results.

Similarly, no depression scale was used in the present study because Rao, Young, and Raguram (2007) found that when both somatic and depressive symptoms occurred and were
distressing in the Indian patients they studied, depression, as opposed to somatization, correlated with the patients’ conceptualization of Westernization. In a similar vein, Raguram et al. (1996) found that depression among Indian patients was considered “socially disadvantageous” (p. 1043) and associated with stigma whereas somatization was not and was, in fact, admitted as having secondary gains. Rather, trance and somatization as the defining feature of SSP from the literature (Seligman, 2005) justified the use of dissociation and somatic scales in the present research.

Normally, a scale is used with at least two groups, the group manifesting the phenomenon of study and a control group, or in a pretest posttest experiment on the same group/s. In the present study, evolving nature of the recruitment and iteration, and the spontaneity of SSP precluded a distinct control group. However, the essence of data triangulation by CART was the formation of groups of women with distinct characteristics vis-à-vis different variables. There were thus internal control groups of women who did not manifest a particular variable (phenomenon), and their results were compared with groups who did manifest the phenomenon.

Further, construct validity was by correlations and based on the conceptualizations of the psychological manifestations set forth in the Literature Review. Mertens (2005) cautioned the necessity of conceptualizing a construct and testing the hypothesis based on it because results vary due to cultural differences. Correlations in the present study appropriately showed convergent and discriminant validity when the literature review was used as a guide for the psychological correlates of SSP. Following are descriptions of the assessments used; questions are reproduced in the respective appendixes, and the authors’ permissions are noted Appendix A when the authors required it.
**Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES).** The DES (Appendix B) was developed by Bernstein and Putnam (1986; see also Carlson, Putnam, Ross, Anderson, Clark, Torem et al., 1993). It is composed of 28 items scored on a Likert-like scale from zero (*never*) - 10 (*always*) with a possible score range from 0 - 280. Bernstein and Putnam standardized the first DES having a 28-item self-report questionnaire. The participants were women; the presence of dissociative experiences’ extent correlated with the degree of reported abuse. Good test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.84 ($p < .0001, N = 26$) and split-half reliability Spearman correlation from .50 to .79 with a median coefficient of .64 at $p < .0001$, were found. All corrected item-total score correlations were statistically significant, showing good internal consistency and construct validity. A Kruskal-Wallis test and post hoc comparisons of the scores of the eight populations studied provided evidence of the scale’s criterion-referenced validity. “The scale was able to distinguish between subjects with a dissociative disorder (multiple personality) and all other subjects” (Bernstein and Putnam, 1986, p. 727). Carlson et al. (1994) claimed that the answers are consistent across different areas in the US based on which reasonably reliable responses were anticipated for the DES in the present study.

Carlson et al. (1994) also showed that people who were diagnosed with multiple personality disorder in which dissociation is a main symptom, and Dissociative Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) had higher scores (43) on this test than individuals with other disorders. This is in keeping with Bernstein and Putnam’s (1986) findings that distinguished between dissociative disorders in patients with multiple personality and other participants although they emphasized that dissociation is both a normal and a psychophysiological process lying on a continuum from minor dissociations in daily life to pathological forms. Second to multiple personality, the highest median score (53) in their study
was by patients diagnosed with PTSD. The DES was used for the present study based on the authors’ finding of “a strong linkage between the development of dissociative symptoms and traumatic experiences” (Bernstein and Putnam, 1986, p. 727) and because trance is definitive of SSP. Often used as a screening measure, it has been observed that scores above 30 may indicate dissociation (Carlson et al., 1993); in Seligman’s (2005) study on spirit possession of shamans, the DES scores were above 30.

Considering dissociation’s association with trauma (Moore, 1993; Ross, Keyes, Yan, Wang, Zou, Xu et al., 2008), feminist research in India (Ram, 2001) showed SSP as oppressed women’s way of coping. In the trauma model of dissociation (Ross et al., 2008), childhood physical and sexual abuse is correlated with adult pathologic dissociation as a method of coping. In contrast, the sociocognitive model of dissociation is “not related to trauma” (Ross et al., 2008, p. 36) but supports a social constructivist view—social circumstances dictate the need to dissociate as a defense; nevertheless, a form of oppression is still implied. However, Ross et al.’s study had compared the results of the DES on two groups, a Canadian general population and patients from an outpatient unit at a hospital in Shanghai, China who met the criteria for schizophrenia, or for childhood physical or sexual abuse. The aspects of their results relevant for the present study are that: (a) dissociation supports the trauma model; (b) there was no significant difference in dissociation due to childhood physical or sexual abuse; (c) the DES was valid for both populations from which they surmised that it has cross-cultural validity; and, (d) since the concept of dissociation was absent in China, the authors emphasized the necessity to ask specific questions relating to childhood trauma, as was done in the present study.

Two modification were made to this assessment in the present study: (a) the first question on the DES was modified from driving a car to household work because the five less-educated
women participants did not drive, and (b) Bernstein and Putnam’s (1986) percentage answering system from 0 to 100% was altered to a Likert-like answering system of 0-10, with zero being a negative answer of never and 10 being an extreme positive answer of always, for the sake of participants who may not understand percentages.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983), the PSS (Appendix C) was used to measure the participants’ subjectively-felt effect of daily life situations; they said: “[The] common assumption among health researchers that the impact of . . . stressful events is, to some degree, determined by one’s perception of their stressfulness” (p. 385). Seligman’s (2005) study showed that the psychological characteristics of mediums may predispose them also to stress.

The PSS is fairly brief with 14 easy-to-answer questions along a Likert-like 5 point scale from never to always, giving the degree to which the participants found, in the previous month, daily events stressful (Cohen, Lamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983, p. 386). The authors found that events experienced as “unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded” (Cohen, Lamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983, p. 386) are three criteria that determine perceived stress: “it is (this) level of appraised stress, not the objective occurrence of the events, that determines one’s response to a stressor(s)” (p. 387).

The PSS showed good predictive validity against scales measuring life events, social anxiety, physical symptomology, and depressive symptomology. The study’s results show its overlap with social and physical issues as measured by the BioPSSI. Despite the high correlation between depression scales and the PSS, the authors concluded that these two scales measure different constructs. However, the Cronbach’s alpha for the PSS, a statistical measure of internal consistency or how closely the items on the scale measure the same concept, was the accepted
higher than 0.70 (Cronbach, 1951), with .84, .85, and .86 in their three samples, two of college students and one group from a smoking-cessation program. For short periods (2 days), the test-retest reliability showed a significant correlation; however, it was only moderate after 4 to 8 weeks.

This above finding was relevant to the present study where it was noted that stress was culturally contextual for the women participants and did not reflect unreliability of the instrument. Also, in the authors’ study, there were no differences in results based on age or gender, a finding advantageous for the present study. The authors also claimed that the general nature of the questions made this test suitable for all subpopulations; however, they did not address cross-cultural validity.

**Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS).** The SIBS (Appendix D) was developed by Hatch, Burg, Naberhaus, and Hellmich (1998) and was used in this study for a measure of spirituality. It is comprised of 22 items scored on a Likert-like scale from 1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree) and a possible score range from 22 - 154. Developed to examine the positive effect of spirituality on health, these authors claimed that the SIBS questions avoid “cultural-religious bias” and assess “actions as well as beliefs” (p. 476) aimed to measure overall spirituality; McKee and Chappel (1992) found that religious scales such as the Spiritual Well-Being Scale were not specific for “several key components of spirituality” (Hatch et al., 1998, p. 476). For the SIBS, questions were formulated by interviewing adherents of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, and tested by administering on 83 participants of which 50 were patients from a rural medical practice and 33 were family practice professionals.

The internal consistency of the SIBS gave a total Cronbach’s coefficient alpha of .92 and the test-retest reliability was alpha .92. The scale also correlated with other measures of
spirituality such as the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982) giving a convergent construct reliability coefficient of .80. The use of this scale for the present study was to explore any relationship between spirituality and SSP.

*Exceptional Experiences Questionnaire (EEQ).* The EEQ (Appendix E) was developed by Kohls, Hack, and Walach (2008). A short version scale of the EEQ, not yet published at the time this research was initiated, was emailed by Dr. Kohls to this researcher and used in this study. The following discussion is of their original, published EEQ. A combination of measuring ineffable experiences by mixed method and triangulating the results made their publication valuable for the present study. The authors (Kohls, Hack, & Walach, 2008) say: “Until now, no questionnaire instrument developed for the purpose of assessing spiritual and religious experiences has been qualitatively double-checked for intermethod validity” (p. 156). In their study, participants were selected in northern Europe from different spiritual-interest groups for their belief in spirituality by an initial questionnaire on the frequency of meditation. The control group consisted of participants from a mental health clinic that incorporates “spiritual aspects in the treatment process” (Kohls, Hack, & Walach, 2008 p. 161).

In all their groups, the number of participants exceeded 36 and went up to 259. Their original 57 item paper-pencil version of the EEQ was administered by mail twice, using a blind format, within a 6-month interval. The two temporal sets of data were compared. Second, some of these participants were invited to participate in qualitative interviews to capture the “inner and private experiences of transcendence” (Kohls, Hack, & Walach, 2008, p. 156). That data was obtained by the sequential explanatory strategy of Creswell (2009) and triangulated for intermethod validity of the EEQ. In this strategy, qualitative data is first collected and analyzed, followed by sequential sampling based on the initial results. Creswell (2009) said that this
strategy uses “quantitative data and results to assist in the interpretation of qualitative findings” (p. 211; see also Mallinson, 2002).

In the present study, the EEQ augmented the SIBS because Kohls and Walach (2007) found only a weak correlation between the EEQ and SIBS for spiritual practitioners, albeit their study showed a strong correlation between the EEQ and SIBS for the nonspirituality practicing participant group. The EEQ was used for the present study based on the following findings:

1. Triangulation showed that the EEQ does measure spiritual constructs as voiced by spiritually-practicing participants.

2. Hill and Pargament (2003) found that not many instruments truly grasp spiritual, religious, or mystical experiences, self-assessments of the experiences. Kohls & Walach (2006) add aspects of temporality or “mystical journey” (p. 126) to these experiences including dose-response, but as a cognitive belief system. The EEQ assessed the mystical journey and revealed egolessness of the altered states of consciousness (ASC) along the journey’s path as participants re-appraised their experiences.

3. In factor analysis of the data, the EEQ showed “discriminant validity against Social Support, Sense of Coherence, and Mental Distress, while it showed convergent validity with Transpersonal Trust” (Kohls & Walach, 2006, p. 145), thus distinguishing spiritual subjectivity from the former constructs while showing similarity with transpersonal beliefs. It is noteworthy for the present study that the Transpersonal Trust Scale cannot measure the ambiguous character of exceptional experiences during spiritual practice but which can be measured by the EEQ. A typical transpersonal trust question would ask about a feeling of connection with a
higher power. Whereas the present study did not use the Transpersonal Trust Scale, Kohls and Walach’s (2007) transpersonal constructs and the women participants’ spiritual experiences resonated.

4. The EEQ distinguished between spiritual experiences and psychopathology. In other words, the psychopathological subscale was a measure of aspects of exceptional experiences rather than psychopathology.

5. Kohls and Walach (2007) suggested further research to substantiate the implication of the findings for “the impact, effect and nature of spiritual experiences themselves and the moderating role of spiritual practice” (p. 1312). This was relevant to the present study’s research question of SSP as a coping mechanism against trauma. A negative correlation between PTSD and SSP and a positive correlation between spirituality SSP could address their concern.

In the present study, pilot testing showed that some constructs were confusing to a woman immigrant from Nepal. This led to a consensual description of these test questions which were later used to explain to participants who did not understand the questions.

*The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist—Civilian (PCL-C).* The PCL-C (Appendix F) was developed by Blake, Weathers, Nagy, Koupek, Gusman, and Charney (1985) (see also Weathers, Litz, Herman, Huska, & Keane, 1993; and Blanchard, Jones-Alexander, Buckley, & Forneris, 1996). The PCL-C comprises 17 items (corresponding to 17 symptoms) scored on a Likert-like scale from 1 (not at all) - 5 (extremely) and a possible score range from 17 - 85. It was compared with the older Clinician Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS) by Blanchard et al. (1996) and found to be, besides not needing clinician administration, a valid, briefer screening instrument that uses different cut off scores for different items. The latter feature is not in the
CAPS, making the CAPS not significantly valid (< .5) for psychogenic amnesia and hypervigilance.

*The Biopsychosociospiritual Inventory (BioPSSI).* The BioPSSI (Appendix G) was developed by Katerndahl and Oyiriaru (2007) to measure “impaired functional status, physical symptoms, psychological symptoms, social symptoms, and spiritual symptoms” (p. 393) and was an all-inclusive yet parsimonious measure for somatic symptoms within test questions of a cultural and social setting. The BioPSSI supports a *biopsychosocialspiritual* model.

The BioPSSI scores from 0 (none of the time) - 5 (all of the time) with a possible range from 0 – 215. It has five domains or dimensions. Four dimensions measure symptoms; the fifth domain measures functional status. The five subscales that measure the five dimensions are Physical Symptom Scale, Psychological Symptom Scale, Social Symptom Scale, Spiritual Symptom Scale, and Impaired Functional Status Scale. The latter correlates with “matters of health problems and medications as well as ambulatory utilization and hospitalization, but was inversely related to perceived health status and total quality of life score” (Katerndahl & Oyiriaru, 2007, p. 403).

In recognizing the need for a multidimensional scale that included the newly emerging interest in spirituality as a construct, Katerndahl and Oyiriaru (2007) recruited 289 patients in the waiting room of a Texas hospital in order to develop the BioPSSI. The final scale had an internal consistency of Cronbach’s alpha > 0.8. The construct validity by Pearson’s correlations was strong at $p = .005$. This scale was used for the present study to measure somatic symptoms within a social and cultural setting.

Noteworthy for the current research is the paradox of dissociation and the hypersomatization that Seligman (2005) empirically found in her Shaman participants;
dissociation involves loss of memory whereas hypersomatization involves an increased somatic focus. Although the literature did not reveal any psychological somatic testing of women who manifested SSP, their behavior shows that they do. This relationship between dissociation and its seemingly opposite, somatization, to trauma has also been documented (Ross, 1989) and justifies the use of both scales in the present study.

The Method

Aspects of the philosophy and theory of the selected method relevant to the present research were discussed in the previous section. What follows is a description of what was actually implemented.

Cultural Considerations

- The several States of South India have partial common history and culture. It is respected that their reduction to “South Indian” is not favored by all South Indians.

- Indians identify themselves by caste and the community into which they are born, and accordingly answered this demographic question. These data were overlooked in the present analysis because participants generally indicated that they did not support this hierarchal system. Yet, in India, marriages arranged by families are within the same caste; 64% of the women in the present study had arranged marriages.

- English is the medium of instruction in many urban Indian grade schools and is often the reason for a woman’s more Westernized attitude. However, more schools teach in a vernacular language than in English. Yet, most college education is in English.

- The religiosity categories were self-identified with participant-suggested labels.
Conceptualizations

First, interview questions did not differentiate between religiosity and spirituality. Vaughan (1985/1995) wrote: “Dreams as a source of spiritual guidance are well known in religious traditions” (p. 251). Walsh (1999) more specifically differentiated the two terms: “The word religion has many meanings; in particular it implies a concern with the sacred and supreme values of life. The word spirituality, on the other hand, refers to direct experience of the sacred” (p. 3). Koss-Chioino and Hefner’s (2006) statement that “contemporary scholars have found spiritual and spirituality difficult to define. . . . The meaning of spiritual has also become more contentious because of the 20-30 percent of Americans who describe themselves as ‘spiritual but not religious’” (p. 28) is suggestive of the reason why several more-educated participants in the present study preferred to call themselves spiritual and not religious although they practiced religious rituals. Conceptualizations within the present study’s participants followed Gia who said: “Religion is more organized, has infrastructure and has boundaries. Spirituality is about individualism, freedom to believe whatever one is comfortable with.”

Second, suffering and trauma are conceptualized as subjective feelings. Trauma was also due to emotional abuse. Abuse is defined as physical or sexual impingement on the body.

Third, the terminology less-educated, besides being literally based on the level of education, also refers to less contact with Western norms within the loose parameter of not completing high school in India. The literature review implied that it is the proximity to the practice of spirit possession and the occurrence of SSP within the community that determines a woman’s capacity to manifest SSP. Although most of the literature on spirit possession in India was from research conducted in rural areas, and although moving to an urban area is a contact with modernity, my personal experience is that rural migrants do form spirit possession cults in
urban slums, and that spirit possession is also practiced by non-Westernized locals during festivals in the heart of the cities. Still, SSP is largely associated with the illiterate, rural population in India. In the present study, two parameters commonly associated with the term “lower class” in India, less-educated and lower socioeconomic status (SES), conflated. Although upper class, rich women in India do not always complete high school depending on the extent a family is patriarchal or orthodox, in the present study’s sample, the less-educated women happened to be from a lower SES. After Rao et al., (2007) and Teja et al. (1970), based on the likelihood that women who meet both these criteria (rural and poor) would be the ones to believe in spirit possession or experience SSP, the demographic questionnaire was prepared to explore the connection between SSP and education and there is no derogatory implication in the informatory term less-educated. Finally, early women participants discussed their choice of using the word “unusual” for their experiences rather than “exceptional” because their experiences were not exceptional within Indian religious experiences and yet they were not daily, “usual” occurrences for them.

Search for Spirit Possession: Recruitment and Research Participants

Spirit possession of women immigrating from an Indian-culture country to the US were deemed nonexistent by anthropological researchers of spirit possession in India (C. W. Nuckolls, email communication, July 10, 2010; K. Erndl, email communication, July, 2010). My intuition said otherwise, and after 2 months of recruitment with the help of a flyer (Appendix H), an informant led me to a weekly bhajan where a woman from the Indian culture of Fiji, herein called The Devotee, gets possessed by Saint Sai Baba; this experience provided observational notes. Toward the end of 4 months of recruitment and interviewing, I was informed of another
temple where devotees go in a trance, an avenue that could not be investigated within the confines of this study. Thus, the phenomenon of this study diverted from SSP, as will be shown. However, starting with the hope of finding the phenomenon of SSP and based on Collins et al.’s (2006) sampling schemes, the first 31 volunteer participants who responded to the recruitment flyer or were approached by this researcher, that is, by convenience sampling (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000), were accepted as long as they met the recruitment criteria of: (a) being over 18 years of age, (b) being born and raised in an Indian culture, and (c) having immigrated to the US as adults. The variety of recruitment methods and results are shown in Appendix J.

Interview Procedure

Contact with participants. After agreeing to participate in this research, each of the 31 participants suggested the interview location that suited them and were their home, my office, cafés, and a temple; culturally, these were considered “neutral” spaces by the women—from the participants’ cultural perspective, these venues suited them. From a method perspective, care was taken to conduct the interviews in quiet areas of public spaces. The participants either chose or were given a pseudonym at their request and these are used throughout this paper starting with the Informed Consent Form (Appendix K) that they signed. All aspects of the consent form and confidentiality issues were discussed with the participants and they were given a copy of the form. The interviews were tape-recorded with participant permission. One participant did not want to be tape-recorded and her interview was hand-written by this researcher. Some participants were concerned about confidentiality and did not want to disclose their addresses.

At the request of most participants, the entire protocol was conducted in one sitting in 1.5 to 3 hours, with some exceptions, as follows—names are provided so that the reader can
reference these women in their biographies: There was attrition, reducing the number of women from 31 to 30; Sangeetha conducted the last three assessments by telephone later on the same day; Christie lives out-of-California and was introduced by a hotline agency as the only trauma victim who responded to the flyer. At her request, her interview and assessment were done by telephone in two sittings, a week apart; Hansa, Ramitha, and Saisha answered the quantitative assessments a week after their narrations because they ran out of time. However, uniformity was maintained in the order of presenting the interviewing instruments to the women; the theoretical content in explaining SSP; and in researcher neutrality when participants expressed opinions or feelings about different aspects of the research topic or their views.

*Instruments and data collection.* Essentially, four sets of data, as follows, were used to answer the mixed research question, but the first three sets of tools, in the order they were administered, generated the mixed data that was analyzed by mixed method.

1. Three semistructured questionnaires created by this researcher based on guidelines delineated in the methodology section and presented to the women participants in the following order: (a) Initial Brief Structured Interview (IBSI, Appendix L), (b) Demographic Questionnaire (DQ, Appendix M), and (c) Semistructured Questionnaire (SSQ, Appendix N). These interviews provided the categorical variables used in CART models. The women’s expansion on answers to the questions was also audiorecorded, similar to the narratives.

2. Narratives for qualitative data were open-ended, and because only the one mentioned case of ritualized spirit possession was found, the starting question was on religious views and any Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences (USRE). Questioning balanced neutrality and interrelatedness following the tenets delineated under
methodology. Narratives were invited after demographic questionnaires but prior to presenting the psychological assessments in order to avoid being influenced by their questions and constructs. Iterative answers were also transcribed and became a part of the narrativized qualitative data. Iterative questioning was conducted in person, on the telephone, or by email. Iterative questioning was of the later 13 participants as well as selected initial participants. In the former case, iterative questioning preceded the SSQ to avoid bias. Although not specifically asked for an open-ended narrative, these final 13 women also had a great deal to report with their iterative answers.

3. The six psychological assessments previously delineated for the quantitative data. Neutrality was maintained and the explanations of the questions to non-English speaking women was as uniform as possible.

4. Observational Notes (Appendix O) assisted in discussing the mixed data. Over the 4 months of interviews with analysis and iteration alongside, I attended weekly Sai Baba bhajans and witnessed ritualized spirit possession of The Devotee eight times. I also recruited three women from this venue. The revered status of The Devotee in the community and her lack of memory for the event surrounding the possession precluded her as a participant or narrator—attempts to invite her narration, failed. For recruitment purposes, I also attended a classical Indian dance recital and interviewed the visiting dancer, herein called The Dancer, renowned in India. She gave an interview and narrated the strong religious basis of Indian classical dance and the culturally-sanctioned trance experiences that can occur during dance.

*Participant number and iteration.* Proponents of grounded theory (Collins et al., 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) suggest a minimum of 18 participants. (See also Sandelowski, 1995).
Although there were 17 women’s data after the one attrition, all 30 women’s responses informed qualitative data, and enabled \( n = 30 \) for the quantitative data. This number gave some measure of saturation of themes. As specified, the first 17 women were interviewed for mixed method in the following order: IBSI, DQ, narratives, SSQ, and the six psychological assessments. The latter 13 participants, primarily for iteration, were interviewed in the following format: IBSI, DQ, SSQ, iterative questioning, and the six psychological assessments. These 13 women also had a great deal to narrate in their iterations and, as specified, also provided qualitative data.

Selected women from the first 17 participants were also invited to answer the same iterative questions; selection was based on a woman’s ability to communicate intellectually in English to enable abstraction of themes, and/or if her narratives gave clues that more information might be forthcoming. The first round of iterative questions that emerged from the earlier narratives were on the concept of *Connection With the Divine*, differentiating between abuse and trauma, and views on SSP. Iteration continued throughout data collection and into analysis as needed for some measure of saturation. Second, third, and fourth rounds of iteration focused on the emerged concept, *Inner-Outer*; the theorized theme, *Nonduality*; and on acculturation. Iterative questions are in Appendix P, and Appendix Q shows two exemplar email responses on acculturation. Emailing of questionnaires and email responses was an ad hoc aspect of the method and based upon the request of participants who did not want to meet again. However, Veena, Ramitha, and Shahi, who were invited to verify emerged concepts on Kali’s association with SSP, sociostress, and acculturation and sociostress, respectively, agreed to be interviewed.

*Treatment of Data*

Narrations were transcribed by this researcher the day after the interviews. All data materials were stored in a locked cabinet and a copy of the key given to the chairperson of the
dissertation committee with written permission from this researcher in the event of researcher’s
death to shred, or use the data for further analysis and publishing, as deemed appropriate.
Participant permission for the latter was delineated in the consent form.

Qualitative data analysis: Grounded theory. Analysis followed Strauss and Corbin’s
(1998) three fluid yet systematically organized levels of data reduction that differed, as
previously specified, from other qualitative content analysis by the iterative process and in the
formation of theory. In the first step of Open Coding, the transcripts were read line-by-line in-
depth and opened-up to reveal codes or workable units. Codes which stood out for their
regularity, commonality, and differences with other participants, and in their significance for the
research question were listed, verbatim when appropriate. Cocoding by a peer, who was given
only the pseudonyms, concurred with my coding. Broad categories and some idea of
relationships between concepts ensued as a result of Open Coding and the most important themes,
grounded in the data, emerged. As appropriate in grounded theory, an initial phase of code
reduction began to be evident visually and mentally, which, toward the end of Open Coding,
started blending with the second step and continued into the iterative process.

In the second step of Axial Coding, two steps that were ongoing throughout the analytic
process gained momentum, namely: (a) revisiting the data, and (b) comparing common themes
that had already emerged and starting to provide depth and structure to the themes. Now the data
was getting connected to the analysis. This process gave subcategories of themes denoting their
properties and provided clues for iterative questions leading to the final step of theoretical or
Selective Coding. Properties of themes gave depth and structure and wove the themes into an
interrelational matrix. This set the stage for theory formation.
Together with properties and dimensions of themes, process-structure interaction was also evident during Axial Coding. Process takes place within a structure, and structure changes over time (as in immigration, a process; and to another country, a structure). As women narrated their stories, they also showed the changes in their views and behaviors as a result of their immigration, augmenting the original code to enrich the ensuing theory. In essence then, in Axial Coding, I reassembled the opened text in a coherent yet consolidated manner. In consolidation, redundancies and topics irrelevant to the research question and theory were eliminated. Further and finer commonalities recurring among participant views were grouped together to form major, condensed themes, and differences among participants were used for subgroup formation within themes.

Throughout this process, memoing was an essential aspect of analysis. Writing down my thoughts, and connections, and comparisons among women enabled consolidation. Memoing made the pseudonym of grounded theory, constant comparison, a living step. In a combination of induction and deduction, I travelled between data and participants, and cycles of abductive reasoning emerged.

The main purpose of the final step of Selective Coding was for saturation of themes and for theoretical analysis to enable the emergence of phenomena which Strauss and Corbin (1998) called the backbone of the emerging theory. Theoretical analysis or engagement with new literature hallmarked this step, for example, validation of the theme Connection with the Divine was evident as one of Palmer and Braud’s (2002) Exceptional Human Experiences (EHE). This step also distinguished grounded theory from descriptive coding and phenomenology. As perhaps a step most at risk of being influenced by preconceptions and researcher bias because it involves intuiting and theorizing on the themes, I ensured that the themes were grounded in the
data, supported by new literature, and validated in the iterative questioning. Exceptional findings to the literature were an important outcome of engagement with new literature.

Theory generation mandated the iterative process until some measure of saturation of data, within the time confines of this study, was reached or the categories were exhausted and more data did not easily reveal richer or newer aspects of the themes as relevant for the research question. Saturation overrode the inductive part of content analysis and continued towards allowing a theory to emerge, a process that Huberman and Miles (1998) termed analytic induction (or abduction, as previously specified) in grounded theory. Thus, at the end of the final step of Selective Coding, phenomena were intuited from the themes and utilized in the theory according to the interpretive theory formation of Charmaz (2009); quantitative data were integrated into the theory.

In the present study, the resultant theory essentialized Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) central characteristics as criteria for the theory. More specifically: (a) The concepts evolved from the data by generative questions and theorizing rather than descriptions of narratives; (b) systematic conceptualization throughout the analysis ensued because concepts were tightly linked via their properties and dimensions; (c) rather than just one phenomenon, a variation of linked concepts gave coherence to the theory; (d) transparency in any changes in research process gave credibility to the analysis; (e) after the utilitarian tenet of pragmatism and the advocacy of feminist theory, new academic information and suggested clinical action was based on the data; and (f) as an extension of time-space specificity of theories, the emerged theory was for this historical time and yet, may stand the test of time as did the theories on “stigma, division of labor, uncertainty, stress, and negotiations” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 272).
Quantitative data analyses: Correlations. Scores from each of the six psychological assessments were totaled to provide continuous variables and were given to SPSS software, Version 17, to correlate by Bivariate, 2-tailed, Pearson Product-Moment Correlations.

Interpretation of strength of correlation was guided as follows, with flexibility in the final interpretation and discussion due to cultural influences and the exploratory nature of the study:
- 1.0 to -0.7 = strong negative association;
- -0.7 to -0.3 = weak negative association;
- -0.3 to +0.19 = little or no association;
- +0.20 to +0.39 = weak or quite small positive association;
- and +0.40 to +.69 = moderate positive association;
- .70 to .89 = high correlation;
- and .90 to 1.00 = very high or almost perfect correlation (Sanders & Smidt, 2000; Simon, 2008; Strength of correlations, n.d.).

Barring flexibility, SPSS gave significant correlations at the alpha (type I error) 0.01 and 0.05 levels where correlations at the 0.01 level were stronger than those at the 0.05 level. In addition, relevant categorical variables extracted from IBSI, DQ, and SSQ were correlated by Phi correlations. Three other variables were also developed from the data, delineated in Chapter 4, and provided to CART: Sociostress, Out-Of-Body Experiences (OBE), and New Age.

Triangulation of Mixed Data by the Categorical and Regression Tree (CART) Method

CART is used here as an umbrella term and shorthand for “classification and regression trees,” a set of tree-based partitioning methods for modeling complex data. This usage of CART does not refer to an algorithm or software also titled CART (Breiman, Friedman, Stone, and Olshen, 1984). The CART models for this study were produced using the tree package in the statistical software R, as described by Venables and Ripley (2002) in their chapter on tree-based methods. The variables analyzed (set of potential explanatory, or predictor, variables and a single outcome, or response, variable for each tree model) were given by this researcher to a statistician who ran the CART models.
Triangulation of mixed data was performed by providing continuous variables from test scores and categorical variables from demographics, questionnaires, and narratives to the R software, producing CART models, and analyzing the resulting “trees.” Triangulation is the “combination and comparison” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 27) of multiple sets of data in mixed method to increase the validity of their interpretations. The spontaneous nature of experiences such as SSP or URSE could not be subject to a pretest posttest experiment. Rather, exploratory questions were the focus of this study: What are the characteristics of the women from the group of participants in this study who have URSE and what are the psychological correlates of their experiences? Given the complexity and quantity of variables, the small sample constraints, and lack of distribution theory for these data, CART was a logical choice for these purposes. It is particularly suited to uncovering nonlinear, non-additive interactions among variables, employing both kinds of variables (Lynn Gayle, 2011, personal communication).

As a nonparametric, exploratory, data-mining tool, CART produces a classification tree if the outcome variable is categorical or a regression tree if the outcome variable is numeric. Thus, the classification problem was predicting a categorical (outcome or response) variable from one or more explanatory or predictor variables (of any type) by classification trees. In a regression model, the problem was prediction of a continuous variable that ensued from CART-determined binary splits of one or more explanatory or predictor variables (of any type)—this gave regression trees. CART is useful when there are multiple interactions of variables that are not normally distributed and where, as in cultural work, categories of the subjects based on their characteristics rather than the probability of something occurring, is useful: “CART is often able to uncover complex interactions between predictors which may be difficult or impossible to uncover using traditional multivariate techniques” (Lewis, 2000, p. 2).
Technically, the algorithm involved in CART is binary recursive partitioning in which the computer program performs an exhaustive search of all possible binary splits at each node. In this sense, it is a deterministic process, not dependent on probability distribution or large sample theories of the significance-testing framework. Thus, CART is more like clustering methods, suitable within exploratory statistics rather than hypothesis-testing statistics. From the group of potential predictor variables given to the program, CART first selects the single best predictor of the construct of interest or outcome/response based on all possible binary splits. This process continues, theoretically ad infinitum, splitting into two branches, until no more split of the last predicting variable is possible based on the data provided to the program and the process ends in a terminal node. In practice, the stopping rule was set by the statistician who then used a standard method of pruning to produce an appropriate size tree (and avoid overfitting).

Reading a tree involves starting at the root node, the top, where the predicting variable is printed in the central split and shows which branch is referenced. For continuous predictors, a score that CART determines is the cutoff score of the predictor variable is also written, and, for the regression trees ensuing in such cases, underneath the line is written the starting, average score of the outcome variable. This shows the associated scores of the predictor variable and the variable that is predicted so that analysis follows in an “if-then” manner. Going down the tree on both sides of each node, the left and right branches, one can see the CART cutoff score or categorical variable values of the predictor variables. Eventually, at the bottom, terminal nodes give the average group scores or each group’s predicted characteristics, respectively, for regression and classification trees.

In the present study, triangulation of mixed data by CART was complemented by comparing the groups of women analyzed by CART with the women’s characteristics or answers
from the qualitative data. In the absence of hypothesis testing or a pretest/posttest experiment of groups of participants, and since authors of most assessments suggest that cutoff scores are meaningful to compare groups, this additional manual step to show complementarity between data explained the reason for a woman to be in a certain CART group. Essentially then, the mixed data was subjected to two sets of triangulations, one by CART, and then CART results further manually triangulated with narratives, rather than being presented side-by-side or partly interacted. Within this analysis, correlations also complemented CART. For example, when ego loss was CART’s best predictor for dissociation, PD/EL also correlated with DES, that is, was complementary. For validity and reliability, thematic analysis was done by this researcher prior to and blind to CART results.

Summary

This chapter discussed the concurrent, transformative mixed method used for conducting the research whose focus shifted to USRE during data collection—sufficient cases of SSP were difficult to find and new literature showed that USRE was an umbrella phenomenon of SSP. First, philosophies underlying mixed method were presented. Ideology of the overall research was feminist theory. For the qualitative portion, the philosophical paradigm was contextualism and the data were collected in the form of narratives. Pragmatism as the basic linkage between contextualism and grounded theory was explained. For the quantitative method, nuances of a positivist paradigm for cross-cultural research were discussed by involving cultural factors that could have impacted scale development for the current sample. Psychological assessments used were described. The overlap between the philosophies underlying these paradigms was again emphasized and justified the use of superficially-opposing positivist and naturalist paradigms.
Next, the method followed was delineated. Thirty-one women were recruited by convenience sampling and there was one attrition, leaving 30 women in the sample. The instruments used were, in order of administration: IBSI, DQ, SSQ, narratives, and six psychological assessments. The IBSI, DQ, and SSQ provided demographic data and most of the categorical variables. Qualitative data were gathered in the form of narratives with the questioning sensitive to feminist theory and EMIC principles; iterative answers also were part of the qualitative data. All qualitative data were analyzed by grounded theory. An important aspect of the present study was that the same participants were involved in both qualitative and quantitative sets of data; however, the open-ended interviews were conducted first so that the questions on the quantitative measurements would not bias the participants’ narrations. The quantitative part involved answers on six psychological assessments and the scores were statistically analyzed for correlations. To this end, the method of recruitment, collection of data, and treatment of data were detailed. Finally, observations of The Devotee getting possessed during bhajan rituals and an interview with an Indian classical dancer who went into trance during performance provided additional data in the form of observational notes.

Both sets of data were triangulated by the statistical software R, called CART. The theory underlying CART and the method of reading its results was explained. The following chapter analyzes the data.
Chapter 4: Research Results

This chapter details the mixed method data collection and analysis intended to explore the research question that started with an interest in the phenomenon of Spontaneous Spirit Possession (SSP) as a coping method for dealing with trauma, and identifying its religious and/or psychological nature in women immigrants from Indian cultures. Although the literature review focused on SSP, the research data revealed its mother phenomenon, Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences (USRE) when sufficient cases of SSP were not found. This shift in the phenomenon was natural because the method was set-up to include USRE, as the questionnaires show. Accordingly, ongoing writing will address USRE in parallel, evolutionary fashion.

Here, participant biographies are first presented to connect the reader to the participants and aid data analysis. Next, quantitative data from the Initial Brief Structured Interview (IBSI), the Demographic Questionnaire (DQ), the Semi-Structured Questionnaire (SSQ), and from scores on six psychological assessments gathered from 30 women participants (after one attrition) are described. These tests were the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale-Revised (SIBS), the Exceptional Experiences Questionnaire (EEQ), the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist-Civilian (PCL-C), and the Biopsychosociospiritual Inventory (BioPSSI).

Open-ended narratives and answers on iterative questions provided the bulk of the qualitative data, and excerpts from these narratives are next quoted within their emerged themes, according to grounded theory. Narratives and verbalized views from SSQ, DQ, and during testing were researcher-translated as needed and researcher-transcribed the day after the interviews. Observational Notes (Appendix O) describe a rare case of ritualized spirit possession—conceptualized differently from SSP as shown in chapter 2—by The Devotee, and
the narrative of *The Dancer* who goes into trance during invocation; they support qualitative data analysis and illuminate the literature review. Finally, the mixed data are triangulated. A glossary defines non-English words (see Appendix R).

**Participant Biographies**

Biographies are listed under the three participant-identified IBSI groups of *highly religious, somewhat religious,* and *not religious,* and, within the discussion of each group, in the chronological order of those interviews. Narratives reveal that the categories do not necessarily reflect the accuracy of participation in religiously-oriented activities. For example, one participant said that she was nonreligious but was spiritual; however, one practice she called spiritual was singing religious *bhajans* at a private temple.

**Highly Religious Participants**

1. *Pakshi.* Pakshi is a 57-year-old married woman from western India who has been in the US for 5 years, sponsored with her husband for citizenship by a daughter married to an American. Born a Hindu, she now follows the Hare Krishna group, and her life revolves around devotion. Pakshi barely speaks English, has studied up to the eighth grade level, and interviewed in Gujarati and Hindi. Pakshi is one of 5 less-educated women.

2. *Sam.* Sam is a 46-year-old divorced woman of Indian heritage born and raised in Fiji. Born a Muslim, she attends a Pentecostal Fijian church, and calls her religious affiliation “mixed.” She has been in the US for 25 years, having come here with her first husband, an older American who met her while travelling in Fiji. After he died, when Sam was in her twenties, she was hospitalized and given an antipsychotic. She claimed she had suffered a reaction to medication rather than a psychotic break. She
remarried and divorced an abusive Fijian-Indian man and after that left an abusive boyfriend. Sam approached this researcher saying that she had been “used and abused.” Sam has an adult daughter, is on disability, has studied up to the eighth grade level in Hindi, speaks little English, and interviewed in Hindi. Sam is in the less-educated group of women.

3. *Rose.* Rose is a 57-year-old woman of Indian ancestry from Fiji, has been in the US for 9 years, has never married, and has no children. Raised a Catholic, she strongly identifies with her religion, and her “job” is church work; she has had “powerful” spiritual experiences. The interview was in English. Rose is in the less-educated group of women.

4. *Christie.* Christie is a divorced 40-year-old Muslim woman who works outside the home and is raising her two sons by herself. Born in Pakistan, she has been in the US for 13 years after her arranged marriage to an abusive Muslim man ended in a divorce; her parents did not support her in this and encouraged her to compromise with him. Her interview was by telephone and in Hindi.

5. *Sher.* Sher is a 50-year-old woman born into the Sikh faith who immigrated with her husband 3 years ago. She was referred by her Indian employer because “she continuously speaks of god and seems to talk to god while working.” Sher spoke euphemistically about some of her life’s events out of the cultural decorum of keeping stigmatizing events private; she implied that, when she was a leader at a public rally for women’s rights in India, she was arrested by the police, beaten, and raped. Sher cried almost continuously during the interview and attributed her weeping to missing her children she had to leave behind in India. Highly religious from
childhood, her family used to say she was chosen by god. Sher cooks for other Indian families. She does not speak English and interviewed in Hindi. Sher is in the less-educated group.

6. *Pushpa.* Pushpa is a 44-year-old Hindu business-woman and has been in the US for 23 years after her love marriage to a Muslim man in India. She practices both religions and also believes in Christ. Her husband has stopped physically abusing her after reaching an agreement involving the police. After she discovered him cheating with several other women, Pushpa and her family have been haunted by evil spirits who she says have possessed her and her daughters. She has tried Hindu and Christian exorcism without success. The interview was in English.

7. *Shirley.* Shirley is a 40-year-old woman of Indian-Fijian heritage undergoing a divorce from her unfaithful Fijian-Indian husband; they had come to the US 20 years ago after an arranged marriage. Their two boys currently live with their father. Born to Hindu parents who converted to Christianity when she was 2 years of age, she recently had a spiritual awakening and now works for the church with Rose. Shirley studied up to the high school level and interviewed in English. Shirley is the fifth and last woman in the less-educated group of women.

8. *Rita.* Rita is a 52-year-old woman born in Fiji of Indian heritage. She has been in the US for 35 years, coming here after an arranged marriage to a Fijian-Indian man. Rita attends The Devotee’s *bhajans,* where she witnesses spirit possession. With a bachelor’s degree, she has a job and interviewed in English.

