

Exploring the transpersonal phenomena of spiritual love relations: A naturalistic observation study of soulmate experiences shared in a New Age Facebook group

Christian Stokke

To cite this article: Christian Stokke (2021) Exploring the transpersonal phenomena of spiritual love relations: A naturalistic observation study of soulmate experiences shared in a New Age Facebook group, *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*, 11:2, 130-144, DOI: [10.1080/20440243.2021.1955454](https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2021.1955454)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2021.1955454>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 09 Aug 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 923



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Exploring the transpersonal phenomena of spiritual love relations: A naturalistic observation study of soulmate experiences shared in a New Age Facebook group

Christian Stokke

University of Southeastern Norway, Drammen, Norway

ABSTRACT

This paper explores varieties of spiritual experiences and transpersonal phenomena that empirically occur in spiritual love relations, which respondents define as soulmates. Soulmate mythologies exist in many traditions and are popular in contemporary spiritual communities and New Age literature. So far, few empirical studies exist of soulmates. Analyzing a convenience sample of 140 responses collected by naturalistic observation on a New Age-themed Facebook group, I explore transpersonal experiences reported by individuals in encounters and relationships with their soulmates. Theoretically, this study draws on spiritual awakening literature in transpersonal psychology, particularly Grof's varieties of spiritual emergency. Findings show that, besides instant recognition and immediate bonding, respondents report phenomena including synchronicities, telepathy, peak experiences, kundalini awakening, dark nights of the soul, psychological transformation, and merging of opposite archetypes. While spiritual love relations overlap with romantic love, they take many physical forms, including friendships, family relations, and relations with animals.

KEYWORDS

Spiritual experiences; New Age; transpersonal psychology; spiritual awakening; soulmates; twin souls

Introduction

Soulmate mythologies exist in many traditions and individuals in contemporary spiritual communities report experiences of soulmate encounters. The phenomenon is widely discussed in New Age literature, but few academic studies exist (Connell and Eulert 2011). The general population may use the term 'soulmate' as a metaphor for intense romantic love, but in New Age contexts it connotes a spiritual and karmic past life connection (Connell 2012). Some groundbreaking doctoral dissertations exist on the topic, including Boyce's (2001) quantitative study of soulmate relationships, Bloomstein's (2001) phenomenological exploration of soulmate experiences, Connell's (2012) study of women who report past life experiences with romantic partners, and Sundberg's (2015) study of extreme love experiences in light of spiritual emergency. Additionally, Connell and Eulert (2011) provide a literature review on reincarnation and soulmates. Sundberg

CONTACT Christian Stokke  christian.stokke@usn.no

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

(2019) defines the extreme love phenomenon as ‘*amigeist*’ (love-spirit), a spiritual love relation distinct from romantic love.

Aims and approach

This paper explores the varieties of spiritual experiences and transpersonal phenomena accompanying relations that participants in a New Age environment define as soulmate encounters. Empirical data consist of a convenience sample of 140 ‘naturally occurring’ comments in a New Age-themed Facebook group with over 30,000 members. In social media research, naturalistic observation refers to collecting comments that occur without researcher intervention (Orth et al. 2020). My sample consists of responses from one comment thread, where the original poster asked if anyone has met their soulmate, and how they know. Quantitative validity is not a goal in this naturalistic study. The Facebook group focuses on healing, paranormal phenomena, and past lives, and respondents do not represent a random population sample, but are individuals familiar with spiritual experiences, transpersonal phenomena and soulmates as past life connections, and who are willing to share experiences publicly.

Theoretically, I draw on spiritual awakening literature in transpersonal psychology (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990; Greenwell 1990, 2018), Sundberg’s (2015) phenomenological exploration of extreme love experiences in light of Grof and Grof’s (1990) varieties of spiritual emergency, and Wade’s (2000, 2004) study of transpersonal experiences during sex. Using themes from previous research, I present a thematic analysis of seven individual responses, followed by a count of occurrences of transpersonal themes and relationship types, status, and length, in the full sample of 140 respondents.

Soulmate definitions

Reviewing literature on soulmates, Connell and Eulert (2011) start with the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of soulmate as ‘a person perfectly suited to another in temperament’ and ‘who strongly resembles another in attitudes or beliefs’ (p. 7). This indicates how many people understand the concept, but it lacks the New Age connotation of soulmate as past life connection. About 20% of U.S. Americans believe in reincarnation (Connell and Eulert 2011). Plato’s *Symposium* contains a soulmate myth in which the God, Zeus, split humans in two, and they have since been searching for their other half. Plato says that when they meet, ‘affection and kinship and love combined inspire in him [*sic*] an emotion which is quite overwhelming’. Further, ‘no one can suppose that it is mere physical enjoyment which causes the one to take such intense delight in the company of the other. It is clear that the soul of each has some other longing’ (Hamilton 1951, 64). Plato’s myth suggests that soulmates form lifelong partnerships, but not necessarily romantic.

