

An Empirical Study on the Relationship between Spirituality and Ethical Style

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Abstract: *Some people view spirituality as being religious, where as for others, it may be more personal. Some people get in touch with their spiritual side through private prayer, rituals, yoga, meditation, quiet reflection, or even long walks. There is a notion that spiritual individuals are more ethical and the components of ethics are nothing but our beliefs and practices. Some studies have indicated that the higher an individual scores on spirituality, the better he/ she will be able to handle ethical dilemmas. This empirical study is an attempt to evaluate an individual's spirituality through The Spirituality Scale by Delaney C (2003; Revised, 2005), which measures spirituality through 3 dimensions viz., self-discovery (a search for meaning), the experience of relationships, and eco-awareness (a connection to the environment and cosmos) and correlate it to the two ethical styles of an individual (Ethics of care and ethics of justice) by using the Ethical style questionnaire developed by the Loyola Marry mount University (2006). It was hypothesized that there would be a correlation between spirituality and ethics and it would vary according to age. The sample for the study was taken from the general population (N=69), with two age groups: 21 to 30 & 45- 60. The findings revealed that there is a strong positive correlation between the spirituality and ethical style of an individual (0.715) at a significance level of 0.01. The results also indicated that individuals who scored high on the spirituality scale had a specific ethical style of dealing with ethical dilemmas. Further research with a larger sample, with different religious groups would probably help explain this pattern (most of the participants were followers of Hinduism). Examining these dimensions of spirituality and ethics would probably provide valuable insights into the ways in which one deals with the day to day situations and problems. It would also help in deciding which ethical style is best suited for a particular occupation.*

Keywords: Spirituality, Ethical Style, Gender differences, Ethics of Justice, Ethics of care

1. Introduction

The definition of spirituality is meant to encompass a multitude of perspectives and experiences, including atheistic and agnostic viewpoints. Although increasing attention to spirituality has provided us with other definitions and perspectives, there seems to be no consensus in the professional literature about a definition for spirituality. In order to lower the ambiguity of the definition, the operational definition of spirituality for this empirical study can be conceptualized as "a manifestation directed towards self-discovery (a search for meaning), the experience of relationships, and eco-awareness (a connection to the environment and cosmos)." Thus, it can be said that Spirituality is clearly a broader construct than religion. Spirituality gives meaning to people's lives and may be an important coping resource as well (Cronbach & Shavelson 2004; Tse, Lloyd, Petchkovsky & Manaia 2005).

The Need to Study Spirituality and Ethical Style

The relationship between spirituality and ethical decision making has made the assessment of spirituality an important consideration for organizations as well as psychologists. To support this notion, there is increasing evidence that spiritual individuals are ethical in business, and consequently, are of significant benefit to an organization. Certain psychologists believe that meaning in life (one of the dimensions of spirituality) is essential for psychological health in general (e.g., Maddi, 1967; Yalom, 1980) and various others propose that meaning in life protects against adverse health effects from stressful events (e.g., Antonovsky, 1987; Kobasa, 1979; Wortman, Silver, and Kessler, 1993). So when a person 'thinks ethically' they are giving at least some

thought to something beyond them. Studying the relationship between ethical style and spirituality would provide us valuable information about how these two variable intervene in the decision making process of an individual and to determine his/ her ethical style.

Ethic of Justice

An "ethic of justice or rights" is based on abstract, impersonal principles, like justice, fairness, equality or authority. People who prefer this style see ethical dilemmas as involving primarily a *conflict of rights* that can be solved by the impartial application of some *general principle*. The statue "Justice Blindfolded" captures this approach very well. People with this style tend to place a good deal of weight on moral principles, laws or policies, which they believe should be applied to all equally. They usually do not like making exceptions based on special circumstances, and they worry about "setting precedents."

The advantage of this approach is that it looks at a problem logically and impartially. People with this style try to be objective and fair, hoping to make a decision according to some standard that's "higher" than any specific individual's interests. The disadvantage of this approach is that people who rely on it might lose sight of the immediate interests of particular individuals. They may unintentionally ride roughshod over the people around them in favor of some abstract ideal or policy. Carried to an extreme, people who strongly prefer this style may tolerate human harm in the name of some principle. Others might think them as inflexible, cold and uncaring. Their approach can appear to be not simply impartial, but impersonal.