9. *Dipti.* Dipti is a 38-year-old woman who has been in the US for 17 years. Born a Hindu in western India, she got married to a Hindu man from a different community
she met during doctoral studies in the US and has two children. Identifying as “somewhere in between highly religious and somewhat religious,” she was placed in the highly religious group based on her narration. Dipti works for a corporation and interviewed in English.

10. Shahi. Shahi is 42-year-old woman born in southern India—from where she has a master’s degree in computer science—and works in a large corporation. She immigrated 18 years ago before her arranged-marriage businessman husband, for job satisfaction. They have two children. She is an active Sai Baba follower and interviewed in English.

_Somewhat Religious Participants_

11. Ramitha. Ramitha is a 52-year-old woman from South India who immigrated to the US 32 years ago after her arranged marriage. She has two children. She has a master’s degree and works for a small corporation. Although she self-identified as “somewhat religious,” the interview, in English, revealed a ritualistic lifestyle and ambivalence about religious prescriptions.

12. Hansa. Hansa is a 28-year-old Hindu woman from southern India, in the US for 2 years from the time of her arranged marriage to a man who returned from the US to India to find a bride. Her lifestyle in India was liberal and independent “for a southern Indian girl from a high caste family.” She has a master’s degree, plans to continue studying, and interviewed in English.

13. Siri. Siri is a 34-year-old woman from western India born into Jainism. She met her Jain-Hindu husband in the US where she has lived for 15 years. Siri was sexually
abused as a child, an experience for which her family sought psychiatric help for her. She has two children and a job. Siri interviewed in English.

14. **Saisha.** Saisha is a 31-year-old woman born into the Sikh faith in western India and who has been in the US for 8 years since her arranged marriage to a Sikh man who had returned to India to find a bride. She left her job to raise her child, and she and her husband have a business. She regularly witnesses The Devotee’s possession and interviewed in English.

15. **Sheela.** Sheela is a 28-year-old Hindu woman who came to the US in the year of the interview after her love-marriage to an American man of Indian parentage. She has a masters degree, intends to study further plus continue her classical Indian dancing, and interviewed in English.

16. **Sangeetha.** Sangeetha is a 50-year-old woman born in southern India who has lived in the US for 20 years with her arranged-marriage husband. She was born in the Hindu community to atheist parents and considers herself spiritual. She has a masters degree from the US, two children, and a job with a corporation, and interviewed in English.

17. **Maya.** Maya is a 61-year-old woman born into the Christian faith in southern India. She was married by arrangement to a Christian man in India; they immigrated to the US 24 years ago. She is a practicing Christian, and she meditates. Maya has a masters degree and is currently not working outside the home, preferring to take care of her two children. The interview was in English.

18. **Rama.** Rama is a 46-year-old woman from southern India who, with her husband by arranged marriage, had been in the US for 10 years. She belongs to the same Saint Sai
Baba study and social work group as do 3 other participants. Rama has two children, teaches Indian music, and interviewed in English.

19. Gita. Gita is a 45-year-old woman from southern India, who has lived in the US for 17 years with her arranged-marriage husband. She has a doctorate, works in a large corporation, has two children, and belongs to the Sai Baba study group. She interviewed in English.

Not-Particularly-Religious Participants

20. Veena. Veena is a 52-year-old woman from southern India, born Hindu. She has been in the US for 26 years, since right after her arranged marriage to an immigrated Indian man. When the interview started, the first thing she revealed was her abuse as a child by her mother and that she was always planning to get away from her small town. She has a masters degree and, although she worked in India, has not worked outside the home in the US. She attributes her lack of self-esteem to her abusive childhood. She has two children. Veena did not want to be audio-recorded and her oral responses during the interview, in English, were handwritten by this researcher.

21. Roshan. Born and married by arrangement in western India, Roshan is a 58-year-old woman who immigrated to the US 15 years ago to escape her abusive husband. She works, after having received a Master’s degree in the US. Her one adult child is married. Born into the Jain religion, she resonates with Buddhism and the teachings of Carl Jung. The interview was in English.

22. Asha. Asha is a 24-year-old single woman from a Hindu family in southern India who had arrived in the US for doctoral studies a year prior to the interview. Stating she was nonreligious, she revealed ambivalence. Asha interviewed in English.
23. Malati. Malati is a 60-year-old woman who was born into the Hindu community to nonreligious parents in urban western India. She came to the US with her love-marriage husband 34 years ago and has worked actively for social causes. She has one child. She identified as an atheist and interviewed in English.

24. Palak. Palak, Malati’ mother, is a 93-year-old woman born into a “progressive” Hindu family in western India, where she raised three children. She and her husband have lived in the US with her daughter’s family for 26 years. An ex-teacher, she is also involved in social work. The interview was in Gujerati, Hindi, and some English.

25. Gia. Gia is a 46-year-old woman born in southern India who had a love marriage with a Hindu man from a different community whom she met in the US during her doctoral studies. She has lived in the US for 26 years, has one child, and works in a corporation. She identified as an agnostic and interviewed in English.

26. Kesar. Kesar is a 47-year-old woman born in North India in the Sikh faith. Her arranged marriage to an abusive husband ended in a divorce in the US, where she has been for 25 years. She is now remarried to an American. She has two children. Kesar identified as “atheist and agnostic” and “spiritual,” and interviewed in English.

27. Prabha. Prabha is a 75-year-old woman who immigrated to the US 10 years ago to live with her son. She volunteers her services and is an avid student of Indian philosophy. Born a Hindu in western India, where she got a masters degree and was a school head-mistress, she was married by arrangement to a Hindu man and is the only widow in this study’s group of participants. She identified as not spiritual, atheist, or agnostic—explaining that her “approach to god is different.” The interview was in English.
28. **Mala.** Mala is a 29-year-old single woman with no children who came to the US 17 years ago with her Hindu parents from North India. She attends The Devotee’s *bhajans*, where she has observed “spirit possession.” The interview was in English.

29. **Mira.** Mira, a 51-year-old woman, born Hindu in northern India, has been in the US for 26 years with her husband by arranged marriage. A survivor of cancer, she considers her medical experience her trauma. She works for a small company and interviewed in English.

30. **Sparrow.** Sparrow is a 46-year-old woman who identified as southern Indian by culture but was born in northern India. She has been in the US for 24 years with her husband by arranged marriage, who was born in southern India. She has two children. A devotee of Saint Sai Baba, she belongs to the same religious study group as do other participants named above. She revealed having suffered abuse, iteratively. The interview was in English.

*Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Quantitative Data*

*The Initial Brief Structured Interview (IBSI)*

Answers to the IBSI (Table 1) allowed the formation of categories corresponding to three levels of religiosity and also provided other categorical variables. *Practicing religion* referred to conventional religious rituals and culturally expected religious activities. The concept of *personal rituals* emerged in narratives of the participants who were not religious or who said they “did not practice religion” and yet, denote a variety of practices such as, singing or reciting *bhajans*, praying, listening to recorded devotional songs, and doing *puja*, activities that can also be performed in public gatherings; they did not include more panhuman practices such as meditation. In contrast, prescribed rituals were referred to as “religious practices,” and usually
these were conducted in a temple or during a religious event, most often with other members of the family. Although meditation and yoga was practiced across all categories of more-educated women, it was prominently the only routine habit of most nonreligious women who called it a “spiritual practice”; less-educated women did not report practicing yoga or meditation.

Table 1

ISBI Results: Groupings of Participants Based on Religious Beliefs (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices conventional ritual</th>
<th>Highly religious (n = 10)</th>
<th>Somewhat religious (n = 9)</th>
<th>Not religious (n = 11)</th>
<th>Sample frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely or when culturally needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes to place of worship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely or when culturally needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has religious icons in the house</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices personal rituals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends private religious meetings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers self spiritual</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet, does not know, may be</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has or has had USRE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported “yes” for trauma</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has experienced abuse</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist or agnostic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Only Gia specified the difference between atheism and agnosticism and they are included as one category because their distinction is not this paper’s focus.

Demographic Data

Tables 2 – 11 show the demographic data for this study’s participants and critical to understanding their effect on the narratives and scores on psychological assessments. The results are cluster-analyzed with the IBSI data from Table 1. Appropriate demographic data is described
but not tabulated. Categorical variables relevant to the research question are used in statistical analyses, and other categorical variables are described merely for the sake of insight.

Table 2

*Age of Participants (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 through 30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 through 40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 through 50</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 through 60</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 through 70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 through 80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81 through 90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91 through 100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Years Participant Lived in the US (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range in years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 35 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*Participant Had or Has Unusual Spiritual or Religious Experiences (USRE) (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5

**Marital Status of Participant (N = 30)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married by parental arrangement</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced from arranged marriage and remarried to American man</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed after arranged marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced from arranged marriage and not remarried</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married to self-chosen man</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married and not living with a partner</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6

**Education Level of Participant (N = 30)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some vocational school post high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Language in Which Participant Was Educated (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English in high school and college</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native language in high school and English in college</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native language in school (education below high school)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

*Religion of Participant at Birth (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholicism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

*Religion Identified With at Time of Interview (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion Identified</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism-Buddhism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mixed/All/All are one”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholicism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Manav Bhakti</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnostic and/or Atheist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Spirituality”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“None”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower of Hare Krishna group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10

*Participant Experienced Trauma (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* As specified in chapter 3, abuse was physical and sexual abuse and differentiated from trauma that was conceptualized as a woman’s subjectivity, often referred by her as “suffering,” but could also involve the outcome of any kind of abuse.

Table 11

*Suffering, According to Participant Subjectivity (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes—participant felt she has suffered a great deal</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No—participant said her suffering was “normal”</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The IBSI (Table 1) showed that the women divided almost equally into three religiosity groups, and, considering that almost a third of the women were nonreligious, all (100%) had religious icons in the home—religion is depicted in art form and narratives showed that even the agnostic women had icons in the home. For example, Malati’s home had a small painting of a deity that she called “art.” Similarly, 25 (83%) women practiced personal rituals and again, agnostic Gia even said that she feels a greater power watches over her and nonreligious Veena
and Asha said that they still pray for solace. Overall, the majority of women, 18 (60%) regularly visited a place of worship and said, in discussing, that it was about once a week.

The sample mean age was 47.16 years (SD = 13.89, Mdn = 47) with a range of 24 - 93 years. The total number of years the participants had lived in the US as immigrants ranged from 6 months to 34 years (m = 17.79, SD = 9.24). There were no breaks in any participant’s continuity of residence.

Twenty (67%) women reported having had USRE; 2 of these women, Roshan and Mira, were initially “not sure” whether their experiences were unusual. All narrations indicated religious themes for the reported USRE, although some women differentiated religiosity from spirituality and considered their experiences “spiritual.”

The majority of the women (90%) had been married. A total of 23 participants (77%) are currently married; 15 were married by arranged marriage and 7 are married to a self-chosen man. In the arranged marriage category, three women were divorced after spousal abuse, out of which dissolution 1 has remarried an American man and 2 are unmarried. One woman is widowed. One unmarried woman first had a love-marriage from which she was widowed and thereafter married and divorced her second abusive husband. There were no self-reported lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or transsexual people in this sample and no question to identify sexual preference or living with a partner out of wedlock was asked in the demographic data collection process.

The level of education peaked with 47% of the women having earned a master’s degree. Women who interviewed in their native language had also been educated in their native language and had not studied beyond eighth grade; exceptionally, Christy had been college-educated in Urdu in Pakistan. English had been the medium of instruction in both high school and college for
the majority (77%) of the women, and these women interviewed in English. The 2 less-educated Christian women from Fiji interviewed in English.

Major religions of India were represented by the sample. The majority (71%) of the participants had been born Hindu. At the time of the interview, the percentage of practicing Hindus had fallen to 45%, and there was a wider range of religious practice represented, including self-identified philosophies. The IBSI (Table 1) showed that participants fell fairly equally into the three, broad, self-identified religious groups—highly religious, somewhat religious, and not particularly religious. Participants were fairly evenly distributed regarding their answer about “practicing religion,” in a range of responses from “yes” to “only when culturally needed,” but the majority (62%) visit their place of worship regularly, 100% had a shrine or religious icon in the home, and 81% had one or more personal religious practices. Nine (29%) of the women currently attend private religious meetings or study groups and 87% consider themselves spiritual. Women who identified as nonreligious and do not practice religion but considered themselves spiritual were Veena, Roshan, Malati, Palak, Kesar, Mala, Mira, and Sparrow. However nonreligious Asha said “don’t know,” Gia said “maybe,” and Prabha said “no” to the question of whether they considered themselves spiritual.

Eighteen (60%) women had experienced trauma, and 20 (65%) women said that they had experienced or were still undergoing more suffering than they considered normal. All women who had experienced trauma also reported a feeling of suffering at some time in their life, and 10 of them (33% of the sample) reported having been abused.

Participants were equally divided into those who had married an eldest son and those who had married men in other birth orders; 2 participants, Rita and Shirley, considered it important that the eldest son and his wife should be most privileged in the family because they carried
more responsibility, but 77% of the women did not agree with placing importance on family hierarchy or patriarchy. Sonia said, “the patriarchal system is a very negative aspect of Indian culture for Indian women” and Maya said that there was “no need now” for family hierarchy. Sonia and Saisha said that they had suffered oppression by their in-laws. Of the 4 women who always wear traditional clothes, 3 were older than 45 years of age and 3 had been in the US for 10 years or less; they were noncommittal about family hierarchy and accepted that honoring it was a common practice in India.

Categorical Variables

Of the several categorical variables from the IBSI, DQ, SSQ, and narratives, the following were used in triangulation as most relevant to the research topic: age, years in the US, USRE, level of education, level of religiosity, trauma, suffering, spiritual practice, social work, and belief in Saint Sai Baba. Religiosity reflected the three levels specified by the IBSI. Level of education was at two levels, namely, having had some college and under was conceptualized as less-educated and possessing a bachelor’s degree or higher as more-educated. CART created its own and slightly more nuanced ordering of religiosity and education levels, mentioned in the relevant CARTs. Otherwise, the rest of the categorical variables were reflected at only two levels, yes/no.

Additionally, two variables were arbitrarily created from the scores on specific questions in the psychological assessments and provided to CART. Their selection was based on their relevance for and connection with dissociation and coping, respectively, in the research question, as data analysis will reveal. Essentially, these variables were conceptualizations and were: Out-of-body experiences (OOBE) and New Age.
OOBE, a conceptualization, was the score on Item 7 of the DES: *Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling as though they are standing next to themselves or watching themselves do something and they actually see themselves as if they were looking at another person.* Based on the scores, CART classified them in groups of “some OOB” and “no OOB.”

Second, the New Age category was inspired by a small group of four women who were not religious, were more-educated, did not report USRE, had a spiritual practice, and did social work, and the data reflected their reported stress level to be low. They answered “no” on trauma.

Finally, 7 participants (23%) *believe in Saint Sai Baba*; 4 of these participants ($N = 30$) and 3 other women from the sample belonging to the New Age group perform active social work as a “religion,” totaling 7 (23%) women in the overall sample who do social work.

During the interviews, yes/no answers were elicited for trauma. However, for triangulation, mixed data were used to create three levels of trauma, *yes, no,* and 6 cases of *underreported trauma.* For interest, the 6 cases of underreported trauma were Pakshi, Rose, Saisha, Prabha, Rita, and Dipti. In the CART, Shirley also appeared in this group of women, and this was based on fact that her other characteristics or variables predicted by CART fall with this group of women. These women were selected as underreporting trauma based on researcher’s interpretation of their narratives. Further, this presumption was verified by CART for predicting trauma because they were placed in the group CART chose for their low scores on PCL-C.

*Psychological Assessments’ Results*

The six psychological assessments were administered after the narratives. As specified previously, the instruments were selected to measure the psychological correlates of the features of SSP gleaned from the literature review: DES, PSS, SIBS, EEQ, PCL-C, and BioPSSI measured dissociation, perceived stress, spirituality, exceptional experiences, posttraumatic
stress, and a biopsychosociospiritual construct including psychosomatic experiences, respectively. SSP was assumed to be one kind of Exceptional Human Experiences (EHE, Palmer & Braud, 2002), measured by the EEQ, and USRE was assumed to be another name for EHE. Further, there were two parts to the EEQ, prevalence (P) and I (intensity), read as EEQP and EEQI (See Tables 13 & 14). Note that two of the measures have spirituality constructs: the SIBS and the spirituality subscale of BioPSSI, which, similar to the other subscales of BioPSSI (see Table 15), was abbreviated for the present study, in this case to Spir.

The proposed function of these assessments was primarily to show three analytic outcomes: (a) which continuous variable, or in competition with categorical variables, is the best predictor of a USRE; (b) how do the variables that these assessments measure, correlate; and (c) what are the psychological correlates of the participants’ experiences.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Table 12 shows the descriptive statistics for the total scales.
The internal consistency of the EEQ was Cronbach’s alpha .90, which was reliable for this sample. The abbreviations and descriptive statistics of the subscales of the EEQ are shown in Tables 13 and 14.

Table 12

*Descriptive Statistics for Total Scales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of scale</th>
<th>Total Items</th>
<th>Possible Range</th>
<th>Statistics in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>α</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0-280</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0-56</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIBS</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22-154</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC-C</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17-85</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The abbreviations and descriptive statistics of the subscales of the EEQ are shown in Tables 13 and 14.

Table 13

*Descriptive Statistics for the EEQP Subscales and Their Abbreviations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of subscale</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Total Items</th>
<th>Possible Range</th>
<th>Statistics in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mystic Positive</td>
<td>EEQPMP</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0-28</td>
<td>α</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deconstruction / Ego Loss</td>
<td>EEQPD/EL</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0-28</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychopathology</td>
<td>EEQPP</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0-28</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visionary Dreams</td>
<td>EEQPVD</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0-16</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Henceforth, the preface EEQ will not be used. For example, EEQPMP will be written PMP.
Finally, the subscales, abbreviations, and descriptive statistics for the BioPSSI are shown in Table 15.

Table 15

*Abbreviations and Descriptive Statistics for the BioPSSI Subscales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of subscale</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Total Items</th>
<th>Possible Range</th>
<th>Statistics in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>α</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Symptom</td>
<td>BioPSSIPhy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0-50</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Symptoms</td>
<td>BioPSSIPsy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Symptoms</td>
<td>BioPSSISoc</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0-40</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Symptoms</td>
<td>BioPSSISpir</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0-35</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired Functional Status</td>
<td>BioPSSIFunc</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0-60</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. In the text, the BioPSSI prefix of the abbreviations will not be used. Phy, Psy, Soc, Spir, and Func will be used.
Inferential Statistics of the Psychological Assessments’ Scores

Two sets of inferential statistics were performed, correlations by SPSS software and triangulation of the mixed data by CART software; the latter will be presented at the end of this chapter. Additionally, factor analysis was used to identify a new factor, sociostress; its choice and creation was based on the results of the correlation analyses.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations. Bivariate, 2-tailed, Pearson correlation coefficients were compared in matrixes of total scores of the scales and subscales. Table 16 shows full scale correlations.

Table 16
Correlations of the Total Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>DES</th>
<th>PSS</th>
<th>SIBS</th>
<th>PCLC</th>
<th>EEQP</th>
<th>EEQI</th>
<th>BioPSSI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.43*</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>- .18</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.74**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIBS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCL-C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>.90**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEQP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.92**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEQI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BioPSSI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

Table 16 shows several significant relationships between total scales. DES correlates with EEQP, $r(28) = .50, p < .01$, and EEQI, $r(28) = .43, p < .05$, suggesting that dissociation is associated with the prevalence and intensity of exceptional experiences, respectively. Note that dissociation is not associated with stress, posttraumatic stress, or spirituality measured by SIBS.
PSS correlates with PLCC, $r(28) = .76, p < .01$, showing the association between stress and posttraumatic stress. PSS also correlates with EEQP, $r(28) = .38, p < .05$, and EEQI, $r(20) = .47, p < .01$, suggesting that stress is associated with the prevalence and intensity of exceptional experiences, respectively. PSS is associated with total BioPSSI, $r(28) = .74, p < .01$, showing the strong relationship between stress and the construct biopsychosociospiritual and its functioning. Note that stress is not associated with spirituality.

SIBS correlates with EEQP correlate, $r(28) = .549, p < .01$, and with EEQI, $r(28) = .38, p < .05$, indicating that spirituality is associated with the prevalence and intensity of exceptional experiences, respectively. Note that spirituality is not associated with posttraumatic stress as well as stress.

PCL-C correlates with EEQP, $r(28) = .49, p < .01$, and with EEQI, $r(28) = .58, p < .01$, indicating that posttraumatic stress is related with the prevalence and intensity of exceptional experiences. PCL-C also correlates with BioPSSI, $r(28) = .90, p < .01$, this indicating that posttraumatic stress is associated with biopsychosociospiritual and its functioning.

EEQI is in concordance with EEQP, correlating at $r(28) = .92, p < .01$; in other words, intensity of exceptional experiences cannot be scored without the exceptional experience being present, and that when an experience is present, it is felt strongly. EEQP is also associated with BioPSSI, $r(28) = .50, p < .01$, indicating a relationship between the prevalence of exceptional experiences and biopsychosociospiritual and its functioning. Similarly, EEQI is associated with BioPSSI, indicating that the intensity of exceptional experiences is associated with biopsychosociospiritual and its functioning. Note that the EEQP and EEQI scales are significantly and positively associated with all the other total scales, indicating that the
occurrence and intensity of exceptional experiences is associated with dissociation, stress,
spirituality, posttraumatic stress, and biopsychosociospiritual and its functioning.

Next, for finer analysis, the subscales of EEQ and BioPSSI were correlated with each
other, and with the total scales (Table 17); the total scales’ correlations with each other are not
repeated.

Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>PMP</th>
<th>PD/EL</th>
<th>PP</th>
<th>PVD</th>
<th>IMP</th>
<th>ID/EL</th>
<th>IP</th>
<th>IVD</th>
<th>Phy</th>
<th>Psy</th>
<th>Soc</th>
<th>Spir</th>
<th>Func</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.45*</td>
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<td>.08</td>
</tr>
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<td>.51**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<td>.28</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCL-C</td>
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<td>.49**</td>
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<td>.64**</td>
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<td>.79**</td>
<td>.77**</td>
<td>.68**</td>
<td>.71**</td>
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<td>.48**</td>
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<td>.43*</td>
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<td>.48**</td>
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<td>.43*</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05, two-tailed. ** p < .01, two-tailed.
Table 17 shows several significant correlations. For the sake of brevity, correlations with EEQI will not be interpreted; as intensity of the prevalence of exceptional experiences, EEQI is seen to correlate with all the scales that EEQP correlates with. In other words, intensity of an exceptional experience cannot be scored without its occurrence.

DES correlates with PD/EL, $r(28) = .64$, $p < .01$, indicating that dissociation and decompensation/ego loss are related. DES correlates with PP, $r(28) = .41$, $p < .05$, showing that dissociation is also related to psychopathology as construed by the exceptional experiences scale. DES correlates with Spir, indicating that dissociation is associated with spirituality within the construct of biopsychosociospiritual. DES does not correlate with PMP and with PVD; nor with Phy, Psy, Soc, and Func, indicating that dissociation is not significantly related to mystical experiences, visionary dreams, or to physical, psychological, and social aspects, and the overall functionality of these realms within a biopsychosociospiritual construct.

PSS correlates with PD/EL, $r(28) = .45$, $p < .05$, indicating that perceived stress is related to ego loss. PSS correlates with PP, $r(28) = .59$, $p < .01$, indicating that stress is also related to psychopathology as measured within the exceptional experiences construct. PSS correlates with PVD, $r(28) = .51$, $p < .01$, showing that stress is associated with visionary dreams. PSS correlates significantly and positively with all the five realms of the BioPSSI namely, with Phy, $r(28) = .58$, $p < .01$, with Psy, $r(28) = .77$, $p < .01$, with Soc, $r(28) = .58$, $p < .01$, with Spir, $r(28) = .68$, $p < .01$, and with Func, $r(28) = .56$, $p < .01$, respectively, indicating that stress is related to physical and psychological symptoms, social aspects, spirituality, and the overall functioning within the biopsychosociospiritual construct. Note that stress is not related only to mystical experiences, $r(28) = -.09$, within the exceptional experience construct, but is related to its ego loss, psychological, and vivid dreams subscales.
On the other hand, SIBSR strongly and positively correlates with PMP and it is the only scale it correlates with, $r(28) = .79$, $p < .01$, suggesting that women who scored high in the spirituality scale tended to score high on mystical themes and did not score on any other scale except.

The reverse is true for PCL-C which correlates with all the subscales except PMP and IMP. In other words, women who did not score on posttraumatic stress also did not score on mystical themes. PCL-C correlates with PD/EL, $r(28) = .45$, $p < .05$, suggesting that posttraumatic stress and ego loss are related. PCL-C correlates with PP, $r(28) = .60$, $p < .01$, suggesting that posttraumatic stress is also related to psychopathology within the exceptional experiences construct. Similarly, PCL-C correlates with PVD, $r(28) = .49$, $p < .01$, indicating that posttraumatic stress is in relationship with visionary dreams. Similarly, PCL-C strongly and positively correlates with all the realms of BioPSSI: with Phy, $r(28) = .77$, $p < .01$; with Psy, $r(28) = .79$, $p < .01$; with Soc, $r(28) = .77$, $p < .01$; with Spir, $r(28) = .77$, $p < .01$; and with Func, $r(28) = .71$, $p < .01$, respectively.

PMP and IMP also did not correlate with any other subscale, except moderately with PP, $r(28) = .31$ in both cases, suggesting that mystic experiences could be affiliated with psychopathology (or disturbing subjectivity in the case of these women). However, Table 16 showed that total EEQP and total EEQI correlated with total BioPSSI. The lack of correlation between PMP (and IMP) with other subscales extends to subscales of EEQ. This suggests that mystical experiences may not be related to any of its sister-subscases, except perhaps moderately to the psychopathology subscale of EEQ, as indicated earlier, or to any subscales of biopsychosociospiritual and its functioning; in other words, to ego loss and visionary dreams; or
to physical and psychological symptoms, social aspects, spirituality within a
biopsychosociospiritual construct and the overall functioning of its four realms.

However, the ego loss, psychopathology, and visionary dreams subscales of exceptional
experiences scale relate to all the subscales in this study except the overall functioning of the
physical, psychological, social, and spiritual factors of the biopsychosociospiritual construct. To
detail, PD/EL correlates strongly and positively with PP, \( r(28) = .77, p < .01 \); with PVD, \( r(28) = .40, p < .05 \); with Phy, \( r(28) = .48, p < .01 \); with Psy, \( r(28) = .48, p < .01 \); with Soc, \( r(28) = .53, p < .01 \); with Spir, \( r(28) = .41, p < .05 \), respectively. This suggests that ego loss is related to
psychopathology and visionary dreams within exceptional experiences construct; and with
physical and psychological symptoms, social aspects, and spirituality within a
biopsychosociospiritual construct. Note that PD/EL does not correlate with Func of the BioPSSI,
indicating that there is no relationship between ego loss and biopsychosociospiritual functioning.
As previously noted, decompensation/ego loss is also not related to mystical experiences.

Going further, PP correlates with PVD, \( r(28) = .47, p < .01 \); with Phy, \( r(28) = .75, p < .01 \);
with Psy, \( r(28) = .66, p < .01 \); with Soc, \( r(28) = .67, p < .01 \); and with Func, \( r(28) = .42, p < .05 \),
respectively. This indicates that psychopathology as measured within the exceptional
experiences construct is related with visionary dreams, and with all but the spiritual realm of the
biopsychosociospiritual construct. It is of note that women who score high on psychopathology,
score the intensity of their experiences of ego loss extremely high, \( r(28) = .91, p < .01 \),
approaching colinearity. Further, although scores on psychopathology do not correlate with
scores on the prevalence of mystical themes, they do correlate on the intensity of mystical
themes, indicating that the women who experience psychopathology tend to score whatever
amount or prevalence of mystical they have with a high intensity. Thus, PP does not correlate with PMP, \( r(28) = .31, \) n.s., whereas PP correlates with IMP, \( r(28) = .39, \) \( p < .05. \)

Similarly, as indicated, PVD correlates with Phy, \( r(28) = .75, \) \( p < .01; \) with Psy, \( r(28) = .45, \) \( p < .05; \) and with Soc, \( r(28) = .43, \) \( p < .05, \) respectively. This means that women who scored high on visionary dreams also scored high on the physical, psychological, and social realms of biopsychosociospiritual. It is of note that visionary dreams is not related to the spiritual or the functionality of a biopsychosociospiritual construct.

From the intensity correlations of exceptional experiences, of note are the following: IP highly and positively correlates with ID/EL, \( r(28) = .98, \) \( p < .01; \) and with Phy, \( r(28) = .86, \) \( p < .01. \) This indicates that there is colinearity between the intensity of psychological and ego loss constructs; and that the women who score high on the physical subscale of biopsychosociospiritual construct tend to score their psychopathology symptoms very intensely.

All the BioPSSI subscales are correlated significantly and positively except for Phy and Spir, \( r(28) = .28, \) n.s. Thus, Phy correlates with Psy, \( r(28) = .59, \) \( p < .01; \) with Soc, \( r(28) = .66, \) \( p < .01; \) and with Func, \( r(28) = .58, \) \( p < .01. \) This indicates that women who score high in psychosomatic symptoms within a biopsychosociospiritual construct also tend to score high in psychology, social aspects and functionality of the same construct—Func correlates positively and strongly with Phy, \( r(28) = .58; \) with Psy, \( r(28) = .67; \) with Soc, \( r(28) = .48; \) and with Spir, \( r(28) = .58, \) respectively, suggesting that psychosomatic symptoms could be interfering with the overall functionality of the relevant participants; however, the women who scored positively in Func verbalized that this was because of some physical ailment. Psy correlates with Soc, \( r(28) = .71, \) \( p < .01; \) with Spir, \( r(28) = .75, \) \( p < .01; \) and with Func, \( r(28) = .67, \) \( p < .01, \) suggesting that women who score high in psychological symptoms within the biopsychosociospiritual construct also
score high in social, spiritual and functional aspects of biopsychosociospiritual. Similarly, Soc correlates with Spir, $r(28) = .72, p < .01$, and with Func, $r(28) = .48, p < .01$, indicating that social aspects of the biopsychosociospiritual construct are related to its spiritual and functional aspects. Lastly, Spir correlates with Func, $r(28) = .58, p < .01$, indicating that women who score high in spirituality in the biopsychosociospiritual construct also score high in its functional aspect. Note that Phy does not correlate with Spir, indicating that psychosomatic symptoms and spirituality are not related within the construct of biopsychosociospiritual.

**Summary of outstanding correlations.** Following are the correlations highlights:

- **Dissociation.** DES is for these participants related to stress-related spirituality as measured by Spir—that is, within the biopsychosociospiritual construct—but not to conventional spirituality as measured by SIBS. Dissociation is also related to ego loss, as expected. However, dissociation is not related to mystical themes.

- **Perceived Stress.** The only construct that PSS is not related to is conventional spirituality as measured by SIBS and PMP, the mystic experiences subscale of exceptional experiences as measured by the total EEQ.

- **Spirituality (conventional).** As a corollary to the perceived stress correlation just shown, conventional spirituality as measured by SIBS is appropriately related to PMP, measuring mystical themes, and not to any other scale or subscale. Its insignificant relationship with stress-related spirituality as measured by Spir that is, within the biopsychosociospiritual construct, is in the negative direction, $r(28) = -.23$, n.s.

- **PTSD.** PCL-C is not related to PMP, the mystic theme subscale of the exceptional experiences scale; conventional spirituality measured by SIBS; or dissociation. Otherwise, it is related to perceived stress measured by PSS and to all the other
subscales, and especially of note is its correlation to Spir, stress-related spirituality within the biopsychosociospiritual construct.

- **Mystical experiences.** The mystical construct of exceptional experiences, as mentioned, is related to conventional spirituality measured by SIBS but not to any other scale or subscale. In contrast, there is a noteworthy correlation of the total EEQ with every scale. When women in this study scored high on the prevalence of mystical concepts, PMP, they also identified them intensely, thus reflecting a correlation with IMP, \( r(28) = .96, p < .01 \).

- **Ego Loss and Functionality.** Whereas ego loss measured by the EEQ subscale PD/EL is related to all other scales and subscales, it is not related to functionality, Func, within the biopsychosociospiritual construct, suggesting that, although women in this study who experience ego loss also show psychosomatic and psychological symptoms, they are functional at a social level. Second, ego loss also does not correlate with PMP.

- **Perceived Stress, Posttraumatic Stress, Psychopathology, Phy, Psy, Soc. BioPSSI.** Highly correlated with each other, this umbrella of “stress” scales are not related to mystical themes (PMP), conventional spirituality measured by SIBS, and dissociation (DES), but they are related to ego loss (PD/EL).

*Factor Analysis Contribution*

Table 16 shows that PSS, PCL-C, and BioPSSI correlations were highly positively significantly correlated \( r > .70 \), approaching colinearity; that is, they could be more similar than different. Thus, they were combined to create the sociostress factor used in further correlations and in the subsequent triangulation by CART. The BioPSSI was intended to “include the
spiritual dimension” (Katerndahl and Oyiriaru, 2007, p. 408) to test for holistic health of medical patients and it is not surprising that the significant, positive correlations of BioPSSI with PSS and PCL-C show that the BioPSSI has features that measure a stressful element for the participants in the present study; combing these three scales makes for a more powerful analysis with an increase in Cronbach’s Alpha. The Extraction Method for sociostress was Maximum Likelihood (See Table 18), showing the considerable increase in reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .74).

Table 18

**Sociostress Factor: Variance and Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Initial Eigenvalues</th>
<th>Extraction Sum of Squared Loadings</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total   % of Variance Cum %</td>
<td>Total   % of Variance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. BioPSSI</td>
<td>2.598  86.59         86.59</td>
<td>2.42     80.55</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PCL-C</td>
<td>.30     9.85          96.44</td>
<td></td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. PSS</td>
<td>.11     3.56          100.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. BioPSSIC is a combination of the four “Condition” realms of the BioPSSI, namely, Physical, Psychological, Social, and Spiritual.*

**Correlations with sociostress.** Sociostress did not correlate with DES—*r*(28) = .30, *p* = .01—suggesting that women who did not show sociostress also did not dissociate, or with OOBE—*r*(28) = .13, *p* < .01—suggesting that women who did not show sociostress also did not have out-of-body experiences. Additionally, sociostress was negatively associated with SIBS, *r*(28) = -.08, *p* < .01, suggesting that women’s sociostress was not associated with conventional spirituality measured by SIBS. On the other hand, OOBE correlated with SIBS, *r*(28) = .66, *p* < .01.
**Phi Correlations**

*Regarding USRE and trauma.* Correlations with two binomial categorical variables were performed as relevant for the research question. USRE significantly and positively correlated with *subjective suffering*, \( r(28) = .46, p < .01 \), and *attending private spiritual meetings*, \( r(28) = .68, p < .01 \), and positively with *religiosity*, \( r(28) = .40, p < .01 \), and, considering the low \( n \), like with *trauma*, \( r(28) = .34, \) n.s. Expectedly, trauma correlated with *subjective suffering*, \( r(28) = .74, p < .01 \). USRE did correlate either with *practicing personal rituals*, \( r(28) = .41, p < .01 \), or with *practicing religion*, \( r(28) = -.13, p < .01 \).

A critical finding was that trauma correlated significantly and positively with subjective suffering, \( r(28) = .74, p < .01 \), and, by Point Biserial method, with PCL-C, \( r(28) = .48, p < .01 \).

*Belief in Sai Baba.* Belief in Sai Baba significantly and positively correlated with spiritual practice, \( r(28) = .52, p < .01 \), and with social work, \( r(28) = .44, p < .01 \). Belief in Sai Baba, spiritual practice, and social work did not correlate with most subscales of the BioPSSI or EEQ and, in fact, most insignificant correlations were slightly in the negative direction. Note their lack of correlation with even the mystic positive subscale of EEQ. However, given the small \( n \), the significance of the correlation of belief in Sai Baba with EEQI, \( r(28) = .27, \) n.s., and with PD/EL, \( r(28) = .28, \) are questionable. Further, social work correlated significantly and negatively with psychology subscale of BioPSSI, \( r(28) = -.38, p < .05 \), with social subscale of BioPSSI, \( r(28) = -.37, p < .05 \), and with spiritual subscale of BioPSSI (stress-related spirituality), \( r(28) = .58, p < .01 \).

*OOBE.* To repeat, OOBES correlated with SIBS (herein called “conventional spirituality”), \( r(28) = .66, p < .01 \), and somewhat, considering the low \( n \), with DES and PD/EL—\( r(28) = .33, \) n.s. and \( r(28) = .29, \) n.s., respectively.
Summary of Quantitative Data Analysis

This section presented the quantitative data. It included the IBSI that divided women into three religious categories, and the demographics, which also provided the categorical variables. Next, the scores or continuous variables of the six psychological tests were provided in the form of Pearson correlations. Additionally, a new factor, sociostress, was created by combining the scores on PSS, PCL-C, and BioPSSI, because their correlations approached collinearity. Finally, Phi tests correlated with categorical variables. The qualitative data is presented next.

Qualitative Data and Analysis

The qualitative data were in the form of narratives from 30 women participants elicited to explore the research question of SSP, whether triggered by trauma or religiosity, and as a way for coping and healing. However, as specified, the focus of the study shifted to USRE because only one case of ritualized spirit possession was found in the area of study within the time constraints of the study. The transcripts thereof were analyzed by Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) grounded theory method that enabled the development of seven major themes namely, Religion; Inner-Outer Energy: Atma and Shakti; Connection With the Divine; SSP; USRE; Transformation; and Acculturation. These were derived from about 110 initial codes (Appendix S).

Recruitment was convenience sampling; again, no participant reported having experienced SSP although Pushpa reported being “possessed by ghosts.” However, Charmaz’ (2009) support was inspirational in data analysis and in eventually gleaning experiences that were akin to SSP in a sample that did not report SSP:

What happens if your qualitative data do not illuminate your initial research interests? Grounded theorists evaluate the fit between their initial research interests and their emerging data. We do not force preconceived ideas and theories directly upon our data. Rather, we follow leads that we define in the data, or design another way of collecting data to pursue our initial interests. Thus . . . I also pursued other topics that my respondents defined as crucial. (Charmaz, 2009, p. 17)
SSP was also explored in the present study by questioning the participants’ views. Further, the Observational Notes (Appendix O) of The Devotee is an exemplar of ritualized spirit possession in India, and The Dancer’s narrative shows the influence of Indian religious teachings (the basis of Indian classical dance) in attaining trance, an aspect of SSP which is herein considered as one kind of USRE, as the data will suggest.

Overall, the large number of open-ended narrations on the vast starting topic of religious views gave diverse data and enabled religiosity to be the cohesion for linking themes, which are listed in the order that best supports their discussion. Some overlap of thematic content was unavoidable and is an aspect of theme linkage for a theory’s validity.

*Religion*

The demographic data had shown that the majority of the women in the present study were born Hindu in India, that there were 1 Indian-Christian and 2 Fijian-Christian women of Indian heritage who were also raised in the atmosphere of Hinduism pervasive in their cultural and social circle, and that the women were almost equally divided into three religiosity groups, *highly religious, somewhat religious,* and *not* religious. This information was essential for data interpretation because religiosity was a major variable that defined the subgroups emerging in all the themes.

*Manifestations of religiosity.* Religion was an essential part of the daily lives of religious women who practiced prescribed rituals at home or in the temple. Many of these practices were related to childhood religious teachings, and others, such as devotion to Sai Baba, developed later in life. Common public practice was worship in a temple or church, in a frequency that varied from weekly to at least during the several annually auspicious occasions. Puja and prayer were common private rituals that were compared to the less common practices of meditation and
yoga that were performed equally by 10 (32%) nonreligious and religious women. The 5 (16%) highly religious women who were less-educated were all highly devotional and did not meditate. Personal prayer as the most common tool for coping in daily life was a practice reported volunteered by 8 (25%) women, Pakshi, Sam, Christy, Ramitha, Pushpa, Asha, Saisha, and Shahi, who were all religious except Asha. As an example of this group’s practice, Christy said, “When I pray a lot I feel different from others. . . . When in trouble, I pray hard, I feel god is with me, in my soul.” Being ambivalent in her views, Asha also sided with 4 nonreligious women, Veena, Hansa, Malati, and Palak, who relied on themselves, and not prayer, for solutions.