In the Celtic tradition, *anam cara* signifies deep spiritual friendships where partners bring out the best in each other (O’Donahue 1998). O’Donahue writes that ‘when you had an *anam cara*, your friendship cut across all convention and category. You were joined in an ancient and eternal way with the friend of your soul’ (pp. 13–14) who is ‘a person to whom you could reveal the hidden intimacies of your life’ (p. xviii). He describes instant recognition, ‘love at first sight’, which causes ‘an awakening between

you, a sense of ancient knowing. You come home to each other' (p. 23). American clairvoyant Edgar Cayce distinguishes between twin souls, companion soulmates, and karmic soulmates, with twin souls as the highest form. He believes each person has many soulmates whose purpose is to help each other to learn and grow spiritually, while twin souls come together to work on a specific mission (Todeshi 1999). In New Age literature, Cayce's distinction between twin souls and 'other soulmates' is popular (Connell and Eulert 2011).

New Age author, Elizabeth Clare Prophet (Prophet and Prophet 1988) writes that while soulmates have great attraction and may marry each other, it is often more like a brother/sister relationship. Prophet (1999) writes that each person has only one twin soul or 'twin flame'. They share the same origin, and opposite feminine-masculine polarities, but go through masculine and feminine embodiments in a series of incarnations as husband/wife, mother/son, father/daughter, or sister/brother. Past-life regression therapists (Weiss 1988; Merivale 2009) write about clients who remember their partners from past lives. Merivale asserts, based on empirical cases, that twin souls need not be romantic, they may break up, be blood relatives, or have the same gender. While soulmate relations overlap with romantic love, New Age literature suggests they are essentially *spiritual* love relations independent of physical form.

My respondents distinguish between soulmates and twin flames, where 'twin flame' is a subcategory of soulmate. To avoid terminological confusion, I use 'soulmates' as a general category that includes two subcategories, 'twin flames' and 'other soulmates'.

Academic research on soulmates

Soulmates have rarely been subjects of academic research, although psychologists Freud (cited in Bloomstein 2001) and Wilber (1991) explore it in personal writings. I found four doctoral (PhD) dissertations from the U.S.A. based on empirical research on soulmates. In a quantitative study, Boyce (2001) compares romantic and non-romantic soulmate relations with ordinary romantic relations and friendships. She finds soulmates score higher on variables of intimacy, passion and commitment, and notes a magical, intuitive component. Bloomstein's (2001), Connell's (2012), and Sundberg's (2015) phenomenological studies find various spiritual awakening phenomena, besides ordinary relationship characteristics of love, intimacy, and connection. From five interviews, Bloomstein (2001) identifies 16 themes, including instant recognition, synchronicities, paranormal communication, mutual growth, soul maturation, and reincarnation. From interviews with 10 women who believed they knew their current romantic partners in past lives, Connell (2012) identifies themes of instant recognition and connection, synchronicities, intuitive phenomena, and helping each other grow.

Sundberg (2015) interviewed 25 individuals who had extreme experiences of falling in love. His respondents characterize encounters as unique experiences far beyond normal romantic relationships, 72% used the term soulmate, and 68% formed romantic relations, marriages, or intimate friendships. Even the 32% who broke up, or did not develop relationships, see the connections as extraordinary life events, equal to bonding with their children. Sundberg finds that extreme love experiences differ from unhealthy forms of romantic love described in psychology, such as limerence (Tennov 1979),

love addiction, unrequited love, and one-sided infatuation. Notably, respondents report immediate mutual bonding and secure attachment (Ainsworth et al. 1978), developing deep connections on many levels based on instant recognition, accompanied by spiritual emergency phenomena (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990), which distinguish spiritual love relations from romantic love.

Sundberg (2015, 2019) defines this phenomenon as ‘*amigeist*’ (love-spirit), described as soulmate-type bonding with high probability of forming long-term romantic relationships or heart-centered friendships. His respondents describe psychic and paranormal phenomena, intense feelings of fulfillment, electric bodily sensations, life-changing peak experiences with lost perception of time and space, psychological transformation and growth, and being ‘the same’ as their partner. Sundberg identifies these experiences as varieties of spiritual emergency (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990), including psychic opening, kundalini awakening (Sanella 1989; Greenwell 1990), psychological renewal, and peak experiences (Maslow 1971). Grof and Grof (1990) found similar awakening phenomena triggered by spiritual practice, psychedelics, sex, emotional experiences, or sometimes happening spontaneously.

Wade (2000, 2004) interviewed 91 individuals who experienced transpersonal phenomena during sex. She records synchronicities, telepathy, out-of-body experiences, peak experiences, kundalini, merging with the partner, and past life visions, which often led to spiritual awakening, psychological healing and transformation. Additionally, Wade’s (2004) respondents report visions, channeling, and spirit possessions beyond the experiences found in research on soulmates. Wade (2004) finds that transpersonal experiences during sex are independent of orgasm, intercourse, and physical touch; unrelated to gender and spiritual belief; and independent of love and type of relationship. Notably, transcendent sex triggers transpersonal phenomena in only one partner – in contrast to mutual soulmate relations (Sundberg 2015). The only two mutual experiences in Wade (2004) are cases where partners share visions of past lives together. These qualify as soulmate encounters.

