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Spiritual Intelligence and Personality

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Keywords *spiritual intelligence, personality traits, HEXACO, SISRI-24, college students*

Abstract

This study quantifies the relationship between measures of spiritual intelligence and personality traits. A random sample of 240 undergraduate students from a mid-sized private Christian university in the West South-Central United States were administered both the SISRI-24 survey instrument for spiritual intelligence as well as the Pathway U survey for HEXACO personality traits. Statistically significant positive correlations were found between critical existential thinking and openness to experience; personal meaning production and extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness; transcendental awareness and extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness; and conscious state expansion and extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. Statistically significant negative correlations were found between negative emotionality and personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. Interestingly, honesty-humility was found to be significantly negatively correlated with overall SI-score, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion in a multi linear regression analysis but was not a significant factor when taken alone. These results inform those who wish to develop spiritual intelligence by taking individual personality traits into account.

Introduction

Human beings enter the world as infants and progressively develop over the course of life in a variety of dimensions, including cognitive, personality, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Gardner (1983) coined the term "multiple intelligences" to acknowledge the variety of facets involved in human intellect. These multiple intelligences are dynamic and connected. For example, numerous studies support the claim that mathematical and musical intelligences are positively correlated (Bergee & Weingarten, 2020; Kusuma & Dwipriyoko, 2021). Other studies note correlations between measures of spiritual intelligence and personality (Asghari Sharabiani et al., 2019; Hossein et al., 2012; Mahasneh et al., 2015).

Whole-person care is concerned with the development and treatment of the whole human being; spirit, mind, and body. Understanding how multiple intelligences interact informs our thinking on how students mature and allows for patient-centered counselors to provide the physical, behavioral, emotional, and social services required to improve overall well-being. For example, how does personal meaning production (a measure of spiritual intelligence) associate with the degree to which a person experiences environmental stresses as anxiety-causing, hostile, and dangerous (a measure of personality)? Or how does the ability to access higher states of consciousness (a measure of spiritual intelligence) correlate with the ability to get along with other people (a measure of personality)? This study examines the connections between spiritual intelligence and personality.

Spiritual intelligence, a term first introduced in organizational management by Zohar (1997) and later defined as the brain's unitive processes to reconceptualize experience and produce meaning (Zohar et al., 2000), quickly gained popularity beyond the business domain, motivating research in religious studies (Amram, 2007; Halama et al., 2004), psychology (Mayer, 2000), well-being (Emmons, 2000), and health (Koenig, 2013). In its immense capacity to influence and impact the individual and society, spiritual intelligence may come in many different degrees and expressions: developed or undeveloped, conscious or unconscious, naïve or sophisticated, beneficial or distorted (Vaughan, 2002). In attempting to harness the inner intelligence potential and impact its constituencies, each professional framework seems to apply a slightly different set of interpretation lenses. For example, Emmons (2000) focuses on the practical facilitation of spiritual data in everyday problem solving, while Mayer (2000) seeks an accurate definition of the concept, challenging the practicality of the previous research and stressing the need for proper measurement of the phenomena. The four-factor model, also known as the Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24), proposed by King and DeCicco (2009), is based on cognitive abilities, not necessarily religious approaches, and encompasses the four core components:

critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion.

Spiritual intelligence is correlated to happiness (Jahangir et al., 2020), plays an important role in reducing mental health problems like depression and anxiety (Jahangir et al., 2020), and correlates with mental health in general (Arnout, 2020; Pant & Srivastava, 2019; Vaughn, 2002). Spiritual intelligence has been linked with higher resiliency and in turn to better mental health via enabling people to be overcomers in the face of mental stresses, tension and depression–changing the threats of life into opportunities (Arnout, 2020; Ebrahimi et al., 2012). Spiritual intelligence is the adaptive use of spiritual awareness to facilitate the process of problem-solving and to endure the stresses of life and motivates people to achieve personal goals (Robinson et al., 2016).

In the multifaceted dialogue on spirituality, Emmons (2000) markedly builds the case for spirituality as a problem-solving and goal-attainment intelligence that transcends mere phenomenological existence and is thus embedded in the pragmatic fashion of simple solutions. In his view, spirituality is "the personal expression of ultimate concern" (p. 4) and is closely related to religion, which according to Tillich (1963) is "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life" (p. 4). In other words, this ultimate concern drives the goal attainment and motivation that can justify the membership of spirituality in Gardner's multiple intelligence model (Gardner, 1993). Despite Mayer's (2000) objection to naming spirituality an intelligence and instead of defining it as consciousness, researchers in the field, such as Vaughan, Amram, Zohar and Marshall, Koenig, and King, have kept a steady interest in the concept's ability to motivate growth processes and problem-solving capacity.

Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory SISRI-24

King and DeCicco (2009) consider spiritual intelligence and religion as two distinct but related psychological concepts and offer a reliable four-factor model of assessing spiritual intelligence, widely recognized as SISRI-24. Several recent studies utilize SISRI-24 to examine the relationship between personality traits and spiritual intelligence and find a statistically significant correlation between some of the personality traits and spiritual intelligence (Amrai et al., 2011; Beshlideh et al., 2011; Farsani et al., 2013; Mahasneh et al., 2015; Sood et al., 2012). Since the current study follows the work of previous research in utilizing SISRI-24, this section briefly discusses the assessment model.

In SISRI-24, spiritual intelligence is defined as "a set of mental capacities which contribute to the awareness, integration, and adaptive application of the

nonmaterial and transcendent aspects of one's existence, leading to deep existential reflection, enhancement of meaning, recognition of a transcendent self, and mastery of spiritual" states King (2008, p. 54). The model consists of four components: (1) critical existential thinking, (2) personal meaning production, (3) transcendental awareness, and (4) conscious state expansion.

Critical existential thinking relates to the individual capacity to contemplate meaning critically and arrive at original conclusions or personal philosophies that integrate the knowledge of science and unique experiences. The concept finds significant support in Gardner's (1983,1993) extensive theory of multiple intelligences and the research on spirituality (Wink & Dillon, 2002) and spiritual intelligence (Vaughan, 2002). Some current discussions of critical existential thinking suggest its application to any life issue as part of one's existence and patterns of behavior (Green & Noble, 2010). In self-estimates of intelligence, Furnham et al. (2005) demonstrate that existential intelligence is a reliable factor in predicting overall intelligence.

Like critical existential thinking, *personal meaning production* is considered a component of spirituality and the individual ability to create personal meaning and purpose in all physical and mental experiences (King et al., 2001; Wink & Dillon, 2002). Emmons' (2000) concept of sanctification embodies the personal meaning of production. Reker et al. (1987) define the personal meaning as "having a purpose and striving toward a goal or goals" (p. 44), and as essential to coping with the developmental crisis. The ultimate mastery of purpose is the individual ability to infer purpose in all events and experiences (King & DeCicco, 2009).

Transcendental awareness involves the capacity to perceive transcendent dimensions of the self, others, and the physical world (Farsani et al., 2013). King and DeCicco (2009) draw on Pascual (1990) to position the key aspect of the transcendental self to the concept of spiritual intelligence. Self-transcendence is described by Le and Levenson (2005) as "the ability to move beyond self-centered consciousness and to see things … with a considerable measure of freedom from biological and social conditioning" (p. 444).

Conscious state expansion is the ability to enter spiritual states of consciousness at one's judgment, supported by Maslow's connection between expanded states of consciousness, religion, and spirituality (Maslow, 1964). Behind the expanded or altered states of consciousness is the potential mental ability of the individual to meditate and relax (Emmons, 2000). Vaitl et al. (1964) note that such altered states of consciousness are "to some extent under our own control" (p. 32), which is a key point in the conscious state expansion.

Mahasneh et al. (2015) investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence (SISRI-24) and the big-5 personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness), thus finding positive and statistically significant relationships between all of the spiritual intelligence dimensions and several of the big-5 personality traits, with critical existential thinking being the spiritual intelligence

factor most easily predicted using linear correlation with personality traits (R^2 = 0.120, F = 19.373, p < .05). The only nonsignificant correlations are between neuroticism and both personal meaning production and transcendental awareness. Also, Mahasneh et al. (2015) note the growing interest in spiritual intelligence as being motivated by its phenomenal capacity to influence culture, people, and society but still indicate the need to differentiate its conceptual framework between religion and spirituality, defining the former as the sacred and the latter as the experiential search for meaning.

HEXACO Personality Traits

The HEXACO model of personality traits has six factors including a measure of Honesty-Humility that is not part of the classic Big-5 personality traits model of personality. These six factors are Honesty-Humility (H), Emotionality (E), Extraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O). The personality-descriptive adjectives that are associated with these traits are: sincere, honest, faithful, loyal, and modest/unassuming *versus* sly, deceitful, greedy, pretentious, hypocritical, boastful, and pompous for Honesty-Humility (H); emotional, oversensitive, sentimental, fearful, anxious, and vulnerable *versus* brave, tough, independent, self-assured, and stable for Emotionality (E); outgoing, lively, extraverted, sociable, talkative, cheerful, and active *versus* shy, passive, withdrawn, introverted, quiet, and reserved for Extraversion (X); patient, tolerant, peaceful, mild, agreeable, lenient, and gentle *versus* ill-tempered, quarrelsome, stubborn, and choleric for Agreeableness (A); organized, disciplined, diligent, careful, thorough, and precise *versus* sloppy, negligent, reckless, lazy, irresponsible, and absent-minded for Conscientiousness (C); and intellectual, creative, unconventional, innovative, and ironic *versus* shallow, unimaginative, and conventional for Openness to Experience (O) (Ashton & Lee, 2007).