Three other groups of women, grouped together as based on distinct religious practices, emerged: (a) A group of 4 women who were Sai Baba devotees and attended a religious “study group”; (b) another group of 3 Sai Baba worshipers who attended weekly ritualized bhajans that often culminated in spirit possession; and (c) the 2 Christian women from Fiji who attended private prayer and healing meetings in homes of congregation members. As unconventional methods of devotion, 4 nonreligious women (Veena, Malati, Palak, and Prabha) and 3 religious women (Shahi, Rama, Gita, and Sparrow) (total 26%) considered work, or specifically social work, and 3 women (Ramitha, Hansa, and Asha) considered their connection with nature, as synonymous with religion: “Serving the needy was always a learning experience. Compassion, care, and just trying to make a difference in someone’s life has always been close to my heart” (Rama); and “Nature, relationships, are all connection with the divine. It can be defined as a kind of energy I get out of it” (Hansa).

Interviews held in religious participants’ homes revealed sacred spaces reserved for shrines, and most women had a minimum of a picture of a god or deceased family elders who were worshiped, often in a daily puja. Even nonreligious women’s homes displayed art based on
religious icons because, Malati said, it was “aesthetic.” As a common ritual in India that joins the social, cultural, and art expressions with religion, Ramitha’s daily **rangoli** raised in her the questioning and need for the logic in rituals that was expressed by several more-educated women.

*Ramitha:* For the longest time I had stopped putting Rangoli in the morning on the prayer space, but strangely enough I picked it up again. I do it every morning and it’s somehow very calming . . . because of what I’m learning in mindfulness as part of Buddhist teachings . . . I find it peaceful . . . I asked why . . . every morning [they] draw the Rangoli . . . wash it off and they do it again the next day . . . And now I find maybe one reason . . . is to teach ourselves unconsciously disengagement or disattachment] to anything in our life . . . when you do a new one you look at things with new eyes, with new perspective.

Ramitha’s conscious analysis was different from the concrete and unquestioning embrace of ritual by less-educated women such as Pakshi: “When I go into the kitchen [where the shrine is] I call *Bhagwan* and he comes. I trust him a lot. I talk to him only, I cry to him only.”

At the most elementary level, all women whose homes I visited required shoes to be removed outside the door, according to the tenet of cleanliness of sacred spaces, the impact of which was also seen in nonreligious women. For example, Gia, when asked: “What is your evaluation of the Hindu religion?” answered simply: “Not to hurt, cleanliness, etc.,” and to the question: “Is there any of your traditional belief that comes in your way in the American world?” responded “Only when it comes to books—I feel books are sacred, I cannot stand it when people step on books.” Similarly, a more religious Gita answered: “I hate it when children here put their feet on the table.”

Ramitha’s response exemplified and summed up traditional, daily, private Hindu rituals and contrasted with less elaborate Jain teachings exemplified by Siri in the next quote.

*Ramitha:* I do practice it fairly regularly . . . light the lamp in the *puja* area and of late . . . [draw] the fresh rice flower *rangoli* in the north . . . I find it is extremely peaceful and calming. And on most days I do recite the Vishnu Sahasranama . . . 108 names of Vishnu. I don’t know why . . . but . . . it feels nice.
\textit{Siri}: You are not really supposed to be asking for something but showing reverence for our teachers to show us the right path. That’s the main essence of the prayers that I say. Other rituals that I follow, I try to follow the righteous path. Jainism is a philosophy.

USRE and SSP-like USRE were the most dramatic manifestations of religious belief and practice and are best described in the texts of the themes specific to them. Finally, 6 (19\%) women consciously practiced advanced, philosophical aspects of the Hindu religion, namely, being an observer of the self (Mira), Kundalini Yoga (Dipti), Nonduality (Rama, Gita, and Sparrow), and egolessness (Saisha). Saisha’s quote below defines her practice of egolessness.

\textit{Saisha}: He said “Put your ego on my feet. That’s all I want.” [So] I try to help people. That little “I” is reducing. . . . So now, He says, “You are Me.” So there is that power that’s judging that little “I.”

\textit{Family-of-origin’s influence on religious views.} Kesar revealed the influence of childhood religious environment: “In educated women, background is relevant—very strict, orthodox, religious upbringing supersedes their education.” Appendix T shows the division of the women based on religion of family-of-origin, and a further subdivision based on their own current religiosity. The 5 (16\%) less-educated women, Pakshi, Sam, Rose, Sher, and Shirley, are all highly religious as adults and came from religious families-of-origin; they will continue to appear as a unified group in different aspects of this study’s analysis. In contrast, the 26 (84\%) more-educated women came from either religious (16) or nonreligious (10) families-of-origin and were varied in their own religiosity and religious views as adults.

Of the 4 (13\%) women who came from religious families and were currently nonreligious, Asha was more questioning in critiquing ritual, and Veena and Gia were actively against ritual. For example, Gia said: “In India I do participate in religious activities simply because it is required of me, and, with a very religious mother, it is the only way to maintain peace at home. . . . [In the US], you couldn’t pay me to go to a \textit{bhajan}.”
Three women, Rita, Mala, and Rama, who had only one religious parent or whose family was “somewhat” religious were placed in the “religious family-of-origin” group, and, interestingly, all 3 are currently devotees of Sai Baba, a relatively recent saint not within ancient Hindu literature. Seven (70%) of the 10 (23% of the sample) women who came from nonreligious families-of-origin, were also currently nonreligious, emphasizing the impact of the influence of family-of-origin’s religious standing. Two of them, Hansa and Mira, as ambivalent women, practiced selective rituals that provided comfort.

The two women, Asha (nonreligious) and Ramitha (religious), who narrated the most stories of childhood religious environment were also exemplars of ambivalent religious views. Ramitha’s adult religious practices were driven by “superstition” as she struggled to maintain her childhood religious practices, and a younger Asha, while having a remnant prayer ritual from childhood, ambivalently struggled to imbibe the change in her belief system.

Ramitha: In the mid-30s I did not want to do it [rituals] . . . don’t believe there was a time when I actually enjoyed it . . . found it too much in my 30s. Maybe because I was taking care of the children . . . like religion was something I had to do . . . did not want to . . . was distancing myself . . . feeling guilty . . . oh my god, not observing all these things . . . something bad will happen to me.

Asha: I used to pray quite often, usually at night . . . in bed, recite a lot of shlokas . . . because I grew up in that . . . used to love [rituals] but . . . when I moved out of my home . . . it wasn’t going on around me, so . . . it was a gradual shift from that to become less religious. . . . I still do pray sometimes but I think my understanding . . . is changed a little bit. Questioning more. And now I don’t see god as this person who sits up in heaven and looks down at all our lives and does things for us. I think god and prayer are . . . personal . . . psychological. . . . that if I pray I’ll find the courage within to do something about it . . . that developed over the years . . . not going to say 100% that there’s no such thing . . . [but I] believe that most things happening are random. . . . So, interestingly, I still pray . . . listen to bhajans . . . for comfort . . . something I have been used to . . . [e.g.,] in my childhood and when I would be sick or something.

Finally, Prabha, as an example of a more-educated, nonreligious woman from a religious family, was selective in using the aspects of her family’s religion that are in accordance with her
worldview: “I believe in god, but my approach is different. God is in myself. . . . Do work without hurting anybody. Think deeply, be conscious. Not because this or that book said it,” indicating that she still follows the Hindu religious tenet of work as synonymous with religion.

**Critiquing religious teachings.** In contrast to the 5 less-educated women, who believed unwaveringly in god, more-educated women were not uniform in the nature of their belief, and the 4-5 ambivalent women especially questioned rituals or needed to understand and explain teachings logically. Ramitha, whose ambivalence is evident in her quote about the ritual of drawing *rangoli* previously mentioned, said,

*Ramitha:* In the context of Ramayana. Here’s Sita [consort of God Rama] who would not look at another man. I’m angry that they portray her as such. We are told it will give you solace and comfort, and it’s the exact opposite . . . so unrealistic. No one can live up to this perfection . . . it seems unfair to thrust upon us this ideal. . . . If you fall off that ideal place, you are looked down. So, I’m drawn back to prayer . . . to spirituality and divinity but with a different view . . . no longer accepting of it as a ritual . . . I find myself modifying things . . . I wish Hinduism would give us a logical reason . . . other than blindly saying “These are religious rituals, you need to do this.”

Similarly, the younger, nonreligious Hansa was in partnership with her husband about raising their future children according to their questioning of religious ideals:

*Hansa:* I went to . . . a temple in Pleasanton. And the kids . . . were asking “What do these chants mean?” and the parents could not explain. . . . I remarked to my husband: “Why do we bring our children to the temple [for] an entire day without explaining to them what we are praying?” My husband was like, “I think it’s an utter waste of time. . . . First of all it’s important we understand what religion means to us.”

Other women taught their children the meaning of the rituals in which the questioning participants did not see the logic. For example, Shahi’s 6-year old daughter did *puja* with us during *Ganesh Chaturthi* and once “led a bhajan of 200 devotees” (Shahi).

As an example of educated women from religious families-of-origin but nonreligious themselves, Veena was knowledgeable but skeptical about her family’s early teachings:
Veena: In [the ritual of] Karvachauti, you have to fast and pray for your husband’s long life . . . on a particular day only. Do they follow it blindly or . . . believe in it? . . . These highly educated women, so Western in their lifestyle . . . don’t see the dichotomy in it at all, but I see it as a conflict. . . . Why is it one-sided—why does the husband not pray for the wife? And why do these women still do it? . . . Being educated, they should know that it is a superstition [but they] are reinforcing it for their daughters, to be subservient to the men. [Are they] doing it out of part of culture, or . . . understand the meaning and still accept [it]? . . . This ritual does not make sense in the 21st century. I don’t believe in [rituals].

*Karma, fate, reincarnation, and moksha as aspects of religion.* Eight (26%) women believed in karma without ambiguity. Women who voluntarily mentioned karma as the cause of their life events were either religious and less-educated or more-educated and ambivalent in their religious views; however, all agreed that their good work could offset bad karma. Karma is also a philosophy of action, and most women were self-aware that good actions reap good karma and endeavored to do good deeds. For example, nonreligious Palak said, “I don’t believe in that [if you do bad things then you suffer]. Whatever is possible, that we do . . . to the extent that it helps others.” Also nonreligious, Malati and Roshan differed in the nature of their disbelief in karma as repayment for past life’s deeds; Malati had a paradoxical explanation that did not negate karma, whereas Roshan abstained from expressing an opinion, saying that there was “no way to know” whether karmic law is true.

*Malati:* Karma is like past life karma . . . like some effect you are just having [with] no relation to other things . . . [it’s] just your duty, what you do.

To their younger nonreligious counterparts, Hansa and Asha, karma was a common-sense action in present time. (In the quote below, Hansa’s word “future” refers to what is ahead “in this life.”)

*Hansa:* I think that we can control our fate. If there is something called “destiny,” it’s a consequence of your actions. . . . What goes around comes back around. . . . If you . . . maximize the number of positive things that you do, it’s going to have a positive effect on your future. . . . Do good and receive good . . . that’s about it.

*Asha:* I don’t kind of believe it [karma] in one way . . . I don’t think something magical . . . just a consequence of your own actions . . . not in the sense that if you steal
it’s going to come back. That is also in the brain, there is no physical basis of it. I actually kind of believe in karma. If I do good . . . I’m making life better for somebody. If enough people feel that way . . . eventually it will come back—not magically but only because you’re changing the way people do things. Butterfly effect, right.

Regarding reincarnation, at a conscious level, Siri, a Jain, was the only participant whose daily actions were based on her concern about improving her past life karma by good actions in this life to attain moksha, or, a future life with less suffering.

Siri: I’m a Jain. We don’t think of ourselves as following a particular religion; it’s a way of life. We believe in the philosophy of reincarnation and the idea of the soul, or, atma, dictating what happens to us in the life [as] based on the philosophy of karma, good and bad. I grew up in India and my [Jain] parents . . . brought us up [in the Jain belief] that it is the soul that has most of the power and our actions dictate what we get or what happens to us . . . When [good or bad] incidents take place it’s . . . because [your soul has] committed such deeds in your past life. It seems to make more sense to me . . . you [not the gods] still have control over your destiny and what you do [in this life, and, in turn,] that compounds karma. We’ve been lucky enough to be born a Jain.

Also the only participant who revealed being sexually abused as a child, Siri explained that the self-responsibility allowed by Jain teachings made her feel less like a victim because, she said, although her abuse is payment for past-life deeds, she felt empowered by taking responsibility for her own actions in her past life and making retribution by being a good person for her future and possible next life.

In a manner similar to that of religious Siri, three nonreligious women, Veena, Roshan, and Mira, felt empowered in partnership with karma. As the second of two Jain women in this group of participants, Roshan’s combination of both self-control and divine control were limited—she could control her fate up to a point: “After a point, I just let go.” Mira said: “I am in control, but there is an unknown entity or power. You are dealt some cards.” She later contradicted her statement by taking responsibility for her actions: “We pay for everything here, right now.” Finally, Veena’s existential views follow:
Veena: Yes, I believe in karma . . . did not believe in it while growing up. But now, watching my own life and that of friends, I cannot explain in a logical way certain things. But the mind wants some explanation—karma gives some answer. Same belief about fate. Many things in life I don’t have control over.

Overall, religious, more-educated women were more complex in their description of karma. For example, Sheela’s view of co-control was similar to that of nonreligious women but, being religious, she also introduced reincarnation, which, like fate and unlike karma, was a concept in which nonreligious women could not definitively believe:

Sheela: For me, karma is everything happens right here. I do believe in rebirth, I do, I definitely do. [Regarding fate,] I think it’s like 50-50. If I said that it’s my fate to be a great dancer, but if I don’t practice, even if it’s written there, I have to make it happen.

The Christian women were not familiar with the terms “karma” and “fate.” When I explained them to Shirley, she said: “Yeah, I believe what is written will happen,” indicating non-appreciation of the differential, and when I reminded her that her son’s physical illness did improve with her prayers, she answered: “Yeah, sometimes. God did it. If god reveals something . . . if I listen to god, then I can stop it,” revealing a combination of divine control (fate) and self-control (implicated in karmic philosophy). Thus, she conflated karma with following God’s word, or was ambivalent.

As a “universal principle of cause and effect” (Anand, 2009), women’s views on karma, however, did focus on and reflect its two prescribed aspects as contributing both to their sense of integrity (taking individual responsibility for one’s actions) and, likewise, to the notion of justice (that the outcome of the action is placed within their control). This seemed important for Ramitha as she struggled to justify her ambivalent views of aspiring to do good and contradictorily giving up that responsibility; conflating fate and karma gave her that flexibility:

Ramitha: I do [believe in fate]. It does help to explain certain things in life that is why we are all born with different endowments and I can’t look to any other explanation than karma which gives me a clear understanding of it. Not that I necessarily do things just to
In contrast, for all the less-educated women, karma was a simple cause-effect phenomenon in which one feels the impact in this life of negative actions in past life; in interviews, their attitude was that their life’s path was prewritten and, rather than seeming fatalistic, they accepted it and seemed to have a calmness about them.

Finally, specifically for the 4 New Age women who were nonreligious and did social work, karma both stems from and leads to the expression of values such as “nonviolence” and “nonattachment” (religious Siri) and to social work as good acts.

Reasons for following religion. Whether they were religious or not, all women agreed that the purpose of religion is to provide healing, comfort, solution to a problem or physical illness, and, above all, “an anchor” (Veena). Nonreligious women considered this as true for their religious counterparts, although they did not themselves need religion’s comfort. Although the women did not judge others’ religious choices, three religious women advocated religion. For example, Saisha trusted religion over science:

Saisha: Education can bring logic. I understand what the [scientists] feel, but I don’t agree. The Devotee can tell my actions; she gets signs. My sister had fibroid in uterus, no way to get pregnant, doctors said . . . a miscarriage before. She is an MBA and went to the doctor first. [The Devotee prophesied a different outcome, and she had a baby]. It’s something powerful. Does science know what happens, after death, to the soul? Divine takes over.

This similarity among the women regarding religion providing comfort diverged into differences in the nature of their reasoning, as based on their own religiosity and level of education. Again, the 5 less-educated women, who were all highly religious, did not
intellectualize the reason behind religion, whereas 3 more-educated, nonreligious women, Veena, Hansa, and Asha, were puzzled as to how people could follow and get comfort from rituals:

Asha: In India places are crowded, dirty. People don’t respect you . . . say, if you’re in a temple and it’s very crowded, the priest starts shooing people away like cattle. I was asking my mother . . . “How can you connect with it in that environment?” A lot of people do . . . I think they comprehend something . . . some kind of connection they make that I don’t. But it just doesn’t make sense to me.

Asha conceded that suffering intensifies religiosity and that she was lucky not to have suffered.

Finally, many more-educated women whose views changed from their youth to feeling more spiritual than religious specified that they needed and felt comfort through an “energy” rather than from a “god” or by praying.

**Ambivalence in religious views and the need for logic.** “Karma; I don’t kind of believe in it in one way. . . . I actually kind of believe in karma” (Asha). Ambivalence of views on different aspects of religion was repeatedly observed in 5 (16%) women, Ramitha, Hansa, Asha, Gia, and Mira, both religious and nonreligious. As more-educated women, Ramitha, Hansa, and Asha were conspicuously troubled by the lack of logic to explain religious beliefs and rituals. As an exemplar for Ambivalence, Ramitha’s quote below overlaps with the prior-mentioned subtheme

**Critiquing Religious Teachings.**

Ramitha: And then I do say two prayers, Vishnu in the morning and goddess in the evening, most days. I wonder why I do that . . . obviously, I don’t have an understanding of what I’m saying, so I’m actually annoyed I’m doing it . . . When I understand a particular line or a word [of the prayers,] I feel deeply touched. . . . I wish Hinduism would do more of it, give a logical reason why we are required to do certain things. . . . I’ve seen that you don’t have to be religious, ritualistic, to be a good human being.

Interviewer: Thing is, despite what you said earlier, you are still practicing rituals.

Ramitha: I am, but I don’t. I’m also struggling with it. When I’m doing it, I want to stop it, then I don’t want to, so I’m confused, I’m afraid that if I stop doing it something will happen.
In another overlap, with the subtheme of *Childhood Influence on Religious Views*, Ramitha’s ambivalence pervaded her interview:

Ramitha: My dada [grandfather] had a ritual that I watched every morning . . . sat on the stone bench as he washed the *Nataraja* statue with tamarind [making it] beautifully shiny and . . . all the time . . . saying something I don’t exactly recall . . . but I loved watching him. Now, what if I say, “OK, I’m not going to do these things anymore, but I think I like the structure of it. I like the routineness of doing it every morning.” Maybe that’s why I’m doing it, you know. When I’m distressed or deeply troubled I do turn to the divine.

Similarly, nonreligious Hansa and Asha, whose ambivalent views started when their religious practices decreased when they moved away to college, draw comfort from select ritual:

Hansa: We read the *Bhagwat Gita* in order to understand how we incorporate . . . self-discipline, consciousness [of one’s] inner voice . . . being kind to other human beings . . . listening intently. . . . This whole lighting incense or putting the camphor on is just too dramatic . . . doing *puja*, you are trying to symbolize the lightness . . . to surround you and not the darkness . . . an explanation . . . [some] logic, but . . . necessary for us to do in a day-to-day life? . . . Practical from a time perspective? . . . Make us better human beings? . . . The positive aspect of having these rituals, the moments that are going to be the most memorable in your life, brings the entire community together. We wanted to . . . have a very controlled sort of wedding . . . everything [rituals] was explained to us. . . [So it was] just being a part of something that is very powerful.

Finally, ambivalence was seen not only in the insecurity of women in questioning rituals but also in an instance reported by a nonreligious woman, the only agnostic participant, who had innocently followed an internalized ritual, namely, the cleanliness ritual of Gia: “Since part of me is somewhat spiritual, I do derive solace and peace from listening to *slokas* and *bhajans*.”

*Inner Energy and Outer Energy*

“I think it is important to know the inner core of our personality. I think of the word ‘Atma’ as something within us and ‘Shakti’ as something outside” (Veena). As important concepts that pervade Indian religious teachings, *Atma* is soul or the inner energy and *Shakti* is the pervasive external, divine energy, specifically female and often associated with goddess Kali or the ubiquitous Mata. Women, in the present study of all religiousities periodically referred to
these energies without mention of god but individually as one part of the inner-versus-outer
binary; they did not voluntarily unite them in Nonduality, until iterative questioning prompted a
response, except for 3 women who mentioned “oneness.” On the contrary, the external was
considered maya, or illusion—something to recognize and overcome, rather than something with
which to unite.

_Inner self—Atma._ Words the women used to refer to inner energy were “inside,”
“empower yourself within,” “nugget,” “from inside,” “from within,” and “Atma.” The similarity
between more-educated women was in regarding inner energy as self-defining, in contrast to
less-educated women, who felt the energy within as god. Three nonreligious women gave sole
importance to an inner strength without attributing it to god. For example, Malati’s answer is a
complicated example of inner energy, based on Hindu scriptures, expressed when I asked about
the awe I saw on her face at The Dancer’s recital.

> **Malati:** Ultimately, it is . . . how you really empower yourself within. [The Dancer] was just explaining . . . when in the dance form you just kill someone or sometimes you feel violent [scenes from the epics] . . . [it is that] the uncontrolled negative things within that person’s within [are] coming out . . . [She’s] getting empowered. She just wants to get rid of that; she just gave a simile.

Asha’s quote below, repeated under the theme “Connection With the Divine,” as exemplar of a
younger nonreligious woman attributing power solely to personal energy.

> **Asha:** There isn’t anything external like a power above us. Whatever connection we feel, it’s internal, a heightened state of consciousness. . . . That is what we are connected with. If you want to pray or do anything, since I believe that it comes from within, I should be able to do it right here in my room.

Shahi, although highly religious and ritualistic, also did not identify with _Shakti_ and in this
regard was similar to Asha: “I’m not aware of the outside energy but I meditate on my internal
energy.” However, the other 3 women who attend Shahi’s Sai Baba study group had felt a
transformation from relying on an external energy to feeling empowered within, as Rama exemplifies for her group:

*Rama:* I had respect for all the ritual aspects of it in my young days . . . [drew] strength from a force that surrounded the rituals. . . . When I had a real life problem when in school, it was this fervent clinging to this higher power that made me surmount physical, mental, and emotional challenges. Today, I even ask myself . . . what it was that felt so different then versus now. . . . [Now], I seem to be less concerned about day-to-day anxieties. . . . Curious to know if I have lost that intent yearning in times of trouble . . . I have grown inside to be a person with lesser expectations . . . [with] a strength that I can draw unconditionally . . . that will be intense, or just there to tap. Just acknowledging this gives me tremendous power and happiness . . . that I have never realized could bring back all the energy that has drained out of me in many of life’s situations. It is a spring that just flows and flows and doesn’t stop for anyone or anything. . . . This clarity is brought about by constant remembering of this power within me.

In contrast to this faith in an inner self by the Sai Baba followers, Ramitha’s overall ambivalence was also reflected in her troubled search for an inner “nugget”:

*Ramitha:* But then why don’t I continue to be happy? The next second I can be unhappy . . . But there is something that is truly real that we need to get to, the nugget . . . then we would be in bliss.

Sher was an example of the straight-forward subjectivity of less-educated women; she felt her connection with god inside her soul, emphatically animating “from inside”:

*Sher:* [As a young woman in India] At midnight, I feel in my ears, I hear the *bhajans*. So I wake up.

*Interviewer:* Do you hear them in this country?

*Sher:* Anywhere! After . . . one hour, the noise comes again, as if *kirtān* is going on. I did not get up, so I got a stomach ache until I got up, had bath. If I don’t do *bhakti* when I felt I had to, I got sick. *Sadhu* told me that my tears will flow from *inside*. That is god’s love from *inside* . . . external[ly] the ears hear the *bhajans* . . . god can’t be seen. I was not fully . . . asleep and someone told me that god is going past the house. Someone . . . shook me . . . I felt from *inside* that god is going by. There was a light. I felt the noise from *inside* . . . I saw it in my line [of vision—she points to her eyes]. I had trust that god is there; He gave me life.

*Interviewer:* You actually saw him going by?
Sher: No, I saw Him from inside. Until today I see it... feel that He is with me. Sometimes here, sometimes there, front, back.

Uncomplicated in her emphasis on the connection between god and herself, Sher moved flexibly and idiosyncratically for her comfort between her inner energy or atma, and god outside.

Outer energy—Shakti. Rama’s childhood belief in an outer energy, as expressed in the quote above; Gia believing that “someone is looking out for me”; Hansa’s and Asha’s feelings of connection with nature; and the women’s connections with divinity were all connections with an external energy that 8 (26%) women voluntarily specified as Shakti. Giving power to external energy, Pushpa called it “force,” Shirley described “Shakti” as “empowering,” and Sheela said it “binds us all.” This similarity between religious and nonreligious women differed in the nature of and name for this energy. Religious women considered external energy divinity or god and all women called it either Shakti or named more universal, nebulous entities. In Sparrow’s case below, this entity represented a father figure—after her spiritual transformation under Saint Sai Baba, whom she conflated with Shakti, she felt protected:

Sparrow: When I met him, I was not a follower. I asked: “Who are you”? He showed me through my teacher (but I don’t consider them to be different). The experience I had after that can only be due to a father figure who is around you all the time, like a shield enclosing you. You feel protected.

Nonduality. Rama poetically conceptualized Nonduality: “Atma and Shakti unite when we are true to our personality and react to the outside world accordingly.” As noted, none of the women had volunteered a conceptual definition of Nonduality. Thus, to fill this gap, potentially for theory formation, Nonduality was specifically discussed with 10 women in an iterative session. Six (60%; 19% of the sample) of these women, Ramitha, Sangeetha, Prabha, Maya, Dipti, and Shahi, conclusively said that they had not experienced Nonduality. Maya, a Christian, said: “Not reached that level. Oneness is more in Hinduism.” Dipti said that, rather than oneness,
she “felt an insane amount of energy” during her transformative Kundalini experience.

Sangeetha and Ramitha cognitively understood the scriptures’ teachings of “oneness.”

*Sangeetha:* The religion believes we are one and the same. We should be able to feel it, aspire. Divinity is within us, but because of external things, we cannot see it. [We are] born with it. Slowly [in adulthood], divinity goes away. Effort is needed to see it.

The other 4 women, Mira, Rama, Gita, and Sparrow, practiced for and had Nonduality experiences. Mira, who practices being the observer of her self, said: “When you practice, it [Nonduality] makes sense.” The other 3 women, Sai Baba devotees and belonging to a religious study group, elegantly connected inner and outer energy verbally to show their achievement of Nonduality. Gita remarked, “It’s duality to Nonduality. The divine force is actually inside. Knowing we are divine creates Nonduality. It needs practice, meditation.” Sparrow said, “Duality needs ritual. The moment you realize that [it, the external energy/God] is yourself or anyone else, ritual becomes moot.” Rama elaborated:

*Rama:* Everything you see is only perception. Things change, cannot say what will happen. When you have the same feeling when you go through the same experience, that feeling is what is divinity showing that everything comes from within. I have to pause to make sure I acknowledge this. I have to experience it at the moment. I can actually create that feeling.

These passages from the interviews show that the women gave importance to their inner energy in achieving Nonduality; god is already in their *atma* and it is a matter of practice or consciousness to unite it with the illusive energy or god that they paradoxically believe is in the illusory external. In other cases, the concept of Nonduality was perhaps implicit in the narratives of religious women, as in Saisha’s efforts to achieve egolessness when god told her “You are me,” Saisha’s experience of “divinity within,” and Mala’s trance during *bhajans,* although the level of conceptualization of Nonduality of these women was not discussed. Prabha’s answer regarding the question of SSP noted the many ways in which women conceptualized Nonduality. Starting
by saying that SSP was due to “depression, she [a woman who gets possessed] feels someone has to pay attention; to attract attention; she wanted some peace of mind,” she continued:

*Prabha*: We believe in *atma*, soul, and reincarnation. Soul never dies—it will take different shape. Western culture will say consciousness. According to me, that is soul. In scripture, Namdev used to pray so hard, he forgot everything. One day he was just singing: “Vithal, Vithal” [chant, name of god] and forgot his son was under him. His son died because he [Namdev] was jumping in the mud. Not aware of any physical thing. You can call it as “spirit has come to him.” Others may call him murderer.

Second example. Gautama Buddha. One day he got totally *moksha*. Relieved from all senses of the five organs. After that he went to his father, wife, son, but said: “I don’t know anybody. Whole world looks like me.” That feeling you can call it a spirit. Like in village ladies do *puja* and get spirit. No one knows what spirit. Today, technology will say this is not spirit, this is physical element.

In this quote, when Gautama Buddha said that the whole world looked like him, he was expressing oneness or Nonduality. This is exactly what Rama, Gita, and Sparrow had said was their understanding of that experience.

Again, some more-educated, nonreligious women had more universal terms for experiences that implied Nonduality. Hansa felt united with nature and Asha said: “Everything is one,” referencing Quantum Physics’ *Butterfly Effect*. Roshan said she identified more with Carl Jung’s ideas than with believing in god: “I will turn to Jung for that [Nonduality]. We all come from a whole and we are seeking to unite with that whole. It makes more sense than Hindu scriptures.”

Finally, although Ramitha’s quote below gives a description of Nonduality within Hindu cosmology:

*Ramitha*: I agree with the way you put it together. Searching, searching, searching. Then you find the universe is a continuum of all of us. Hindu religion points to . . . *Brahman* . . . the ultimate, the one self that you want to become a part of—infinite, without form, without face . . . the universality of consciousness from a religious viewpoint. Your research, continuum, is at one end and spirit possession at the other end. . . . While Hinduism has come upon a set of steps to follow, the Western world has bought into it . . . calling it “mindfulness,” you be in the present moment. Just being. That is connecting with divine.
Interviewer: Why? How?

Ramitha: Because everything is momentary, transient, shifting—so what are you left with? You are not that thought, so who are you? OK, I’m a consciousness. So you remain in balance. You is the consciousness—Brahman, or call it universal consciousness or spirit.

Again, the 5 less-educated women did not allude to Nonduality but felt a concrete connection with their god as an entity apart from them as well as, paradoxically, inside them.

Core Category: Connection With the Divine

The word “connection” emerged early, voluntarily, and pervasively (see Appendix S) when the women said in many ways that they aspired for, felt, or had experienced a connection with the divine in some form. Later, while thematizing during Axial coding, the profundity of the word “connection” and its significance in and overlap with SSP and USRE dictated its status as grounded theory’s “Core Category.” Whatever the nature of their connection with the divine, the women identified it as a memorable but private experience in their lives.

The highly religious, less-educated women were clear in their aspiration to connect directly with the god to whom they surrendered their power. As mentioned, some religious, more-educated women mentioned a nebulous “this connection” and the Sai Baba devotees were specific about their connection with this saint. Two nonreligious women agreed on a different characterization: “Internal peace and harmony” (Kesar), and “Peace of mind” (Prabha). The nature of connection with the divine varied in its manifestations depending on the participant’s religious or spiritual aspirations, resulting in personalized relationships, as the following passages will illustrate. Seven (22%) participants who were ritualistic expressed the necessity of faith in order for their divine connection to benefit them or for god to love them.

Saisha: So, as we go forward He’s teaching us, he’s getting more and more closer. So He said: “Any time you call me, I’ll be there, no matter what. But there is one thing. You have to call Me with faith.
Connection as synonymous with closeness. This appeared concretely in several narrations:

“I find it [rituals] peaceful and I also find this connection . . .” (Ramitha); and “Nature, relationships, are all connection with the divine” (Hansa). The connection/closeness relationship was more elaborately expressed by 4 of the women:

_Saisha:_ So as we go forward, He’s teaching us . . . getting . . . closer. It’s just that inner happiness, that joy. I think I cannot express . . . that good feeling that I am closer to the almighty and everything else is just away from me, like money.

_Sheela:_ I got into practicing Reiki and crystal healing [after a trauma]. That’s when I started making sense of my connection. That time the mind is like calm. In fact, it’s kind of a trance.

_Shirley:_ After I got married I lost my first child. And I blamed god because I was only 16, 17 years old at that time. And I was not that close to; right now for the past one and a half years I’ve been very close to the Lord, after this experience [transformation].

Ramitha intellectualized her connection with the divine and extended it to Nonduality.

_Ramitha:_ My understanding about connection with the divine . . . [is that] my religion clearly states that the goal of each individual is to become one with nature. It also lays a sequence of things that must happen. It’s very hard to follow that life and reach that nobility. I feel I’ll never get to that point. If it happens naturally . . . it’s due to . . . karma.

_In-love with the Divine_. Shahi shared her ecstasy: “I am totally in-love with Him. When I meditate, I sit and stare at Him. I did not even do that with my husband. Baba is everything to me.” Mala felt similarly: “I felt a change at the bhajan. I have gone into a trance a few times. I get a warm feeling in my heart like when you’re madly in-love with someone. Peace and calm.”

For Rama, divine love united her with divinity and enabled self-realization:

_Rama:_ When I met Satya Sai Baba, the love that radiated from Him, I just had to share it. Every time I want it, I just have to close my eyes and I can feel it. [It] is the form that shows you the way. It is an utter identification with yourself. I know that I have to only concentrate on improving myself as a person to get closer to divinity.

Although the concept of _being in-love with god_ was provided by Shahi’s direct quote toward the end of gathering narratives, it was a shining beacon in adding properties to Connection with
Divine—she was both, the concrete originator of this category and the guide taking me back to glean this theme from revisited transcripts. For example, in reviewing the narratives after her revelation, I found that, when the first participant, Pakshi, said, “There is only Bhagwan, no one else. I talk to him only, cry to him only” she had been manifesting the same Indian religious concept of being in-love with god.

*Connection with the Divine in dreams.* When asked about her USRE, Rita said: “Shirdi Baba comes in dreams. He tells me things, He takes me places. He told me I was [Goddess] Lakshmibai in my last birth.” The dreams that symbolized some women’s connection with the divine were either prophetic, directive, prescriptive, or signs of warning. Pushpa, speaking about her parents’ neglect of her as a child, narrated a prophetic dream that had occurred when she was 16 years old in India:

*Pushpa:* I had this dream which was very real. It was next to the ocean and there were waves coming and they were crashing. And I’m just walking and I’m all alone. And I feel so good, I feel so peaceful. And in the morning I got up and say to my mother that I need to leave, to go. And I didn’t know where I was going, so I said, “OK I’m going to [another city].”

In the new city she found herself walking by the ocean, experiencing the crashing waves of her dream that she attributed to a divine sign to leave her neglectful mother. Pushpa’s example, which started as a description of a USRE that led to prophetic abilities, is highlighted because it can be conceptualized as a non-direct, unique manner of achieving a connection with the divine.

Other women, too, felt awe at their prophesying ability as a result of their dream-connection:

*Sheela:* I started getting more aware of it [divine connection and prophetic powers] . . . if somebody’s going to pass on, I kind of know. My maternal grandmother was very sick . . . that night when I went to sleep I felt like maybe she’s going to [pass on]. I saw this really beautiful, young woman. I can’t say I saw it but I felt it. She said I’m leaving and I wanted to say “bye.” She didn’t look like my grandmother but I knew it was her.

Saisha’s dream, after she had told her sister she did not want to go visit the deity
Chintpūrnīma’s temple was a chiding message from a goddess that made her embrace all gods:

*Saisha:* Chintpūrnīma came in my dream, next morning. When god wants to tell you something . . . they give you that clue. They are not there for long conversation. . . . She was sitting on a lion, and she said “No.” She didn’t utter that word but she was nodding her head: “mm, mm, not good.” And then I saw Chintpūrnīma’s face next to my, my mother’s sister. What does that mean now? My māsī came with Chintpūrnīma. Now, I think [goddess] Kali is my mom, and Chintpūrnīma is her sister [who said] “I’m your māsī, you wanted to go to Kali, your mother’s place, you didn’t want to come to me, uh, uh, I didn’t like it.” So then . . . I regret, I shouldn’t [have said I wouldn’t go]. Oh my gosh, these are not mere dreams; they are messages.

As Saisha and I analyzed the prophetic significance of her dream, new literature that I sought for theoretical sensitivity informed us: “Chintpūrnīma. . . . This fierce and gruesome goddess is . . . almost always associated with esoteric Tantric practices and is not popularly worshipped by most Hindus” (McDaniel, 1989, p. 51), and, as a reincarnate of Kali, she is depicted as “seated on a lion or tiger” (p. 4). The only prior information Saisha had had was that her mother worshipped Kali, and, thus, Saisha felt she had been intuitively prevented from going to Chintpūrnīma to honor her mother.

*Conversational connection with the Divine.* God as a friend with whom the women talk was an intimate connection for many women and Asha, Shirley, and Dipti were specific about this. Shirley said that, after her transformation, she had realized that “Nobody ever told me that god can talk to you,” and Dipti said of her transformation that it got her out of her postpartum depression: “After that I felt better. At other times I feel like having conversation with god, pretty often. Intense conversation. Feel a sense of peace right in the middle [touches her chest].”

*Sensory connection with the Divine:* Hearing, feeling touch or presence, and seeing. Of the excerpts that show these different sensory connections, perhaps the most dramatic recount was when Saisha’s visions of Sai Baba changed from those she had experienced prior to the first interview to seeing his presence by the time of the second interview. With Shirley and Rose, she
was 1 of 3 women who specified that they see their god; 6 (19%) other women (Sher, Pushpa, Shahi, Rama, Gita, and Sparrow) had implied it, but further questioning revealed that they merely, but strongly, felt his presence or saw a vision. Following are exemplar quotes:

*Saisha:* He [Sai Baba] gives *darshan* in dreams. . . . Now it’s not just dreams. [Now] he says, “I’m taking you forward,” so he gives *darshan* . . . inside my eyes . . . he appears there, and there are times when he’s talking to me. . . . Now he’s appearing, you know, like fakir, white color, he’s there and he’s talking. . . . “When it’s the right time, I pull you, I bring you close to me.” . . . [Before] I feel there’s some different vibration. . . . I feel he’s around, and now, recently, he’s started to show his presence. . . . So as we go forward, he’s teaching us, he’s getting more and closer.

*Sher:* I was walking to my work, I had water in my eyes [she is crying], I told: “Oh god, everyone has a car, I don’t.” After half an hour I felt a hand on me. I felt *kripa* on me. I felt god listened to me. [At that moment, her husband passed his driving test].

*Pakshi:* When doing *āārti*, like in Vrindavan, all of god’s associates come. It’s visual. I feel I am there and can see it all. I can hear mantras at certain times.

*Rose:* Soon as I was washing my face, I felt his presence. My face, my ears, all got hot. . . . Ooo, when they were sitting, singing, I could not sit down . . . I just stood up for him. I was praising . . . dancing . . . shaking. I felt more powers coming. I see his presence; he is here. . . . listening to this conversation.

For years Ramitha had blamed herself for her father’s death because she had delayed taking him to the emergency room; she finally felt peace when she heard a divine message:

*Ramitha:* [Upon death of her father, asking god] Why, why, why did you do that? I was struggling with why did god, if he was so kind and loving . . . not let me know that I had to do something for my father. One day . . . . when I was standing there at the end of a deep, deep [depression], out of the clear blue an answer came back to me . . . saying, “It was his time to go.” I don’t know if my mind was playing tricks, but at that moment I heard it . . . clearly, you know. I heard it. And that just startled me . . . that I was seeking, seeking, searching.

When Shirley said, “When I worship, I see Jesus,” I asked her to explain the dramatic phenomenon of physical connection with her god that I had observed at her church:

*Shirley:* Yes, like 2 days ago, we were worshipping at sister Mary’s house and all of a sudden I see Jesus on my side. And I said: “Lord, come in the front, I want to see you . . . full.” And then one sister in front of me . . . Jesus came and stood in front of her. And then I felt His power in me. So I wanted to touch someone . . . to release that power. So I
touched sister Rose; she started crying and worshipping. I touch another sister, and then I wasn’t done, the lord wanted me to touch this sister. . . . I touched her from the back but she felt a hand of Jesus from the front, too . . . started crying and worshipping. And when the prayer was over she’s asking: “Pastor, did you touch me?” Pastor says: “No.” Then I said, “I touched you from the back.” Then she says, “No, someone else touched me with a bigger hand from the front.” I said, “Yes, He was standing right there in front of you. And He touched you from the front and I touched you from the back.”

Spontaneous Spirit Possession (SSP)

Most more-educated women were surprised that the phrase “spirit possession” used by Western scholars included divine possession and not only malevolent spirit possession. Explaining it in colloquial terms such as a “visit by deity” or “when Mata comes into you” (see Gold, 1988) created new avenues for its discussion.