Transpersonal themes

The following 6 themes and 11 subthemes from research on soulmates (Bloomstein 2001; Connell 2012; Sundberg 2015) and spiritual emergency (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990; Goretzky 2007) form the basis for my analysis:

- (1) Instant recognition, immediate bonding, and past life connection
 - (a) *Instant recognition* (Bloomstein 2001; Connell 2012; Sundberg 2015). Sundberg describes stunning first meetings, *love at first sight*, feelings of familiarity, as if meeting an old friend, knowing a person from before, or *coming home*.
 - (b) *Immediate bonding* (Connell 2012; Sundberg 2015). Sundberg describes quick, secure bonding with deep connection, instantly feeling safe to have intimate conversations without normal gradual progression.
 - (c) *Past life connection* (Grof and Grof 1990; Bloomstein 2001; Connell 2012). Connell describes intuitive feelings and spontaneous visions of past lives (Wade 2004), confirmed through psychic readings or past life regression therapy.

- (2) *Psychic opening* (Grof and Grof 1990) includes synchronicities and telepathy (Bloomstein 2001; Connell 2012; Sundberg 2015), and out-of-body experiences (Wade 2004).
- (a) *Synchronicities* refer to Jung's (1960) acausal connecting principle that accounts for meaningful coincidences, where outside observers recognize meaningful connections between inner experiences and external events beyond chance and causality (Grof and Grof 1990).
 - (b) *Telepathy* refers to acquiring thoughts or feelings of another person through mind-to-mind transference (Goretzky 2007) between emotionally bonded persons (Wade 2004). Sundberg (2015) describes reading the partner's mind and feeling their feelings when not physically near, such as picking up the phone before it rings.
 - (c) *Out-of-body experiences* describe states of consciousness where persons feel their self-awareness is separate from the physical body (Grof and Grof 1990; Goretzky 2007). Goretzky includes *communication with spirit guides*, where individuals communicate verbally with recognizable spirits.
- (3) Peak experiences (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990; Maslow 1971). Maslow coined the term for 'the happiest moments of life, for experiences of ecstasy, rapture, bliss, of the greatest joy' (101). Sundberg (2015) describes extraordinary and life changing encounters where perception of time disappears.
- (4) *Kundalini awakening* (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990; Sundberg 2015; Wade 2004) refers in yogic tradition to life force energy in the subtle body (Greenwell 1990), associated with *libido* or sexual-erotic energy (Taylor 2017). *Kundalini awakening* refers to energetic activation, often by transmission (*shaktipat*) from individuals with active kundalini. Experiences include tingling, waves of energy in the body, magnetic and electric sensations, waves of intense emotions (Greenwell 1990).
- (5) *Dark nights of the soul* (Grof and Grof 1990) describe periods of negativity after awakening, when kundalini brings to the surface emotional trauma stored in the body and removes stress and blockages from the nervous system (Sanella 1989). Greenwell (1990) found that people experience emotional rollercoasters of bliss and pain, including difficult relationship experiences that trigger past trauma or *karmic patterns*.
- (6) *Psychological transformation and renewal*.
- (a) *Growth, learning and healing* (Bloomstein 2001; Connell 2012; Sundberg 2015). Sundberg describes helping each other heal and grow spiritually, and learning to change.
 - (b) *Psychological renewal and merging of opposite archetypes* (Grof and Grof 1990; Sundberg 2015) refers to an 'inner marriage' with erotic emotions, a merging of feminine and masculine archetypes, anima and animus in Jungian psychology (Goretzky 2007). With a wider interpretation, I include descriptions of *complementarity and mirroring*, e.g. when soulmates report they have opposite Myers-Briggs personality types, opposite astrological signs, or feel 'the same, but different'.

Methods and ethics

Naturalistic observation

The method of data collection was naturalistic observation in a public English-speaking Facebook group (Coughlan and Perryman 2015). Naturalistic observation is a qualitative

method that observes subjects and phenomena in their natural environments, without researcher interference (Bryman 2012). On social media, empirical data about social phenomena are readily available and publicly accessible, offering researchers opportunities to collect rich qualitative data for phenomenological exploration. In social media research (Orth et al. 2020), naturalistic observation refers to collecting comments that ‘occur naturally’ on social media without researcher intervention. When participants freely share information that they deem relevant in social media conversations, data may be more accurate than if researchers ask predefined questions. Results have high ecological validity and correspond closely to real-life settings (Bryman 2012), but are not generalizable beyond the study’s natural environment, which is not a random population sample.

Sampling and limitations

This study’s setting is a Facebook group with over 30,000 members, mostly from the U.S.A. and the U.K.; a loose network of social media users who have joined a ‘special interest group’ focusing on topics of healing, past lives, and paranormal phenomena. Group members represent a demographic that is familiar with New Age ideas, spiritual experiences, transpersonal phenomena, and a past life connotation of soulmates. The purpose of the study is to explore soulmate phenomena within a broadly defined New Age setting in which, beyond sharing interests in healing, past lives, and paranormal phenomena, participants seem to have diverse spiritual beliefs.