This style is more common of men than women, and of people who define themselves in more solitary, individualistic terms (Gillian, 1988). It seems to fit with a more legalistic approach to life that gives allegiance to some external source of authority. This approach can also go along with a traditional management style that prefers to justify decisions according to authority, policies or other impersonal standards, like numbers or executive prerogative.

Ethic of Care

An "ethic of care or responsibility" is founded on a sense of *responsibility* to reduce actual harm or suffering. For these people, moral dilemmas generally involve a conflict of duties or responsibilities. People with this orientation believe that the focal point of every ethical dilemma is the *specific individuals involved* and the *particular circumstances* of the case. Solutions, then, must be tailored to the special details of individual circumstances. Notions of equity, or what is *appropriate* or "fitting," tend to be favored by this approach. Making exceptions does not phase these people, and they tend to feel constrained by policies that are supposed to be enforced without exception.

The advantage of this approach is that it is responsive to immediate suffering and harm. This approach is flexible, caring and subjective--appropriately so. It can respond quickly to changing circumstances and is not preoccupied with the idea of setting precedents. The bad news, however, is that by focusing so much on circumstances, people with this orientation can lose sight of the forest for the trees. Their reliance on subjective, "gut" response can limit their appreciation of other factors. When carried to an extreme, this style can produce decisions that seem not simply subjective, but arbitrary.

This style is more common of women than men, and of people who define themselves primarily in terms of their relationships with other people (Gillian, 1988). It seems to fit with a more situational approach to life. This orientation seems related to a management style that is sensitive to the consequences of decisions on the individuals involved, that considers consensus-building to be very important, and that emphasizes having people do things as a result of personal "buy-in" rather than simply following orders.

Where does an ethic come from?

Philosophers have several answers to this question:

- God and religion
- Human conscience and intuition
- A rational moral cost-benefit analysis of actions and their effects
- The example of good human beings
- A desire for the best for people in each unique situation
- Political power

Categorization of Ethics

God-based ethics: Supernaturalism makes ethics inseparable from religion. It teaches that the only source of moral rules is God. So, something is good because God says it is, and the way to lead a good life is to do what God wants.

Intuitionism: Intuitionists think that good and bad are real objective properties that can't be broken down into component parts. Something is good because it's good; its goodness doesn't need justifying or proving. Intuitionists think that goodness or badness can be detected by adults - they say that human beings have an intuitive moral sense that enables them to detect real moral truths.

Consequentialism: This is the ethical theory that most non-religious people think they use every day. The basis of morality is on the consequences of human actions and not on the actions themselves. Consequentialism teaches that people should do whatever produces the highest no. of good consequences. One famous way of putting this is 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people'. Virtue ethics looks at virtue or moral character, rather than at ethical duties and rules, or the consequences of actions - indeed some philosophers of this school deny that there can be such things as universal ethical rules.

Situation ethics: Situation ethics rejects prescriptive rules and argues that individual ethical decisions should be made according to the unique situation. Rather than following rules, the decision maker should follow a desire to seek the best for the people involved. There are no moral rules or rights - each case is unique and deserves a unique solution. In this empirical study, we mainly concentrate on the situation ethics to determine the ethical style of an individual, based on certain situations and what he/ she considers worse among the two alternatives.

2. Review of Literature

There are a number of studies and research articles on the impact of spirituality on health and wellbeing (Fehring R. J. 1987) and even more on spirituality and ethics in an organization.

Veach and Chappel (1992) analyzed the dimensions of personal spiritual experience, spiritual well-being, sense of harmony, and personal helplessness on the Spiritual Health Questionnaire. They reported that spiritual well-being was positively related to psychological health and general well-being

Several studies (Conger, 1994; Marcic, 1997; Mitroff & Denton, 1999a; Mohamed et al., 2001; Palmer, 2001) suggested that spirituality is a critical human need and definitely should be part of organizational culture. Finally, organizations realized they could become more successful by meeting their members' needs and allowing them to express their spirituality.