Beliefs about SSP. All the participants had heard of spirit possession, and many had seen it in India. In the Bay Area, 3 women, Saisha, Rita, and Mala, participate in the ritualized Sai Baba’s “visit” (Saisha) of The Devotee (see Appendix O). The phenomenon of SSP versus ritualized spirit possession had to be explained to the women, and, yet, they conflated the two during discussions. However, Veena narrated spirit possession as a performative ritual, as opposed to the spontaneous nature of SSP:

Veena: To me, the term *spirit possession* has a very different meaning than “connection with the divine.” From what I’ve seen in Indian villages, spirit possession is a temporary, physical state where a local spirit enters the body of a person . . . and either makes his/her demands, or gives solutions to people’s problems through that person. This happens only in a public place of worship [in] an elaborate ceremony to invite that spirit. Connecting with the divine is the goal of most people who are religious and they achieve this through prayer, either private or communal.

Most (81%) more-educated women believed that SSP occurs in “illiterate” women.

Hansa repeated her need for logic, this time to explain the relation between SSP and education: “Logic. Education gives exposure to form judgment and understand rituals.” She and 2 other
women, Asha (not religious) and Siri (religious), found SSP to be implausible from a scientific perspective.

The less-educated Hindu women uniformly accepted SSP as a valid religious phenomenon. However, the two Catholic women and one Muslim woman from Fiji, who were also less-educated and highly religious, felt that SSP was solely due to malevolent spirits who were allowed entrance by the possessed party’s personal shortcomings—that it happens to all who are “not stronger in the lord, we don’t read his work, the Bible; if we don’t pray, the spirit will attack us” (Rose). In Fiji, the juxtapositioning of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and cults such as that of Sai Baba followers result in, for example, icons of Jesus being found in Shakti temples (McNeal, 2003). Rose and Shirley reflected this when they referred equally to Jesus’ power and Shakti while praising Jesus and when they did not see the connection of the Shakti they believed in with SSP, although their narratives and the weekly church meetings I witnessed were replete with SSP-like behavior. The one Christian woman from India, Maya (more-educated), evaluated SSP within religions: “More advanced religions do not encourage it. For example, Catholicism does not.”

The disbelief in SSP in educated women of all religiosities involved finding it implausible, fake, an outcome of hysteria, a ploy for secondary gain (to get better treatment, and for fame or money), and/or as triggered by the “external energy created by drumming” (Sangeetha). Example passages expressing this understanding included the following: it is “more of a brainwash” (Sangeetha); it is “folkloric” (10%), and it “excuses a lot of behaviors that would never be allowed” (Kesar); it is “psychological” (Dipti; 10%); it is “just attention-seeking personality . . . hysterical” (Malati); and it is “fake” (Hansa). Hansa added a psychological reasoning that had been found in the Literature Review: “Women who feel powerless, feel
powerful, for short period of time. If successfully established, it can benefit longer term—it can have social, financial benefits,” while also saying that she found it “hard to believe how, in this age one can believe in a spirit entering a body.” Mala commented about SSP—without realizing that Sai Baba possessing The Devotee is a similar phenomenon that healed her, “Education instills reasoning in you and makes you more scientific. So you don’t believe in things that can’t be proven.” Gia expounded on that understanding:

_Gia:_ My immediate reaction is that there is a neuronal or neurochemical imbalance triggering these responses. I don’t doubt that people are experiencing what they claim to experience, but I do think there is an underlying psychological explanation.

Saisha’s more detailed exemplar excerpts are from her direct observation of SSP in The Devotee and spirit possession in India:

_Saisha:_ Baba says, “[The Devotee] is my baby, she is my child.” _Mata _said, “He’s [The Devotee manifesting Sai Baba is] my child, he’s facing all the hardships.” Yes, when Baba comes there is some pain, when he goes there is some pain. So she’s [The Devotee is] taking that pain. “She is my kid because she is taking [pain]”; not everyone can do that. . . . I think she [The Devotee] is not normal like you and me. She is divine. She’s now gone to that level. Now when Baba appears . . . she takes all the pain. He’s not a small little thing—He’s power, He’s that energy. Back in India, in men or women, when Mata appears or god comes in, they go up and down or they shake. Here, I was shocked to see that god’s there, calm, calm.

**SSP as a connection with the Divine.** Veena, when asked why she did not consider SSP as a connection with the divine, gave an in-depth, rich analysis of SSP with mirroring characteristics found in the literature:

_Veena:_ Kali is a positive figure but also shows the evil side of her [in some of her forms]. These negative avatars or personifications of negative aspects of life are worshipped by uneducated people . . . a way for them to understand the destructive aspect of life. . . . I have observed [that,] before the person is possessed, there are rituals and chants that build up to it. They know who is going to be possessed. Then people come with questions seeking answers to their problem. The spirit comes to . . . general, standardized answers; you can apply . . . any way you want. It’s not a connection with the divine, because it normally involves very mundane, day-to-day matters and problems. This is folk religion.

_Interviewer:_ What would you say about an educated woman getting possessed?
Veena: I am trying to distinguish. For example, Amma, lot of people who follow her and go to her with the same kind of issues [but not in] the dramatic form of village spirit possession. Spontaneous spirit possession of oppressed rural women is some kind of comfort for them. In the Bhagavat Gita, Krishna says, “There are several paths through which you can find me.” So if you see godmen, they have achieved it purely through bhakti. But . . . their deeds, how they express themselves, is focused on how to get followers . . . donations. Even if it is for building a hospital, their aim is opposite to attaining pure Nonduality. Their only concern should be god. If they want to call themselves social workers, fine. If they are honest, I have no problem with it.

Interviewer: What do you think spontaneous spirit possession is, then?

Veena: Their way of coping with their trauma.

Interviewer: But, do you think they really believe that they are visited by god?

Veena: Yes.

Interviewer: So, it is their form of connection with the divine?

Veena: Yes, from their point of view it is connection with the divine. Religion, believing in godmen, getting possessed is all convenient ways of comforting yourself. Negative connotation is in going to a counselor, so these are accepted forms. That is Indian version of counseling. These people don’t have any dilemma or confusion [about SP]; they are pretty straightforward, whereas I question everything.

Veena’s response validated, first, many participants’ general assumption and the analyses from the literature that SSP is a coping mechanism, and, second, that she was referencing the impact of goddess Kali on the worldview of women from an Indian culture. Veena grudgingly agreed that, if one considers Kali as synonymous with external (female) energy, then SSP is a religious phenomenon, and that the characterization of Kali in the Hindu religion with her dual control over life and death gave her devotees opportunity for considering both evil and divine spirit possessions, as Saisha also indicates in the upcoming section on malevolent spirits.

SSP as a religious phenomenon. Indian mythology is known to have accumulated the highest number of spirit possession descriptions. When asked how SSP could be a religious phenomenon, the answers were varied and ambiguous: “In India, it is done in temples. In the
epics, the characters have superpowers” (Hansa); “Because of belief and priests’ guidance” (Sangeetha); “When growing up, no matter what socioeconomic context, myth is in the environment. Spirituality in India is part of daily life; people are very devout” (Kesar); that SSP is a religious phenomenon “at some point” (Dipti); and “Somebody who’s religious or spiritual may accept what’s going on to them, but an atheist may doubt it or label it something else . . . there’s no evidence that it does not. . . or, maybe god comes to those who truly believe in him” (Mala). Prabha, a scholar of Indian religion, narrated a myth and analyzed it as SSP, essentially a trance triggered by the religious practice of chanting:

*Prabha:* We believe in atma, soul, and reincarnation. Soul never dies—it will take different shape. Western culture will say consciousness. According to me, that is soul. In scripture, Namdev used to pray so hard, he forgot everything. One day he was just singing: “Vithal, Vithal” [name of god] and forgot his son was under him. His son died because he [Namdev] was jumping in the mud. Not aware of any physical thing. You can call it as spirit has come to him. Others may call him murderer.

Asha connected a religious explanation for SSP with the psychological and neurological:

*Asha:* When I said “inside-outside,” oneness, I’ve heard some of these cases, people revere them, prophesies and what not . . . I’m not going to call it problem. . . . I think it’s all in the human brain. We don’t completely understand how these things happen. . . . Absolutely [it can be done for money or performance value]. But not everybody who has the experience is faking it. There is . . . some external entity . . . spirits or ghosts, or whatever, it’s just that something . . . made a connection between the part of the brain that they know, and . . . some part of their consciousness they don’t know. And . . . something, good or bad thing, has just snapped that connection.

*SSP due to malevolent spirits.* Three women, Sam, Pushpa, and Saisha, specified their experiences with possession by evil spirits while also believing in good spirits. During recruitment, Pushpa was the only woman who said that “yes,” she had experienced spirit possession. After discovering her husband’s unfaithfulness, Pushpa said she, her children, and her home have been possessed by ghosts:

*Pushpa:* We will hear, in the middle of the night, thousands and thousands of footsteps running across the hallway and on the roof. . . . They will not allow my husband
to touch me. And if ever there is a physical relationship, they’ll try to kill him. . . . My older one will have bad dreams; she is possessed. There are ghosts chasing her. She cannot talk. She’s praying, but they are not going away.

Although she herself had not been possessed by spirits, Saisha had experience with the opposing roles of malevolent and good spirits in an Indian guru. In her quote below, note the reversal of roles, in which the healer possesses the evil spirit in order to control it:

Saisha: One of my aunts . . . her dad actually was the one who possessed a bad spirit, called Jin . . . had control on one of the bad spirits. So they tried to do bad on my family sometimes. There was a point when they tried to kill us with the bad spirit. . . . So one of my dad’s friends [said] “Why don’t you come over and see a person in whom god comes, Mata comes. And you can ask all your problems, and he [the one possessed by Mata] can help you. . . . So when we face all the hardships, we look for godly direction.

In contrast, as has been previously shown, the Christian women considered spirit possession only by evil spirits and did not consider their own experiences of being visited by Jesus to be in this same category.

Unusual Religious or Spiritual Experiences (USRE)

The 20 participants (65%) who reported subjectively felt USREs defined them as experiences they did not feel normally in daily life and preferred to call them “unusual” rather than “exceptional,” because they were “not usual” for them but not exceptional within Hindu religion. They are Pakshi, Sam, Rose, Ramitha, Sher, Asha, Roshan, Pushpa, Saisha, Sheela, Shirley, Sangeetha, Rita, Mala, Dipti, Shahi, Mira, Rama, Gita, and Sparrow. The conflation of religion and spirituality by the less-educated women was evident when they described their USRE as anticipated experiences of their religiosity. In contrast, more-educated women distinguished between religion and spirituality and called their experiences “spiritual.” Several of the USREs are also seen within other themes and can be recognized utilizing the list in Table 19. The experiences that women defined when asked to describe their particular USREs are in Table
20. The frequency denotes the total number of times a particular category occurred overall in women’s narratives; the frequencies of specific experiences are in parentheses.

Table 19

*Categorization of Unusual Religious or Spiritual Experiences (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad category of manifestation</th>
<th>Specific experience/s</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intuiting visit by deity</td>
<td>Feeling deity is within the self (6); feeling presence of deity in the external (7);</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>power of god felt (11); Nonduality (10); message or sign by god (8).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically feeling the divine</td>
<td>Feeling touch (2); Kundalini-type (2); through another healer (6)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard god</td>
<td>Hearing during ritual; hearing response to prayer/plea/complaint.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw god</td>
<td>Saw god (2); saw image inside eyes (4); In dreams (3).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard chants</td>
<td>when no evidence of chanting (2).</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing ritual chanting</td>
<td>when third party does not hear it</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>Feeling as if dream is “real;” “visit by god” in dream; “message” given by god in dream.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heightened emotions</td>
<td>Feeling “joy,” “bliss,” “calm,” “peace,” “comfort” when connection is made with divine (49); feeling “in-love” with god (3).</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near death experience</td>
<td>During death of child at childbirth.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of body experience</td>
<td>Feeling as if standing next to body and observing body; specifically aspiring to be “observer” of self via spiritual practice.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cursed by ghosts (event)</td>
<td>Ghosts causing havoc; exorcism sought</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
### Table 19 (continued)

**Categorization of Unusual Religious or Spiritual Experiences (N = 30)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad category of manifestation</th>
<th>Specific experience/s</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devil/malevolent spirit</td>
<td>Seeing “black,” fearing the “devil” after feeling his touch; “contaminants” removed from body by guru as proof of healing abilities.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trance</td>
<td>Going into a trance at <em>bhajans</em> (3); trance during Reiki practice (2).</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific signs</td>
<td>God using participant for His message (3); dancing (2); speaking in tongues (2); prophesying ability (4).</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Table 20

**Descriptions of the 20 Participants’ USRE (Listed in Order Interviewed)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Overarching UE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakshi</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Visions of Vrindavan; unable to sleep and feels excitement when auspicious day approaches; talks to Lord Krishna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Felt devil was touching her; talks to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Change of voice; felt God’s energy in her and that he was using her to spread his word; shivering, shaking, feeling hot; self-proclaimed community healer by “hands-on” and distance prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramitha</td>
<td>Somewhat religious</td>
<td>Hindu; Buddhist</td>
<td>Felt external energy with “deep sense of calmness”; heard God talk to her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sher</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>Felt presence of God from “inside”; felt God’s hand on her when she asked for help; felt from childhood that she was chosen by god.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20 (continued)

*Descriptions of the 20 Participants’ USRE (Listed in Order Interviewed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Overarching UE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roshan</td>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>Born Jain</td>
<td>Quivering energy through body from head out to toes after The Dalai Lama put his hand on her head, and again years later just prior to interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushpa</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Born Hindu; married to Muslim; practices “all religions”</td>
<td>Devoted life to God after prayer answered; had prophesizing dream as a sign; feels home and family’s life is possessed by evil spirits; felt “possessed” by ghosts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha</td>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>Born Hindu</td>
<td>Memory from when she was less than a year old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saisha</td>
<td>Somewhat religious</td>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>Aspires for egolessness and detachment; had premonitions in dreams; experienced black magic; witnesses SP regularly during <em>bhajans</em>; has had visions of Saint Sai Baba; currently sees Sai Baba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheela</td>
<td>Somewhat religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Trance during Reiki practice; had premonitions in dreams and can prophesize events; talks with Divine as a “friend.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Said Saint Sai Baba “visits me in dreams and takes me places.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Speaks in tongues, shivering, feels God’s energy in her, and danced in a trance “like an angel” during devotion; hands-on healer and prophesizor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangeetha</td>
<td>Somewhat religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Prayed and said “I have to see You,” and saw an apparition that night in her dream—“Felt elated.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mala</td>
<td>Somewhat religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Saw Saint Sai Baba in dreams; Sai Baba answered her questions and was healed followed by spiritual transformation; tingling sensation all over body and trance during meditation; witnesses SP during <em>bhajans</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 20 (continued)

*Descriptions of the 20 Participants’ USRE (Listed in Order Interviewed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Overarching UE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dipti</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Kundalini; conversations with God; felt intense energy and healing after Kundalini during Kundalini Yoga practice during severe depression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahi</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>In-love with Sai Baba; feels internal energy; ecstasy experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira</td>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Felt calming energy when hugged by living Saint Amma; practices being observer of Self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rama</td>
<td>Somewhat religious</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Felt love radiating from Saint Sai Baba and felt joy and contentment; experienced Nonduality; strong force within that helps her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gita</td>
<td>Somewhat religious;</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Practices Nonduality via meditation; cried at sight of Saint Sai Baba; Sai Baba has helped her resolve crises at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparrow</td>
<td>Not religious;</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Considered self spiritually transformed after “meeting” Saint Sai Baba for the first time; feels his protective energy enveloping her; near death experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

USREs were welcomed with a positive valence, although Sam and Pushpa feared their contact with ghosts. The religious women found their USRE peaceful and soothing, awe-inspiring, as giving a feeling of heightened excitement and energy, or as providing healing from trauma. Some women reported their USRE to be spiritually transforming. Most USREs were unexpected and spontaneous, however, the USREs of less-educated women were an expected outcome of their devotional practice and aspired-for connections with god. Although two more-educated women, Roshan and Mira, initially doubted that their experiences were religious or spiritual expressions, other women accepted the authenticity of their USRE and its healing role.
or as simply an expression of their devotion and did not attribute to them any objectivity, such as in a perception of the experience as a possible coincidence.

Although nonreligious women reported that they did not have USREs, many of them, as mentioned previously, described experiences of symbolic connections, behaviors, or habits that could be analyzed as identifications with some aspect of their religious teaching. Upon further questioning, Gia, an atheist, acquiesced to this interviewer and responded: “Sometimes I do feel that there is ‘someone looking out for me’ as when I’ve had a narrow escape from a terrible accident or when I feel I performed a lot better than I had ever imagined when giving a talk.” Further questioning made Roshan, Asha, and Sangeetha admit to at least puzzling about experiences they could not explain, for example, in this quote:

Asha: There’s this one vivid memory that I have which can only be from when I was before a year old because I’ve never been there since. [A memory of] my grandmother’s ancestral home . . . But quite later on in my life there was this time when I described the house to my parents . . . they were very surprised because I had not been there since I was a year old. And I don’t think babies form memories so early. And there were no pictures of the house; I don’t remember people having told me about that.

As 1 of 2 nonreligious women who doubted their experiences, Roshan analyzed, during the interview, such an occasion, and, whereas it was not as dramatic as some other women’s USREs, she admitted it was significant for her. One such occasion had been her sense of awe while trekking in the Himalayas when she was 14 years old and suddenly realizing the insignificance of “human beings . . . like a speck of dust in the whole bigger picture. . . and still our egos fill the whole universe.” Another was when The Dalai Lama laid his hands on her head:

Roshan: I felt a physical sensation like energy . . . like when your hands and feet go to sleep and you get that tingling—the tingling came down from my head, went out from my feet. Only then I realized maybe I had some aura . . . from him, some energy . . . that kind of drained out. . . . I see it as a spiritual-physical experience.
As with religious views, the ambivalence about their USRE emerged among the same more-educated women. For example, Mira was searching for a spiritual connection:

*Mira:* I’m not sure [had USRE]. I hugged Amma many times. Initially I didn’t feel anything. Only once I felt it was a very calming experience. I was looking for something. I have trouble with the faith that energy of one person can change things for others.

There was an overlap in the women’s views between the theme “Connection With the Divine,” and the experiences of SSP and USRE. Although several women considered SSPs—and all considered their own USRE—as divine connections, no woman mentioned her own USRE as akin to SSP. Finally, the women who did not have USRE were Christy, Veena, Radha, Hansa, Siri, Malati, Palak, Maya, Kesar, and Prabha. (Gia’s statement of an external power looking out for her was a case that was not included among the 20 women who had USRE because she was staunchly against religion and clarified upon further questioning that she considered it more a coincidence than divine intervention.)

*SSP-like USRE.* A woman who responded to the flyer became an informant who led me to The Devotee and said that SSP in the US was atypical to anthropological depictions from India and that its “quiet” (informant) or non-hysterical nature was adapted for a different culture. Saisha, too, emphasized the “calm” nature of The Devotee’s possession, as compared to the ritualized spirit possession she had seen in India, and Veena mentioned the Bay Area’s living Saint Amma’s calmness during SSP. This led me to explore the women’s USRE with a different perspective, because the typical text-book depiction of spirit possession described in the Literature Review was not seen in the narratives of the women participants of this study.

Although Pushpa, as noted previously, was the only woman who said she had been possessed, several women’s USRE descriptions were compellingly reminiscent of SSP. Dianne Jenett (personal communication, May, 2010) said of her study of women in South India that many of
her women participant’s experiences had sounded like SSP to her, although the women did not present them as SSP. Second, as the literature showed, SSP involves possession by divine, as well as malevolent, spirits. Analysis of some USREs as SSP-like was made possible by conceptualizing a set of criteria from the criteria of SSP from the literature:

- At the minimum, an intuitive feeling of the presence of a deity.
- Feeling the presence of deity through one of the senses—hearing the deity’s voice, feeling the deity’s touch, or seeing the deity, including in a vision.
- Trance during religious or spiritual practice or devotion.
- At the most extreme extent, feeling the deity “inside” oneself.

In general, for an USRE to be compared with SSP, it needs to involve the direct presence of a deity in a way that is more than the connection referenced in other USRE herein which did not indicate a presence of or contact with a spirit’s or god’s figure. Thus, devotional awe, connection with nature, Kundalini, visions in a dream, or physical sensations (hot, shivering, goosebumps, and so on) are not USRE akin to SSP, although many of the women who had these USRE also felt a strong connection with god. Following are the understandings expressed by 9 women whose USRE had the above parameters or partial aspects of text-book SSP. The signifying aspects that had some similarities to SSP are italicized.

1. Pakshi calls to her Bhagwan, Lord Krishna, “and he comes. . . . I talk to him.”

2. Sam feels the presence of a malevolent spirit: “Many times I pray, somebody is touching me. Sometimes I feel like this from inside. I have no idea but it was like the devil. . . . I felt caught and tied, trapped.”

3. Rose described one of the dramatic incidents at her church when she had a change of voice and believed herself to be the vehicle for Jesus’ message, two aspects of SSP:
And I could feel, I was shaking with his powers. I felt more powers coming to me. And minister said: “If there is anyone led by god, you can pray.” I stood up . . . Oooo, the way it [the voice] came from me. Roaring thunder, very high pitched. Coming out, telling the people of agency: “Celebration! We are not here to sit down, run for truth, run for life. There is only Jesus. . . . My voice changed, and I knew something really is happening.

4. Ramitha’s emphatic words about hearing god’s voice when she begged for an answer as to why she did not take her father to the emergency room prior to his death.

5. Sher, who has been very religious and prayed deeply all her life and was considered by her family to have been chosen by god, feels the presence of god inside her and has felt his hand on her.

6. Pushpa and her family have been harassed by evil spirits and ghosts, and she felt “possessed” by them.

7. Saisha had evolved from seeing visions of Sai Baba to feeling him within her and finally to seeing Him: “Now he’s appearing like fakir, white color.”

8. Shirley’s behavior when she felt the presence of Jesus after a 3-week fast is akin to the behavior manifested in an SP as found in the Literature Review descriptions:

   Shirley: I had 3 days of the Holy Ghost experience . . . the Lord gave me more power than usual. For 3 days and 3 nights I experienced many things. I’m not a dancer but I danced like angels . . . my pastor said. And the Lord revealed to me things about people around me . . . would tell me everything about that person, where they came from . . . occupation . . . what the person is going to do in the future. And that happened for 3 days and 3 nights . . . a wonderful experience. I felt like I had so much power . . . acted like I never act in my normal life. And after that experience I had the gift of visions, and speaking in tongue and sometimes interpretation of tongues . . . healing and revelation . . . my spiritual life has become much stronger . . . When I worship I see Jesus standing there. . . . I feel the same power for a few seconds . . . when I lay hands on someone . . . sometimes they just fall and sometimes they just start crying because . . . they feel the presence and the power of god penetrate from my hands to their body.

9. Finally, Mala sees Sai Baba in her dreams and has “gone into a trance a few times” at the bhajans.
Transformation

Eleven (35%) women, Rose, Ramitha, Pushpa, Saisha, Sheela, Shirley, Mala, Dipti, Rama, Gita, and Sparrow, spoke about the positive change in their lives, a strengthening of their spiritual or religious beliefs, or a transformation (Pargament, 2006). Saisha shifted in her interest from purely religiosity to an emphasis on spirituality after certain events or intense spiritual or religious practices—she vividly showed this when she narrated the unimportance of material things and her aim toward egolessness. Other women, Ramitha, Saisha, Rama, Gita, and Sparrow (16% of the women), said they changed from understanding religious teachings concretely to the ability to intellectualize them abstractly. Exemplar of how these women expressed how the sacred changed for them in character was Gita, who said of her spiritual awakening following devotion to Baba: “Once you are spiritual, you don’t need religion.” Subthemes below show when and why the women’s transformations occurred.

Trauma coped with through devotion leading to spiritual awakening and transformation.

Six (19%) women, Ramitha, Pushpa, Sheela, Kesar, Mala, and Dipti, reported a spiritual transformation after a traumatic experience made them turn to increased devotion to help them heal. For example, Mala emphasized that prayer and meditation “was the only thing that helped” her get out of her year-long catatonic depression. She said of her first encounter with Sai Baba:

_Mala_: One night, Baba stared at me. At the _bhajan_, as I walked in, He [Sai Baba possessing The Devotee] looked straight at me. Prior to that [The Devotee] did not know me. After that I became my old self immediately. I felt a change at the _bhajan_. Peace and calmness. Feel warm in my heart like when you’re madly in-love with someone.

Mala and Sheela were the youngest of these women and were not devotional prior to their transformation. Sheela’s USRE, followed by a spiritual awakening and then a transformation from religiosity to spirituality, involved Reiki as an alternate healing method gaining popularity in India, and yet, her quote shows its connection with Hinduism’s _chakras:_
Sheela: I’ve never been like really religious or really not . . . been going through up and down phases. At times . . . totally [religious] . . . and at times I would follow the ritualistic part of the religion. . . . Then, 3 years back, I went through some issues and my mother took me to a friend of hers and her husband, who are . . . spiritual healers. That’s how I got into practicing Reiki and crystal healing [and] when I started making sense of my connection. . . . At that moment. . . . There was a flash of colors. . . . I could feel that energy flow that wasn’t there before . . . the sensations in my hand . . . really feel the temperature . . . my whole chakra was opened up and I felt that’s probably the spirit of the universe. . . . I go into that thought-no thought space . . . thoughtless space.

Dipti’s post-partum depression combined with her regular Kundalini Yoga practice seemed to be a mix that resulted in her first Kundalini experience, following which she felt the intense energy and rejuvenation expressed in a prior quote. In contrast to these examples, Kesar, who was not religious or ritualistic, nevertheless felt spiritually refreshed following traumas in her life, including the “fourth one a few months ago” which she said was a “call back” to spirituality. In 4 of these 6 cases (Ramitha, Sheela, Mala, and Dipti) the USRE was an outcome of devotion wherein the women felt transformed due to its intensity.

Trauma leading to instant transformation. Rose was a unique example in that she reported being immediately awakened to heightened religiosity following the news of her brother’s death:

Rose: My brother was providing everything for me, my family was there. I was a Christian but I was a lukewarm Christian . . . not strong . . . [not] taking things seriously. The day my brother died . . . I felt I was not standing on the ground, I was on top. . . . I was in my 40s. That day my mind grew up . . . [He] took me stronger and higher. And I said: “Oh no, now I know, only you [God] are the one who will be with me all the time.”

Transformation after prayer, ritual, spiritual practice. Transformation as a result of practice occurred in 12 (39% of the sample) religious women—they evaluated the presence of a transformation based on the USRE that followed. Shirley had a dramatic transformation following 3 weeks of devotional fasting, and Dipti’s routine Kundalini practice resulted in a Kundalini experience following postpartum depression and which healed her and intensified her
belief. The transformation of two other women, Pakshi and Saisha, who were highly religious from their youth, came slowly over the years. Pakshi evolved into being highly devotional, ritualistic, and in-love with her god over the course of 10 years following the example of her husband’s increased religiosity. She currently spends a large part of her day in devotional practices such as praying, preparing prasad, and taking care of her gods’ statues by bathing and feeding them at prescribed times of the day. Saisha’s intense transforming experiences over the years culminated in her ability to see Sai Baba, as quoted in the subtheme “Conversational Connection With the Divine.” There was in her narratives an overlap of experience and practice as they reinforced each other. She had been raised in a highly ritualistic and superstitious environment, had had several influential experiences with healers, and had in her youth experienced premonitions in dreams, all of which culminated in a transforming dream:

_Saisha:_ Since my childhood I believed in going to Gurdwara. One morning, was about 6 in the morning, I saw Guru Nanak in my dream . . . . My mom is like: “Not everyone sees this but then what you saw is something different, it’s not normal.” And I felt that after that day my life changed. Guru Nanak came in my dream and then I couldn’t, I couldn’t just handle it.

Four Sai Baba followers (Shahi, Rama, Gita, and Sparrow), as reported in discussion of the theme “Nonduality,” had an increased spirituality and experiences of Nonduality due to their contact with Sai Baba. In contrast, as a less-educated woman, Sher had always been highly devotional, and her narration was replete with unusual phenomena, although she did not emphasize transformation. Within her less-educated and highly religious status, USRE is a normal and expected result of devotion and, in reporting the experience, a woman focuses on god, rather than on individual transformation.

To summarize the experiences of the remaining 4 of the religious women, Radha, Siri, Maya, and Rita, they did not report either any transformative experiences or USRE, although
Rita nonchalantly accepted her dream travels with Sai Baba. Similarly, nonreligious women did not report awakenings or transformation from nonreligiosity either to religiosity or to spirituality.

**Acculturation**

The women’s individual circumstances emerged as defining their unique acculturation process; however, commonalities between them highlighted their culturally specific uniqueness of acculturation. Yet, because acculturation has many aspects and the term had not been conceptualized for the women, there were found further subcategories of women based on mixtures of characteristics affecting and being affected by their acculturation process that are discussed next.

*Feeling settled.* Twenty five (81%) women felt “settled” in the United States and 6 (19%) women answered “no” to the question of feeling settled in the United States, including a newly married Hansa, who hopes that she and her husband will move back to India eventually. As a more-educated woman from a progressive family and privileged class in India, who nevertheless had agreed to an arranged marriage, Hansa voiced modernity in India, independence for herself, and a measure of choice in the matter of where she settled as factors influencing her tentative integration into American society:

*Hansa:* My aunt was living in the US and would write to me; it was a total different world. But as I started growing up . . . thinking, there are so many things available to you where you are growing up . . . a good mix of West and . . . East. And where you have your emotional stability in place, you also have everything that money can buy. A lot of people come to the West to make money and improve their standard of living, but now that divide is reduced. The kind of salary that people are getting back home and the kind of life style and . . . choices they are exposed to is as much as anywhere in the world. . . . I [thought I] would marry a person either living in [city in India] or anywhere else but I would marry a person mainly that I thought was a person rather than [being identified with] what he did. . . . I was very particular that the person I marry had to be more educated than me. . . . Another important thing, he has to [want to] go back [to India].
Hansa is nonreligious and the life of her nonreligious family in India was typically not devoid of rituals that are connected with social and cultural norms, especially rites of passage. Thus, while questioning superstition and certain rituals, as has been quoted under the theme “Critiquing Religious Teachings,” Hansa also took comfort in those aspects of rituals that are in accordance with her values. In the absence of these chosen rituals and the support of her family and community, she finds her new status as a young immigrant to be unsettling.

Although not uncommon among Indian immigrants, Pakshi’s circumstances were unusual among the women participants. Less-educated and highly devotional, she accepted her immigrant status and took comfort in the fact that she had obliged her daughter’s request to be near her. Not speaking English and being older, she has not integrated into American culture and has immersed herself in day-long ritual that she can pursue due to the “peace and solitude” available to her in the United States: “Nobody here to come between me and [god] Krishna.”

Most women missed their country of birth at certain times, such as when troubled or during auspicious occasions; however, they also felt settled as immigrants. For example, Radha felt “happy” when she first immigrated and is “again happy,” but felt very “traumatized” when her parents died in India and she could not be there with her family. In general, what women liked most about life in the United States was the unrestricted lifestyle, especially the lack of enmeshment with extended family; the potential for job satisfaction; and the accessibility of financial security.

*Education and marriage*. Although many women’s stories, as mentioned, were case studies on acculturation, some grouped characteristics can be educated, and the two major variables, religiosity and education, played a vital but varied role in women’s integration into mainstream American life. Education and marriage enter into a relationship in India where
education is generally expected by families to be present in the betrothed prior to marriage, because it is a mutually attractive asset. Women in this study who came to the United States for higher education were from more progressive families, and all 3 such women in this study (Siri, Gia, and Dipti) married Indian men they met in the US; although they all reported feeling acculturated, Siri reported herself to be highly in favor of her culture and Gia allowed that she has integrated. There were no women in the present study who had immigrated and then married a Non-Indian American, with the exception of Kesar, in her second marriage.

Integration into American society. Women in this sample who have young children take them to common American events such as the Fourth of July parade, as well as to Indian events such as New Year’s festivals, and, despite the freedom they value in the United States, they still put children, husband, and religious rituals above their own needs. Information gleaned from the initial interviews indicated that very few women specified having American friends with whom they socialized. Not only were many busy with their careers, but keeping their cultural values alive came in the way of their integration into American society. Yet, religious women have many Indian family friends and spend a great deal of their off-work time at Indian religious events. How did the women integrate their religious views, rituals, and spiritual experiences into their mainstream American life? or did they? Following below is a discussion of factors that could have affected their integration.

Prejudice. Prejudice as one factor arose in varied results. Thirteen (42%) women definitely did not feel prejudice at any time, whereas 6 women did. Although the reasons were not pursued, Rita and Sangeetha did not feel prejudice when they first arrived to the United States but now sometimes feel prejudice, and 4 (13%) women, Maya, Mala, Mira, and Sparrow, felt prejudice when they first came to the United States but do not feel it now.
Values. From the perspective of cultural differences, generally, the women were benign in their talk about “American” culture. They “accepted” and “respected” all cultures and religions. Ramitha said she “never goes there” that is, to the idea that her native culture is “better.”

All were cautious when asked if they had any aspects of their religious life that interfered with their American friendships, although 3 (10%) women younger than the sample average, Hansa, Asha, and Siri, were open in their views and expounded upon the cultural differences regarding values. Hansa said the following:

_Hansa:_ One thing about India is that it inculcates certain values—nonviolence, etcetera—and ritual has a role: it binds family, community. Here, running free with no ritual. Child has no sense of self. I worked in a school in San Francisco . . . where a large portion of the children come from economic unstable backgrounds . . . parents who have issues with law . . . basically it seems so confused and out-of-bounds . . . I was not able to really connect with them or understand why at such a young age they would be undergoing such extreme emotions . . . probably because the social structure here is so undefined and so liberal, just allows the child right from birth to make choices. The kind of choices that are there are way too much for the child to handle.

Whereas, Siri teaches her children her religion’s values, unmarried Asha’s opinions included praise about similar Indian values, but she also agreed with certain values in the United States:

_Asha:_ There are some positives and some negatives . . . cases like rape, topics related to sex or sexual health . . . are very taboo in India. Some values are [healthier] and some aren’t. For example, if somebody falls sick, parents come to visit, they thank them but that expectation is not there. People move out of their parents’ houses, and if they come to live with them it’s considered a big burden. In terms of that, Indian values are quite different and I must say I prefer those. . . . But definitely, in cases such as topics about sex and abuse [more openness is] a good thing. We shouldn’t be so closed-minded about those things. . . . It’s not like people aren’t having sex in India, even before marriage. . . . It’s just that they build this whole image of it being forbidden . . . wrong. Take gay rights. [In the U.S..] people have a much more open mind about it . . . their values are very progressive. . . . Values must change as the world is changing. India lags very far behind in things like that.

Again, the less-educated women, who, it is assumed, could have been more restricted and more conforming to cultural norms in their own country, uniformly appreciated the freedom they experienced in the US. They were more concrete and straightforward in their views on values:
“Here, people’s lives is their own. They talk nicely to me, say ‘Good morning.’ I do my own business, take god’s name” (Sher). However, they were not, from their own report, actually integrated into American culture, These women retained in their daily lives most aspects of their own culture.

To fill the gap of the presence or absence of American friends as an aid or an impediment to integration into American society, 10 participants were emailed a third round of iterative questions (Appendix P). Siri and Rama had comprehensive, though ambivalent, answers, and, thus, their entire emailed responses are presented in Appendix Q. Siri’s answer showed that she did not practice her definition of acculturation as changing one’s culture to the host culture, which was evidenced in the fact that she firmly retains her religious practices. On the other hand, Rama’s ambivalent definition of acculturation suited her simultaneous management of American life and her Indian roots. Other participants who were not religious had simpler and more straightforward responses. Gia’s definition of acculturation as “integrating into a different culture” compromised her Indian culture and was in accordance with her nonreligious identification.

Sociostress. Although Gia was not asked whether having strong feelings about her cleanliness rituals and whether their compartmentalization influenced her high stress, Ramitha, who was invited to validate the results of sociostress in the final theory, gave insight into how such compartmentalization may impact some women’s acculturation and stress.

**Interviewer:** Do you agree with the concept of social stress?

**Ramitha:** Sociostress, absolutely. Especially first generation who are struggling. They cannot let go of cultural practices [e.g.,] being in the kitchen. They need to keep the culture or religious part of the family . . . their responsibility. Cannot explain it to friends at work . . . Every year I do a memorial service for my mother-in-law because she died as a married woman . . . considered sacred in my Tamil community. So then what? All the other people are not blessed? . . . I cannot tell my co-workers she is blessed, because, to Western world, it seems superstitious. The dual life takes a toll on you . . . could be self-
imposed . . . [e.g., I] can never discuss my arranged marriage in all its reality in non-Indian work or social settings. So many aspects . . . how it came about in the first place.

Interviewer: Why can’t you tell? Would you be afraid of rejection?

Ramitha: Good question. Don’t know. Maybe they won’t understand it. Or maybe I’m ashamed.

Interviewer: Ashamed of what, yourself, your culture?

Ramitha: Lots of things about my culture. I’m not crazy about them. Maybe I’m ashamed that I did not question it. As much as possible, I stay away from superiority, never tell people that Indian culture is better.

Did other women compartmentalize the two cultures? I went back to Shahi, a religious woman and Sai Baba devotee, during a dinner invitation at Ganesh Chaturthi. Her husband had asked her to have a “block party” and she wondered what would she serve her American neighbors and how she would entertain them. Yes, it made her wonder about her own compartmentalization of cultures—just as would Ramitha and Rama, she would not mind discussing aspects of her religion and rituals if asked, but basically she would feel uncomfortable about discussing deeper aspects such as the puja to the elephant god that they had just performed. This information from the women led to the subtheme of friendships aiding integration.

Friendships. Subsequent to the emergence of compartmentalization of religious rituals from sharing with their American contacts, a fourth questionnaire (Appendix P) was emailed to some more-educated women that asked about American friends. Six women responded—Veena, Ramitha, Saisha, Sheela, Maya, and Shahi. The results were mixed, and, again, contextual life situations besides religiosity and level of education entered their answers. Conceptualizing a friend as someone with whom they socialize outside of work, Roshan, Veena, Saisha, and Maya, more-educated, expressed having several American friends. Comparing Saisha and Shahi, both highly devotional, Saisha’s husband had lived in the United States as a single man most of his
adult life and has a business that serves Americans, whereas Shahi’s husband speaks minimal English with less opportunity to meet Americans at his work in a business primarily frequented by Indians; she was the only women asked this question who had never been invited to an American home.

When I asked Shahi whether she “felt it” that she was never invited to her American friends’ homes, she avoided answering. She also feels comfortable confiding only to Indian (women) friends, whereas Ramitha, considering her intense desire to maintain her family within Indian cultural values, feels safer to confide only to American friends, and Veena confides in both.

Maya assumed, not in keeping with working women’s experiences, that working outside the home benefits integration:

_Maya:_ Since I have not worked here, my acculturation has been through participation in . . . activities at my children’s school or exposure to the media, and both have been somewhat limited, so . . . probably not as well integrated in terms of my comfort level in a purely American setting. . . . Because I live in the Bay Area [with its] mix of cultures [and Indians] fairly well represented and . . . I am cognizant of the fact [it is] a culture of immigrants, I am perfectly comfortable living here with my level of integration. . . . If I had lived in an area with less Indians, I would have had more American friends and would have been better integrated in social sense.

The comfort Ramitha got from her rituals became the other half of her ambivalence that troubled her, as shown in the rich snippets from answers on acculturation and in the DQ:

_Ramitha:_ Coming to USA started off as a traumatic experience . . . didn’t want to come here . . . [or] realize what I was getting into . . . the loneliness and the distance, totally different culture hit me, the first year . . . Then, it was neutral . . . when I got busy with my own life. Now, I look at it as a positive thing . . . I like my life here . . . the things I am able to do. . . . My ideas of my religion . . . I held on to them because I felt that was my connection. . . . [Gradually,] I got lost, I got frustrated in things I was not studying or couldn’t observe [rituals] . . . slowly I’m allowing myself to accept only what I fully understand. I’m not letting religion have such a hold on me. . . . I would have to say that my values have changed . . . being in the U.S. and the culture have changed [the rituals or her children]. Arranged marriage I don’t think would work for my children . . . I’m
starting to appreciate the benefit of love marriage. . . . I’ve become more independent, which I’ve begun to appreciate now.

Interviewer: Has your change in values made you happier?