Since the initial development of the HEXACO Personality Inventory in the early 2000s, it has been used to study various aspects related to psychology, including religiosity (Saroglou et al., 2005), and matters related to mental health and well-being (see Anglim et al., 2020 for a recent meta-analysis). The HEXACO traits have also been shown to have moderate advantages over the Big Five in predicting psychological well-being (Aghababaei & Arji, 2014), and counselors utilizing a growth-mindset view of all intelligences (Dweck, 2006, 2008) can focus on spiritual development to ultimately profit the whole person (McCrae & Costa, 1991; Piedmont, 2001).

This study aims to explore the relationship between spiritual intelligence and personality traits by documenting statistically significant correlations.

Methods

Participants and Recruitment

Spiritual intelligence data were collected using King and DeCicco's (2009) SISRI-24 survey instrument from N = 240 (62.5% female; mean age 19.3 yrs) students taking the institution's elementary statistics course, a course required by all majors, from the spring (N = 150), summer (N = 1) and fall (N = 89) semesters of 2021. Students were offered a small amount of extra credit for completing the survey instrument. Next, Pathway U (2022) personality data that all students had entries for, due to it being required in the institution's freshman 'university success' course entitled Introduction to Whole Person Education. The data were then de-identified before being provided to the research group for analysis.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

Sex	N (%)
Male	90 (37.5)
Female	150 (62.5)

The research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations, institutional policies, and in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration, and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board (IRB#: F2018-14).

Instruments

Spiritual intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24)

The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24) is designed to measure a person's level of spiritual intelligence. This questionnaire has 4 dimensions: Critical Existential Thinking, Personal Meaning Production, Transcendental Awareness, and Conscious State Expansion. The instrument has as its name suggests, 24 items which are scored using a 0-4 Likert scale, corresponding to the following: (1) not true at all with me, (2) is not true with me, (3) quite true to me, (4) very true to me, and (5) is true to me. The level of spiritual intelligence is a score with higher scores corresponding to higher levels of spiritual intelligence. Validation and reliability were carried out by King (2008) from the original item

of the 84-item questionnaire, which was reduced to 24 items of study on 305 university students consisting of 231 females and 74 males and obtained an alpha of 0.92. As a measure of internal consistency, King reported values for Cronbach's alpha for the subscales of Critical Existential Thinking, Personal Meaning Production, Transcendental Awareness, and Conscious State Expansion of 0.78, 0.78, 0.87, and 0.91, respectively (King, 2008). In this current research effort, values for the same reliability coefficient were calculated and found to be .79, .76, .74, and .84.

HEXACO-60

The HEXACO-60 instrument (Ashton & Lee, 2009), a shorter version of the HEXACO Personality Inventory—Revised (Ashton & Lee, 2008), comprises 10 items that measure the six HEXACO dimensions. Each facet of each dimension is covered by 2-3 items. The 5-point Likert scale ranges from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The HEXACO-60 dimensions have been found to show adequate scale reliability and validity (Ashton & Lee, 2009). Cronbach's alpha could not be evaluated since Pathway U reported only summary scores for each dimension.

The de-identified dataset is available from figshare under a CC0 license (Harder et al., 2022).

Results

The first analysis to be performed was that of determining the spiritual intelligence and personality trait levels of the participants in the study as measured by the instruments used. Standard descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation for spiritual intelligence and personality trait levels for all participants were calculated and are presented below in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively. Also presented are values for male and female participants.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Score as a Function of Spiritual Intelligence Factor

	All		*Males*		*Females*	
Spiritual Intelligence Factor	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Conscious State Expansion	11.04	3.90	10.54	4.42	11.34	3.53
Critical Existential Thinking	18.50	5.08	19.16	5.44	18.11	4.83
Personal Meaning Production	14.07	3.19	13.71	3.60	14.28	2.92
Transcendental Awareness	20.11	4.03	19.40	4.30	20.53	3.81

Note. *M* and *SD* represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Score as a Function of Personality Trait Factor