I used a ‘convenience sample’ consisting of one comment thread with over 200 responses, where the original poster asked whether anyone has met a soulmate and how they know. This thread, with so many responses sharing personal experiences, stood out as an exceptional opportunity to obtain a convenience sample for exploring soulmate experiences. Statistical validity is not a goal in this study. I count occurrences for each theme to show varieties, without attempt to determine how common these are in the general population. The only background data I record is gender, determined from names and pictures on Facebook profiles. Women are overrepresented in the sample. Since most soulmates are mutual relations between men and women, this is likely a sampling error. Women may be more open to share personal experiences on social media or overrepresented in New Age networks.

Ethics

Discussing online research ethics, Coughlan and Perryman (2015) argue that observation-only research on passive participants (who do not complete surveys or interviews) in the public sphere, does not require disclosing our status as researchers. Naturalistic observation in public places, including social media, does not require informed consent (Coughlan and Perryman 2015; Orth et al. 2020), which would be unfeasible to obtain from a large number of participants. Coughlan and Perryman (2015) recommend protecting the privacy of individual respondents and online communities by limiting analysis to counting and analyzing fully anonymized and coded data. For this study, I obtained consent to quote the full responses of seven individual participants. For the remaining participants, I paraphrase descriptions.

Analysis

From the selected comment thread, I eliminated responses from participants who did not share their own personal experiences of soulmate encounters (these responses stated either that they had not met a soulmate, or shared general ideas about soulmates without mentioning their own experiences). I then systematically analyzed the remaining 140 responses. 75 persons describe relationship length and status, and 72 persons, including 10 men (14%) and 15 twin flames (21%), describe experiences of phenomena, with 1–5 themes in each response. 49 persons describe both relationship length and phenomena, while 42 give no further information than ‘yes, several’ or ‘yes, met my twin flame’. While depth and scope of themes described by each participant varies greatly, my analysis shows significant overlap among respondents, where person after person describes similar events, feelings, and insights, so that a pattern of varieties emerges (Wade 2000) that corresponds closely with previous research, suggesting data saturation and reliability. I coded the data into 6 themes and 11 subthemes, which I systematically quantified into categories from previous research (Grof and Grof 1990; Goretzky 2007; Sundberg 2015).

The presentation of findings starts with seven responses quoted in full, selected by purposive sampling among longer responses describing transpersonal phenomena. These seven include different types of relations, including ‘twin flames’ and ‘other soulmates’; marriages, romantic couples, best friends, relationships that ended, family relations, and individuals with several soulmates including pets. These seven are not representative of the sample, but show maximum variety of relationships and themes, and show how I code phenomenological descriptions as *types of experience*, e.g. ‘reading partner’s mind’, or ‘bodily activation/*shaktipat*’ and categorize them in themes. Occasionally, participants just mention experiences, e.g. ‘out-of-body experiences’ or ‘telepathy’, but mostly they provide details. After the seven responses, I present counts of occurrences of relationship type, status and length, and counts of themes for the full sample, before discussing findings in light of theory.

Findings

The following responses are answers to a question on Facebook where the original poster asked if anyone has met their soulmate, and how they know.

Respondent 1. Woman married to an ‘other soulmate’:

Me!!! We got to talking from an internet dating website ... we talked on the phone for hours. Had parallel lives growing up. Both similar in many ways. Then it turns out we were both were missing our left sexual organ (teste and ovary) that’s the moment I knew. Talked about our retirement together on our first date (almost went to Vegas after being together the first weekend) Now going on 7 years married w twins. We think the same thoughts at the same time daily. Call each other at the same time so much that it won’t even ring. Plus, I’ve been told by psychics so that was another confirmation to me. We help each other in many ways and I feel like that’s part of our lessons together.

She gives information on relationship status (married) and length (7 years). She describes experiences of *synchronicities* (parallel lives, both missing left sexual organ) and *telepathy/ reading partner’s mind* (think the same thoughts, call each other simultaneously),

which fall under subthemes 2a and 2b. She describes *quick bonding* (talked for hours, talked about retirement on first date), which I categorize as *open authentic conversation* (subtheme 1b). ‘Help each other ... lessons together’ falls under *help to grow, heal, transform* (subtheme 6a).

Respondent 2. Man married to his twin flame:

I have met my twin flame. You just know. It is as they say. They are the other half of you. Each person has the life experience that reflects what the other half is missing and the energies that pass through the body when anywhere near is ridiculous, its healing each other for the past lives it has to be. Also you grow spiritually at a massive rate. Telepathy also comes in to play as well as dream sharing. It is a total madness so you will just know. Tell you what though, you thought you met someone that pushes your buttons before if you have this expect next levels ha ha. All part of the journey. Love it

He describes six intense phenomena, indicated by words like ‘total madness’ and ‘ridiculous’. He writes they are ‘healing each other’ and refers to massive spiritual growth, categorized as *help to grow, heal, transform* (subtheme 6a). The mention of *past lives*, falls under subtheme 1c. He mentions *telepathy* and dream sharing, which falls under *feeling partner’s feelings, dreams* (subtheme 2b). He describes kundalini experiences and energy transmission (energies pass through the body when near the twin flame), categorized under *bodily activation/shaktipat* (theme 4), and experiences *triggers* (pushes your buttons), characteristic of *dark nights* (theme 5). He explains the phenomenon of opposite archetypes (“They are the other half of you. Each person has the life experience that reflects what the other half is missing”) which I categorize as *complementarity and mirroring* (subtheme 6b).