Ramitha: Oh, very good question. . . . It has definitely made me more confident at some level, but I also realize . . . women pay a price for equal footing. . . . OK, you want to date someone, you have to meet this person halfway. You can get hurt, it can get ugly . . . community, society, values about good name, I’m realizing it still has a huge hold on me. . . . On the one hand, I work and . . . people here are very ready to share what’s going on in their lives, be it good or bad . . . I could never bring myself to do that. I admire it on the one hand, and I know I am not there yet. . . . The Indian community, I am not able to, and I have a good friend who’s Caucasian [to] whom I’ve revealed the most. I don’t feel she would judge me.

The younger women, Hansa, Asha, and Sheela, felt more freedom to share the Indian religious environment with their American friends. As a unique example, newly-married Sheela, more-educated and from an urban city, met her American-born Indian husband in India, now lives on a university campus, and has an integrated lifestyle. The impact on acculturation of Hansa’s and Asha’s moving away from religious rituals is unknown; however, 4 (13%) other nonreligious women (Roshan, Malati, Prabha, and Dipti), who are older than Hansa and Asha and who, in view of their nonreligious status, were not conflicted and do not ambivalently take solace in selected aspects of their religious background, reported low stress and had integrated. Lastly, 3 of them (Roshan, Malati, and Prabha) identified with more global concepts such as social work and being a good person, that may be more conducive to acculturation. Malati, who opened a social agency with a UNESCO grant, exemplified integration:

Malati: Emphasis was on the service in my family—that you have to reach out. That’s what higher power wants. . . . Good thing is a godly thing. So that was central part . . . grew up seeing my family reaching out . . . helping out in the neighborhood.

In summary, for the most part, the women were happy in the United States and, with exceptions, inadvertently kept their two cultures, apart. As Radha revealed when she said “I’m a 9-to-5 American,” they derived what they needed from each culture.
Summary of Qualitative Data

This qualitative data section presented the analysis of the women’s narrations from which seven main themes were consolidated from the emerged codes. They were: Religion; Inner-Outer Energy: Atma and Shakti; Connection With the Divine; SSP; USRE; Transformation; and Acculturation. Because only one woman reported being possessed by malevolent spirits (ghosts), the starting focus of the interviews was on religious views and USRE. However, questions on SSP were retained and resulted in the women providing rich information on it that also gave their further views on religion. Thus, the phenomenon of SSP-like USRE was conceptualized, albeit based on reported manifestations of the women and not intuited, during analysis of the themes SSP and USRE. Religiosity and level of education were outstanding factors affecting the women’s views on different aspects of religion and on their USRE. Within the limits of the current study, the theme “Acculturation” defied full investigation and gave a varied picture on the influence of religiosity and level of education on acculturation. The following section is on triangulation of the mixed data to cross-validate the separate quantitative and qualitative findings.

Triangulation of Mixed Data

Triangulation of data was done by the statistical software R commonly called Classification and Regression Tree (CART) and the output graphs (trees) are presented in Appendix U. The choice of models to be run by CART was based on: (a) the analysis up to that point, (b) the purposeful exploration of certain dynamics between variables, and (c) the phenomena or psychological manifestations of interest from the research question.

Denzin (1998) defined triangulation to include any method to cross-check different data for the sake of credibility and validity. As triangulation is in the interest of locating an unknown relationship, all three methods of analysis in this research—qualitative data outcome,
correlations, and CART—were complementary although within different methodological paradigms. There was one case of attrition, leaving the data of 30 women for analysis, and the \( n \) in each model further reflects the removal of outliers (over 2 SD from the mean score).

**CART’s Essence Remembered (Appendix U)**

*The CART trees.* CART terminology of “prediction” simply means which variable (predictor) is best associated with the variable or phenomenon of interest (to be predicted) from the list provided to the software by the researcher. Generally, predictor and predicting variables correlated linearly in the present study’s CARTs, providing internal validity.

*The groupings of women.* As used in this study, I consider CART’s essence to be its ability to provide groupings of women in each model. CART initially provided nameless groups of women at each node of the trees and upon demand, gave the names of the women in each group (see Appendix U). During analysis, a further step in data integration was performed by manually adding characteristics/data that CART did not pick—as continuous scores tend to supersede or overshadow categorical variables—in which, CART’s selection of characteristics can be identified from the trees. CART’s groupings of women can also be compared to the groups that were suggested by this researcher from the qualitative data during grounded theory. CART added objective characteristics critical to the research question (e.g., dissociation), which are usually difficult to confirm qualitatively.

As spontaneous phenomena, USRE could not be subjected to a pretest, posttest experiment, and thus, no baseline “normal” scores for this sample were presumed for any of the constructs. Rather, the benefit of CART was in comparing groups of women, adding to internal validity, as specified. As with any statistical test, CART groups had “outliers.” However, these
provided opportunities for understanding (by referencing qualitative data), why a particular woman had reported an answer contrary to CART’s placement of her in a group.

*The models.* It is critical to note that models created are dependent on the particular mix of variables provided to CART. Simply, CART picked the most important variable that predicted a phenomenon and this does not mean that other variables—not chosen due to their low n or not in this study—may not impact the variable of interest of that model. Thus, some women fell in different groups depending on the variable of interest.

*Overall Data of Psychological Assessments in a Star Plot*

Figure 1 shows a star plot of the participants’ scores on the assessment questions. This helps in understanding the psychological dynamics of each participant, hints at outlier status, and shows how the data from each participant enabled her placement by CART in a particular group. Sam’s data was eliminated from most CART models due to her outlier status (over 2 SD above the mean).
Figure 1. Star plot of participants arranged by age and results of the six scales. Participant arrangement by age starts at the top left with Asha, the youngest participant, and moves from left to right, ending with the oldest woman, Palak, at the bottom right.

USRE

CART Model to Predict USRE

Three CART models for predicting USRE, follow. In a process of elimination mode, they were selected to see the relationship of dissociation and USRE.

USRE predicted by categorical variables. See Appendix U for the figures and tables for this model. In Figure U1, the classification tree shows which variables CART selected to predict
USRE when only categorical predictors were provided to CART. It is suitable for a primary level exploration that was later built upon by other models involving continuous variables. At the heart of the data was the finding that level of education was the most important variable in defining the women, dividing them into two primary groups, less-educated and more-educated. In this CART, it was the single best predictor of USRE. Table U1 gives the names of the women in each CART group, and the lattice plot in Figure U2 visualizes these two main clusters of women. All of the 5 less-educated women were predicted to have USRE with no other variables dividing them further. Of the 25 more-educated women, only 14 women who had a spiritual practice and were under 49 years were predicted to have USRE. More-educated, religious women form further subgroups, upcoming, depending on the variable mix.

USRE predicted by categorical variables and full scale continuous variables scores except dissociation (DES) scores. In Appendix U, Figure U3 shows this model’s regression tree, Table U2 shows the groupings of women, and Figure U4 visualizes the results in a scatter plot. Conventional spirituality measured by SIBS was the best single predictor of USRE followed by stress-related spirituality measured by BioPSSISpir, herein abbreviated as Spir. Fourteen women from the sample who scored high in SIBS and low in Spir were predicted to have USRE. It is critical to note that, although it seems that low Spir is needed for USRE, the fact is that the variable selected, Spir in this case, simply better identifies the women’s USRE compared to other variables. Whether high Spir prevents USRE is unknown.

A third CART for USRE using all the variables: The DES-USRE relationship. In Appendix U, Figure U5 shows the regression tree, and Table U3 shows the groupings of women for this model. With dissociation in the mix, the prevalence of exceptional experiences measured by EEQP was the single best predictor of USRE. Eighteen religious women who had high scores
on EEQP were predicted to have USRE, and this is closer to the 20 women who reported USRE than in the previous two models. Women low in exceptional experiences did not have USRE although the three doubtful cases of USRE were in the case of women low in exceptional experiences. Dissociation correlated with exceptional experiences, $r(28) = .50, p < .01$.

Spir was the next best predictor of USRE and further divided the women who were high in exceptional experience. The 5 less-educated women were low in Spir—and also low in dissociation—all the less-educated women had USRE. The more-educated religious women who had USRE, had high Spir—they were also high in dissociation. DES and Spir correlated, $r(28) = .37, p < .05$.

**CART Interaction Model for USRE**

The literature suggested that trauma could be one trigger of SSP (a kind of USRE), and in the present study, trauma correlated with PTSD measured by PCL-C, $r(28) = .48, p < .01$, and due to the low $n$, possibly with USRE, $r(28) = .30$, n.s. Thus, to explore trauma’s relationship with USRE and to see the impact of spiritual practice, three variables/predictors—trauma, USRE, and spiritual practice—were given to CART to predict the dynamics of their “yes/no” interactions. In Appendix U, Figure U6 shows the CART outcome that Table U4 clarifies by showing the women in each group of different interactions.

Conventional spirituality measured by SIBS was the single best predictor of the interaction. Sixteen women were predicted to have USRE and they were placed into one of three groups. The first group consisted of 3 women with low conventional spirituality, over 51 years of age, with New Age characteristics, and with “yes” for trauma but “no” for spiritual practice. However, CART *misclassified* (contradicted some answers); CART is picking up on some nuance that is not obvious and this is speculated about in the appendix. The second group was
comprised of less-educated women with high conventional spirituality, with “yes” for trauma, and “no” for spiritual practice. Third group was comprised of more-educated women with high conventional spirituality, low sociostress, and with “yes” for trauma and spiritual practice.

_The Spirituality Scales (Presumed to Also Measure Religiosity in This Study)_

**CART Model to Predict “Conventional Spirituality” by SIBS**

In Appendix U, Figure U7 shows the regression tree, and Table U5 shows groupings of women for the model to predict conventional spirituality. Mystic positive, a subscale of exceptional experiences, best predicted conventional spirituality—\( r(28) = .79, p < .01 \)—and women who were highest in mystic positive were also highest in conventional spirituality.

**CART to Predict Mystic Positive Subscale of Exceptional Experiences (EEQPMP or PMP)**

The selection of this model was based on the assumption that the exceptional experiences scale was a measure of USRE. Only its mystic positive subscale correlated with only SIBS measuring conventional spirituality, \( r(28) = .79, p < .01 \). Although it was likely that conventional spirituality would be the best predictor of mystical experiences, this model was run to see what other characteristics CART determined for the women who had high exceptional experiences (USRE) and also to manually include reported USRE.

In Appendix U, Figure U8 shows the regression tree, Table U6 shows CART’s groupings of women, a scatter plot in Figure U9 shows the strong, linear correlation between SIBS and PMP, and a lattice scatterplot in Figure U10 gives further dynamics. Women highest in conventional spirituality were also highest in mystic positive—and had USRE—but women who were low in conventional spirituality and high in sociostress had the lowest mystic positive scores. In the latter case, the validation by CART of the correlation between mystic positive and conventional spirituality is overshadowed by its benefit showing that sociostress could get in the
way of mystical experiences—the cases of no USRE or initially doubted USRE were in this group.

*The Overlap of Religiosity/Spirituality and Stress*

In Appendix U, Figure U11 shows the regression tree, and Table U7 shows CART’s groups of women for the model to predict Spir. The social subscale of BioPSSI was the best predictor of Spir—$r(28) = .72, p < .01$—and women who were highest in this social construct were also highest in Spir, suggesting that Spir has a social basis. Women with the lowest scores on Spir with concomitant lowest scores on the social subscale were best defined by the two variables of PTSD and the intensity of mystic positive experiences as follows: (a) those who had the lowest PTSD scores (close to zero average) had the lowest Spir; and (b) women who felt their mystical experiences more intensely than the rest of the sample also had more Spir, and feature in the discussion for their trance-like USRE, a ghost possession, high dissociation, and a high rate of abuse and/or trauma.

*Dissociation (and Constructs Overlapping With Dissociation)*

Three CART models were run to predict dissociation. One used all variables, and the second used categorical variables plus scores on item 7 of the DES that was construed as an out-of-body experience (OOBE) construct, selected ad hoc during triangulation due to its outstanding raw scores and its literature-based association with trauma. The third model was to predict decompensation/ego loss, a subscale of EEQ, the exceptional experiences scale.

*CART Model to Predict Dissociation Using all Variables*

In Appendix U, Figure U12 shows the regression tree, and Table U8 shows the groupings of the women. As expected by their high positive correlation, $r(28) = .64, p < .01$, ego loss, measured by the subscale of exceptional experiences, EEQPDEL, was the single best predictor
of dissociation measured by DES. Women with high ego loss and under 47 years of age had the highest dissociation.

For women with low ego loss, low perceived stress measured by PSS was the next predictor of their lowest dissociation in the sample—the correlation between PSS and DES was not significant, \( r(28) = .26, \text{n.s.} \) Again, they were the less-educated religious women who repeatedly group together with the more-educated nonreligious women.

**CART to Predict OOBE With Categorical Variables**

In Appendix U, Figure U13 shows the classification tree for OOBE, Table U9 shows groupings of the women, and a lattice plot in Figure U14 shows the clusters of women who were predicted for OOBE. *Years in the US* was the single best predictor of OOBE; women who had lived in the US less than 16 years did not experience OOBE. All the less-educated women and again, grouping with women who were more-educated and nonreligious, had OOBE; the religious women had USRE.

**CART to Predict the Decompensation/Ego Loss Subscale of Exceptional Experiences (EEQPD/EL or PD/EL)**

In Appendix U, Figure U15 is the regression tree. Table U10 shows CART’s groupings of women, and a scatterplot in Figure U16 pictorializes this model’s dynamics. Dissociation was the best predictor of ego loss—DES correlated with PD/EL, \( r(28) = .64, p < .01 \)—and women who were high in dissociation had the highest ego loss. They had USRE.

The picture was more complex for women who had low dissociation. An unexpected mix of women who had the lowest scores on the DES had low to zero ego loss. Further, if they had a spiritual practice, they had twice the ego loss of the women who did not have a spiritual practice, suggesting an association between spiritual practice and dissociation. Of the women low in dissociation, the religious women had USRE.
The Stress Scales and Trauma

CART Model to Predict PTSD by PCL-C

In Appendix U, Figure U17 shows the regression tree, and Table U11 shows CART’s groupings of women for the model to predict PTSD. Sociostress best predicted PTSD, again suggesting a social basis for trauma. Women lowest in PTSD were also lowest in sociostress and this group again combines less-educated, religious women and more-educated, nonreligious women.

As a measure of PTSD, PCL-C is essential in addressing the research question of whether USRE is triggered by trauma—trauma correlated with PCL-C, \( r(28) = .48, p < .01 \)—and the literature connects trauma and PTSD with dissociation. An alternative method of triangulation to CART proved to offer useful insights when studying the PCL-C results of this sample. Two broad categories of participants were visually observed from positive raw scores on PCL-C: 10 participants who scored pervasively positive on many items and 12 participants who scored only 1 on most items and are conceptualized as identifying with the essence of the PCL-C construct, totaling 22 women—their characteristics from qualitative and demographic data are in Table 21 in this section. The rest of the women scored zero on most items.
Table 21

Characteristics of 22 Participants Who Identified With PCL-C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Trauma</th>
<th>Abuse</th>
<th>USRE</th>
<th>Spiritual practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample (N = 31)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with PCL-C (n = 22)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas the statistical significance of the figures in Table 21 is unknown, it shows that a higher percentage of women who reported trauma (77%) and abuse (45%) compared to the overall sample (58% & 32% respectively) identified with PTSD questions. Further, it also shows that 10% fewer women (55%) who had positive scores on PTSD, had USRE as compared to the sample (65% had USRE). The latter finding can be compared to CART models that show low rates of USRE associated with the presence of PTSD, sociostress, and perceived stress, suggesting that USRE may be inhibited by stress constructs. CART also shows that USRE is affiliated with Spir. Finally, spiritual practice did not change the percentages of women who identified with PTSD compared to the total sample, as also seen in the interaction model.

CART Model to Predict Sociostress

In Appendix U, Figure U18 depicts the categorical tree for sociostress followed by Table U12 showing CART’s groupings of women, and a dotplot of the dynamics in Figure U19. Religiosity was the single best predictor of sociostress. Women inbetween in religiosity (including all of the women ambivalent in their religious views) and in the US over 16 years had the highest sociostress, almost twice that of the sample average. They had no USRE or USRE that they initially doubted. For women who were at the extremes of religiosity—not religious or
highly religious—age was the next predictor of sociostress. Women over 52 years of age, including 2 of the less-educated women, all the New Age women, and 3 other women who presented as nonambiguous about their religiosity had about 42% less sociostress than the sample average, which was the lowest sociostress in the sample. The religious women had USRE.

**CART Model to Predict Trauma**

In Appendix U, Figure U20 shows the regression tree, and Table U13 shows CART’s groupings of women for the model to predict trauma. Based on observations that some women underplayed their trauma, three levels of trauma (reported “yes,” reported “no,” and underreported) were provided to the CART software. As in the interaction model (Appendix U, Figure U6), conventional spirituality was again the best single predictor of trauma. Two groups of women reported trauma, those high in conventional spirituality and those low in conventional spirituality: (a) religious women high in conventional spirituality and also high in PTSD—\(r(28) = .07, \text{n.s.}\); and (b) nonreligious women low in conventional spirituality who were predicted by suffering. Other data shows that both these groups of women had high rates of reported trauma (65 -100% depending on the model). In other words, for women low in conventional spirituality, their report of suffering best predicted that they had experienced trauma. On the other hand, a group equally low in conventional spirituality but also low in reported suffering, reported no trauma.

The effectiveness of the objectivity of the PTSD scale was evident when women who were also high in conventional spirituality but low in PTSD were those who did not report trauma or were presumed to have underreported their trauma. This chapter ends with Figure 22, which shows a pictorial of the suggested groupings of women based on the mixed data analysis and taking the research question into consideration. The starting point in this pictorial is EEQ,
hypothesized as measuring the women’s USRE—groups were formed based on EEQ scores. The qualitative data or characteristics of the women were utilized to support the divisions of women based on these scores and are graphically connected with the scores to enable the formation of a pictorial matrix.

Figure 2. Suggested groupings of participants based on mixed data.
**Summary**

Chapter 4 detailed the mixed data and its analysis in the following order: First, the women’s biographies were presented, followed by the results of the IBSI, DQ and SSQ which gave the categorical variables. Next, the results of the psychological assessments were presented as Pearson Product-Moment correlations. A new factor, sociostress, was created by combining the three stress assessments, PPS, PCL-C, and Spir (the spirituality subscale of the BioPSSI). Relevant Phi Correlations were also performed and presented. The qualitative data followed in the form of narratives from which, by grounded theory, seven main themes emerged, Religion, Inner and Outer Energy, Connection with the Divine as the core category, SSP, USRE, Transformation, and Acculturation. This analysis ended in Axial Coding and the final step of grounded theory, Selective Coding, is better addressed in chapter 5. The present chapter ended with the section on triangulation by CART to justify the concept and use of mixed method.

In the final, following chapter, the new path that the data presented which is, USRE as the phenomenon of interest, is justified and discussed. This is followed by an integrated discussion including the present chapter’s mixed data analysis and CART results. In the end, a conclusion is presented to suggest a theory.
Chapter 5: Coniunctio

I began this study with a hypothesis that, the phenomenon found in India, Spontaneous Spirit Possession (SSP) would manifest in first generation women from Indian cultures who immigrated to the US as adults. My aim was to explore, by mixed methods, SSP in 30 such women in regards to its connection with religion/spirituality and/or oppression/trauma, and as a coping method. However, SSP was difficult to find in the area of study, therefore the research interest shifted to Unusual Spiritual and Religious Experiences (USRE) under the aegis of the broad starting topic of religion—what sense do the women immigrants make of their USRE, and what are its psychological correlates? Qualitative data were open-ended narratives, analyzed by grounded theory, and the quantitative method entailed answers on 6 psychological assessments and the scores correlated. Data were triangulated by R software’s Categorical and Regression Tree (CART) statistical method (Appendix R). In this study, the essence of CART was groupings of women based on their characteristics. Variables in models best determining each other largely also correlated. Hand-selection of additional characteristics from the mixed data expanded a model’s dynamics.

Given the literature’s claim of an oppressive, gender-based etiology for SSP, this study was conducted under the tenets of feminist theory. Pragmatic philosophy as the basis of mixed methods and grounded theory gave a utilitarian outcome, and contextualism as its offshoot allowed for both women’s views of their experiences and culture’s influence on them.

This discussion introduces 3 main phenomena, the retained core theme Connection with the Divine, and Ritual and Ambivalence which emerged through selective coding as the final step of data analysis by grounded theory, from the original 7 themes that had emerged from the narratives: Religion; Inner-Outer Energy: Atma and Shakti; Connection with the Divine; SSP;
USRE; Transformation; and Acculturation. Being theoretical in nature, the phenomena are better addressed in the discussion (see also Denzin, 1998).

A preamble supporting the shift from SSP to USRE follows this introduction and rejustifies the use of the psychological assessments for USRE. Selective Coding follows and becomes a part of mixed data. The main discussion then integrates all data and analyses. Discussion involves compartmentalized models, necessarily overlapping, with emphasis on the three issues in the research question potentially related to USRE, namely, trance (dissociation), religiosity/spirituality, and trauma and coping. Literature review is not disjointed from research, and SSP is discussed in a comparative context with USRE. Delimitations and limitations of the study, its transpersonal relevance, and unusual findings conclude the chapter.

**Preamble: SSP to USRE**

The lack of a priori literature on the USRE of women from an Indian culture upon which to scaffold the data was offset by new literature during theoretical sensitivity. Harvey’s (2002) edition of unusual experiences that come with Hindu practice and belief supported USRE as a valid phenomenon to study in this sample. Harlan and Courtright’s (1995) edition showed that, for urban, upper class women in South India, the religious practice of *bhakti*—primarily the chanting or prayer during *bhajan*—results in religious ecstasy as the doorway to spirit possession for some women, giving scholarly perspective to USRE’s potential relation to SSP. Can USRE be considered under the common term “religious ecstasy”?

Palmer and Braud’s (2002) and White’s (1993) list of Exceptional Human Experiences (EHEs) also includes spirit possession. White’s (1997) classification of EHEs as mystical, psychic, and peak experiences that “move humans from a lesser to a more consciously evolved state . . .” (p. 88) resonates with ancient Indian scriptures on consciousness (Harvey, 2002). The
nature of USRE that the present study’s women reported are among the approximately 100 EHEs specified by Palmer and Braud (2002) and included: clairvoyance, demonic encounter, dream, divine encounter, ghost encounter, goose-flesh/tingling, intuition, Kundalini, near-death experience, out-of-body experience (OOBE), paranormal touch, possession, revelation, transcendental music, unitive experience, and unorthodox healing (including laying-of-hands).

The Psychological Correlates of USRE

The six psychological assessments administered to the participants were selected based on certain assumptions from the literature about SSP which are now also presumed for USRE. Two potential aspects of USRE (psychological and religious) cover the two basic hypotheses in the research question namely, that USRE is a psychopathological and/or a religious phenomenon with healing capacity. The psychopathological possibilities attributable to USRE are that (a) USRE is triggered by trauma, measured primarily by the posttraumatic stress (PTSD) scale; and/or (b) that USRE could occur in personalities predisposed to dissociation as well as dissociation historically occurring in trauma cases, measured by a Dissociation scale and by the Decompensation/Ego Loss subscale (D/EL) of the Exceptional Experiences Questionnaire (EEQ). Social functioning including somatization was measured by the Biopsychosociospiritual Inventory (BioPSSI). Standardized for Western norms of psychopathology, scores on these scales vicariously suggested trauma or its resolution.

USRE as an expression of religious beliefs was tested by the Spirituality Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS)—as specified in chapter 4, based on researcher-assumption of the essence of the items, the construct it measures is herein called “conventional” spirituality. Although a religiosity scale was overlooked in the selection of tests, participants often conflated religiosity and spirituality and the SIBS was presumed to measure this sample’s spirituality and/or
religiosity. Additionally, two spirituality/religiosity subscales were Mystic Positive, another subscale of EEQ, and a subscale of the BioPSSI which measured what this researcher construed as “stress-related” spirituality and called it Spir. Finally, the full EEQ with both spiritual and psychopathological constructs was a general measure of USRE.

Selective Coding: Overview of Themes and Their Theorizing

During thematic analysis, the key question about the nature of USRE was probed for in order to deeply define four critical questions that helped answer the research question and that reappear during this discussion: who experiences USRE, what triggers USRE, what is the relationship of USRE to the other themes and variables in this study, and what is the role of USRE? Selective Coding expanded the answers from this unidimensional analysis via Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) adage, what’s going on here? Three main phenomena—Ritual, Ambivalence, and Connection With the Divine—seemed to thread within the women’s stories and thus, suggest a plausible theory on USRE. The data suggested Connection with the Divine may be synonymous with USRE and, now at a multidimensional level, be influenced by Ritual and Ambivalence. As essential to the question of USRE as a coping against trauma, I concluded, post-CART, from all data and analyses that, simply stated, religious ritual enabled USRE as a connection with the Divine and ambivalence of religious beliefs inhibited USRE.

Ritual as a Phenomenon

As an important part of religious women’s daily lives or in nonreligious women’s critique, ritual was highly visible in narratives. Most religious women performed daily home puja and many routinely frequented temples. Many nonreligious women also seemed to follow remnants of their childhood’s rituals, and prominent were cleanliness rituals such as the removal of shoes
before entering the house, religious icons as “art” (Malati), and prayer for “solace” (Veena, Asha)—these became habits, but they are rooted in religious tenets (Harvey, 2002).

If considered a universal process that differentiates belief (the cognitive) from action, Bell’s (1992) definition of ritual as “thoughtless action—routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic” (p. 19) was the stated reason for several more-educated women’s criticism about their religion’s rituals. Ramitha was uncomfortably ambivalent between her culture of origin, largely symbolized by rituals, and individuation as a norm in the US. This may be because ritual’s prescriptions—which several women called “superstitious”—are in tension with its proscriptions (Knipe, 2005). Knipe (2005) showed that the compulsion to follow ritual rules and a terror of the outcome of ritual mistakes is especially high in Indians. Ramitha, exemplar of this fear, said she was “afraid something would happen” if she did not perform the rituals of her family-of-origin.

Whereas areligiosity is not uncommon in India (Quack, 2012), several women in the present study who came from highly orthodox religious families now had the freedom to choose their beliefs—demographics show that identification with Hinduism, the born-religion of the majority of women, decreased after immigration to beliefs in alternate or newer religious forms. This process often involved a change in ritual to global spiritual practices. Although the latter have been shown to be beneficial, the habitual constancy and stability that rituals provide (Bell, 1992; D’Aquili & Newberg, 1999) involve different dynamics after immigration (see also Bhabha, 1994; Bhatia & Ram, 2001).

Ambivalence as a Phenomenon

Most religious women experienced USRE except the few more-educated women who were ambivalent in their religious views and who formed an unexpected group with high sociostress. Ambiguity, having varying explanations, and ambivalence or holding two views for
a phenomenon are often theoretically conflated. Ambiguity is not considered negatively in Indian culture and can be a contextual coping skill with a conflict-mediated role (Nuckolls, 1998). Nuckolls (1998) said that his Indian subjects were “aware of the inconsistencies . . . and were quite able to formulate hypotheses to account for them. . . . [They had] many context-sensitive perspectives” (p. 95).

In the present study, the paradox of ambiguity versus ambivalence was distinctly different depending on the level of education. When less-educated women modified their rituals to life in the US, they loosely justified it; they had an ease in practicing conventional or hybrid rituals as it suited their context and their wellbeing was reflected in their reported low stress.

On the other hand, of the more-educated, ambivalent women, Ramitha’s struggles to integrate ingrained religious rituals with new-found self-interest was a touching example of what many immigrant women must encounter in the US—she described being married by arrangement and, without natal family support, had to find her identity in a new culture. She felt tortured in suppressing her late-life discoveries about herself for the sake of family honor, and she overcame her guilt in a renewed fervor in rituals she had abandoned with life in the US—perhaps she had internalized Chatterjee’s (1993) concept of the ideal Indian woman as upholder of cultural norms at the expense of individual expression. Integrating fully in the US vis-à-vis ritual was visibly difficult for Ramitha—if she let go of rituals, she feared godly retaliation; adhering to rituals compromised the individuality she had discovered; and her inability to fully divulge the superstitious parts of her rituals for fear of being misunderstood resulted in a lack of close American friends and sociostress. Ambivalence was implicit in several more women’s actions as they identified as nonreligious but continued with those rituals that comforted them.
Although suitably ambiguous, such ambivalence denoting conflict was not evident in the less-educated women. Nuckolls (1998) writes: “Beliefs and opinions become increasingly incoherent with each other as the level of sophistication and education decreases” (p. 185)—and, as in the current sample, low socioeconomic status often confluences with less-education.

*Connection With the Divine*

In this play of ritual and ambivalence, the women’s many ways, conscious or underlying, of connecting with the Divine were evident in their narrations. USRE was the vehicle for this time-immemorial religious aspiration that is an inherent part of Indian religion and culture. Nonreligious women did not have USRE and did not express connections with the divine, yet, although 11 women self-identified as nonreligious, most of them called themselves “spiritual” and at least 4 of them even attended *bhajans*. The remaining 7 more-educated women’s nonreligiosity was evidenced by their overt dislike of rituals and temple visits, or by self-identification as atheist or agnostic. As specified, even these women retained habits rooted in their religion’s tenets and did not consider it contradictory (see Flueckiger, 2006).

Life in the US, or modernity, could change the nature of connection with divinity. In Pargament’s (2006) primary spiritual transformation, a person’s aims shift to “God-centered strivings” (p. 18); Saisha said material things were unimportant (Harvey, 2002) in following Sai Baba’s command toward “no ego.” Pargament’s (2006) second category of transformation, a “change in the character of the sacred” (p. 19), was seen in the present study’s women’s change from following their born-religion to a generic spirituality. As part of the data, the three phenomena pervade the integrated discussion.
Demographically, the sample of 30 women participants was well-distributed with respect to age (24 to 93 years) and education (8th grade to doctorate degree). There was a wide spread in the years a woman had lived in the US, from one to 35 years. Majority (66% overall) of the women had marriages arranged by their parents, making them unique in this respect compared to American women. Hinduism was also a majority (70%) born-religion, as in India. Despite the diversity in the level of education, only 5 women held less than a bachelor’s degree (less-educated), the majority (47%) had master’s degrees, and 3 women had doctoral degrees, making them a highly educated group. Majority (67%) of the women also had USRE. A majority (60%) expressed trauma and 10 women reported historical physical or sexual abuse; trauma was a nebulous issue and was not discussed in-depth during interviews but its dynamics with other variables will be a part of the ongoing discussion. Selected by convenience sampling, the sample is skewed with respect to these variables.

Selected for their birth-cultural similarity, several women commented on how this study helped them to reflect on their religious and cultural views for the first time. The study did not aim to find commonalities, or differences, and both were observed during interviews and solidified during analysis with mixed data findings. (See Stone, 2004, as a support for the present discussion’s anti-essentialist stand).

Division at a Basic Level: The Level of Education

Differences in characteristics based on the level of education were prominent early in the interviews. CART for USRE also selected level of education as the prime variable that divided the women into manifesting two types of USRE, associated with less-education and with more-education. The outstanding observation that all the less-educated women had USRE was
complemented by their shared characteristics of high religiosity, rituals, staunch religious belief, as well as their upcoming objective characteristics; they grouped together in most CART models. They were not concerned about the logic of ritual, conflating karma and fate, and religiosity and spirituality with the ambiguous ease specified previously. Their low stress was congruent with an acceptance of life’s events as fateful or karmic. They also tested low in sociostress and expressed little interest in socializing with Americans—3 out of 5 of them barely spoke English.

**Less-education, detachment, and low stress.** The fateful attitude of the less-educated women can be explained under the practice of detachment found in Indian religious scriptures (Harlan & Courtright, 1995; Harvey, 2002). Detachment is known to reduce stress as the emphasis shifts to enhancing the spiritual self by increased spiritual activity (Roland, 1989). Hancock (1995) analyzed this as a means within women’s bhakti practice to gain boundaries in a patriarchy-dictated marriage. The low to zero dissociation scores of the less-educated women in the current sample did not reflect the trance-like states they reported within their USRE and during bhakti; however, rather than incongruent, the discussion suggests that dissociation may not be the most useful measure of less-educated women’s religious practices, or trauma.

The sample’s correlation between perceived stress and exceptional experiences, \( r(28) = .38, p < .05 \), does not reflect the low stress of the less-educated women because of their low number (17% of the sample). This correlation could be due to the larger number of more-educated women whose stress could be reflected by their higher scores on the ego loss and psychopathology subscales of the EEQ.

Thus, USRE’s psychological correlates are better seen in the results of the more-educated religious women who did not uniformly report USRE. They had diverse characteristics, noticeable from early in the interviews and substantiated by their placement in a variety of
CART groupings. This was despite participant Kesar’s claim that for Indian women, a very religious upbringing supersedes education, and suggests the impact of modernity in their having more individual views. Although Indian women are more represented by the familial and spiritual selves than the individual self, the “changing self” (Roland, 1989, p. 4) may better define them as they adjust to a new culture to which stress they seem to be more vulnerable than the less-educated women.

Comparative research. Little research has been done on the importance that the level of education may have in integrating with a new culture. Inman’s (2006) work showing that identity or culture-value conflict occurred not in first but in second generation South Asian women may be true for only the less-educated women in the present study. On the other hand, more-educated first generation women had sociocultural conflict shown by high sociostress. The correlations between PTSD and stress-related spirituality and the social subscale—$r(28) = .68, p < .01$ and $r(28) = .72, p < .01$ respectively—suggested that theirs was a social stress and supported the observation that more-educated women were conscious of adjusting to American society. The caveat in discussing sociostress is that this study was not set-up to determine whether it was due to involvements/conflicts within their own community or American culture.

Sasaki and Kim’s (2011) study on the general view of religion providing a sense of control was not evident in their Korean immigrant population and for them, the role of religion was maintaining sociocultural bonds. In the present study, this was again dependent on level of education—whereas some more-educated, ambivalent women could depend on religion to subdue the sociostress they felt, less-educated women may have gained a sense of control via religion. However, overall, social norms—Indian or American—seemed more important to the
women than personal aspirations. The importance of the level of education shows further in women’s views about USRE versus SSP.

What Is USRE? A Compare-Contrast With SSP

The rituals in the daily lives of the women are highly invocative and involved chanting which can reach a frenzied level in temples, such as The Devotee’s bhajans that I attended. As such, they are trance-invoking and may be conducive to experiencing USRE. Nonreligious women who meditated did not report USRE. Yet, a religious basis for USRE was superseded by CART’s pick of level of education as best explaining USRE and it is the level of education that helps to theorize the descriptive data on USRE and SSP, as follows.

A participant bias. In the concentrated pockets where SSP does occur in an Indian culture, both in India and in the US, it is set within a pervasive religious backdrop and is accepted within its own possession culture. In the present study, compared to the less-educated women who accepted SSP simply as “something that does occur,” more-educated women were divided in their views on SSP. Those who did not belong to a SSP culture—by their disbelief in it or not belonging to a subculture such as The Devotee’s temple where it is routinely manifested—were mostly nonreligious and more-educated, and termed SSP as fake, hysteria, and so on.

Many of the religious, more-educated women were more deferential toward SSP, although several also marginalized it. Mainly, they conflated SSP with psychopathology or possession by malevolent spirits, guessing its nature without trying to fully understand it. However, they believed in and valued their USRE as a personal connection with divinity.

The more-educated, religious woman who dropped-out of the study and whose partial data was not analyzed with the rest of the data had said, during the initial interview, what is particularly informative to the discussion of SSP’s marginalization by many women in this
sample as well as to the segregation of the two cultures. Although she used to see spirit
possession of a woman in the Bay Area who she visited for guidance, she now wanted to
distance herself from it and “live life in dignity”—she later refused to guide me to this woman.
She worked for a large corporation but wanted to keep her contacts with colleagues within work
hours and proudly said: “I’m a 9 to 5 American.” Visibly uncomfortable about SSP in her
selected venue of her temple, she rejected, in the US, the SSP part of a culture she valued.

*Connection with the Divine.* After the mentioned Harlan and Courtright’s (1995)
ethnography that the spiritual ecstasy during *bhakti* often leads to spirit possession, USRE and
SSP could be symbolic, cultural/religious common avenues for the women in the present study to
connect with the Divine. Comparing SSP and USRE can be clinically useful because they both
present as a dynamic of somatization or dissociation with religious and unusual experiences
overtones, with amnesia in SSP being the major differential.

The Indian imperative to connect with divinity was verbalized by The Dancer:

*Through my work . . . I want to connect the people to the Lord. . . . Never it was said, in
the Bible or the Mahabharata, there will be some person in between you and the Lord.
Your connection with the Lord has to be direct.*

*Whereas the women voiced in different ways that Indian religion extends this direct
connection with the Divine to the entrance of Divinity into the body leading to infinite *Atma* or
the soul housing god, the similarity with deity entering a woman in SSP was not readily
acknowledged. Less-educated Sher insisting that she felt God’s presence *inside* her could be a
simple parallel of her acceptance of SSP. On the other hand, the more-educated Sai Baba
devotees who experienced the complexity of Nonduality said that it was a voluntary practice that
came with their study of religion and, although they did not contrast it with the uncontrolled*
spontaneity of SSP, they said they valued the control with which they achieved, and continue to achieve on a daily basis, their practice’s goals.

*Goddess Kali and the class issue.* Several women marginalized SSP as occurring in lower “class” women (see also Singh, 2004). Their description of the hysterical appearance of SSP suggested that they may not want to be associated with it because it did not reflect their educated status. Their presumption of psychological distress due to social factors as a trigger of SSP implied that they did not have similar issues. This could be because the women did not consider their USRE as a connection with the same God or deity as in SSP—Veena, Ramitha, and Saisha, specifically, gave the power of SSP to goddess Kali, the oft-possessing, life-giving and life-sucking deity in the Indian pantheon. However, Kali did not appear in any woman’s USRE. In fact, except for Sai Baba, no woman specified a deity from the Indian lexicon as associated with their USRE. Although several women worshipped a specific God, a generic god or energy entered their *Atma.* Whether many of the women in this sample were transitioning to a more general spirituality and USRE reflected by their level of education or, distancing from Kali because of her dark symbolization could be potential areas for future research.

Veena’s (born upper class) lengthy focus on goddess Kali suggested class distinction because the lower, marginalized classes in India identify more with Kali (McDaniel, 1989; McDermott & Kripal, 2003). Class distinction in this immigrant population is rarely researched in the field of psychology; however, it could be a critical aspect for future study because the women bring from India the selectivity of ritual associated with the class system. In the US, rituals are influenced by two cultures and could magnify acculturation stress. In other words, SSP, which is commonly associated with lower classes in India, could be further marginalized in the US during more-educated women’s acculturation process. Ironically, Harlan and Courtright’s
(1995) studied SSP in urban, upper class, orthodox women. Although a caveat is that religious manifestations in India are highly specific to the cosmology of a particular subculture, the women in their study were not more-educated or modernized (my guess as Indian-born). See also Caldwell (2003); Gupta (2003); and Kripal and McDermott (2003).

Marginalizing SSP could be symbolic of the women rejecting a part of their culture in order to better accommodate life in the US, but, in doing so, they may feel the stress of conflicting beliefs, or sociostress. At the time of this writing, the Bay Area’s India West Daily Newsletter’s August 15, 2012 online edition wrote that a videogame developer acquiesced to protesting local Hindus to remove the image of Goddess Kali from their site because it gave the “appearance of a porn star” and “trivialized the highly revered and sacred deities of Hinduism” and that the deities would be “controlled and manipulated” by devotees (in the course of gaming) rather, they said, the deities should control the devotees. Other Hindu gods were mentioned, but the ambivalent Kali’s sexualized (life-giving) yet fearsome and bloody (life-sucking) picture, a dichotomy commonly depicted in India, was shown. Worded as a support for the goddess, it also shows how stressful it must be for Hindu immigrants to keep their religion sacred in mainstream US.

The well-known fear of Kali (Lawrence, 2003) keeps the devotee believing in her together with the projection of her strength—needed by lower classes—that empowers the devotee. A psychodynamic but controversial speculation could be that the more-educated women in the present study reject Kali through their outward rejection of SSP as the internalized fear of her projects as “superstition.” Ramitha, born upper class but who did not mention Kali among her home-temple’s gods, gasped in agreement when I said that embracing Kali’s dark side rather
than fearing it is healing—she seemed to be reevaluating her relationship with Kali. This is supported by O’Kane’s (1994) theory on God’s shadow and the dark Self.

