



**Abstract: 146**

**An Ethnography of UK Spiritual Peer-Support Networks: Narratives and Experiences of Mental Health / Spiritual Crisis**

**Learning goal:**

This presentation will be based on my MSc thesis, which was an ethnography of what I call Spiritual Peer-Support Networks' (SPSNs) community in the UK, as an umbrella term encompassing organisations such as the Spiritual Crisis Network and Emerging Proud. I will briefly introduce the topic, its relevance in anthropological research (and what anthropological research entails), as well as a couple of my main findings.

**Abstract text:**

These networks provide support – mostly through peer-support groups – for individuals who identify as having experienced a mental health and / or spiritual crisis. This type of crisis can range from what psychiatrists could label a psychotic episode, to what religious or spiritual authorities could label a mystical experience, enlightenment, awakening – as well as everything in between these. I use “and / or” or simply “/” in this paper to encompass this diversity of experiences without pinning them down. The SPSNs in fact promote seeing these psychotic and spiritual experiences as located on a spectrum, rather than as separate ontological categories.

There is a growing body of literature on these types of experiences, sometimes called “psychotic-like phenomena” (Heriot-Maintland et al., 2011), “psychotic-like anomalous experiences” (Brett et al., 2013), “hallucination-like events” (Luhmann, 2017), which consider both clinical groups (ie. diagnosed with a psychotic disorder and / or in psychiatric services) and non-clinical groups (not diagnosed or in psychiatric services) reporting these experiences. These studies point towards the need for a shift in diagnostic categories of psychosis, notably schizophrenia, often advocating for a psychotic continuum to better understand the diversity of experiences (Van Os, 2016).

In this research, I spoke to a group composed of a majority of individuals who had encountered psychiatric services (ie. clinical) as well as a few who had not (ie. non-clinical). They all identified as having experienced a mental health and / or spiritual crisis, sometimes calling themselves “experiencers” within SPSNs.

I took part in activities such as events and meetings, conducted participant observation of peer-support groups as well as interviews with individuals, in different locations and mostly in the UK.

In this thesis, I delve into the narratives and experiences of mental health and / or spiritual crisis, explore how these can become types of knowledges, and the extent to which these can be beneficial or healing for individuals.

**ON THE HEALING POWER  
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**