Respondent 3. Woman with a best friend ‘other soulmate’:

I have found several ... my BFF, my hubby, my daughter, and a friend from high school. Soul mates aren’t always romantic. I think when your paths mirror each other even if you live far apart, that is a good sign. That is the case with me and my BFF. Every time we talk (which isn’t terribly often), we find that we are thinking similar things and facing similar situations. It can be eerie at times.

She mentions several ‘other soulmates’, with the best friend as primary relation. Like participant 1, she describes *synchronicities* (facing similar situations) and *telepathy/reading partner’s mind* (thinking similar things), and uses the word ‘eerie’ which suggests a psychic dimension. These fall under subthemes 2a and 2b. In light of how participant 2 describes mirroring life experiences, I interpret the statement ‘paths mirror each other’ as *complementarity and mirroring* (subtheme 6b).

Respondent 4. Woman whose twin flame relationship ended:

I think I may have met my twin. Being with him was so comfortable, and his energy was so pure and clean to me. We knew when one was thinking of the other. Especially when he was about to call - I’d get a 30 second heads up. I’d suddenly stop thinking of whatever I was currently doing and his name would pop in my head and I’d feel a tingle. He is the one who woke me up. He broke up with me and I found someone else to be with. That was 6 years ago and I still think about him and how I still love him. Every time I do think of him in this way my current relationship falters [*sic*] in some odd way.

She describes having met her twin flame and provides relationship status (he broke up with me 6 years ago); a romantic twin flame relationship that ended. She describes *telepathy/reading partner's mind* (his name would pop in her head 30 s before he would call), and *kundalini activation/shaktipat* ('his energy ... I'd feel a tingle ... he woke me up'), categorized under themes 2b and 4. I interpreted 'Being with him was so comfortable' as *peace and comfort* under *bonding* (subtheme 1b). This example shows the life-changing significance of meeting a twin flame, whom she still thinks about and loves 6 years later.

Respondent 5. Man in romantic relation with twin flame:

I found my twin flame. When we met in person we had several spontaneous activations. We both had literal out of body experiences when we were getting busy. Now somehow it's 8 months later and feels like it's been a week.

He mentions he met his twin flame, describes three phenomena, and relationship length (eight months). Under theme 2c, he mentions *out-of-body experiences* during lovemaking (Wade 2004). The relationship is romantic and ongoing. In light of other responses, I interpret 'spontaneous activations when we met in person' as *kundalini activation/shaktipat*. I interpret '8 months feels like a week' as *loss of time and space* that characterizes theme 3, *peak experiences*.

Respondent 6. Woman, whose 'other soulmate' marriage ended, has now met twin flame:

Since my awakening I've now connected who are soul mates to mee [sic]. Most aren't romantic. Just family members and very close friends and who and what they been to me in this life now. My ex husband of 19 years was a soul mate but also a karmic partner whom I had previous like karma to clear with him. My daughter is an incarnation of a cousin I lost in the late 80s and I know now my mum has been a little sister to me in a previous life and this is her first time being my mum. And I've now met my "twin flame" but he is currently on his own life path.

She reports several 'other soulmate' relationships, including close friends, daughter, and mother. She mentions clearing karma with her ex-husband of 19 years (a karmic soulmate), coded as *difficult/karmic relationship dynamic* (theme 5). The mention of *awakening* related to connecting with soulmates, falls under theme 4. She provides details on past life relations with her daughter (who was a cousin who passed in the 1980s) and mother (who was her little sister in a past life), counted as *past lives* (theme 1c). She mentions having met her twin flame, counted as twin flame encounter that has not led to relationship.

Respondent 7. Woman, who ended twin flame relation and is now with an 'other soulmate':

Met my twin flame. Six months of incredible amazing hell ... if you can imagine that. Triggered each other and expanded our consciousness like no other. Sadly, we had to end things because he still has a lot of growth and childhood trauma to heal and I needed a break from the emotional roller coaster ride. My soul misses his presence every day every minute, but this is what needs to be done. I am with one of my soul mates, my closest soulmate to bliss and happiness. It's not the same but it is gentle and loving and I can be myself without the triggers. I like soulmate unions much better than twin flame unions, but once you do meet your twin flame it is difficult to let them go completely.

She describes two romantic relations, first with her twin flame that ended after 6 months, and an ongoing other soulmate relationship. I interpret ‘expanded consciousness’ as *awakening* (theme 4). She describes *triggers* and emotional rollercoaster experiences characteristic of *dark nights* (theme 5). She contrasts a difficult twin flame relation with a ‘gentle and loving’ ‘other soulmate’ relation, categorized as *peace and comfort* under *bonding* (subtheme 1b).

Relationship types, status, and length

Among the 140 respondents who had met a soulmate; 39 had met several, 37 had married one, 39 had unmarried romantic relations, 14 were close friends, 9 described their children as soulmates, 5 were soulmates with their dog or cat; and a few described other family members or acquaintances as soulmates. 21 had met their twin flame, which were all human, non-family relations. No one reported having more than one twin flame. A majority of both twin flame (13 of 21) and ‘other soulmate’ (76 of 140) relations were romantic. Respondents described status and length of 82 soulmate relations, including 15 twin flames; 1 lasts over 40 years, 9 over 30 years, 9 over 20 years, 7 over 10 years, 12 less than 10 years (including 5 twin flames), and 12 are still together without reporting length (including 2 twin flames). 13 ended (including 4 twin flames), 12 partners passed (including 1 twin flame); and 7 encounters did not lead to relationships (including 3 twin flames). Many ‘other soulmate’ relationships lasted many years, while twin flame relations were more recent (Table 1).