Studies on financial management suggest that workplace spirituality can reduce a manager's motivation to manipulate financial reports to achieve pre-determined targets (Bhunia & Das, 2012), (Ming-Chia, 2012). Giacalone & Jurkiewicz (2003) found that Individual spirituality influences whether an individual perceives a questionable business practice as ethical or unethical. Huang & Shih (2011) found that spiritual leaders' values are concerned with moral issues. Issa & Peck (2010) found that the presence of spirituality is associated with ethical practice in the workplace.

However, the area of spirituality and ethical style hasn't been studied so far.

Aim

The aim of this study is to find out if spirituality is a factor in determining a specific ethical style of the individuals based on situation ethics.

Objectives

- To assess an individual's spirituality
- To find out the correlation between spirituality and the two ethical styles (Ethics of justice and ethics of caring).
- To find out if spirituality varies based on the age and gender of the individual.

Hypothesis

- H1:** There would be a positive correlation between spirituality and ethical styles
H2: Individuals who have an ethics of justice style would score more on the spirituality scale.

Sample size: 69 participants from the general population with two sub groups of 20 to 30 and 45 to 60 years of age were taken for the study. All the participants had a minimum of 10 to 12 years of education, to facilitate assessment. No specific religious background was taken as a criterion.

Data collection method: Quantitative data would be collected using questionnaires.

Research Instruments:

- **The Spirituality Scale (SS)**
- **What's your Ethical Style?**

The Spirituality Scale (SS): The spirituality Scale was developed and validated by Delaney C. (2003, revised, 2005). The Spirituality Scale (SS) is a 23 item instrument that measures the human spiritual dimension including: beliefs, intuitions, lifestyle choices, practices, and rituals. Spirituality is conceived as a multi-faceted phenomenon that incorporates 3 dimensions: self-discovery (a search for meaning), the experience of relationships, and eco-awareness (a connection to the environment and cosmos). The scoring is based on a 6- point Likert scale. Psychometric analysis of the SS provided strong evidence of the reliability and validity of the instrument. The SS is designed to assess spirituality in a manner that may be used to guide spiritual interventions.

What's your Ethical Style: This questionnaire was developed by the Centre for Ethics and Business, Loyola Mary Mount University (2006) and consists of 9 items with two alternatives to choose from: One is based on ethics of justice and the other is based on ethics of caring. Based on the options chosen by the participants, the scores on the questionnaire show how strongly the participant prefer one or another of two major styles for recognizing and resolving ethical dilemmas. The higher your "J" score, the more you rely on an "ethic of justice." The higher your "C" score, the more you prefer an "ethic of care."

3. Results

The data collected through the research instruments was analyzed using SPSS software. Based on the demographic data (Age and gender), cross tabulation was done with ethics and spirituality

Table 1.1: Gender * Ethics Cross tabulation

Count		Ethics		Total
		Caring	Justice	
Gender	Male	14	17	31
	Female	6	32	38
Total		20	49	69

Table 1.2: Age * Ethics Cross tabulation

Count		Ethics		Total
		Caring	Justice	
Age	21 to 30	15	20	35
	45 to 60	5	29	34
Total		20	49	69

From the above table 1.1, it is evident that out of the total sample of 69, 31 were men and 38 were women. Even though majority of the participants (both sexes included), had an ethics of justice style, more no. of women followed an ethical style of justice, when compared to males. From table 1.2, it is clear that there is a significant difference in the ethical styles based on age. Majority of the participants from the older age group, i.e. 45 to 60 yrs. had an ethical style of justice.

Table 1.3: Gender * spirituality Cross tabulation

Count		Ethics		Total
		Caring	Justice	
Gender	Male	14	17	31
	Female	6	32	38
Total		20	49	69

Table 1.4: Age * spirituality Cross tabulation

Count		Spirituality		Total
		Above 100	Below 100	
age	21 to 30	13	22	35
	45 to 60	31	3	34
Total		44	25	69

From the table no. 1.3, it can be interpreted that women scored higher on the spirituality scale when compared to men. Out of the 38 women participants, 33 had scored above 100 on the SS. When age is cross tabulated with spirituality, it can be observed that the majority of the participants from the older age group scored above 100 on the SS.