	All		*Males*		*Females*	
Personality Trait Factor	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Agreeableness	3.71	0.53	3.65	0.47	3.76	0.56
Conscientiousness	3.58	0.72	3.50	0.71	3.62	0.73
Extraversion	3.50	0.80	3.41	0.90	3.56	0.73
Negative Emotionality	3.27	0.75	3.10	0.75	3.38	0.73
Openness To Experience	3.74	0.79	3.71	0.88	3.76	0.74

Note. *M* and *SD* represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

In order to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and personality traits, a correlation matrix was created and is presented in Table 4. Positive correlations were found between spiritual intelligence traits and the personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience. Negative correlations were found between spiritual intelligence traits and the personality traits of negative emotionality and honesty-humility. Conscientiousness was positively correlated with all spiritual intelligence traits

apart from critical existential thinking. Most of the correlations demonstrated statistical significance at the level $p < 0.05$.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations with Confidence Intervals

Variable	Negative Emotionality	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Openness To Experience	Conscientiousness	Honesty-Humility
Critical Existential Thinking	-.09 [-.21, .04]	.00 [-.13, .13]	.07 [-.06, .20]	.21** [.08, .33]	-.08 [-.20, .05]	-.06 [-.20, .07]
Personal Meaning Production	-.19** [-.31, -.07]	.22** [.10, .34]	.27** [.15, .38]	.06 [-.07, .19]	.26** [.14, .38]	-.03 [-.16, .11]
Transcendental Awareness	-.14* [-.27, -.02]	.23** [.10, .34]	.21** [.08, .33]	.19** [.07, .31]	.14* [.01, .26]	-.00 [-.14, .13]
Conscious State Expansion	-.19** [-.31, -.07]	.17** [.04, .29]	.23** [.10, .34]	.10 [-.02, .23]	.18** [.05, .30]	-.13 [-.26, .00]

Note: M and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

The evaluation of the predictability of spiritual intelligence using personality traits was performed using multiple linear regression analysis. The results are provided in Table 5 (see p. 81). An initial regression analysis was run to evaluate predictability of the total Spiritual Intelligence score as a function of Personality Traits. The model indicated that the 12.2 percent of the total Spiritual Intelligence score can be explained by Personality Traits (adj r-squared = 0.122, F = 8.266, $p < 0.001$). Further models were generated specifying each Spiritual Intelligence trait as a dependent variable with the six personality traits acting as independent variables. A review of each model's output was performed, and the model rerun to include only personality traits that demonstrated a statistical significance using $p < .05$ using a best subsets technique.

The model specifying critical existential thinking as the dependent variable and narrowing the independent variable to openness to experience demonstrated statistical significance (adj r-squared = 0.039, F =10.78, p = 0.012).

This indicated that with this group of participants, openness to experience accounted for a 3.9 percent variance in critical existential thinking. Using personal meaning production as the dependent variable and using extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and honesty/humility as independent variables, the model reflected statistical significance (adj r-squared = 0.13, F = 8.809, p < .001) and that these four personality traits account for 13 percent of the variance. With transcendental awareness as the dependent variable and using extroversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience as independent variables, the model reflected statistical significance (adj r-squared = 0.094, F = 9.294, p < .001) indicating that these three personality traits accounted for 9.4 percent of the variance in this Spiritual Intelligence trait. Finally, using conscious state expansion as the dependent variable and using extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and honesty-humility as independent variables, the model reflected statistical significance (adj r-squared = 0.1169, F = 7.92, p < .001) and that these four personality traits accounted for 11.7 percent of the variance.

Table 5

Results of Regression Analysis Predicting Personality Traits

Spiritual Intelligence	Personality traits	Adj. R-Squared	Beta	T	p-value
Total SI Score	Extraversion	0.1221	3.2721	3.444	0.000696***
	Agreeableness		4.2112	2.687	0.007803**
	Openness to Experience		2.3170	2.542	0.011750*
	Honesty-Humility		-2.7275	-2.141	0.033489*
Critical Existential Thinking	Openness to Experience	0.0393	1.335	3.283	0.00118**
Personal Meaning Production	Extraversion	0.13	0.8192	3.113	0.00212**
	Agreeableness		1.2944	3.066	0.00246**
	Conscientiousness		0.8691	2.833	0.00507**
	Honesty-Humility		-0.7752	-2.12	0.03522*
Transcendental Awareness	Extraversion	0.09429	0.9552	3.045	0.00259**
	Agreeableness		1.2342	2.607	0.00971**
	Openness to Experience		0.7757	2.45	0.01503*
Conscious State Expansion	Extraversion	0.1169	0.8196	2.466	0.014498*
	Agreeableness		1.72	3.226	0.001464**
	Conscientiousness		0.9126	2.355	0.019477*
	Honesty-Humility		-1.5692	-3.397	0.000818***

Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore the relationship between spiritual intelligence and personality traits by documenting statistically significant correlations. The work of previous studies including those by Beshlideh (2011), Amrai (2011), Sood (2012), and Farsani (2013) is well-documented by Mahasneh et al. (2015) and details both positive and negative statistically significant correlations found between certain personality traits and spiritual intelligence components. The correlation matrix for this current study is presented in Table 4. There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the spiritual intelligence components of personal meaning production, transcendental awareness and conscious state expansion with the personality traits of conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness. These results align closely with those found by Beshlideh (2011) and Amrai (2011). Results also showed a negative and statistically significant relationship between personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion with the personality traits of negative emotionality. Hossein et al. (2012) and Asghari et al. (2019) report similar results with a negative correlation with spiritual intelligence factors and neuroticism and positive correlations with spiritual intelligence factors and conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness, and both conclude that personality factors can be predictors of spiritual intelligence.

Results of this current study show critical existential thinking had positive significant correlation to openness, and no significant correlation to conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, negative emotionality, or honesty-humility. Correlation between critical existential thinking and personality traits is not as consistent among studies of undergraduate students. Beshlideh et al. (2011) and Mahasneh et al. (2015) both reported a statistically significant correlation between critical existential thinking and conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness.

The results of this current study largely confirm previous efforts to quantify the association between personality and spiritual intelligence. Intriguing new observations include that measures of personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion all appear to negatively correlate to measures of negative emotionality/neuroticism and that, maybe surprisingly, honesty-humility is a significant factor determining overall spiritual intelligence, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion when included in multi linear regression analysis.

Widiger et al. (2009) define neuroticism as an inclination to experience negative emotional states, respond poorly to environmental stress, or undergo minor frustrations that are hopelessly overwhelming. The neuroticism personality trait can have a devastating impact on an individual's mental, emotional, and

physical health. Although this study does not assert that the inverse relationships between neuroticism and spiritual measures are causal, it would be worth exploring these connections to develop possible new therapies. For example, our research suggests that a person suffering from anxiety might very well benefit from the practice of spiritual disciplines. Likewise, spiritual disciplines may positively contribute to other measures of personality development, such as agreeableness (the degree to which a person is pleasant and gets along with others), extraversion (the degree to which a person is truly interested in other people), and conscientiousness (the degree to which a person can plan ahead and self-motivate). The development of a person's unique personality is represented by an extension of intended changes of organized thought and behavior patterns over time. If we take a growth-mindset view of all intelligences (Dweck, 2006) and allow for the possible intentional development of personality traits (Dweck, 2008), we move forward in the hope that individuals are capable of growth, and that a focus on spiritual development ultimately profits the whole person. This has implications for counselors facilitating the development of spiritual intelligence and personality traits to improve well-being (Muris, 2022; Wigglesworth, 2013). For example, further research needs to be done to see if it is possible to facilitate development of spiritual intelligence traits in counseling through personality changes and/or vice versa?

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between spiritual intelligence and personality traits and found results that largely confirm previous efforts to quantify the association between personality and spiritual intelligence, including that: there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the spiritual intelligence components of personal meaning production, transcendental awareness and conscious state expansion with the personality traits of conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness; and a negative and statistically significant relationship between personal meaning production, transcendental awareness and conscious state expansion with the personality traits of negative emotionality.

New observations include that measures of personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion all appear to correlate negatively to measures of negative emotionality/neuroticism and that honesty-humility is a significant negative factor determining overall spiritual intelligence, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. This finding, in particular, calls for further research to explore potential implications. Much of the previous research utilized the Big-5 model, which does not include the honesty-humility trait. Current studies on the HEXACO Honesty-Humility trait suggest that the H-H factor predicts prosocial behavior (Brazil,

2022; Hilbig, 2014). Characteristics such as sympathetic empathy were found to be positively associated with the HEXACO H-H trait (Brazil, 2022). Hilbig (2014) discusses the specific facets of the HEXACO H-H trait related to cooperativeness and notes that the HEX-HH tends to actively cooperate as opposed to reactively cooperate. Continued research on these fine-grained facets of the HEXACO H-H trait may assist in further dissection of the finding related to honesty-humility as a significant negative factor to determine overall spiritual intelligence and aid in understanding more fully which facets of the trait contribute to this significance.

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