_Bhakti is the gateway to SSP._ Attendance at _bhajans_ was a prominent part of the qualitative data. To reiterate, _bhajan_ gatherings are for _bhakti_, “the path of love” (Harvey, 2002, p. 50). Hancock’s (1995) study discussed the “interpenetration of _bhakti_ (religious devotion) and spirit possession in several Smārta Brahman households” (p. 60) previously mentioned, and first, provided significant support for the present discussion’s attempt at understanding USRE.

Second, Hancock’s (1995) women initiated _bhakti_ practice in household spaces afforded by their upper class status, giving cultural normality to The Devotee’s home temple in the US. Third, when _bhakti_, suggested by Hancock for psychological reasons, results in spirit possession, the woman’s status in both a patriarchal family and as spiritual consultant to community members, increases, as did the status of Rose and Shirley due to their healing powers after their vibrant USRE, and for The Devotee after her possession by Saint Sai Baba. My speculation is that USRE, as a result of the women’s religious practice largely involving _bhakti_, could be a muted form of SSP—the outcome of SSP is limited due to social factors in the US and, as with modern idioms for SSP in India, due to education and modernization.

Fourth, Hancock (1995) shows that some women try but cannot get spirit possessed, bringing to fore the predispositional nature of dissociation and somatization in SSP. However, contrary to Cohen’s (2005) study for SSP, dissociation as panhuman in USRE can be questioned because USRE in the present study occurred with and without dissociation depending on the level of education—a Western measure of dissociation may depend on level of education as determining women’s openness to USRE with dissociation because more-educated women could identify more with dissociation test questions. Different types of USRE, below, paved the way
for its relationship with the three main variables in the research question: religiosity, dissociation (as a coping method according to the literature), and trauma.

*Types of USRE*

It was somewhat difficult to differentiate variations of USRE from the women’s descriptions alone. However, together with objective characteristics drawn from CART and this researcher’s attention to descriptions of USRE with trance-like states, the following four kinds of USRE were noted. Primarily, all women who manifested USRE were religious with high conventional spirituality scores and were also affiliated with some low level of stress-related spirituality, suggesting that USRE is a religious/spiritual expression that also involves stress.

1. USRE conceptualized as *vivid* were manifested by more-educated women whose trance-like states were supported by CART results showing their high dissociation and ego loss, two constructs that also positively correlated, \( r(28) = .64, p < .01 \). They had average stress and sociostress.

2. Similarly vivid USRE reported by less-educated women who, although they also reported trance-like states, had the lowest dissociation and ego loss in the sample. They also had very low to zero scores on stress and sociostress.

3. Nonvivid USRE that were one time occurrences or that were initially doubted were reported by more-educated women ambivalent about their religious views and rituals. They had dissociation levels that were average for the sample. Their identifying feature was reported and tested high stress, and in many cases, high sociostress.

4. Unusual experiences that were unwelcomed and involved possession by ghosts or contact with the devil. The 2 women who formed this category narrated these experiences when asked if they had experienced SSP and/or USRE.
USRE’s Relationships With Religion, Dissociation, and Trauma

USRE and Religion

The observation that USRE occurred only in religious women was objectively supported by their high scores in conventional spirituality and mystic positive, which correlated, $r(28) = .79$, $p < .01$. The few somewhat religious women who did not report USRE were also low in conventional spirituality and mystic positive.

The theme Transformation suggests that although a group of women who had USRE said that it was their religious practice that healed their trauma, USRE could be an expression of trauma in the presence of religious practice—USRE did correlate with subjective suffering, $r(28) = .46$, $p < .01$, and, considering the low $n$, most likely also with trauma, $r(28) = .34$, n.s. In other words, women spoke synonymously about their religious practice and USRE—USRE correlated with attending private spiritual meetings, $r(28) = .68$, $p < .01$, and with religiosity, $r(28) = .40$, $p < .01$.

USRE and Dissociation

Religious, more-educated women who were younger than sample average experienced vivid USRE and had the highest dissociation as well—for the sample, exceptional experiences correlated with dissociation, $r(28) = .50$, $p < .01$. They described trance-like states and reported trauma—of which they were more expressive than less-educated women—both characteristics historically associated with dissociation. This implied relationship of dissociation with exceptional experiences is probably due to the correlation of dissociation with the ego loss and psychopathology subscales of exceptional experiences because dissociation did not correlate with the mystic positive subscale of exceptional experiences. On the other hand, mystic positive correlated highly with conventional spirituality, as specified. This is because the range of the
exceptional experiences scale has both, spirituality/religiosity and psychopathology subscales. The authors’ inclusion of a psychopathology subscale in the exceptional experiences scale is interesting and could be revealing the West’s suspicion of religious experiences as pathological. Dissociation also correlated with the stress-related spirituality subscale, \( r(28) = 37, p < .05 \) and, due to the low \( n \), possibly with PTSD, \( r(28) = .36 \), n.s.

Whereas mystic positive and conventional spirituality correlated only with each other, their insignificant correlation with stress-related spirituality in the reverse direction suggests different spirituality constructs, and also supports the less-educated women’s lack of stress. All these correlations show that dissociation is not affiliated with conventional spirituality but, in more-educated women, with stress-related spirituality and with constructs suggestive of trauma.

Although the CART model for dissociation visually shows a more or less even distribution of abuse and/or trauma among all of its groups, the above correlation of dissociation with trauma becomes more credible due to the observation that 83% of the women with the highest dissociation experienced abuse and/or trauma, and 100% of them had USRE—these percentages were calculated from CART’s groups of women and are model-dependant. The question remains whether dissociation is the correlate of the trance in USRE, as could be true only in the case of more-educated women with both USRE and high dissociation.

**Women with low dissociation.** Less-educated women with low or no dissociation may have resolved their trauma as evident from their reports and their low PTSD and sociostress—the CART for stress-related spirituality shows that the only less-educated woman, Sher, who reported abuse, had high PTSD. These characteristics make them similar to the more-educated, nonreligious women, especially the New Age women, who practiced meditation and social work, did not report trauma, and had very low posttraumatic stress scores. Parallels can be drawn
between the less-educated women’s belief in fate and “leaving things up to God” and the meditation practice of the New Age women which has been shown in previous studies to decrease stress (Ross-Chioino & Hefner, 2005).

Meditation and religious practice can both lead to unusual spiritual experiences (Newberg, 2006), and if trance is involved in either practice, it is a trance not high in Western measures of dissociation for these two groups of women in the present study. Leaving aside the more-educated women’s USRE, the experiences of women with low dissociation could be what is neurologically defined as a “lesser mystical state” (Newberg, 2006, p. 116) which could be like an Out of Body Experience (OLOBE) that is discussed in the next section.

An outstanding observation of both groups of women who had low dissociation is that they were older than sample average age and many of them had immigrated later in life and thus, spent more time as adults in a culturally supportive environment. On the other hand, the more-educated women who also had USRE but had high scores in dissociation were younger (under 49 years), and had immigrated at a younger age than the women with low dissociation. For them, dissociation could be a coping method against the stress of modernity, including the work environment in a different culture.

*Out of Body Experience (OLOBE)*. I explored OOBES due to its overlap with dissociation in the literature (Spiegel, 1994). CART showed that only women—of varied characteristics—in the US for over 16 years experienced OOBES. This group included the less-educated women and the 3 women who had doctorate degrees, along with atheist Gia. Of these women, those who were religious reported USRE. Again was seen a connection between the less-educated women and more-educated nonreligious women that this study was not designed to further explore.
On the other hand, the ambivalent, more-educated women, who had high sociostress and no or doubtful USRE, did not have OOBE (they also had low to average dissociation). Unlike dissociation, OOBE did not correlate with ego loss. OOBE may be associated with less-educated women’s USRE, just as dissociation is involved in more-educated women’s USRE. Simply put, dissociation could be a more-educated but non-ambivalent woman’s psychological method of coping, yet another intriguing aspect of the data that this study was limited in investigating.

As opposed to dissociation, OOBE’s correlation with conventional spirituality, \( r(28) = .66, p < .01 \) lends some support to this speculation. OOBE’s weak correlation, if any, with dissociation and ego loss, \( r(28) = .33, \text{n.s.} \) and \( r(28) = .29, \text{n.s.} \), respectively, may help to explain its absence in women with high dissociation who had a high rate of trauma. For this sample, OOBE—although an item in the dissociation scale—seems like a different construct from dissociation and ego loss.

**Dissociation as a cultural problematic.** Dissociation was more prevalent in this sample of women than is seen in general population surveys in the West, a finding that can be better understood by noting three previous findings.

- The “overlap” between “ritual trance . . . and dissociative phenomena” (Kirmayer, 1994, p. 96) would question the validity of the DES for the present sample. Kirmayer (1994) showed, by comparing the DES with scales that measure hypnotic susceptibility, that high scores on the DES may not reflect psychopathology but rather cultural traits such as hypnotizability or “openness to absorbing experiences” (p. 97) that are known to have less of a social-subjective dichotomy and that are associated with music and healers in a religious setting. In other words, in Indian cultures, trance
is a nonprivate, social, and accepted occurrence, calling for culturally-specific
dissociation and religious/spiritual trance scales.

- Although mainstream psychology equates loss of memory with dissociation and Ross
  (1989) said loss of memory occurs only in pathological dissociation, Erdelyi (1994)
discussed the difficulty in this simplification and involved the unconscious (see also
in spirit possession cultures with high hypnotic suggestibility rates. In the present
study, although the religious ecstasy during some women’s USRE reports were
trance-like states, loss of memory was not reported and this again questions the
diagnosis of a client from India tested for dissociation by the DES.

- The third confound is in the interpretation of DES scores. Carlson (1994), who helped
standardize the DES, showed that the same score measured a more severe dissociative
experience in a psychiatric patient than in a nonclinical person. He notes that
Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) is the most severe dissociative disorder, and he
reported different studies where patients with DID had a mean DES score of 43,
followed by patients with PTSD who scored 30 on an average. In the present study,
the average dissociation scores was 53 and the highest dissociation scores was 106,
considerably above Western population-average, yet the women were high
functioning. This section suggests that dissociation in these women is an expression
of their religious practice, perhaps affiliated with USRE, and not psychopathology—
although this religious practice as helping cope with trauma continues to be a part of
the discussion. For a discussion of DID and spirit possession, see Heinz (2004); and
for dissociation and spirit possession, see White (1997).
USRE and Trauma

Trauma was not selected as a main predictor in any CART model. One reason could be the underreporting I observed in interviews, suggesting there may have been some hesitancy on the part of subjects to self-disclose this. For example, Saisha answered, “no” on trauma and said that she “did not want to go there” when questioned during her cursory mention of her oppression by her in-laws. For this reason and based on data from interviews, trauma still merits discussion as a potential trigger of USRE. Underreporting of trauma could occur in this cultural group due to differences in its expression (Furst, 2003), manifested as unconscious defenses (Roland, 1989), or learned acceptance of suffering and its projection onto religious activities.

Because of its absence in CART models, trauma was added manually to CART’s groups of women from their answers in the qualitative interviews. When this was done, trauma’s connection to USRE was evident in two findings: (a) As specified, there was high rate (83% – 100% depending on the CART model) of reported abuse and/or trauma in groups of women who reported vivid USRE and had the highest dissociation and ego loss; and (b) in the interaction model of trauma-USRE-spiritual practice, USRE occurred only in groups in which the women reported trauma (see pictorial matrix Figure 2).

Women who underreported trauma. The narratives of women who had the highest conventional spirituality and low PTSD suggested that they may have underreported their trauma. They were an eclectic group but included 3 of the 4 less-educated women who again grouped with the older, nonreligious, New Age women. Recall that these women had OOBE and the lowest dissociation, ego loss, stress, and sociostress. Characteristics that could be potentially healing for this sample can now be delineated: (a) a longer life in India; (b) a higher age; (c) life-long meditation and social work by nonreligious women; (d) high religiosity in less-educated
women; and, (e) from the cases of Rose and Shirley, spiritual awakenings followed by healer roles that shift the focus away from their own suffering. These conclusions add to the body of work that meditation is a psychologically healing practice (Ross-Chioino & Hefner, 2005) and opens the door to research the less explored topic of social work as also healing.

Overt reports of unresolved trauma. The women who expressed most suffering related to their trauma did not have a spiritual practice or do social work. They were a small group of more-educated women, both religious and nonreligious, who had high perceived stress and sociostress, low dissociation and ego loss, and grouped together in CART models. They differentiated, in their lack of USRE or initially-doubtful USRE, from (religious) women who also had high dissociation and reported abuse and/or trauma but who had 100% USRE, and could be deprived of USRE’s potential healing role. A few of them who were not religious also lacked cultural connectivity and support that comes with religious events, perhaps adding to acculturation stress. Was the nature of any “doubtful” USRE confused with or have less impact than the effects of their abuse and/or trauma? The question remains whether both phenomena, The “chosen” (Saisha) Devotee’s SSP and mundane Mala’s trance in front of the same Devotee, have the same healing function.

Evaluation of the Study

Delimitations

This study’s delimitations were set by the aspects in the research question—it was limited to women who immigrated from an Indian culture to the US as adults and to the time and space in history that they occupy. The main delimitation, the study of SSP, was modified to focus instead on USRE.
Limitations

Although every attempt was made to ground the analysis in the data, the main limitation of this study was my own perspective and knowledge of Indian culture which may have influenced the theorizing aspect of the discussion (Mertens, 2005). However, several procedures and outcomes limited bias: Blind peer coding concurred with my thematic analysis; CART triangulation gave groups of women with characteristics similar to the groups deciphered from narratives; correlations and triangulation complemented qualitative data analysis in a credible manner; and correlations showed internal (convergent and divergent) validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Trochim, 2009).

There were several other limitations inherent in the study, many of which have been addressed as caveats where appropriate during the discussion of the findings. In addition, first, whereas the intention was not to generalize the findings but to explore the experiences of the women in this study for clinical use and future research, the low sample number, although adequate for grounded theory, made analysis of the quantitative results tenuous. Second, regarding method, grounded theory is a “complex and iterative” (Trochim, 2009, p. 160) process that hypothetically “never ends” (Trochim, 2009, p. 160). Although the present study was conducted within appropriate time delimitations, a limitation could be that themes were not fully explored. However, I balanced Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) generative questioning with “unstructured interviewing” (p. 161) to get a rich array of themes. Further, although Creswell (2009) defined theoretical sampling as selecting new participants based on their ability to contribute to the theory and this was not done, it was offset by thorough iterative questioning of the same sample’s selected participants. Yet, I questioned trauma ineffectively and insufficiently,
a major limitation for answering the research question of trauma as trigger of or being healed by USRE. “Underreported trauma” was researcher-assumed from interviews.

Third, the insider position I had with my participants due to cultural similarity is not always considered advantageous in cultural research. From an emic-etic philosophical perspective (Kenneth Pike, 1967), my emic stand—when the behavior of a group is explained in terms of the people within that group—may be challenged as biasing instead of helping the data. On the other hand, Kassam and Bashuna (2004) said that an etic stand—where an outside source professes an explanation of the behavior of a group—gives an alternate perspective that can empower a marginalized group. Overall, women’s experiences in the present study were validated and could empower them to be open to and reexperience USRE.

Validity of the Study

Reliability and validity of the quantitative assessments. Quantitative assessments used with a sample from a population that was not used to standardize the assessments could have compromised their reliability and validity. Additionally, my translations of the assessment questions for the participants who did not speak English may have been inadequate or crossed the tests’ authors intended boundaries. Finally, an error was made in the exceptional experiences assessment of the second part, which was presented to the women for the intensity of their experiences, whereas the authors intended to question the valence of the experience. However, the results proved interesting in that in some cases, an answer on an experience was weak, suggesting that the women considered it a normal aspect of life, but its intensity was strong, suggesting that the experience moved them more at a personal level. On the other hand, knowing the valence of an experience would have contributed to validating the women’s professed welcome of their USRE versus feeling overwhelmed by or fearful of their USRE.
Credibility of the qualitative method. I attempted to enhance the credibility of the study by following Mertens’ (2005) mandate for tracking and disclosing alterations to the research process. I also enabled Strauss and Corbin’s (1989) four basic caveats for validity of a theory: (a) theory addressed the research question; (b) although a theory needs generalizability, the current theory focuses on specificity, an alternate, valued format; (c) it specifies the historical conditions under which it was created; and (d) it has a utilitarian solution. Additionally, women validated the themes during the cyclical iteration (see also Braud, 1998b; Braud & Anderson, 1998).

Lived experiences explored via thick, rich, and deep descriptions, as in the present open-ended interviews, are believable (Creswell, 1998). Finally, transparency about my cultural background lends credibility.

Useful and Unexpected Aspects of the Research and Findings

On SSP. The loss in finding SSP was offset by three positive outcomes of searching for this phenomenon. First, although not text-book SSP, convenience sampling resulted in two reports of possession: Pushpa’s ghost possession and Sam feeling the devil’s touch. The fear and negativity associated with the malevolent spirits was the main difference from the benevolent connection with an external energy or god that the rest of the women described for their USRE. Further, Sam was medicated for psychosis and presented the controversial issue of differential diagnosis of spiritual phenomena versus psychosis (Grof & Grof, 1989; Lukoff, 1996). Sam’s case could not be addressed but, the vibrant feminist presence in conducting the interviews validated and normalized her experiences (Reinharz, 1992).

Second, women’s rich views on the retained discussions on SSP allowed its theoretical comparison with USRE. This gave further cultural insight into USRE, the less-studied topics of
the dark side of Hindu religion, and the class distinction prevalent in India and which future research could pursue in the US.

Third, the only case of ritualized spirit possession following a first appearance of SSP by The Devotee was a prize finding for this research. Her trance with loss of memory but without hysterical behavior, keeps the phenomenon quiet and segregated from mainstream American knowledge. Her amnesia supports trance as the literature’s defining feature in SSP, and shows both, that SSP does occur and that authentic rituals to enable spirit possession do exist in the US. After data collection, I was informed of other temples where spirit possession occurs during bhajans, paving the way for future research. The prevalence of bhajans and the practice of bhakti by immigrants from Indian cultures in the US are of sociocultural importance.

Regarding method. Conducting interviews and psychological assessments with the same women is more credible (discussed by Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2006) than using different participants for each part of the mixed method more often followed by researchers. It enhanced the finding that hypotheses suspected from qualitative data were supported by objective data from the same participants. Second, comparing triangulation results back to the raw data created a more complete integration of mixed data that has rarely been attempted as a systematic step in mixed methods research. Third, using the women’s views to explain discordance between qualitative data and triangulation results has also not been fully documented as a systemic methodological aspect of mixed methods in the literature. In the present study, it also showed limitations of the psychological assessments used in this study. For example, when Rose was questioned on her rare high score on a perceived stress question in a series of otherwise low scores in comparison to her narration of no stress, she said that her stress was because she “had to do a lot of the Lord’s work,” showing the clinician its origin and target.
Fourth, the noted distancing from SSP as the dark side of Indian religion paves the way for clinically and theoretically approaching issues of shame, impact of modernity, and the stress to acculturate due to religious compartmentalization. Schweder (1991) noted that shame (the basis of acts or the abstinence from certain acts by Indians) results from the fear of exposure and implicates “banishment” (p. 244).

Unexpected findings. Sociostress as a new concept and a manifestation in women immigrants who were ambivalent about their religion was an unexpected finding. A new scale to measure sociostress, especially in the context of acculturation, would be beneficial in cross-cultural work. In addition, the study showed different kinds of USRE depending on the level of education and the presence or absence of dissociation, and a new taxonomy of spiritual experiences would theoretically add to the literature on exceptional spiritual experiences, such as Wardell and Engebretson’s (2006) taxonomy, as well as for differential diagnosis in order to understand the subjectivity involved in different experiences. Finally, the importance of the level of education in determining the psychological correlates and the experiences of women is also important theoretically, for clinical work, and for understanding sociocultural dynamics.

Clinical importance. There is paucity of literature on the differences between the phenomenological views of this population of women and their measurable characteristics such as level of education, religiosity, years in the US, dissociative tendencies, and USRE, knowledge of which could be of clinical benefit. Simply recognizing the potentiality for women immigrants from Indian cultures to experience USRE would be a resonating factor between client and therapist as there is little work done in this particular aspect of clinical research. See Marwaha’s (2003) work on culture and counseling.
Transpersonal relevance. This study was founded on the literature for SSP, historically linked to psychological disorders. New scholarship (Keller, 2002) paved the way to study SSP from a religious perspective. Present findings suggest USRE to be rooted in religious beliefs and practices with complex dynamics with a socially stressful aspect of religion, trauma, as well as coping and healing. Being suggested here as a coping strategy for trauma—familial, social, or acculturation stress—gives USRE and its mother religion potential for healing and self-actualization. Although normalizing of behavior akin to hysteria, psychosis, or SSP that is suspected as a religious manifestation or rooted in religious tenets has occurred in transpersonal circles throughout history (Perry, 1974), Huskinson’s (2010) new research advocates for a non-pathological view of spirit possession in modern Western psychology.

For future research. Starting with open-ended narratives on the broad topic of religion and utilizing six psychological assessments provided a wealth of data that has not been fully analyzed, leaving ample material for future analysis. The low number of participants for a quantitative study resulted in dynamics that, although the mixed data substantiated each other, gave tentative, exploratory, and suggestive conclusions of the findings, several of which could be explored in future research. Of these, I consider the following paths as important and feasible to study: (a) A typology of USRE based on cultural specificity and considering religious, acculturation, and objective correlates; (b) the impact of USRE in coping with trauma and in acculturation; (c) culturally specific psychological assessments; and (d) the manner in which this high-functioning and relatively less emotionally disturbed population copes.

Conclusion: A Theory

With academic caution, this theory is specific for this sample and time and space in history. Yet, chapter 3 proposed Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) vision that describing a social
phenomenon with a theoretical concept is insufficient for culminating a grounded theory research. Rather, phenomena created during Selective Coding and linked to create a credible theory vis-à-vis the data can potentially predict (USRE in women who immigrated to the US from an Indian culture). Charmaz’ (2009) extends this vision to her imaginative, interpretive method for generating theory that “leads other scholars to new vistas” (p. 181), which too I espoused.

Manifestation of USRE in women immigrants from Indian cultures, its trigger/s, and its role depend upon the variables involved. In other words, the experiences of women in the US represented by this sample vary depending upon their situation in the presumed context of acculturation. The women’s descriptions of their USRE are positive and benign, almost synonymous with religion. Objectively, relationships important for understanding USRE are with religiosity (as its potential trigger), trauma (as its other potential trigger), and dissociation (as its potential manifestation). One conclusion is that USRE is an expression of both religious practice and trauma. Only in more-educated women is USRE associated with dissociation—whether dissociation is associated with trauma, coping, or religious practice is not known, but modernity, implied as accompanying higher education, either allows easier expression of trauma or allows dissociation as a coping mechanism. In other words, these women take solace in their religious practice and value the resulting USRE, but all in their group report that trauma still impacts them, as also presumed by their moderate, above-sample average PTSD scores.

Less-educated women’s USRE is not concurrent with dissociation, and these women seem to have resolved their trauma. For them, OOBE could be associated with their USRE and/or religious practice. Is their wellbeing due to their belief in karma and their attitude of letting-go of worries or due to detachment? Given the characteristics of low reports of trauma,
low dissociation, and low stress, they are enjoined with the more-educated religious women whose spiritual practice and social work are most likely healing.

Are there two types of USRE, associated with dissociation and without dissociation? The answer could be in the interplay of levels of education and religiosity which could be main factors that characterize women immigrants from Indian cultures. Both are prime variables in determining USRE, healing, and well-being in various combinations, which likely also depend on external factors specific to the US.

Despite their reports of trauma, the current data suggests that wellbeing could be related to experiencing USRE. If a woman from an Indian culture is religious, USRE seems to give at least cultural connectivity with other similarly religious people from Indian cultures and modernity and more-education does not always translate into wellbeing. More-educated women have the tools to question their religion’s tenets and rituals as superstitious, yet, some, due to strong childhood internalizations, are unable to let-go of them—these are the ambivalent women. The resulting sociostress limits their capacity to experience USRE, thereby depriving them of its healing potential. Trauma in this sample is often due to social factors, either within their own community or in acculturating.

Simple as this conclusion sounds, the interplay of events and phenomena creates corollaries, or contradictions, to these potentials—when the women turn to religion to cope with trauma, is habitual religious practice conducive to enabling USRE, is USRE synonymous with dissociation only for more-educated women, and is this dissociation a coping mechanism? Or, according to Western psychological models, does trauma trigger catharsis, which, in Indian women immigrants, manifests as USRE? In the latter case, religion nevertheless seems to play an
important part in general coping and solace for many religious women, and USRE could be their expression for/of coping.

How, indeed why, does one express the personally ineffable and which could seem odd or alien to those in a host culture who are areligious or need logic to understand phenomena? Yet, in the course of this study, I realized the importance of the adage that people need to tell their story and this feeling provided a path for empathizing with the more-religious-than-I women in this study who regally carry on their culture/religion, perhaps more privately than they would like. At the same time, they embrace American culture, to which dichotomy I have been somewhat immune as a more Westernized Parsi. Transpersonally, USRE speaks of things ineffable, making Schweder’s (1991) dedication appropriate for the present study: “To those who doubt that there are such things as concepts, propositions, and gods subsisting outside of time and beyond our world, and to those who doubt not, I dedicate these essays” (para. 1, dedication page).
References


Appendix A: Permission Emails From Authors of Psychological Tests

Yes, you have my permission to include the instrument.

David A Katerndahl, M.D., M.A.
Professor
Family and Community Medicine
University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio
7703 Floyd Curl Drive
San Antonio, TX 78229-3900
Telephone: 210-358-3885
Fax: 210-223-6940
Email: katerndahl@uthscsa.edu

-----Original Message-----
From: Goolrukh Vakil [mailto:goolrukhv@comcast.net]
Sent: Monday, January 24, 2011 8:03 PM
To: Katerndahl, David A
Subject: RE: Scoring

Dear Dr. Katerndahl,

I am asking permission again, to include the actual test (BioPSSI) in my paper, would you allow it, and if I can paraphrase a few questions to give the reader an idea of the constructs.

Thank you,

Goolrukh Vakil
The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

-----

sure, that would be fine.

congratulations on being close to the finish line!

Rob

From: Goolrukh Vakil [goolrukhv@comcast.net]
Sent: Monday, January 24, 2011 9:40 PM
To: Hatch, Robert L
Subject: FW: SIBS-R

Dr. Hatch, again,

I would also like your permission to quote the test items of Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale-Revised, and if I do that, then I would have to include the test in the appendix.

Please let me know if this is OK.

Sincerely,

Goolrukh
Appendix B: *Dissociative Experience Scale (DES)*

1. Some people have the experience of doing some work in their home and suddenly realizing that they don't remember what they were doing.

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)

2. Some people find that sometimes they are listening to someone talk and they suddenly realize that they did not hear part or all of what was said.

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)

3. Some people have the experience of finding themselves in a place and having no idea how they got there.

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)

4. Some people have the experience of finding themselves dressed in clothes that they don't remember putting on.

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)

5. Some people have the experience of finding new things among their belongings that they do not remember buying.

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)

6. Call them by another name or insist that they have met them before.

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)

7. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling as though they are standing next to themselves or watching themselves do something and they actually see themselves as if they were looking at another person.

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)

8. Some people are told that they sometimes do not recognize friends or family members.

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)

9. Some people find that they have no memory for some important events in their lives (for example, a wedding or graduation).

   (Never) [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (Always)
10. Some people have the experience of being accused of lying when they do not think that they have lied.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

11. Some people have the experience of looking in a mirror and not recognizing themselves.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

12. Some people have the experience of feeling that other people, objects, and the world around them are not real.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

13. Some people have the experience of feeling that their body does not seem to belong to them.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

14. Some people have the experience of sometimes remembering a past event so vividly that they feel as if they were reliving that event.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

15. Some people have the experience of not being sure whether things that they remember happening really did happen or whether they just dreamed them.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

16. Some people have the experience of being in a familiar place but finding it strange and unfamiliar.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

17. Some people find that when they are watching television or a movie they become so absorbed in the story that they are unaware of other events happening around them.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

18. Some people find that they become so involved in a fantasy or daydream that it feels as though it were really happening to them.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)
19. Some people find that they sometimes are able to ignore pain.

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

20. Some people find that they sometimes sit staring off into space, thinking of nothing, and are not aware of the passage of time.

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

21. Some people sometimes find that when they are alone they talk out loud to themselves.

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

22. Some people find that in one situation they may act so differently compared with another situation that they feel almost as if they were two different people.

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

23. Some people sometimes find that in certain situations they are able to do things with amazing ease and spontaneity that would usually be difficult for them (for example, sports, work, social situations, etc.).

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

24. Some people sometimes find that they cannot remember whether they have done something or have just thought about doing it (for example, not knowing whether they have just mailed a letter or have just thought about mailing it).

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

25. Some people find evidence that they have done things that they do not remember doing.

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

26. Some people sometimes find writings, drawings, or notes among their belongings that they must have done but cannot remember doing.

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)

27. Some people sometimes find that they hear voices inside their head that tell them to do things or comment on things that they are doing.

   (Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)
28. Some people sometimes feel as if they are looking at the world through a fog so that people and objects appear far away or unclear.

(Never) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (Always)
Appendix C: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

Researcher narration as suggested by the authors of the scale: *The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer each question fairly quickly. That is, don’t try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.*

Scoring:

0. never
1. almost never
2. sometimes
3. fairly often
4. very often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?
4. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?
6. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
7. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
8. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
9. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
10. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
11. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
12. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?
13. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?
14. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?
Appendix D: The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale-Revised (SIBS-R)

Scoring:
- Strongly Agree = 7
- Agree = 6
- Mildly agree = 5
- Neutral = 4
- Mildly disagree = 3
- Disagree = 2
- Strongly disagree = 1

1. I set aside time for meditation and/or self-reflection.
2. I can find meaning in times of hardship.
3. A person can be fulfilled without pursuing an active spiritual life.
4. I find serenity by accepting things as they are.
5. I have a relationship with someone I can turn to for spiritual guidance.
6. Prayers do not really change what happens.
7. In times of despair, I can find little reason for hope.
8. I have a personal relationship with a power greater than myself.
9. I have had a spiritual experience that greatly changed my life.
10. When I help others, I expect nothing in return.
11. I don’t take time to appreciate nature.
   [This question was changed as follows: I don’t appreciate nature]
12. I have joy in my life because of my spirituality.
13. My relationship with a higher power helps me love others more completely.
14. Spiritual writings enrich my life.
15. I have experienced healing after prayer.
16. My spiritual understanding continues to grow.
17. I focus on what needs to be changed in me, not on what needs to be changed in others.
18. In difficult times, I am still grateful.
19. I have been through a time of suffering that led to spiritual growth.
20. I solve my problems without using spiritual resources.
21. I examine my actions to see if they reflect my values.
22. How spiritual a person do you consider yourself (“7” being the most spiritual).

Scoring instructions:
Reverse score all negatively worded items (3, 6, 7, 11, 20).
For all other times, the score is the number (from 1 – 7) circled by the subject.
Appendix E: *Exceptional Experiences Questionnaire* (EEQ)

(As emailed by author on March 9, 2010)

Range Prevalence Scale: 0 (never) – 4 (very frequently)
Range Evaluation Scale: 1 (very positive) – 5 (very negative - only if frequency is > 0) [Reverse the order: 1 = very weak; 5 = very strong. Based on participants’ suggestion and responses in pilot study]

**Factor Scoring: Compute mean scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1: Mystic positive</th>
<th>Prevalence Scale</th>
<th>Evaluation Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am illuminated by divine light and divine strength. [Like an awareness]</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Benign light surrounds me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A higher being protects or helps me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Spiritual powers inspire me at work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel the presence of spiritual/extraterrestrial [spiritual] beings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am in touch with everything. [Awareness]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I know my calling. [Spiritual path and life work]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor 2: Deconstruction/ Ego Loss**

8. My world-view is falling apart.
9. My environment seems somewhat blurred or illusory to me.
10. A feeling of ignorance or not knowing overwhelms me.
11. My thinking slows down.
12. A part of me dies.
13. The world around me seems absurd or exaggeratedly distorted to me.
14. My consciousness separates from my body.

**Factor 3: Psychopathology:**

15. I clearly hear voices, which scold me and make fun of me, without any physical causation.
16. I am cursed.
17. I am controlled by strange and alien forces.
18. A strong, sinister power takes possession of my body.
19. Other people read my mind.
20. Some of my thoughts seem strange to me, as if they were not mine.
21. I mentally send harm to my enemies.

Factor 4: Visionary Dreams

22. I dream so vividly that my dreams reverberate while I am awake.
23. I have meaningful dreams.
24. I have strange and peculiar dreams.
25. I dream of future events which later happen.
Appendix F: PTSD Check List—Civilian (PCL-C)

The present researcher’s note: The instructions for this questionnaire have been modified to suit the present study’s participants. Whereas the introduction did not focus on words such as “problems and complaints” but rather on more euphemistic wording, nevertheless, this researcher was consistent in relevance to the reliability of this scale namely, to ask the participants to indicate how much they have been concerned with the issues in the questions in the past month. Some questions have been modified to suit a subpopulation of women from India who are culturally used to compliancy; these modifications are in [brackets].

Scoring:

1 = not at all
2 = a little bit
3 = moderately
4 = quite a lot
5 = extremely

1. Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful experience from the past.
2. Repeated, disturbing dreams of a stressful experience from the past.
3. Suddenly acting or feeling as if a stressful experience from the past were happening again (reliving it).
4. Feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past.
5. Having physical reactions (e.g. heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating) when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past.
6. [Would you prefer to] avoid thinking or talking about a stressful experience from the past or avoiding having feelings relating to it.
7. [Would you prefer to] avoid activities or situations because they remind you of a stressful experience from the past?
8. Trouble remembering important parts of a stressful experience from the past?
9. Loss of interest in activities that you used to enjoy?
10. Feeling distant or cut off from other people?
11. Feeling emotionally numb or being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?
12. Feeling as if your future somehow will be cut short?
13. Trouble falling or staying asleep?
14. Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts?
15. Having difficulty concentrating?
16. Being “superalert” or watchful or on guard?
17. Feeling jumpy or easily startled?
Appendix G: Biopsychospiritual Inventory (BioPSSI)

For each condition, please describe how often have you had or felt that way during the past month (circle the number that best describes how often you feel that way).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>None of the time</th>
<th>A Little of the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>A good bit of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faintness or dizziness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pains in heart or chest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pains in lower back</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauseous or upset stomach</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soreness of your muscles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble getting your breath</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbness or tingling in parts of your body</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lump in your throat</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling weak in parts of your body</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy feelings in your arms or legs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervousness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Down in the dumps&quot;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Downhearted and blue&quot;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others cared what happens to you</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and affection</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chances to talk to someone about problems at work or with housework</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chances to talk with someone you trust about personal and family problems</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chances to talk about money matters</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitations to go out and do things with others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful advice about important things in life</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help when you were sick</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A reason for living</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your life has been productive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace of mind</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of purpose</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to reach down deep into yourself for comfort</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of harmony within yourself</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the **past month**, how often have (circle the number that best describes your functioning):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Time</th>
<th>None of the time</th>
<th>A little of the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>A good bit of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your physical health problems caused you to:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cut down the amount of time spent on work or other activities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accomplish less than you would like</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limit the kind of work or other activities you do</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have difficulty performing the work or activities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your emotional health problems caused you to:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cut down the amount of time spent on work or other activities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accomplish less than you would like</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limit the kind of work or other activities you do</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have difficulty performing the work or activities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any problems interfered with regular social activities with family, friends, neighbors, or groups</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any problems interfered with new opportunities to be with family, friends, neighbors, or groups</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any problems interfered with your ability to participate in public religious/spiritual activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any problems interfered with your ability to participate in private religious/spiritual activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Solicitation Flyer

Research Study on Women Immigrants from an Indian Culture to the U.S.A.

by

Indian woman doctorate student

- Can you participate in a research study in full confidentiality?
- Were you born in the Indian subcontinent?
- Are you over 18 years old?

If so, please consider participating in this most valuable project which will:
- Enable cross-cultural understanding
- Provide you with an opportunity to tell your story and an opportunity to thereby heal

In my initial interview with you, I will select certain participants who meet certain criteria. At this time, participants will be given the details of the research.

- All participation is in the utmost confidence.
- Participants may conduct all interviews by telephone if they wish.
  - They may not give their real name if they don't wish to.
- If in person, they may choose where and when they want to be interviewed.
  - Participants can drop out of the study at any time.
- The interviewing will take about five hours and can be done on one day or be broken into different days.
- At the end of the study, participants can provide feedback on the results and get a copy of the final research.
- At any time during the study, counseling contacts can be provided. Group therapy will be conducted at the end of the study; participation is voluntary.

Please contact Goolrukh Vakil, MS, MA psychology, in confidence:
Mobile phone, 24 hours (xxx) xxx-xxxx
Office phone, confidential voice mail: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
goolrukhv@comcast.net
Appendix J: Recruitment

Table J1

*Diversity in Recruitment Results (N = 30)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email to agencies and temples</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fijian church (Pentecostal)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter-to-the-editor of Indian paper</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching at temple</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly bhajan open to all at shrine in private home</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad hoc: street/café/public event/restaurant</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintances and through acquaintances</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowballing (Gruppetta, 2010)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Informed Consent Agreement

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. I would like to go over this consent form with you so you can further decide if you want to accept this invitation to participate in this research.

This study, which is considered research, will help me to meet the requirements of the doctoral psychology program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, CA, and which could be a valuable contribution to transpersonal psychology.

The aim of this study is to explore the religious phenomenon of spirit possession as it occurs spontaneously. Those women who are familiar with spontaneous spirit possession as well as those who are not, are invited to participate in this study. You attest that you were born in India and are over 18 years of age and that you are not currently suffering from substance abuse or severe mental health issues.

This study will involve several parts. The total time you will spend will be approximately seven hours over three different days. Some people may take less or more time. All parts of the research will involve you and I meeting at a neutral location and at a time that is comfortable for you, either at your or my home or my office. In some meetings I will ask you a series of questions, which you will answer the best you can. In another meeting you will narrate your life story as much as you want, especially any particular events that impacted you strongly, and any feelings associated with any memories.

The time details of the research are listed below for your convenience:

Day one [consent form and demographic form] ..............................................30 minutes
Day two [narration or life story followed by a semi-structured questionnaire]..........1-3 hours
Day three [six series of tests called *instruments or scales*] ........................................3 hours

For all interviews, we can meet at any place that feels neutral and comfortable for you. Your home or my office are two possible places.

I will record your answers so that I don’t forget what you said. The audiotapes will be transcribed after the professional transcriber signs a confidentiality form so that your privacy will be fully protected. You will be given a copy of this form. What you narrate in your life story will not even be revealed to any family member. Your real name and of anyone else you mention will not be used; you will be given or can choose a pseudonym. What you say will be stored in a locked cabinet. Only I will have the key to this cabinet. One professor from my dissertation committee will also have a key to the cabinet so that the data is in safe hands in the event of my death. If I as researcher die before the research is complete, it may be completed by another scientist. If not, all data will be shredded upon my death. Please feel free to ask me any questions that you have about confidentiality or anything else now, prior to the onset of the interviews, or at any time during our meetings.
There will be no monetary compensation for your time; however, I hope our work together will greatly benefit the field of psychology and enhance cross-cultural understanding. I also hope that you will gain personal benefits from the study by gaining new insight into your experiences. You may also participate in a group session which will be conducted for all the participants at the end of the study. I anticipate no risks to you as a result of participating in this study. However, because you will be answering questions on such powerful and religious phenomenon and also perhaps remembering anything else in your life history, you may experience uncomfortable feelings for which you need support and someone to talk with. If you feel any distress at any time please do not hesitate to contact me, Goolrukh Vakil, at any time on my cell phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx, or by email at goolrukhv@comcast.net. I will be happy to also give you names of any Indian counselor or social worker to help you deal with any feelings that arise.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and no pressure has been applied to encourage participation. Further, you may withdraw your participation in the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. If you do withdraw but wish to get professional counseling. I will be happy to give references.

If you would like to receive a written summary of the general results of this study you can provide the address where you would like me to mail it.

You agree to allow publication of the results. The results of this research will be in my doctoral dissertation, a copy of which can be seen at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and library websites. Neither this nor any other publications that use the results will have the names of any participants. Once a research is published, the material may be used by other researchers, scholars, or agencies.

Finally, you can also contact the chair of my research, Charlotte W. Lewis, PhD, by phone at (650) 493-4430 X 258 or by email at clewis@itp.edu any time before, during, or after any interview or any questioning, or the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee, Dr. Frederic Luskin, at (650) 493-4430 or by email at fluskin@itp.edu

You may also contact me at any time after the study is over if you wish to talk with me about anything related to this research, ask further questions on the research, or provide me with any new information relevant to the subject I am studying.