Discussion

The most common themes identified were *instant recognition*, *immediate bonding*, and *past life connection* (52 occurrences), *psychological transformation and renewal* (21), *psychic opening* (15), *dark nights of the soul* (15), and *kundalini* (12).

Immediate bonding had the highest occurrence (26) among subthemes, followed by *instant recognition* (21). Respondent 1 describes *immediate bonding*; talking for hours on the phone, planning retirement together on the first date, and almost going to Las Vegas to get married on their first weekend. Sundberg (2015) discusses that quick, secure bonding is known in folklore, but not in psychological research on romantic love. Attachment theory (Ainsworth et al. 1978) cannot explain how secure mutual bonding could develop instantly. Pre-existing spiritual connections may be a plausible explanation.

Past life connection had 17 occurrences, whereof 8 refer to regression therapy. Respondent 6 describes ‘clearing karma’ with her ex-husband and past life relations with other family members. Connell (2012) found that past lives is a key theme among soulmates. Goretzky (2007) writes that incomprehensible fears, attractions, and relationship difficulties are often interpreted as past life karma. Most psychological research on past lives consists of children’s reports of spontaneous past life memories and experiences from hypnotic regression therapy (Connell and Eulert 2011). Weiss (1988), a psychologist and past life regressionist, writes about clients who discover past life connections with soulmates. Grof and Grof (1990) note that past life memories of soulmates could emerge during spiritual emergency, and hold potential for healing and transformation.

Table 1. Counts of occurrences for transpersonal experiences, themes, and subthemes.

Themes (6) Subthemes (11) Codes (26 types of experiences) (example description)	Total no. of persons who report each phenomenon	Men as % of total	Twin flames as % of total
Total sample for thematic analysis	72	14%	21%
Theme 1: Instant recognition, immediate bonding, and past life connection	52	13	19
a. Instant recognition	21	5	10
Recognizing someone they know	6		
Feeling of coming home	7		
Immediacy (e.g. 'love at first sight')	8		
b. Immediate bonding	26	12	15
Deep connection, mutual understanding	9		
Open authentic conversation ('talked for hours')	7		
Deep love	5		
Peace and comfort ('comfortable', 'gentle and loving')	5		
c. Past life connection	17	12	24
Mentions past life with soulmate	9		
'Confirmed' by past life regression therapy	8		
Theme 2: Psychic opening	15	13	40
a. Synchronicity (e.g. 'parallel lives growing up')	3	0	33
b. Telepathy	11	18	36
Reading partner's mind ('thinking the same thoughts')	8		
Feeling partner's feeling, receiving messages in dreams	3		100
c. Out-of-body experiences	4		50
Out-of-body experiences	3		
Communication with deceased partner	1		
Theme 3: Peak experiences	6	33	17
Once in a lifetime ('life-changing', 'once in a lifetime')	5		
Loss of time and space	1		
Theme 4: Kundalini awakening	12	17	42
Bodily activation/ <i>shaktipat</i> ('DNA awakening', 'activation', 'he woke me up')	4		75
Magnetism and energy ('tingling', 'chills up the spine')	6		
Awakening	2		
Theme 5: Dark night of the soul	15	27	27
Difficult times	5		
Difficult/karmic relationship dynamics ('clearing karma', 'narcissism', 'abuse', 'hell')	7		
Triggers ('pushing buttons', 'emotional rollercoaster')	3		100
Theme 6: Psychological transformation and renewal	21	24	14
a. Growth, learning and healing	12	25	17
Mutual learning	4		
Help to grow, heal, transform	8		
b. Merging of opposite archetypes	11	27	27
Complementarity and mirroring ('same, but different')	7	43	43
Merging, being the same ('becoming one', 'merging')	4		

Psychic experiences had 15 occurrences. Three persons report synchronicities, a low number considering that Bloomstein (2001), Connell (2012) and Sundberg (2015) found this a common theme. Respondent 1 describes a synchronicity where both soulmates lack their left sexual organ, two observable physical events. Respondent 3 describes

facing similar life situations as her soulmate while apart. Jung (1960) suggests seemingly unrelated events may be connected at a deeper level of archetypes in the collective unconscious. Telepathy was the most common psychic experience with 11 occurrences. Respondent 4 describes how her twin flame's name would pop in her head 30 seconds before he would call.

Peak experiences had a low occurrence (6). Respondent 5 describes losing sense of time. Five respondents describe life-changing and once-in-a-lifetime soulmate encounters. Sundberg (2015) describes phenomena of losing sense of time and space, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences, which characterize peak experiences (Maslow 1971; Grof and Grof 1990). In spiritual awakening, Goretzky (2007) points out that love can trigger peak experiences.