Table 1.5: Ethics * spirituality Cross tabulation

Count		Spirituality		Total
		Above 100	Below 100	
Ethics	Caring	7	13	20
	Justice	37	12	49
Total		44	25	69

Table 1.5 shows ethics and spirituality being cross tabulated and it clearly indicates that majority of the participants (44) i.e. 63%, irrespective of their age and gender, scored above 100 on the SS and out of these, 37 (84%), of them had an ethical style of justice.

2.1 Correlation between Age and Spirituality

		age	SpR
age	Pearson Correlation	1	.610**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	17.246	403.942
	Covariance	.254	5.940
	N	69	69

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2.1 shows the Pearson correlation between age and spirituality. The Pearson Correlation between these two variables is .610, which means that age and spirituality are positively correlated (moderately high) and the significance level is very high (0.000).

2.2 Correlation between Gender and Spirituality

		SpR	Gender
SpR	Pearson Correlation	1	.254*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.036
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	25431.072	154.565
	Covariance	373.986	2.273
	N	69	69

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2.2 shows the Pearson correlation between gender and spirituality. The Pearson Correlation between these two variables is 0.254, which means that gender and spirituality are positively correlated but the correlation between the two variables is weak at a significance level of .036.

2.3 Correlation between Spirituality and the two ethical styles

		SpR	caring	judging
SpR	Pearson Correlation	1	-.491**	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	25431.072	-971.768	1038.116
	Covariance	373.986	-14.291	15.266
	N	69	69	69

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2.3 shows the Pearson correlation between spirituality and ethics. The Pearson Correlation between these two variables is .501, which means that age and spirituality are positively correlated (moderately high) and the significance level is very high (0.000).

4. Discussion

From the statistical analysis, it has been observed that age and gender had a very significant role in determining the

participants score on the spirituality scale. There is a pattern that has emerged when Spirituality and Ethical styles were correlated. Majority of the participants who scored above 100 on the spiritual scale had an ethical style of justice. In order to determine the underlying cause for this particular pattern, further research is required with a larger sample and religious diversity as well. It has to be noted that majority of the participants who took part in this study were followers of Hinduism. So, when we interpret the results in the context of the Bhagavad Gita, the holy scripture of the Hindus, which preaches “dharma” i.e., justice to the duties and responsibilities of an individual, it is evident that those scoring high on spirituality had an ethical style of Justice.

When age and gender were compared to spirituality, it is clear that age and gender are both positively correlated. When age and gender were compared to ethics, there was a positive correlation between the dependent and independent variables.

5. Conclusion

From the statistical analysis and interpretation, we can conclude that there is a positive correlation between spirituality and ethical style, especially the ethical style of justice. Thus H1 is proved. H2 is proved as well as those who scored high on the spirituality scale (above 100) had an ethical style of justice but not ethical style of caring. Age and spirituality also had a positive correlation which means that the higher the age of an individual the greater his/ her score is on the spirituality scale. Gender and spirituality were also positively correlated at a high significance level and majority of the women participants had an ethical style of justice when compared to the percentage of men. This pattern also needs to be studied further as the literature supports the notion that men tend to be utilizing more of an ethical style of justice and women are more inclined towards an ethical style of caring, and the results indicate the opposite of it (Gillian, 1988). This change in the ethical styles of gender can be attributed to evolution of feminism. Things, with respect to the way women are being treated and an increase in the occupational opportunities and independence have led to women empowerment which might be the reason behind change in the women’s ethical style from caring to justice.

6. Research Outcomes

- It would help in deciding which ethical style is best suited for a particular occupation.
- Based on the SPSS analysis, it was found that individuals who scored high on spirituality had ethics of justice style in dealing with ethical conflicts/ dilemmas.
- Further research is required to study this pattern which would help us in understanding the underlining process involved in taking decisions in a conflicting situation.

7. Limitations

- There is no religious diversity among the participants of the study

- An in-depth analysis and interpretation based on the three individual dimensions of spirituality was not done.
- More demographic data has to be collected to study the emerging pattern in detail.
- The sample size of the study was small. A larger sample might provide greater significance levels.

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