At this time, I as researcher have explained the study to you and answered your questions. Please ask me anything else you wish before signing this consent form.

I, ____________________________________, the undersigned, voluntarily consent to be interviewed for this study conducted by Goolrukh Vakil, and no pressure has been applied to encourage participation. I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or prejudice. I have received a copy of this consent form and understand that my confidentiality will be protected. I am aware that the interview may be audio recorded. The researcher, Goolrukh Vakil, has explained the study to me and answered my questions.
Participant signature: ________________________________  Date: ____________________

Participant address: ________________________________

If someone other than the participant is involved in translating this consent form to the participant, please print the name of person translating.

Relationship to participant: ____________________________________________________

Signature of translator: ________________________________  Date: ____________________

Researcher signature: ________________________________

Researcher address: Street, City, State
Appendix L: Initial Brief Structured Interview (IBSI) for Group Formation

Note: The IBSI was for group formation. It is akin to a flyer and the consent form was applied only to those women who were selected from the IBSI because it is likely that a particular individual may decide to not participate in this research during or after the IBSI. This researcher used judgment about the timing and modification of wording; however, the ultimate essence of the questions was as below and the potential participants were prompted for one of the possible answers following each question. Answers were noted by this researcher’s check marks.

1. Do you consider yourself religious? Highly religious ____ Somewhat _____ No _____.
2. Do you practice religion? Yes ____ Rarely, only when culturally needed _____.
3. Whether you consider yourself religious, non-religious or if you only rarely practice rituals as needed, do you consider yourself spiritual? Yes _____ No _____.
4. Have you had any unusual spiritual experiences? Yes ____ No _____.
5. If you answered to being non-religious, whether you answered to being spiritual or not, do you consider yourself agnostic? Yes ____ No _____.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>How often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Do you visit temple</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Do you have a shrine in your home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Do you sing Bhajans [devotional songs]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Do you go to spiritual meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note to reader: This researcher did not ask specifically about any unusual experiences or SSP at recruitment due to its esoteric nature. Specific queries were at the researcher’s discretion. When this phenomenon was not discovered, any vicarious revelations about this phenomenon were handled gently, with validation. Clues, hints, and suspicions about the possibility of SSP during the narrations were further probed. Originally, this gentle and slow method of recruitment was considered culturally sensitive and was intended to continue until SSP revealed. In its absence, an equally validating and gentle probing of USRE and other sensitive topics, such as goddess Kali and trauma, was followed.
Appendix M: Demographic Questionnaire (DQ)

[This researcher filled in or underlined the participants’ answers].

Please answer each question only as asked without expounding.

1. I am a woman born in India. Yes _____ No _____
2. I am _______ years old.
3. I have been in the U.S.A. for ______________months/years.
4. I am married/divorced/single.
5. I am or was married to the eldest brother. Yes ___.
   If not, explain your hierarchy in your husband’s family ___________________.
6. Please explain in a sentence or two why you remained single or whether you intend to get married in the future._______________________________________________________________.
7. I used to ___ or currently ___ live with my in-laws.
8. If your nuclear family used to live with your in-laws, why did you move away?
   _________________________________________________________________.
9. I have ____ sons and ____ daughters.
10. My highest level of education is _________________________________.
11. My education was in ______________________________ country.
12. My education was in ______________________________ language.
13. My profession is ______________________________ or, I am a home-maker ____.
14. If I work for a wage, I work from the home ____ or outside the home ____.
15. When in India and if you were married then, did your husband ____ or in-laws ____
   approve your working outside the home? [Asked based on answer to question 14.]
16. I was born in _______________________________(region and state in India).
17. I was born into the ____________________________ religion; 
__________________________ community; and ____________________ caste.

18. At this time I consider my caste or religion to be ____________________________.

19. If you follow religious rituals, have you changed your natal family’s rituals to those of 
your husband’s family _____ or, do you practice your own rituals _____.

20. Have you had ____ , do you still have _____, or have you never had _____ any 
exceptional religious or spiritual experiences?

21. If yes, can you say what it could be in a sentence. ____________________________.

Note to reader: This researcher proposes that these questions are within cultural norms, 
reflect aspects of the culture with which the participants would be familiar and not consider 
offensive, and give answers to demographic variables that are of interest to the present study. 
For example, asking if in-laws object to a daughter-in-law working outside the family is 
within culturally appropriate boundary; for many orthodox families, women working outside 
the home is not encouraged and women are used to this. In lower socioeconomic status 
families, women are necessitated to work for a wage. However, in all cases, the answer to 
this question would reveal any oppressive or double-bind conditions for the participant.
Appendix N: Semistructured Questionnaire (SSQ)

*Introduction:* You already told me your life story and experiences during the narration, for which I thank you; it was very helpful for this research. Now, I want to ask some specific questions in addition, some of which you may have told me about.

1. Do you practice religion regularly? What rituals you follow, where, how often, and so on?

2. Please name the practices you follow (for example, praying, meditating, going to the temple, private spiritual meetings with friends, *bhajans*, and so on).

3. To which god, gods, or deities do you pray?

4. Do you believe in karma?

5. Do you believe in fate or do you believe that we are in control of what happens to us?

6. Would you explain unfortunate life circumstances, events, or ill-health to karma or fate?

7. Has coming to the U.S.A. been a happy, traumatic, or neutral event for you? Please explain a bit as to why.

8. Are you familiar with spirit possession? Please tell it in detail. If so, please answer the following.

9. Did you have this experience in India or in the USA?

10. How many times in each place?

11. Does the spirit currently visit you?

12. If you stop to think about it, do you feel that something in your life triggered this/these experience/s?

13. How were you feeling before this/these experience/s?

14. How did you feel after this experience or after the first time it occurred?

15. How do you feel:
   (a) at the present time?
   (b) in general about the experience/s?
   (c) in relation to the experience/s?

16. Do you feel that your experience helped or healed you in a deeper, spiritual way? If so, describe.
17. If you had any distress prior to your experience of spirit possession, how do you now feel emotionally, psychologically, or physically ill because of the experience of spirit possession?

18. Did you feel any distress during or after the experience of spirit possession, or felt the spirit would not leave? If so, describe it.

19. If you felt the above-mentioned distress, was there adverse reaction or criticism from others and if so, from whom?

20. If you felt distress, were you helped in any way, or were you professionally treated?

21. Do you feel any distress currently or have you felt any distress since your last experience of spirit possession that has not alleviated?

22. Were there periods in your life which you don’t remember, or have other people narrated events where you were present that you don’t remember?

23. Have you ever felt or had distress, and if so, do you feel it had/has any other reason/s. besides your experience of spirit possession?

24. If so, was or is the distress due to any family problem or a relationship problem? Explain.

25. Did you ever feel fearful of spirit possession, or that it was unreal, or that you could not handle it?

26. If so, were you hospitalized or treated as if you were mentally unstable and by whom?

27. If so, did you feel ashamed?

28. If so, what did you feel ashamed about/for?

*Note to reader:* This line of questioning poses the risk of specificity namely, fear, stigma, and hospitalization at the end so as not to scare away the participant. Further, although some of these aspects may have been mentioned in the narration, the answers from this questionnaire gave more specific details useful in quantitative data analyses.
Appendix O: Observational Notes

Additional data in an interview with a classical Indian dancer visiting the United States as well as observational notes of trance during ritualized spirit possession during weekly *bhajans* over 3 months enrich participant narrations and add to qualitative data.

*The Dancer: An Invocation of Lord Shiva*

I met The Dancer at the start of gathering data in August 2010 at her local classical dance recital which I attended to recruit participants for this research. Indian classical dance originated in the temple and its basis or the underlying philosophy is cosmic and mythical. During the performance, The Dancer seemed to have an internalized focus that was trance-like. Yet, her connection with the small audience was revealed in their rapture in the closeness of a small room. It was as if she created a triangle between herself, the audience, and something akin to divinity and which three aspects at once also merged. Following is her narration during a solicited interview, in English, that took place the week following the performance. Redundancies were eliminated and her formation of sentences and language is reproduced verbatim.

*Interviewer starting statement:* When I saw you dancing, you invoked the divine.

*The Dancer:* Yes. That is the way the source I have. Because I totally believe in this: through your own work, you can connect with the Lord. Even my parents had a very broad view about the religion. And, moreover, we were artistic family. My father was also busy. So this was the best way to connect, our own art form to give the values of the religion. Religion was, people mistook it, what religion is. Religion is to give happiness to others. Every religion talks about only one thing, happiness of all the humankind. And peace for all humankind. Never it was said, in the Bible or the Mahabharata, there will be some person in between you and the lord. Your connection with the lord has to be direct, so why the priests are there in between us. When I dance, I feel the majestic power of [god] Shiva. When Shiva hit the floor, with the feet, the sound was produced, that sound was a music. When he moved his body the dance was produced. For me, Shiva is nature, totally nature. I’m a practitioner of Buddhist practice you know, death is the beginning of a life, a new life. Shiva is the creator, he is destroyer too. But when this destruction comes then only the life starts. So for me Shiva is the ultimate power. They say he created the whole thing.
Interviewer: To me, you had this very personal contact with the divine. Your expressions and your passion, that is what came through. Technically there are lots of good dancers, but this connection is something that you brought out.

The Dancer: It’s because from last 8 years I’m totally into Buddhist practice because you know, it’s the only religion that is left which is talking about only peace and happiness of the humankind. So this change has come in last 10 years. I really want to connect people, through my work, with that divine quality. Through my work I will show the expression of, I want to connect the people to the lord, the ultimate happiness. So when they are watching me, they should totally be connected with that lord, that giving nature.

Interviewer: Have you had any exceptional experiences?

The Dancer: So many times. Fifty percent happens there [makes a general hand motion indicated the external or outside the self], 50% happens on the stage. So, whatever is happening there [hand direction to the outside] it is again my part of the dance. I never dreamed a barrier line. So once I was performing in Ujjain and the audience was all those people who were left their home, there were big beard, sadhus. So I was doing one item [dance] there which is Mira’s [female saint] bhajan. In one particular item Mira is asking to be one with the Lord. She doesn’t want to be “you are there and I am here, no, I want to be you.” One thing I want to say is very clear, I never set my abhinay [choreography] before I go on the stage—the expression, the poetry, I never set it. But what I’m going to do physically, mentally, with my eyes, that happens because of the people who are looking at me. So whatever I did, in the end of that show, the Monibaba [a sadhu] who has never spoken for years and years wrote on his slate and said: “First time Krishna came to ashram. I saw Krishna in you.” In my performance of one and a half hours or whatever it is, there are many, many moments I don’t perform, I don’t care about the audience, I become lost. What I did I don’t know. I was so much into it, at certain point, I was totally blank. So I came into the light and they were clapping and, then, there was no link, I was not knowing what I did the last piece. The link was totally broken with the clap of the audience. I was lost in it.

Interviewer: Were you aware of anything?

The Dancer: Yes, my guru, my teacher. I felt that he was there with me and was making me do the best what I can do. I made it my thing, I have to do it, I have to convince the people. If you have to connect with the lord, the supreme power, you have to give that love to each and every thing in your life. Give that love, and connect them, Totally, let’s go together and try to knock the door of that supreme power, where are you, we want you with us. And believe me it happens. It becomes part of you. And it became part of me in a way that, the dancer, who was the modern dancer [an American dancer at the recital], she started crying. She was connected. My effort was done. For me it’s important how much they have taken from me. How much I have poured out. It should be 100% from my side. Now she will be different when she’s teaching students. [The Dancer narrated about a neighbor who had once told her about a young woman’s oppression because she had no children]. Ayse eee mere moo say [just out of my mouth] like that only it came, I said
“don’t worry, everything will happen. Relax, be relaxed. And you will have a beautiful child.” When that compassion is there in you, that supreme power will not be so cruel. And after two to three years when I met that lady, she was with a child and she touched my feet. So, like, everybody in my family or my friends they always feel that I’m a very enlightened woman. Frankly speaking, I don’t know what they are thinking, but if it is religious what I am doing through my work, then I am a very religious woman. If it is called a spirituality, then I am a very spiritual woman. I don’t want to make it two separate things from my entity.

*Interviewer:* Do you believe in spirit possession. The women who get possessed and sometimes become healers.

*The Dancer:* That girl [a participant in the present research we had discussed] who became a healer, that was a faith which she had because she was suffering earlier. With lots of patience she collected there in her heart; her in-laws were giving her suffering, that made her very powerful. And when she opened her eyes in one moment, she was powerful person because she had a power to, she was not a weak person, she could have also revolted to her mother-in-law but she kept it in her heart. So that made her a powerful person. I cannot take away your suffering. This I believe in. You have to take care of it yourself, with your own power, with your own connection with the Lord. With your own faith that yes, you can erase these sufferings in your life. You are lonely, that loneliness is created here in your mind. Otherwise you are not lonely, it is up to you. I actually respect all these type of things because it must have felt it or witnessed it, so I don’t condemn whoever is saying it or feeling it. My mentor says whenever there is a suffering, some problem in your life, Lord has given us change to grow. When you fight against it you will become more strong. So this world suffering, this what Buddha, my mentor says: “rejoice it.”

*Atman* is soul, but *parmatma* is also there in you. What remains here, The Buddha says, is myself. One thing remains here is myself. And that is what atman is. Atman is good things which you leave behind. My only struggle is to be one with the environment. Acceptance for what should be there. Be one with it and leave it. Surrender it. Don’t die like that, be a victor.

I never asked the audience to clap with me in the last item. They started clapping, why? It was becoming one with that law. The whole environment forced them to be one with me. It was not me, it was the power of that whole music and the things which were, you can say, beautiful souls were there who were blessing them. Angels were there, they were touched with those angels, the audience you know. It’s not me, I was there on the stage enjoying that and asking them to come there and bless everybody. [She narrates a dance performance where she enacted an old woman]. She’s touching Rama, old woman, eyesight is weak what is to see there? When I was doing it I was crying. It was a very beautiful moment of my life. There was no Rama as a person [actor], I was doing a solo, you know. But I created my Rama there. And if you are saying I have seen something [visions], yes, I see my creators. When I talk to Krishna, Krishna is there.
The Dancer’s narration shows some common themes found in participant’s narrations. The Dancer aspires for a connection with the divine through her dance form. She considers it her “work” and that it is her duty to connect the audience with the divine. Often she goes into a trance-like state when she is unaware of what she is doing or how she is dancing. In creating the forms of gods like Rama and Krishna during a recital she has to envision the forms of these gods and she believes they are there, just as she visualizes and believes that the angels are dancing during her performances and helping to connect her with the audience. She attributes her values of nonviolence, peace, and love for all, to Buddhist teachings. She experienced blessing an infertile woman and prophesying the conception of her child; people consider her prophetic.

Saint Sai Baba Visits “The Devotee”

Sai Baba is twice the reincarnation of god Shiva. Shirdi Sai Baba lived in Shirdi, a small village in the state of Maharashtra, India, in the 19th century. Achieving saint status after his transformation and proof of healing powers, he predicted that he would be reincarnated in 8 years. Satya Sai Baba was born 8 years later in south India and is alive. It is predicted that when he dies, a third avatar of Shiva, the second reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba, will be born.

I was introduced to a weekly bhajan by an informant who responded to my recruiting email to her cultural organization. My entrance into the bhajan room and my first encounter with a trance involving possession by a deity was a dramatic and memorable event. We entered late, in the midst of the ritualized trance. Having blessed the line of about 100 kneeling devotees, my informant and I were hurriedly pushed by devotees-in-charge, as late entrants, toward The Devotee for her blessings. In looking into her eyes I thought I was paying respect; perhaps I was supposed to have lowered my eyes out of respect? Dressed as Sai Baba, The Devotee looked back into my eyes through what I imagined would look like a dissociated person’s eyes—a hazy
look. Later, I had the feeling that she/he was perusing me as someone new to the bhajan and who looked more western than most of the devotees in the audience.

These bhajans became my weekly ritual. The congregation sang devotional songs continuously throughout the bhajan, which lasted for about 2 hours. On some occasions, Sai Baba visited The Devotee and she went into a trance. Each time, as soon as the vigilant young priest saw this, he and another male devotee dressed The Devotee as Sai Baba, in a white cloak over her sari, would carry her to the altar and set her on a red velvet seat. She would then be garlanded and given a hookah to smoke; Sai Baba is pictorially depicted as having a hookah next to Him and this ritual attempts to emulate Sai Baba’s originality to the extent that The Devotee sits in a stooped position and acts as an older person—on two occasions she/he walked among the devotees in a stooped position while being led by two of the assistant devotees.

On my first visit, the priest explained the history of the “temple,” which is a large room in The Devotee’s extended family home. The Devotee and her family used to have regular prayer meetings when, at one such meeting, a visitor from the East Coast claimed to see Sai Baba standing next to The Devotee. Moved, he sent, in homage, larger-than-life sized statues of Sai Baba and two other gods to The Devotee so that she could enlarge the shrine. From then on, The Devotee has been visited by Sai Baba, evidenced by her trance; she does not remember anything of the period he visits, which is about half an hour or as long as it takes for the congregation to be blessed. On one auspicious occasion I guessed there were about 500 devotees; most had to sit in the room downstairs, some spilled onto the street. They watched the bhajan recorded via a large screen television and I felt fortunate to have arrived in good time to be in the main temple room. On this day, the trance lasted as long as all devotees were blessed. During the announcements prior to the start of the bhajans, the priest occasionally has said that The Devotee
The priest continued to give the temple’s history, showing the ashes that spontaneously appear on Sai Baba’s picture and the *ghee* that appears on Krishna’s statue. These are *vibhuti* or *prasad* (gifts, blessings)—although these are offerings of food and flowers placed before the statues of the gods in the shrine, the congregation unequivocally believes that they originate from Sai Baba and are blessed by him. These *vibhuti* are then returned by Sai Baba in The Devotee’s body to each member during the blessing. At an external level, nobody acknowledges this, the human origin of *vibhuti* is repressed and *prasad* simply and miraculously manifests from Sai Baba or god. Sai Baba’s *vibhuti* of flowers are crushed by The Devotee in her hands and she allows the yellow pollen to fall onto the white paper that is given by the chief devotees to each devotee as they inch forward on their knees toward The Devotee to collect His *vibhuti*. Other *vibhuti* are sweets, *pān*, sacred thread to wear around the wrist, coins, and so on.

The Devotee, when she is visited by Sai Baba, is referred to as “Baba.” I too began to call her “Baba” when I interviewed participants or when I knelt in front of Him for blessing. In The Devotee’s possession, there was no physical display of the deity “mounting” The Devotee or The Devotee being “played upon” like a flute (Keller, 2002, p. 76), or “hysterical” as participant Malati said. My informant called this a “quiet trance” more conducive to the United States. Two aspects of this trance observation deserve merit as it relates to theoretical sensitivity during analysis by grounded theory: There are certain occasions when The Devotee predicts that she will go into a trance; as specified previously, often the priest informed this to the congregation at the start of a *bhajan* or during the prior week’s *bhajan*. Ritual, as spirit possession, has a
performative aspect in India, about which Knipe (2005) says: “The occupation and preoccupation of these individuals is ritual, and the relationship between personal narrative and ritualism-as-calling discloses intriguing aspects of possession phenomena,” (p. 2), including rivalries (Howe, 2000). These rivalries are in the form of “external competition between ritualists’ striving for recognition. . . [or] within the ritualist whose body may be serving as medium for more than one supernatural power” (Knipe, 2005, p. 2). Finally, see Tambiah (1979) for the performative aspect of ritual.
Appendix P: Iterative Questions for Grounded Theory Saturation

First Round of Iterative Questions:

Name: ______________________ Pseudonym: ___________________ Date: ___________

On Spirit Possession

1. Do you think that spirit possession is more likely to be believed by and observed in women who are not highly educated?
2. If so, what do you think is the connection between education and belief in religious practices?
3. How do you think spirit possession is a religious practice?
4. Do you think spirit possession can only occur in women (leaving aside men who also get possessed) who have some psychological issue? Such as psychologically disturbed, abused, under some life stress, unhappy home or married life, and so on.
5. Do you think that spirit possession has any psychological benefit?

On Unity with the Divine

Introduction: Perhaps you mentioned in your narration some personal experience that involved some manner of connection with the divine. It could be awe, a connection with nature, a feeling of peace during meditation or rituals, or a feeling of the presence of the supernatural, god, or a deity. For the moment, for our purpose, we will simply call all these experiences “a connection with the divine.” Please answer the following further questions on this topic:

6. Do you agree with the phrase “connection with the divine”?
7. If not, can you give an alternate concept?
8. What is or was your experience of connecting with the divine or of your concept as you define it above? Please describe it.
9. Would you say that your experience also involved a unity with the divine? In other words, did you feel that you were one with the divine? This possibility arises from religious philosophy that says that Atma or god is within each individual.
10. In view of this discussion about unity with the divine, do you want to add anything to our previous discussion on spirit possession?

On Psychological Wellbeing

11. Does any of what we have discussed so far benefit your psychological wellbeing? If so, please explain further.
On Trauma

*Introduction:* For our purpose, we will differentiate between trauma and suffering. Trauma is any event that causes a trauma to the body, mind, soul. Examples of trauma are domestic violence, sexual abuse, being involved in war, and so on. Suffering would be caused by a trauma; however, suffering need not involve an external agency, one can also have existential suffering or be depressed. The suffering that is relevant for our purpose is over and above normal suffering due to a life event.

12. Please say whether you have had a trauma, or suffering, or both, in your life.  
13. Has any of what we have been discussing remind you of that trauma or your suffering in any of the following ways?  
   a. Was it a source of comfort for you to have this connection with the divine?  
   b. Did the trauma trigger a greater feeling of connection with the divine?  
   c. Did the trauma diminish the beliefs you had about your religion or your connection with the divine?

*Second Set of Iterative Questions by Email*

1. How do you define acculturation?  
2. Do you feel you are acculturated in this country?  
3. What is the role of your spiritual beliefs or religious rituals such as going to the temple, in your American social life?  
4. For example, are any of your American friends aware of the extent of your spirituality or practices?  
5. Do you expect your children to follow your religion?  
6. Are your children into your cultural activities?  
7. Do they and you socialize mostly with Americans or Indians or half-half?

*Third Set of Iterative Questions by Email*

These questions were emailed to relevant women based on their narrations or our discussions.  

1. You identified as atheist. How do you say that atheism is different from agnosticism?  
2. You answered “no” to religious rituals. At the same time, you listed that you listen to some taped religious words. When you are in India, do you go to the temple with your family or partake in any rituals? How do you explain this? For example, does it provide some solace, peace, connection with your family?
3. What is your idea of the difference between religiosity and spirituality?

4. What is your evaluation of the Hindu religion?

5. Is there any way that your traditional beliefs or habits come in your way in the American world?

6. When people tell of SP experiences, what is your interpretation of it?

7. Do you feel there is an external energy?

8. Can you say something about your idea of any inside (yourself) and outside? Had you thought about this before? Can there be a connection between the two?

*Fourth Set of Iterative Questions by email (for theme “Acculturation”)*

1. About how many American friends do you have?

2. Are most of your American friends work-related?

3. Do you socialize with them outside work?

4. If so, do you socialize with them by yourself or with your husbands?

5. Has any American friend invited you to their house for say, Thanksgiving, or a vacation together?

6. Have you invited any American friends to your special occasions?

7. Are most of your American friendships not social? (Do you, for example, only talk at work, lunch from work, talk on phone, exchange greeting cards).

8. Do you prefer American or Indian food?

9. Do you divulge confidences to American or Indian friends?

10. Do your children’s American friends come to your house? Are they of all cultures?

11. Are there any American festivities that you routinely partake in, such as July 4th fireworks?

12. Please write anything else you wish.
Appendix Q: Participant’s Email Responses to Iterative Questions

*Siri’s Email Response*

**Question 1:** How do you define acculturation?
*Answer 1:* Influence of one culture on another that changes the culture of one or the other.

**Question 2:** Do you feel you are acculturated in this country?
*Answer 2:* Yes, but not in regard to religion.

**Question 3:** What is the role of your spiritual beliefs or religious rituals such as going to the temple, in your American social life?
*Answer 3:* It's part of it. For both me and my family.

**Question 4:** For example, are any of your American friends aware of the extent of your spirituality or practices?
*Answer 4:* Somewhat. Not completely.

**Question 5:** Do you expect your children to follow Hinduism?
*Answer 5:* No. Jainism.

**Question 6:** Are your children into your cultural activities?
*Answer 6:* Yes.

**Question 7:** Do they and you socialize mostly with Americans or Indians or half-half?
*Answer 7:* Both.

*Rama’s Email Response:*

**Question 1:** How do you define acculturation?
*Answer 1:* To me acculturation means retention of your cultural roots without compromising their value and integrating those values as much as you can with the borrowed culture.

**Question 2:** Do you feel you are acculturated in this country?
*Answer 2:* I am happy I can continue doing what I can to feel culturally connected to my country [India]. I am also very happy to be able to look at other cultures with as much respect that the other cultural groups give my cultural background.

**Question 3:** What is the role of your spiritual beliefs or religious rituals such as going to the temple, in your American social life?
*Answer 3:* My social life has not changed or has not been impacted because of cultural differences. I believe that no matter where your roots belong, the values that they
impart do not vary with cultures. Human values to me is of top significance and as long as those values stay uncompromised, nothing impacts my social life.

**Question 4:** For example, are any of your American friends aware of the extent of your spirituality or practices?

**Answer 4:** Not particularly. I am not embarrassed to share my spiritual experiences with them and do on several occasions discuss very philosophical and spiritual issues with a few of my American friends.

**Question 5:** Do you expect your children to follow Hinduism or believe in Sai Baba?

**Answer 5:** I do not have any expectations. If they do, it might make them strong basically, if my children find strength in themselves and follow basic human values, they will automatically be a good individual, Hindu or otherwise.

**Question 6:** Are your children into your cultural activities?

**Answer 6:** Yes, to a certain extent.

**Question 7:** Do they and you socialize mostly with Americans or Indians or half-half?

**Answer 7:** My children socialize with 50-50, and we the parents interact (socially and other like at work) with 80-20 (80 percent is Indian).
Appendix R: Glossary

Āārti: Ritual of burning camphor in a container. The smoke is considered holy and people try to surround themselves with it, blowing it toward them with their hands. The lit camphor in its lamp is taken around the entire location where the puja is done so that the smoke envelops the area. Aarti is one of the most common and simplest rituals performed daily or occasionally in most homes. Often incense is burned in place of doing aarti, or lighting a lamp.

Abhinay: In classical Indian dance, the essence of the performance, the technicality.

Ammā: Literally means mother, it is more a south Indian word. Often used to address respected elders. The woman who is currently called Amma is considered a saint and practices in her center in the East Bay area, east of San Francisco.

Ātmā: Soul. Often considered in union with god—god is within us, in our atma.

Ayatul Kursi: Islamic prayer that starts with the phrase: “I seek refuge in Allah from the outcast Satan.”

Bhagwān: God

Bhaiya: Literally means brother. Among nonmodernized people, women call men who are not their husbands, bhaiya rather than their first name.

Bhajan: A religious or devotional song. Often the word is also used for gatherings or Satsangs where devotional songs are sung; Satsang is a more appropriate word to denote a gathering of people for devotional reasons. A person can also call her own private singing of devotional songs, bhajan, as in doing bhajan. Bhajan is the cognate of the word “Bhakti.” Bhajans are also recorded for listening.

Bhakti: Worship; devotion; devotional worship; religious devotion. The main purpose of bhajans is bhakti meaning “path of love,” and often involving religious ecstasy, awe, or trance (Harvey, 2002, p. 50).

Bhagvad Gita: A Hindu text denoting the lessons given by Lord Krishna to Arjuna of a royal family as he battled in the Kurukshetra war; an epic text that gained a religious symbolism.

Bhava: Ecstatic, devotional state (of mind).

Brahmanical Sutras: As a genre, Sutras are a group of highly laconic yet aphoristic Vedic religious texts meant for lay-use.

Cakra: Also chakra. Originating in the religious text Upanishads, cakra refers to one of seven energy points in the body paralleling cosmic energy. In Sanskrit it means “wheel/turning.”
Devapuja: Worship (puja) of god (deva) through icons or images in home or temple.

Diwali: New Year; the word is also used for New Year’s festivals and events.

Ganesh: Also Ganesha, Ganapath, Ganapathi. Fondly depicted by an elephant head, this deity removes impediments and bestows order and thus, worshipped at the start of auspicious events.

Ganesh Chaturthi: Birthday of Lord Ganesh.

Ghee: Clarified butter.

Gṛhya-sūtra: Any of the religious manuals (sūtra) detailing the ritual performed in the home (grhya) by family members in their own shrine over their own family fire. These rituals are specifically for rites of a male’s passage.

Gulmohr: A tree of the Delonix regia species known for its bright red flowers. Gul means flower and mohr means peacock, suggesting a dramatic show of flowers.

Gurdwārā: Temple of the Sikh faith. Known for its real gold overlay, commonly called the Golden Temple.

Kali: Like many words common to the Indian culture, Kali is pronounced differently in different parts of India. In this paper, transliteration is according to the authors cited; otherwise, Kali is the spelling used.

Kārtikeyā: Younger brother of Lord Shiva

Kirtan: Chanting, especially at Satsangs or religious gatherings. These chats are bhajans, both of which usually involve a devotional calling by the chief singers or priest followed by a response or repeat from the congregation. The vibrations from a Kirtan is said to have healing powers.

Kripa or Kirpa: Another word for devotional singing, in Punjabi and used more than bhajan by Punjabis and Sikhs, as did the two Sikh participants in this study, Sher and Saisha.

Maharashtrian: Someone from the Indian state of Maharashtra; also their language, Maharashtrian.

Mahabharata: Religious-social epic.

Mānav bhakti: Service to all (human) people. Manav means humanity; bhakti means devotion.

Mandir: Temple.

Māsī: Pronounced mahsee. Mother’s sister.
Mata: Mother. This name for mother is not daily usage. It is usually referred to a mother goddess, especially Kali. When the suffix “ji” is added, it is used to denote respect to an elder woman who is generically called “mother—mataji.

Maya: Illusion. When used as a noun, it refers to the deity who controls illusion and duality. As was discussed during one of the bhajans I attended where Sai Baba is manifest, and as narrated by Rama, the understanding of this duality is the way to nonduality necessary to attain Nirvana.

Moksh/Moksha: Nirvana, freedom from rebirth. The result of good deeds.

Murdi: Statue, religious icon, usually of a smaller size.

Nāām simrān: Naam means name and simrān means to contemplate or to remember. Together it means repeating the name of god or chanting. It is a phrase more often used by Sikhs.

Nataraj/ā: God of dance.

Navratri or Navratrā: Nav means nine; ratri means night. It is the festival of 9 nights celebrating goddess Durga or Maa (mother) Durga, the goddess of energy pervading the universe. The ninth night is the culminating celebration when devotees often go into a trance. Mass spirit possession is seen on the streets in India during this time.

Pān: Areca, a drupe, is commonly called betel nut because a it is eaten wrapped in a the edible betel leaf. Often also filled with sweetened, shredded areca and coconut, and spices such as cardamom and cloves, the catechu that is spread on the leaf is what gives the mouth a red color. The preparation of pan is a ritual and its partake, auspicious and bonding. Eating pan is a custom common to South-East Asia since recorded history.

Paramatma: Atma or soul literally means being (as in a human being). Paramatma means supreme being, that which is outside of us, cosmic, all encompassing. This relates well to the discussion of nonduality and connection with the divine in the present paper because the difference between atma and paramatma disappears when the atma blends with the paramatma. In the Upanishads, atma and paramatma are the same; paramatma is Brahman and resides in each living soul.

Prasad: Offering given to deity who then blesses it during puja or bhajan and is “given back” to the congregation, symbolically as if coming directly from the deity. See vibhuti.

Puja: Literally means adoration or devotion. It refers to any simple prayer ritual of an offering, generally flowers, and often involving the lighting of camphor or incense. The requirement of a puja is that it be performed in a sanctified place that usually becomes the routine place of conducting the puja, such as a part of the house or corner of a room. As such, where the puja is performed had religious icons and forms a small shrine. Camphor or incense lit during puja is carried to other areas to envelop them with the now-sacred smoke. A puja is most often a private ritual; household members do their own puja.
**Ram**: Hindu God

**Rangoli**: A pattern formed on the ground or floor or ground with white and colored rice power, generally at the doorway. It is considered sacred and is not stepped on; as such, it frames the doorway or is drawn on a space that is not stepped on. I can command a larger, more central space such as the middle of a courtyard, in which case it is a bigger square or round design. Traditionally, the design is created free-hand with the powder between the thumb and forefinger. Alternately, there are stamps that can be filled with the powder and stamped down on the ground in different arrangements. Rangoli is washed off, often the next day to prepare for its reapplication; this symbolizes several aspects of Indian religion and culture such as the concept of impermanence, and the performance of ritual.

**Sadhu**: Holy man; different from a formal priest, Sadhu’s usually are not keepers of temples but rather lead the life of a sanyasi or one who has given up on worldly matters. As such, they are “homeless” and depend on offerings of food and other necessities.

**Saint Sai Baba**: A saint born in India and worshipped in many parts of the world including Fiji.

**Samadhi**: A step in the process to achieve Nirvana. Samadhi is often mislabeled as Nirvana. The Samadhi step involves meditation and intense ritual of days of fasting and abstinence from worldly events as a form of cleansing the soul. If successful, it is intended to culminate in trance and union with the Divine with feelings of Nonduality.

**Satsang**: Worship

**Shakti/Sakti**: External energy, usually associated with or denoted by female form.

**Sita**: God Ram’s consort.

**Sloka**: Religious verses, in Sanskrit, of two lines, each line having 16 syllables.

**Srauta or Shrauta**: Ritual; conservative, ritualistic tradition of ancient, Vedic Hinduism. From the Sanskrit word *shruti* meaning revelation.

**Tantrābhilāsir Sādhu-saṅgha**: *Tantra*, an esoteric Hindu practice, is a “sensual” or earthly yoga practice that worships Kai in the formlessness of the female form of energy called Sakti. The officiating goddess and from whom the name derives, of the Tantra temple in West Bengal, India, is Tara, the reincarnate of goddess Kali. Goddess Tara is equally fearsome; whereas Tara means star, she is iconized with red blood around her mouth signifying her limitless hunger. Some people directly worship Kali as the mother goddess; others worship her through Tara, or both the goddesses are worshiped—preferencing one over the other is considered dangerous. In recent times, a male saint who dedicated his life to goddess Tara is affiliated with Tara’s temple and is still called the “mad sadhu” due to the symbolic-violence surrounding Kali and Tara (Sadhu means holy man; sangha means congregation or gathering; Bhilasi is a location
**Vaiṣṇava** [tradition]: Meaning Vaishnavism, it is the following of God Vishnu. Its philosophy is based on the Upanishads, ancient Indian religious texts that heralded Hinduism and from which arose other important texts such as the Bhagavad Gita. Inherent is the belief in Vishnu’s avatars, mainly Rama and Krishna.

**Vibhuti**: The ash resulting from a ritual’s fire or aarti that is applied to the forehead (and often the throat) at the end of the ceremony. It symbolizes the deity’s offering and can be one of a variety of items kept on the altar to be consecrated during prayer, such as flowers or ghee. Symbolically vibhuti is similar to prasad except that the latter is always an edible item; both are offerings to deity by devotees and are returned, after consecration, by the deity as blessings.
Appendix S: Codes, Categories, and Frequencies of Affirmative Responses

Table S1

*Codes, Themes, and Subcategories from Open and Axial Coding and Memoing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes, and obvious themes thereof</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuse, childhood sexual</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse, domestic violence</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse, at hands of in-laws</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse, parental neglect</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse, physical abuse by parent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence; logic needed for religious beliefs</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belief in divine is growing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Believe, need to believe to experience the divine</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Brahman” is external</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brahman is within</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bhajan”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bhakti”</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black magic experienced from other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bliss, eternal, promised by god</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort from god (religious women)/nature (nonreligious women)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort from rituals</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfort from spiritual practice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort from “something” by atheist women</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Connection” with god, “felt”</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection felt as feeling of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“goosebumps”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“hot”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“sweating”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“shaking”</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone (divine or devil) shaking participant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“shivering”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“tingling”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection as blessing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection with god felt as “a gift”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection, god listened to plea</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to god since childhood</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection, god is getting closer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection, god is “inside”</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection, god is listening</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection, “something taking care of” participant</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection with external “energy”</td>
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</table>

(continued)
### Codes, Themes, and Subcategories from Open and Axial Coding and Memoing (Part 2 of 4)

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Connection as protective power</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection, “in-love” with god/deity</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection with divine, sensory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“heard” god</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heard mantras</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“saw” god</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“saw god from inside”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection, “speaking in tongues”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection, via vision of religious icons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection, saw “angels”</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection, crying when praying</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control; self is in control</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control, lack of, god is in control</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cursed by evil/devil/ghosts</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Dancing,” during prayer</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Darshan”</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreams—significant; “feeling as if real”</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Dreams”—visit by god</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dreams as signs, prophesy, or “messages”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egolessness, aspire for; “no ego”</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Energy/power/Shakti” felt from the external</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy is internal to self only</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusivity; one God or divine</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Exorcism</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evil spirit, ghost, “devil” seen, felt, or belief in</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faith in god needed for “healing”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Faith needed” for prayer to be answered</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith needed for contact with god</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith provides strength</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fate, belief in; lack of personal control</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fate, belief in, plus personal control—contextual</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fate, does not believe in</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings, adjectives used for religious contact—excitement; nervousness; calm; peace; solace; amazing; beautiful; wonderful; joy</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt by participant that she is going “mad”</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forgiveness asked for</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Gender inequality vis-à-vis Indian culture | 3 | (continued)
### Codes, Themes, and Subcategories from Open and Axial Coding and Memoing (Part 3 of 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code or theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Good person”, aim to be, as religious teaching</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healing received from personal prayer/meditation/guru/possessed deity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing, participant can give</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing; divine is father-figure that envelops in comfort</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Higher power,” guiding, taking care of us</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hurt, not to inflict on others” as religious belief</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffability of religious or spiritual experiences and beliefs</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Inside” and “outside” forces/”energy”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity of religious belief from original belief, increase in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slowly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suddenly</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational or role modeling of beliefs and rituals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Karma,” belief in</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma, does not believe in</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Kundalini”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Logic” needed to understand their religion; questioning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic experienced by religious elder</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maya</em>, feeling of unreality; acknowledging that all is illusion</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical help, first medical doctor or psychiatrist</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Message” by god</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nirvana, “<em>moksha</em>”</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonduality felt</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonduality not aspired for</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental influence of religion and ritual</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power of god felt</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power felt within self</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pragmatism, in reference to coping</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer, evocative—for help, power, forgiveness</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prayer, evocative—<em>god</em> listened, answered</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Progressive” family of origin</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophesy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>participant can</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>experienced from religious others/priests/possessed people</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological benefit of interview, enabled introspection</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questioned god, why no answer or solution, or angry at god</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions god or is angry at god after trauma or suffering</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions god because of need for logical reasoning</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reincarnation</td>
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</table>

(continued)
### Codes, Themes, and Subcategories from Open and Axial Coding and Memoing (Part 4 of 4)

<table>
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<td>Religious and/or spiritual from childhood</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Rituals” followed</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rituals give security; healing felt</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rituals, given up</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Shame”</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Signs”, given by god, to heed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soul</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit possession is due to the person’s psychology</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit possession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belief in</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disbelief—“fake”; “attention seeking”; “diversion”</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>“gender-free”, reversal of gender roles</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>healing role, has a</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>saw in others personally</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>is on “higher plane”</td>
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<tr>
<td>needs exorcism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needs psychotherapy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is due to evil spirit only</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual awakening, result of trauma</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual awakening, result of practice</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual maturity felt as not reached</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritually “getting stronger”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudden spiritual awakening; “transformation”</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Superstition, “something will happen” if rituals/beliefs not followed</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Trance” experienced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trance seen in other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transformation from religious to spiritual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trigger, religious or spiritual practice intensified by abuse or suffering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigger, religious belief diminished by abuse or suffering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle of god, self as</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Work,” as in service to others as a concept of spirituality</td>
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</table>
Appendix T: Women’s Groupings Based on Religion

*Women’s Groupings Based on Religion of Family-of-Origin and Their own Religion as Adults*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Family of Origin</th>
<th>Religious participant</th>
<th>Nonreligious participant</th>
<th>Nonreligious participant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakshi</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramitha</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radha</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siri</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saisha</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dipti</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahi</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rama</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gita</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparrow</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veena</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesar</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushpa</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheela</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mala</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hansa</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palak</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sangeetha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prabha</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>
Appendix U: Results of Triangulation by CART

Chapters 3 and 4 gave the method to read CART. Chapter 4 also provided the essence of CART for this particular study. Chapter 4 gave succinct and relevant information on each CART model in this appendix and this appendix details each CART and also provides brief discussions on the findings as they are relevant to understanding the models in depth. Also provided are the additional hand-picked characteristics of the women in each group—this is an innovative, systemic addition to interpreting CART and extends the triangulation and integration of data in which CART-picked characteristics are apparent from the graphs. A justification of CART’s pick of characteristics is also provided in chapters 3 and 4. Overall, this extended, manual triangulation provides an avenue to explain or justify from the qualitative data why some CART placements of women in a group are not corroborated by the women’s narrations and categorical answers. Analysis of CART is best studied side-by-side with biographies and qualitative data.