Kundalini phenomena had 12 occurrences, including 4 cases of *bodily activation/shaktipat*. Respondent 2 describes energies passing through his body when near his twin flame, Respondent 4 reports her twin flame caused her awakening ('he is the one who woke me up'), and Respondent 5 mentions spontaneous activations when meeting his twin flame. In yogic tradition, *shaktipat* means that an enlightened teacher with active kundalini activates another's kundalini. Greenwell's (2018) research found that anyone with heightened energy might activate another's kundalini. Some people feel intense energetic or psychic impact in their body when in the presence of a lover, friend, or stranger, who may be unaware of transmitting energy. This is common among twin flames. Greenwell found that kundalini awakening and psychic phenomena often occur together. Respondent 4 connects telepathy to energetic sensations, describing she would 'feel a tingle' when the twin flame was about to call. Respondent 5 describes having out-of-body experiences, also a psychic phenomenon, during lovemaking (Wade 2004) with his twin flame, which makes sense if kundalini is *libido* or sexual-erotic energy (Taylor 2017).

Dark nights of the soul had 15 occurrences. Three twin flames describe triggering each other. Respondent 2 describes that his twin flame pushes his buttons, as part of the journey to heal each other. Greenwell (2018) relates intensification of unresolved psychological issues, mood swings, and intense positive and negative emotions that occur during dark nights, to kundalini. Psychological liberation is an ongoing process of with peaks and valleys (Goretzky 2007). Respondent 7 describes 'incredible amazing hell' when she and her twin flame trigger each other and expand consciousness in an emotional rollercoaster of trauma healing. Greenwell (1990) and Grof and Grof (1990) write that kundalini brings to light negative emotions, patterns, and conditioning stored in the body (*samskaras* in yogic tradition). Intense love can be a catalyst to bring to light childhood trauma, attachment trauma, codependency issues, and cultural conditioning. In yogic tradition, these dynamics are seen as *karmic*, indicating a belief in past life debts between partners. Seven respondents describe difficult or karmic relationship dynamics.

Psychological transformation and renewal had 21 occurrences. Twelve individuals reported experiences of *growth, learning and healing*. Respondent 1 reports they help each other in joint lessons. Respondent 2 writes they are healing each other and growing spiritually. *Psychological renewal and merging of opposites* (11 occurrences) is more intense. Respondent 2 describes *complementarity and mirroring*, where the twin flame is his other half; and they each have the experiences the other is missing. Other

respondents describe they are 'same, but different'; they have opposite astrological signs, or opposite Myers-Briggs personality types. These relate to Jung's mystical marriage of anima and animus, the inner merging of masculine and feminine archetypes, the basis of psychological renewal (Grof and Grof 1990).

In comparison, almost all of Sundberg's (2015) respondents experienced instant recognition and immediate bonding. A majority had kundalini experiences, described as electric and energetic sensations, butterflies, 'lightning bolts', and euphoric feelings, 'like taking a drug'. Half of his respondents experienced psychic opening, including synchronicities, telepathy and mindreading. A few experienced psychological renewal, but many describe helping each other's psychological transformation. They learned to communicate better, and changed behavior, became less shy, more assertive, and took more chances. Sundberg (2015) describes soulmate encounters as life changing. Some report losing sense of time, characterizing peak experiences. Despite different methods and sampling, my study replicates types and varieties in Sundberg's study, and adds dark nights of the soul.

Sundberg concludes that spiritual love relations are distinct from romantic love described in psychology. Soulmate meetings lead to immediate, mutual bonding, and secure attachment (Ainsworth et al. 1978), in contrast to unrequited love, limerence (Tennov 1979), and one-sided infatuation. In my study, immediate bonding had the highest occurrence. Sundberg (2015) found that soulmate encounters relate to spiritual awakening, particularly kundalini and psychic phenomena. Spiritual love relations are distinct from 'transcendent sex' (Wade 2000, 2004), which triggers largely the same phenomena, but mostly only experienced by one partner. Only two of Wade's (2004) respondents share the experience. They both have visions of past lives together with their partners, and these two cases appear to be soulmates.

Twin flames represent 21% of those who describe phenomena, but stand for 40% of psychic experiences, and 42% of kundalini experiences. Twin flames score higher on telepathy, synchronicity, energetic phenomena, awakening, and complementarity and mirroring. Experiences of *feeling the partner's feelings and dreams, bodily activation/shaktipat* and *triggering* were almost exclusive to twin flames, suggesting this subcategory of soulmates has more intense energy dynamics, which could make relationships difficult. Participant 7 ended a triggering twin flame relation in favor of an 'other soulmate' relation, where bonding, mutual learning, and helping each other grow, are common characteristics. Findings support popular belief that twin flame encounters trigger awakening. Further research is needed to explore what causes twin flames to connect energetically, enable psychic phenomena, trigger awakening, and cause psychological transformation?

My sample contained only 14% males. However, men were overrepresented on peak experiences (33%), dark nights (27%), transformation and renewal (24%). Common for these is a life-changing, transformational aspect. In yogic tradition, kundalini is the goddess Shakti. This begs the question: Do men experience awakening divine feminine energy, reintegrating their feminine side through soulmate encounters, more intensely?