**CART Prediction of USRE**

*USRE predicted by categorical variables.* See Figure U1. Categorical predictors provided to CART were age, years in the US, level of education, religiosity, trauma, spiritual practice, out-of-body experiences (OOB), and pain tolerance. Under these conditions, 9 more-educated women who had a spiritual practice and were under 49 years of age, and all 5 less-educated women, totaling 14, had USRE. See Table U1 for the names of the women that fall in each of the groups denoted by the four terminal nodes—group 1 starts with the left-most node.
Figure U1. Classification tree predicting unusual experiences by categorical variables (N = 30).

Note. This tree is pictorialized by the researcher as an example for ease in reading.

Table U1

**Groupings of Women for UE Predicted by Categorical Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No USRE.</td>
<td>USRE.</td>
<td>No USRE.</td>
<td>USRE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie§§</td>
<td>Saisha+</td>
<td>Ramitha+</td>
<td>Pakshi*+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veena§§</td>
<td>Sheela+</td>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>Sam*§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansa</td>
<td>Kesar§§</td>
<td>Palak</td>
<td>Rose*+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshan++§§</td>
<td>Mala+§§</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Sher*§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushpa+§§</td>
<td>Dipti+</td>
<td>Prabha</td>
<td>Shirley*+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha++</td>
<td>Shabi+</td>
<td>Rita+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siri§§</td>
<td>Rama+</td>
<td>Mira++</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Gita+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangeetha++</td>
<td>Sparrow+§§</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. + denotes women who had USRE.  
++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.  
* denotes less-educated women.  
§§ denotes reported abuse.  
§ denotes reported trauma.
Analysis of CART graph and groups of women for predicted USRE using categorical predictors. Of the women who did report USRE but were not picked by CART, Ramitha, Asha, Roshan, and Sangeetha initially doubted their USRE, and Pushpa was the only woman who reported being possessed and haunted by ghosts and this may render hers a unique case. Including these women among the 14 that CART showed as having had USRE would bring the total number closer to the demographic number of 20 who reported USRE, but, to repeat, CART gives dynamics based on the variables presented to the software program, and this could be translated to mean that certain conditions are essential for certain phenomena to be considered authentic by definition.

Lattice plot of women grouped for USRE predicted by categorical predictors. Figure U2 gives a visualization of the relationship between the variables in Figure U1 and shows two clusters of women who had USRE, those who had a spiritual practice and were in the more-educated range (top panel) for one cluster and all 5 women who were less-educated, denoted by the five points in the bottom panel, for a second cluster.
Figure U2. Lattice plot depicting unusual experiences by education and spiritual practice ($N = 30$).

*USRE predicted by all categorical and continuous variables except dissociation.* For this model, continuous variables from spirituality and stress scales were added to the list of categorical predictors of USRE, and were comprised of PSS, SIBS, PCL-C, BioPSSISpir, and sociostress data components. The categorical variables were, age, education, religiosity, trauma, spiritual practice, and belief in Sai Baba. Figure U3 shows the CART regression tree with SIBS as the best predictor of USRE where 14 women with scores over 114.5 on conventional spirituality measured by SIBS together with scores lower than 11 on stress-related spirituality measured by Spir, had USRE.

Twelve women who scored under a SIBS score of 114.5 did not have USRE, and 17 women who scored over a SIBS score of 114.5 but also over 11 on Spir also did not have USRE. See Table U2 for the lists of women in the three terminal groups.
Figure U3. USRE predicted by categorical and full continuous variables’ scores without DES (n = 29).

Table U2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veena§§</td>
<td>Pakshi*+</td>
<td>Christy §§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansa</td>
<td>Rose*+</td>
<td>Ramitha+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshan++§§</td>
<td>Sher*+§§</td>
<td>Mira++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha++</td>
<td>Pushpa+§§</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siri§§</td>
<td>Saisha+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>Sheela+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palak</td>
<td>Shirley*+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Rita+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangeetha++</td>
<td>Mala+§§</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Dipti+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesar§§</td>
<td>Shahi+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prabha</td>
<td>Rama+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gita+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sparrow+§§</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 29.
* denotes 4 less-educated women (barring outlier on Spir, Sam).
+ denotes women who had USRE.
++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.
§§ denotes abuse.
Of the remaining 6 women who reported USRE but did not fall into CART’s category of USRE, 4 were the same women who reported an initially doubtful USRE but were not picked by CART in Figure U1 namely, Roshan, Asha, Sangeetha, and Mira. Ramitha and Mira scored above 11 on Spir and were thus not picked by CART in Figure U3. CART’s cutoff score on SIBS was higher than the actual raw score of some women who were placed in the USRE group; apparently, CART considered both SIBS and Spir raw scores as predictors in an if-then fashion and women with the most extreme scores were picked for a particular group. Based on the predicting variables provided to CART, the multiple characteristics that divide the women are different in the two CARTs, and, thus, the 14 women who experienced USRE do not exhibit the same characteristics relative to the groupings in both the CART models. For example, Pushpa’s USRE, considering her fear about the ghosts that haunt her and her religion-associated exorcism attempts, seems to be associated with stress-related spirituality because, when Spir was provided to CART, CART picked her as having USRE whereas, she was not selected in the previous CART (Fig. U1) as having USRE.

Considering EEQ as measuring USRE, EEQ did not correlate with Spir but did correlate with SIBS, \( r(28) = .55, p < .01 \). Further, within EEQ subscales, PMP, too, did not correlate with Spir. However, PMP did correlate with SIBS, \( r = .79, p < .01 \). It was the ego loss subscale of EEQ namely, PD/EL, that correlated with Spir: \( r(28) = .41, p < .05 \).

*Scatter plot for USRE without dissociation in the predicting mix of variables.* Figure U4 shows the dynamic predicted by CART in Figure U3: women who had USRE scored highest on SIBS and scored lowest on Spir, suggesting that conventional spirituality and stress-related spirituality are different constructs. Women who had USRE scored highest on SIBS and scored
lowest on Spir, suggesting that conventional spirituality and stress-related spirituality are different constructs; SIBS and Spir also did not correlate.

![Figure U4](image)

*Figure U4. Scatter plot showing cross-tabulation of SIBS and BioPSSISpir (Spir) scores as best predictors of USRE (n = 29).*

*USRE predicted by all categorical and continuous variables including dissociation.* All variables were provided to CART: DES, PSS, SIBS, PCL-C, EEQP, PMP, PD/EL, PP, PVD, BioPSSI (n = 29), Phy, Psy, Soc, Spir, Sociostress (n = 29), age, years in the US, education level, religiosity, trauma, suffering, abuse, spiritual practice, social work, and belief in Sai Baba. Figure U5, the regression tree for USRE, shows that under these conditions, 18 women, depicted in Table U3, who scored over 25.5 in EEQ had USRE when stress-related spirituality measured by Spir was present and irrespective of the scores on Spir. However, when EEQP scores were lower, under 25.5, there was no USRE irrespective of the scores on conventional spirituality measured.
by SIBS. Thus, in the presence of DES, CART provides a better fit giving 18 women, a figure closer to the 20 women who reported USRE. It is noteworthy that, in the presence of DES, total EEQP was the best predictor of USRE; and, the presence of subscales as predictors provided a finer analysis showing that EEQP superseded its individual subscales of mystic positive, decompensation/ego loss, psychopathology, and visionary dreams in predicting USRE.

**Figure U5.** Regression tree for USRE predicted by all variables including dissociation (n = 29).

Considering correlations to complement the CART in Figure U5, DES correlated with only one full scale namely, EEQ, $r(28) = .50, p < .01$, that I propose as a reason for exceptional experiences emerging as the predictor of USRE in the presence of dissociation. More critical is that DES correlated with the EEQ subscales PD/EL, $r(28) = .64, p < .01$; and PP, $r(28) = .41, p < .05$, but not with PMP. DES also correlated with Spir, $r(28) = .36, p < .05$. Accordingly, PMP did not correlate with Spir, but PD/EL did correlate with Spir: $r(28) = .41, p < .05$. 
Table U3

*Groupings of Women for USRE Predicted by all Variables Including DES*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1, ( n = 3 ): No USRE. Low EEQP, low SIBS</th>
<th>Node 2, ( n = 8 ): No USRE. Low EEQ, high SIBS</th>
<th>Node 3, ( n = 12 ): USRE. High EEQP, low Spir.</th>
<th>Node 4, ( n = 6 ): USRE. High EEQP, high Spir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roshan++§§</td>
<td>Hansa</td>
<td>Pakshi*+</td>
<td>Christie§§×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Asha++</td>
<td>Rose*+</td>
<td>Veena §§×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Siri §§</td>
<td>Sher*+§§</td>
<td>Ramitha+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>Saisha+</td>
<td>Pushpa+§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palak</td>
<td>Sheela+</td>
<td>Mala+§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sangeetha++</td>
<td>Shirley*+</td>
<td>Dipti+§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prabha</td>
<td>Kesar§§ ×</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mira++</td>
<td>Rita+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shahi+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rama+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gita+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sparrow+§§</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* + denotes women who reported USRE. ++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE. * denotes 4 of the 5 less-educated women. (Outlier Sam eliminated) §§ denotes reported abuse. § denotes reported trauma. × denotes women who did not report USRE but CART determined them to have had USRE, suggesting that CART is considering a certain combination of characteristics as denoting the dynamics present in the majority of the women in this category. In other words, there are some aspects of the experiences of Kesar, Christie, and Veena that are similar to those in USRE.

Table U3 shows that the women who reported USRE but had EEQP scores of less than 25.5, Roshan, Sangeetha, and Mira, were, again as in Figure U2, the women who initially doubted their USRE; they also identified as nonreligious and Mira was ambivalent. They were placed in the groups in Table U3 based on their overall EEQP and SIBS scores. They cannot be placed in an USRE group based on their Spir scores (even if their EEQP scores were high) because even a Spir score of zero places a woman in an USRE group provided she has high EEQP scores. Veena, although low in SIBS and Spir, had a score of 28 on EEQP, and this is significant considering that she was an exemplar in qualitative analysis in nonreligiosity but who said that prayer gives her “solace.” Rather than discordance, this simply shows that CART
triangulation was concordant with qualitative results and an outcome, such as Roshan, Sangeetha, Mira, and Veena can be considered with a positive valence as informing their subjectivity.

*CART Interaction Model for USRE (n = 29)*

The literature-based hypothesis that trauma triggers SSP, an unusual/exceptional experience, was extended to see the effect of the addition of spiritual practice in their interaction. In the present study, trauma did not correlate with USRE or PSS but its correlation with PCL-C, \( r(28) = .48, p < .01 \) indicated construct validity. The variables DES, SIBS, EEQPMP (PMP), IMP, Sociostress, age, years in the US, education, and religiosity and were entered to predict dynamics of the interaction of “yes” or “no” with three variables: trauma, USRE, and spiritual practice. Figure U6 (n = 29) shows 7 terminal nodes, symbolizing 7 subgroups of women, based on the different interactions of the three variables with SIBS is the best predictor of different dynamics of interactions between the three variables. Noteworthy is that CART determined 114.5 as the cutoff score for SIBS, whereas the sample mean was 91.55 (SD = 18.89), and a low cutoff score of 7.5 for the intensity of the mystic subscale of exceptional experiences (IMP) compared to the sample mean at 15.93 (SD = 8.74). The 7 groups of women are named, from the far left, in Table U4 and the summary is that three groups of women had USRE: (a) women who scored under 114.5 on conventional spirituality, were over 51 year of age, had experienced trauma, and had no spiritual practice (node 3); (b) women who scored over 114.5 on conventional spirituality, were less-educated, had trauma, and did not have a spiritual practice (node 5); and (c) women who scored over 114.5 on conventional spirituality, were more-educated, scored under 126.5 on sociostress, had experienced trauma, and had a spiritual practice (node 6). Once again, one determining factor for more-educated, religious/spiritual women’s USRE was the presence of sociostress and node 7 shows that high sociostress prevented USRE
in the absence of spiritual practice compared to the high-educated, religious/spiritual women in node 6 who had a spiritual practice.

*Figure U6.* Subgroups of women based on the interaction of trauma, unusual experiences, and spiritual practice by multiple predictor variables (*n* = 29). 1 = yes on that variable.
Table U4

*Groups of Women Manifesting Interaction of Trauma, USRE, and Spiritual Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1, 1,0,0</th>
<th>Node 2, 0,0,0</th>
<th>Node 3, USRE 1,1,0</th>
<th>Node 4, 0,0,1</th>
<th>Node 5, USRE 1,1,0</th>
<th>Node 6, USRE 1,1,1</th>
<th>Node 7, 1,0,0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(n = 2)</td>
<td>(n = 4)</td>
<td>(n = 3)</td>
<td>(n = 3)</td>
<td>(n = 4)</td>
<td>(n = 9)</td>
<td>(n = 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low SIBS,</td>
<td>Low SIBS,</td>
<td>Low SIBS,</td>
<td>Low SIBS,</td>
<td>High SIBS,</td>
<td>High SIBS,</td>
<td>High SIBS,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 51 yrs.,</td>
<td>&lt; 51 yrs.,</td>
<td>Over 51 yrs.,</td>
<td>Over 51 yrs.,</td>
<td>more-educated,</td>
<td>more-educated,</td>
<td>more-educated,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low IMP.</td>
<td>high IMP.</td>
<td>not Newage</td>
<td>Newage.</td>
<td>low sociostress.</td>
<td>low sociostress.</td>
<td>high sociostress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Siri§§        | Hansa Asha++  | Veena§§ Roshan+++§§| Malati Maya   | Pakshi*+ Rose*+  | Saisha+ Sheela+   | Christy§§       |
| Kesar§§       | Gia Sangeetha++| Palak†            | Prabha        | Sher*+§§ Shirley*+| Rita+ Mala+ §§   | Ramitha++       |
|               |               |                   |               |                    |                   | Pushpa§§        |
|               |               |                   |               |                    |                   | Mira++          |

Note. The three numbers denote “yes” or “no” on the three variables, trauma, reported USRE, and spiritual practice, in that order. 1 = yes; 0 = no. Thus, in node 1, “1,0,0” is read as “trauma, no USRE, and no spiritual practice.”

“Low” and “high” scores are relative to the cutoff scores determined by CART.

* denotes women who reported USRE; ++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.
† denotes that Palak did not report USRE.
§§ denotes reported abuse.
§ denotes reported trauma.

Once again, the women who reported USRE but who fell in node 7, the group CART picked as not having USRE, are the same women as in the all the CARTs for USRE. Second, Veena and Palak did not report USRE but are picked by CART as having experienced USRE in the presence of trauma with no spiritual practice. Veena’s outcome here can be considered in her outlier status also in Figure U3 and Table U3; her childhood abuse and its negative impact continuing in her adult life could render hers a unique case. Further, Palak, 93 years of age, reported a soothing external energy—her generation’s norm of detachment will be discussed.
As specified, trauma correlates with PCL-C, \( r(28) = .48, p < .01 \) and not with USRE in this study. I propose that for these women, trauma alone was not sufficient for USRE. USRE correlates with religiosity, \( r(28) = .42, p < .05 \) and thematic analysis of the theme “Transformation” suggested that traumatized women first turned to spiritual or religious practice to heal and that it was the practice that triggered USRE.

*CART Model to Predict “Conventional Spirituality” by SIBS*

All variables were provided to CART as potential predictors of conventional spirituality. Figure U7 shows the regression tree to predict conventional spirituality. The mystic positive subscale of exceptional experiences (EEQPMP or PMP) was the single best predictor of conventional spirituality, and these two constructs correlated. Twelve women who had PMP scores of above 17.5 had the high conventional spirituality out of which, it is critical to note the descriptions of the USRE of the 7 women who had the highest conventional spirituality scores averaging 144.0 with the 5 women who had relatively high conventional spirituality scores averaging 128.0.
Figure U7. CART model to predict conventional spirituality.

Women who had scores lower than 17.5 in PMP were further defined by their dissociation scores measured by DES. The 4 women who had dissociation scores higher than 76.5 had relatively high conventional spirituality scores of 122.0 average. All the women in these three mentioned groups had USRE. However, the last 13 women did not have USRE and they had dissociation scores of lower than 76.5. They were further and again defined by the total exceptional experiences scale scores. Although none of these 13 women in nodes 1 and 2 had USRE 2 of them, Roshan and Asha, had experiences that they initially doubted were USRE but
that we decided to classify as USRE. These groups of women and their overall characteristics are shown in Table U5.

Table U5

*Groupings of Women for Conventional Spirituality Predicted by All Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1. $n = 3$</th>
<th>Node 2. $n = 10$</th>
<th>Node 3. $n = 4$</th>
<th>Node 4. $n = 5$</th>
<th>Node 5. $n = 7$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No USRE</td>
<td>No and 2 cases of doubtful USRE</td>
<td>No USRE</td>
<td>USRE</td>
<td>USRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low mystic positive</td>
<td>Low mystic positive</td>
<td>Low mystic positive</td>
<td>High mystic positive</td>
<td>High mystic positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low dissociation</td>
<td>Low dissociation</td>
<td>Higher dissociation than nodes 1&amp;2</td>
<td>Higher conventional spirituality than nodes 1&amp;2</td>
<td>Highest mystic positive and conventional spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low exceptional experiences</td>
<td>Lower exceptional experiences than node 1</td>
<td>Lower conventional spirituality</td>
<td>Lower conventional spirituality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower than average conventional spirituality</td>
<td>Lowest conventional spirituality</td>
<td>Lowest conventional spirituality</td>
<td>Lowest conventional spirituality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Malati
Prabha
Mira

Veena§§
Hansa
Roshan++§§
Asha++
Siri§§
Palak
Gia
Sangeetha++
Maya
Kesar§§

Ramitha+
Dipti+
Gita+
Sparrow++§§

Christie+§§
Sheela+§
Rita+
Mala+§§
Rama+§

Pakshi+*
Rose+*§
Sher+*§§
Pushpa+§§×
Saisha+
Shirley+*§
Shahi+§

*Note.* + denotes women who had UE.
++ denotes women who initially doubted their UE.
§§ denotes reported abuse.
§ denotes reported trauma.
* denotes less-educated women. All 4—without outlier Sam—of the less-educated women are in this group.
× denotes ghost possession.

*CART to predict the Mystic Positive Subscale of Exceptional Experiences (PMP)*

The CART model to predict PMP used the following variables: DES, SIBS, sociostress, age, USRE, education, religiosity, trauma, spiritual practice, and New Age. Figure U8 shows SIBS to be the best single predictor of PMP. This was expected considering the strong linear
correlation of PMP and SIBS, $r(28) = .79, p < .01$, and a scatter plot, Figure U9, nicely shows this. Table U6 shows the women in each CART grouping. Women who scored highest on SIBS also scored highest on PMP, whereas, women who scored low on SIBS and high on sociostress, scored the lowest on PMP—this dynamic can be seen in lattice scatterplot in Figure U10. However, women who scored low on SIBS and low on sociostress but also low on DES also scored nearly as low on PMP. Table U6 shows the women in each of the 5 nodes in Figure U8.

Figure U8. CART regression tree for PMP ($n = 29$).
Table U6

*Groupings of Women for Mystic Positive (PMP)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1, ( n = 5 ). Low SIBS, low sociostress, low DES. Low MP</th>
<th>Node 2, ( n = 7 ). Low SIBS, low sociostress, high DES. Average MP.</th>
<th>Node 3, ( n = 6 ). Low SIBS, high sociostress. Lowest MP.</th>
<th>Node 4, ( n = 5 ). High SIBS but lower than in women in node 5. Over average MP.</th>
<th>Node 5, ( n = 6 ). Highest SIBS, highest MP.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hansa</td>
<td>Veena§§</td>
<td>Ramitha+</td>
<td>Christie§§</td>
<td>Pakshi*+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha++</td>
<td>Sheela+</td>
<td>Roshan++§§</td>
<td>Pushpa+ §§</td>
<td>Rose*+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palak</td>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>Siri§§</td>
<td>Mala+§§</td>
<td>Sher*+ §§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesar§§</td>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Sangeetha++</td>
<td>Rama+</td>
<td>Saisha+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prabha</td>
<td>Rita+</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Gita+</td>
<td>Shirley*+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dipti+</td>
<td>Mira++</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shahi+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sparrow+§§</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * denotes all 4 less-educated, highly religious women. (The 5th, Sam, was an outlier). + denotes women who reported USRE. ++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE. §§ denotes women who experienced abuse.
Figure U9. Scatter plot showing a strong linear relationship between Mystic Positive experiences (PMP) and conventional spirituality (SIBS).
Figure U10. Lattice scatter plot for Mystic Positive experienced (PMP). Shows that women who scored high in sociostress, scored low in conventional spirituality measured by SIBS and low in mystic experiences; and women who scored low in sociostress, scored high in conventional spirituality and mystic experiences (n = 29).

CART Model to Predict Stress-Related Spirituality by BioPSSIspir

All variables were provided to CART as potential predictors of stress-related spirituality. Figure U11 shows the regression tree to predict stress-related spirituality, which was best predicted by the social subscale of the BioPSSI, or Soc. Four women, Christie, Ramitha, Maya, and Mira, who had Soc scores of over 18.0, had the highest stress-related spirituality of the sample, scoring 18.5 on an average, three times as high as the sample average stress-related
spirituality score of 6.66. The rest of the women who had Soc scores of under 18.0 were further divided into groups, starting with the full BioPSSI scale as the next predictor of Soc.

*Figure U11.* CART model to predict stress-related spirituality, Spir.

*Note.* Due to an input error difficult to correct in Word text, PCL-C was misspelled as PLCC.

The analysis hereon involves all the rest of the 25 women and reveals four groups, two groups of women with high BioPSSI scores higher than 19.5 and two groups with BioPSSI scores of lower than 19.5. The women with high BioPSSI scores are further defined by the intensity of their mystic positive subscale scores—women who scored lower than 15.5 on mystic positive had higher than average stress-related spirituality 9.17, although not as high as the women who had higher scores on the social subscale.
Women who scored lower than 19.5 on the BioPSSI were further defined by PCL-C, the scale for posttraumatic stress and women who had low scores on the BioPSSI as well as PCL-C (and were also low in Soc), had the lowest stress-related spirituality, almost zero (0.286). Three of the 4 less-educated women were in this group; Sher, as the only less-educated woman who reported abuse, was not in this group; however, she was in the next group of higher posttraumatic scores but at the same time, hers was a group that still scored lower than average in stress-related spirituality (4.33). Table U7 shows the groupings of women depicted in the 5 nodes in Figure U11.

Table U7

Groupings of Women for Stress-Related Spirituality by BioPSSI$\text{spir}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1. $n = 7$</th>
<th>Node 2. $n = 6$</th>
<th>Node 3. $n = 6$</th>
<th>Node 4. $n = 6$</th>
<th>Node 5. $n = 4$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USRE</td>
<td>No USRE</td>
<td>No USRE</td>
<td>USRE</td>
<td>USRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low social scale</td>
<td>Low social scale</td>
<td>Low social scale</td>
<td>Low social scale</td>
<td>Highest on social scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest PTSD (0)</td>
<td>Lower than average PTSD</td>
<td>but higher than nodes 1&amp;2</td>
<td>but higher than nodes 1,2&amp;3</td>
<td>(Also high in sociostress)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pakshi*∞+</th>
<th>Rose*∞+§</th>
<th>Malati</th>
<th>Shirley*∞+§</th>
<th>Palak</th>
<th>Kesar§§</th>
<th>Prabhha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veena§§</td>
<td>Sher*+§§</td>
<td>Asha++</td>
<td>Rama+§</td>
<td>Gita+§</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansa</td>
<td>Roshan+++§§</td>
<td>Siri§§</td>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Sangeetha++</td>
<td>Dipti§</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushpa∞×§§</td>
<td>Saisha+</td>
<td>Sheela+§</td>
<td>Mala§§</td>
<td>Shahi+§</td>
<td>Sparrow+++§</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie+++§§</td>
<td>Ramitha+§</td>
<td>Mira+++§</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. + denotes women who had USRE.  
++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.  
* denotes less-educated women.  
§§ denotes reported abuse.  
§ denotes reported trauma.  
∞ denotes religious woman.  
× denotes ghost possession.  
In node 1, the less-educated women group together with the nonreligious more-educated women.
CART Model to Predict Dissociation

Figure U12, the CART regression tree for DES \( (n = 29 \) without outlier), was run with all total scales, subscales, sociostress, age, years in the US, USRE, level of education, religiosity, trauma, abuse, spiritual practice, social work, and belief in Sai Baba. Expectedly, PD/EL was the best predictor of dissociation with women who scored high in PD/EL, over 5.5, and were under 47 years of age, as having the highest dissociation, with an average total score of 106, twice the sample average of 52.7. The least stressed women, those with PSS scores of under 17.5, had the lowest dissociation, 17.8 or less than three times lower than the sample average of 52.7. It is noteworthy that CART picked PSS over sociostress as predicting dissociation, suggesting that perceived stress alone and not necessarily associated with biopsychosociospiritual factors better predicts that some (average) dissociation will occur (node 2). The women in each group are listed in Table U8.

![CART regression tree for DES](image)

*Figure U12. CART regression tree for DES \( (n = 29) \).*
Table U8

*Groupings of Women for Dissociation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1, ( n = 9 ).</th>
<th>Node 2, ( n = 8 ).</th>
<th>Node 3, ( n = 6 ).</th>
<th>Node 4, ( n = 6 ).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low PD/EL, low PSS,</td>
<td>Low PD/EL, high PSS</td>
<td>High PD/EL, under 47</td>
<td>High PD/EL, over 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lowest dissociation.</td>
<td>average dissociation.</td>
<td>yrs. of age, highest</td>
<td>yrs. of age, average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dissociation.</td>
<td>dissociation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakshi*+</td>
<td>Christy §§</td>
<td>Pushpa (87)+§</td>
<td>Veena§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose*+§</td>
<td>Roshan++§§</td>
<td>Saisha (135)+§</td>
<td>Ramitha (81)**+§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sher*+§</td>
<td>Asha</td>
<td>Mala+§§</td>
<td>Maya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansa</td>
<td>Siri §§</td>
<td>Rama (88)+§</td>
<td>Kesar§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>Sheela+§</td>
<td>Gita (92)+</td>
<td>Rita+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley*+§</td>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Sparrow (99)+§§</td>
<td>Mira++§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palak</td>
<td>Sangeetha++</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prabha</td>
<td>Dipti+ §</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahi §</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *denotes 4 of the 5 less-educated, highly religious women. Note their low ego loss.

**Ramitha is over 47 years of age.**

+ denotes women who reported UE. ++ denotes women who initially doubted their UE.

§ denotes women who reported trauma.

§§ denotes women who experienced abuse. They have high stress (PSS) (node 2), except when it is superseded by high ego loss (node 3).

Dissociation scores of Node 3 women are provided in parentheses.

PD/EL as the best predictor of DES is compatible with the significant correlation between PD/EL and DES, \( r(28) = .64, p < .01 \). Second, the women who scored low on PD/EL and PSS had the lowest DES scores, and PD/EL did correlate with PSS, \( r(28) = .45, p < .05 \).

PD/EL also correlates with PSS, \( r(28) = .45, p < .05 \), suggesting the reason for CART showing PSS as a second predictor after PD/EL for dissociation.

**CART to Predict OOBEn**

As specified, Item 7 on the DES is assumed to measure OOB. What are the characteristics of women who have OOB? As a test item on the DES, is OOB one outcome of dissociation?

Figure U13 shows the CART classification tree for OOB using only categorical predictors variables age, years in the US, UE, level of education, religiosity, trauma, spiritual
practice, and pain tolerance; the latter is the only continuous variable. CART determined that 4 – 6 was the medium score range on DES Item 7 and indicated that as “some OOB.”

The best predictor of OOB was the number of years a woman had lived in the US; only women who had been in the US for over 16 years had some OOB, and were further divided based on their level of education. Women who had high school or less and a PhD, had OOB (node 4). Women who had a college education up to master’s, were further divided based on their religiosity, and the women who were nonreligious, had OOB (node 3). Table U9 shows the women in each group and Figure U14 is a lattice plot of these results.

![CART Tree Diagram]

*Figure U13. Classification tree predicting OOB (n = 30).*

Note: This figure has been modified by pictorializing the CART tree as an example to decipher.
Table U9

Women Who Have OOBE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No OOB. Less than 16 years in the US.</td>
<td>No OOB. More than 16 years in the US. More-educated. Somewhat and highly religious.</td>
<td>OOB. More than 16 years in the US. More-educated. Not religious.</td>
<td>OOB. More than 16 years in the US. Less-educated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Pakshi*+  
Rose*+  
Christie§§  
Sher*+§§  
Hansa  
Roshan++§§  
Asha++  
Siri§§  
Saisha+  
Sheela+  
Prabha  
Rama+ | Ramitha++  
Pushpa+§§  
Sangeetha++  
Maya  
Rita+  
Shahi+ | Veena§§  
Malati  
Palak  
Kesar§§  
Mala+  
Mira++  
Sparrow+§§ | Sam*+§§  
Shirley*+  
Gia  
Dipti+  
Gita+ |

Note. * denotes less-educated women.  
+ denotes women who had USRE.  
++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.  
§§ denotes women who experienced abuse.
**Lattice Plot Showing Clusters of Women Predicted for OOBE**

Figure U14. Lattice plot of OOBE prediction (N = 29).

**CART to Predict the Decompensation/Ego Loss (PD/EL) Subscale of the EEQ**

The same predictors as for PMP were used for the regression tree to predict PD/EL, namely, DES, SIBS, Sociostress, age, USRE, education, religiosity, trauma, spiritual practice, and New Age. Figure U15 shows that DES is the best predictor of ego loss—DES and PD/EL correlate significantly. The women in each group are shown in Table U10. Women who scored high on DES had the highest scores on PD/EL, their average of 11.10 being more than twice the sample average of 5.34. Correlations complement this outcome: DES correlates with PD/EL, $r(28) = .64, p < .01$.

The picture is more complex for women who scored lower on the DES. SIBS was the next best predictor of their PD/EL. For women who scored high on SIBS, DES again was a
predictor of their ego loss. Those who dissociated less (women who scored the lowest overall on DES), had practically zero ego loss. The unexpected mix of women in this group is shown in Table U10. Second, of the counterpart women in the left branch who dissociated more, those who had a spiritual practice had twice the ego loss (4.20) of the women who did not have a spiritual practice (2.50). Considering the theoretical similarity between ego loss, dissociation, and OOB, and that dissociation is associated with SP, its discussion would be nuanced. The lattice scatter plot in Figure U16 shows that low scores on ego loss are associated with low SIBS and low DES scores.

*Figure U15. CART regression tree for EEQPD/EL*
Table U10

*Groupings of Women for Ego Loss (PD/EL)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1, ( n = 6 )</th>
<th>Node 2, ( n = 5 )</th>
<th>Node 3, ( n = 6 )</th>
<th>Node 4, ( n = 5 )</th>
<th>Node 5, ( n = 7 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low DES, low SIBS, Average PD/EL</td>
<td>Low DES, high SIBS, low DES, Near zero PD/EL</td>
<td>Low DES, high SIBS, high DES, no spiritual practice, Low PD/EL</td>
<td>Low DES, high SIBS, high DES, spiritual practice, Low PD/EL but double of that without practice</td>
<td>High DES. Highest PD/EL.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Veena§§ | Hansa | Roshan++§§ | Gia | Maya | Kesar§§ | Pakshi*+ | Siri§§ | Palak | Prabha | Shahi+ | Rose*+ | Christie§§ | Sher*+§§ | Asha++ | Shirley*+ | Sangeetha++ | Sheela+ | Malati | Rita+ | Dipti+ | Mira++ | Sheela+ | Malati | Rita+ | Dipti+ | Mira++ | Ramitha++ | Pushpa+§§ | Saisha+ | Mala+§§ | Rama+ | Gita+ | Sparrow+§§ |

*Note.* *denotes 4 of the 5 less-educated, highly religious women, barring outlier Sam. Note their low ego loss.
+ denotes women who reported USRE.
++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.
§§ denotes women who experienced abuse.
Figure U16. Lattice scatterplot for Ego Loss (PD/EL) \( (n = 29) \) showing inbetween women having the highest sociostress.

**CART to Predict Posttraumatic Stress Disorder by PCL-C**

All variables were provided to CART as potential predictors of posttraumatic stress disorder. Figure U17 shows the regression tree to predict posttraumatic stress. Sociostress was the best predictor of posttraumatic stress. Women who scored higher than 69 on sociostress were again best defined by sociostress as also the secondary predictor of posttraumatic stress. It was immediately obvious that that all the more-educated religious women who reported USRE were in this category and they were further subdivided: four women who had the highest sociostress, above 141.5, also had the highest posttraumatic stress scores of 45.2 average, and 12 women
who had sociostress scores of less than 141.5 had the next highest posttraumatic stress scores of 32.1 average.

The posttraumatic stress of the women who scored under 69 on sociostress was best predicted by social work. The 8 women who had social work as a CART picked characteristic included all the less-educated women (although they did not report social work) and the more-educated, nonreligious women including all the New Age women and Kesar. This group had the lowest posttraumatic stress scores of 18.6 average. The remaining 5 women were an eclectic group of more-educated women—the one religious woman, Rita, also reported USRE, the 2 nonreligious women, Veena, Hansa, and Asha did not report USRE, and Sher, the only less-educated woman of the sample who reported abuse. They had close to average posttraumatic stress of 25.4 although Sher’s level is much higher than her less-educated counterparts in node 1.
Figure U17. CART model to predict PTSD.

Table U11 shows the women in each node of Figure U17.
Table U11

**Groupings of Women for PTSD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1. ( n = 8 )</th>
<th>Node 2. ( n = 5 )</th>
<th>Node 3. ( n = 12 )</th>
<th>Node 4. ( n = 4 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USRE + No USRE</td>
<td>USRE + No USRE</td>
<td>Fairly high sociostress</td>
<td>Highest sociostress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low sociostress</td>
<td>Low sociostress</td>
<td>USRE + No USRE</td>
<td>USRE + No USRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>No social work</td>
<td>+ ghost possession.</td>
<td>+ ghost possession.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Pakshi*∞+          | Veena§§             | Roshan§§             | Christie∞+§§        |
| Rose*∞+§           | Sher*∞+§§           | Siri∞§§              | Ramitha∞+§          |
| Saisha∞+           | Hansa               | Sheela∞+§            | Pushpa∞×§§          |
| Malati             | Asha++              | Gia                  | Sangeetha++         |
| Shirley*∞+§        | Rita∞+              | Maya∞                |
| Palak              |                     | Mala∞+§§             |
| Kesar§§            |                     | Dipti∞+§             |
| Prabha             |                     | Saisha∞+§            |
|                    |                     | Mira++§              |
|                    |                     | Rama∞+§              |
|                    |                     | Gita∞+§              |
|                    |                     | Sparrow∞+§§          |

*Note.* + denotes women who had USRE.
++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.
* denotes less-educated women.
§§ denotes reported abuse.
§ denotes reported trauma.
∞ denotes religious woman.
× denotes ghost possession.

**CART Model to Predict Sociostress**

Figure U18 depicts a CART regression tree for sociostress using only categorical predictors for reasons previously mentioned, and Table U12 shows the women in each CART group. Variables age, years in the US, USRE, level of education, religiosity, trauma, and spiritual practice. Outlier scores of Sam and Christy were dropped. The decision to include only categorical variables took into account the analysis thus far and the intent to explore the qualitative characteristics of the women who manifested sociostress. Employment of continuous variables would have taken over the prediction and shadowed the binomial categorical variables. Religiosity was the best predictor of sociostress, with 5 women inbetween in religiosity and who
had been in the US for over 16 years showing the highest sociostress (147.20) of almost twice the sample average (85.68). The lowest sociostress (52.62) was seen in women who were over 52 years of age, 4 who were highly religious and 4 who were nonreligious.

Figure U18. CART regression tree for sociostress (n = 28).
Table U12

*Groupings of Women for Sociostress*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1, ( n = 10 ). Under 52 yrs. of age Average sociostress</th>
<th>Node 2, ( n = 8 ). Over 52 years of age. Lowest sociostress.</th>
<th>Node 3, ( n = 5 ). Inbetween religiosity, in US &lt; 16 years. Average sociostress.</th>
<th>Node 4, ( n = 5 ). Inbetween religiosity, in US &gt; 16 years. Highest sociostress.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sher* §§</td>
<td>Asha++</td>
<td>Pakshi*+</td>
<td>Veena §§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley*+</td>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Rose*+</td>
<td>Roshan++ §§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesar §§</td>
<td>Mala+ §§</td>
<td>Malat</td>
<td>Prabha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dipti+</td>
<td>Shahi+</td>
<td>Palak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira+</td>
<td>Sparrow + §§</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * denotes less-educated women.
+ denotes women who had USRE.
++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.
§§ denoted women who experienced abuse.

Figure U19 is a dot plot of Sociostress by level of education and shows that highly religious and not religious women who have the lowest scores on Sociostress area are additionally at the lowest level of education and the highest level of education, respectively.
Figure U19. Dot Plot for Sociostress by Religiosity and Education. Including Sam (< HS) and Christy (college), shows that less-educated women and the highest educated women have the least sociostress compared to the inbetween women who have the highest sociostress.
CART Model to Predict Trauma

CART was provided with all variables as potential predictors plus an additional ad hoc level of the categorical variable trauma namely, underreported trauma based on the observation that some women’s narratives indicated trauma but they answered “no” or “not more than normal” to the question of trauma. Figure U20 is the CART for this model. Conventional spirituality measured by SIBS was the single best predictor of trauma. Women who scored over 113 in conventional spirituality were all religious women and their trauma was further predicted by posttraumatic stress. Eleven women who scored over 29.5 on the PCL-C reported trauma, and women who scored under 29.5 on the PCL-C underreported their trauma.

![CART Model](image)

Figure U20. CART model to predict trauma.
The left branch showed women who scored less than 113 on the SIBS and they all were nonreligious except for Siri. She belonged to a group of 6 women whose trauma reports were predicted by suffering. Five women who did not express suffering also did not report trauma.

Table U13 shows the groupings of women depicting the characteristics in each of the nodes.

Table U13

**Groups of Women for Trauma**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node 1. $n = 5$</th>
<th>Node 2. $n = 6$</th>
<th>Node 3. $n = 7$</th>
<th>Node 4. $n = 11$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No USRE</td>
<td>No USRE</td>
<td>USRE</td>
<td>USRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low conventional spirituality; no report of suffering; did not report trauma</td>
<td>Low conventional spirituality; reported suffering; reported trauma</td>
<td>High conventional spirituality; low PTSD; underreported trauma</td>
<td>High conventional spirituality; high PTSD; reported trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansa</td>
<td>Veena</td>
<td>Pakshi*∞+</td>
<td>Christie∞+§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha++</td>
<td>Roshan++§§</td>
<td>Rose*∞+</td>
<td>Ramitha∞+§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>Siri∞§§</td>
<td>Saisha∞§</td>
<td>Sher*∞§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Palak</td>
<td>Shirley*∞§</td>
<td>Pushpa∞×§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Sangeetha∞++</td>
<td>Prabha</td>
<td>Sheela∞+§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kesar§§</td>
<td>Rita+∞</td>
<td>Mala∞+§§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dipti+∞§</td>
<td>Saisha∞+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mira++§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rama∞+§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gita∞+§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sparrow ∞+§§</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** + denotes women who had USRE.  
++ denotes women who initially doubted their USRE.  
* denotes less-educated women.  
§§ denotes reported abuse.  
§ denotes reported trauma.  
∞ denotes religious woman.  
× denotes ghost possession.