Conclusion

This study of soulmate relations confirms previous research showing that spiritual love relations are distinct from romantic love described in psychology. Spiritual love relations

overlap with romantic love, but do not depend on physical form. While sex can trigger individual transpersonal experiences (Wade 2000, 2004), soulmates are mutual relations of spiritual love. Whether soulmates form romantic relations, friendships, parent–child or sibling relations, they report similar phenomena. Findings support popular belief that twin flames have more intense dynamics; that one can have several soulmates; and that relations may end. Defining criteria of spiritual love relations include instant recognition, immediate bonding, and various psychic and energetic phenomena corresponding to spiritual awakening described in transpersonal psychology (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990; Greenwell 1990, 2018; Taylor 2017; Goretzky 2007).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Christian Stokke is Associate Professor in the Department of Culture, Religion and Social Studies at the University of Southeastern Norway. His research interests include multicultural education, religious education, and spirituality.

References

- Ainsworth, M. D., M. C. Blehar, E. Waters, and S. Wall. 1978. *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. Oxford, UK: Erlbaum.
- Bloomstein, Y. 2001. “The Soulmate Experience: A Phenomenological Investigation.” *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering* 62 (5-B): 2531. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2001-95022-256>.
- Boyce, J. A. 2001. “In Search of a Soulmate: Variables That Characterize Soulmate Relationships.” (PhD dissertation). Arizona State University.
- Bryman, A. 2012. *Social Research Methods (4th ed.)*. Oxford University Press.
- Connell, E. 2012. “Soulmates: A Phenomenological Study of Women Who Believe They Knew Their Romantic Partner in a Previous Lifetime.” (Psy.D. Clinical Dissertation). Alliant International University, San Diego.
- Connell, E., and D. Eulert. 2011. Reincarnation & Soulmates. A Review of the Literature. *ahp perspective*, April/May 2011, <http://www.atpweb.org/jtparchive/pdfs/AHP%20Perspective%20APRIL%202011.pdf>.
- Coughlan, T., and L.-A. Perryman. 2015. “A Murky Business: Navigating the Ethics of Educational Research in Facebook Groups.” *European Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 146–169.
- Goretzky, M. 2007. “The Differentiation of Psychosis and Spiritual Emergency.” (PhD Dissertation). University of Adelaide.
- Greenwell, B. 1990. *Energies of Transformation*. Cupertino, CA: Shakti River Press.
- Greenwell, B. 2018. *When Spirit Leaps. Navigating the Process of Spiritual Awakening*. Oakland, CA: Non-duality Press.
- Grof, S., and C. Grof. 1989. *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.
- Grof, S., and C. Grof. 1990. *The Stormy Search for Self: Understanding and Living with Spiritual Emergency*. London: Mandala.
- Hamilton, W. 1951. *The Symposium by Plato*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Jung, C. G. 1960. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Maslow, A. 1971. *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. New York: Viking Press.

- Merivale, A. 2009. *Souls United. The Power of Divine Connection*. Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications.
- O'Donahue, J. 1998. *Anam Cara. A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Orth, Z., M. Andipatin, F. C. Mukumbang, and B. Van Wyk. 2020. "Applying Qualitative Methods to Investigate Social Actions for Justice Using Social Media: Illustrations from Facebook." *Social Media + Society* 6: 1–14. doi: [10.1177/2056305120919926](https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120919926).
- Prophet, E. C. 1999. *Soul Mates and Twin Flames. The Spiritual Dimension of Love and Relationships*. Gardiner, Montana: Summit University Press.
- Prophet, M., and E. C. Prophet. 1988. *The Ascended Masters on Soul Mates and Twin Flames. Initiation by the Great White Brotherhood. Volume 2*. Gardiner, Montana: Summit University Press.
- Sanella, L. 1989. "Kundalini: Classical and Clinical." In *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*, edited by S. Grof, and C. Grof, 99–108. Los Angeles, CA: Putnam.
- Sundberg, J. C. 2015. "Shotgun Awakening: A Phenomenological Study of Extreme Occurrences of Falling in Love." (PhD Dissertation). California Institute of Integral Studies, <https://pqdtopen.proquest.com/doc/1757513014.html?FMT=ABS>.
- Sundberg, J. C. 2019. "Amigeist: A New Extreme Love Phenomenon." *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*. 38 (1): 83–98. <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1608&context=ijts-transpersonalstudies>.
- Taylor, S. 2017. *The Leap. The Psychology of Spiritual Awakening*. London: Hay House.
- Tennov, D. 1979. *Love and Limerence. The Experience of Being in Love*. New York: Stein & Day.
- Todeshi, K. J. 1999. *Edgar Cayce on Soul Mates*. Virginia Beach, VA: A.R.E. Press.
- Wade, J. 2000. "Mapping the Courses of Heavenly Bodies: The Varieties of Transcendent Sexual Experience." *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 32 (2): 103–122.
- Wade, J. 2004. *Transcendent Sex. When Lovemaking Opens the Veil*. New York: Paraview Pocket Books.
- Weiss, B. 1988. *Many Lives, Many Masters*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Wilber, K. 1991. *Grace and Grit: Spirituality and Healing in the Life and Death of Treya Killiam Wilber*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.