

# **Daily spiritual experience in Basques and Mexicans: a quantitative study**

Experiencia espiritual cotidiana en vascos y mexicanos:  
un estudio cuantitativo

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of daily spiritual experience, as measured by the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale-Spanish (DSES-S), with life satisfaction, positive/negative affect, psychological well-being and personality in a sample of Basques (N=100) and Mexicans (N=96). Among the findings were that Basques reported a greater frequency of daily spiritual experience than their Mexican peers. In addition, Atheists and Agnostics reported more daily spirituality than Christians and Catholics. Finally, daily spiritual experience was positively correlated with life satisfaction, positive affect, and psychological well-being, and negatively correlated with indicators of anxiety and depression.

## **Key words**

Daily spiritual experience, Satisfaction with life, Positive/negative affect, Psychological well-being, Personality.

## **Resumen**

El propósito del presente estudio fue investigar la relación de la experiencia espiritual cotidiana, medida por la versión española de la Escala de Experiencia Espiritual Cotidiana, con la satisfacción con la vida, el afecto positivo/negativo, el bienestar psicológico y la personalidad en una muestra de mexicanos (N=96) y vascos (N=100). Entre los resultados se encontró que los vascos reportaron una mayor frecuencia de experiencia espiritual que sus pares mexicanos. Además, los ateos y agnósticos reportaron mayor espiritualidad cotidiana que los cristianos y católicos. Por último, la experiencia espiritual cotidiana se correlacionó positivamente con la satisfacción con la vida, el afecto positivo, y el bienestar psicológico, y correlacionó negativamente con los indicadores de ansiedad y depresión.

## **Palabras clave**

Experiencia espiritual cotidiana, Satisfacción con la vida, Afecto positivo/negativo, Bienestar psicológico, Personalidad.

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The famous phrase “the 21st century will be spiritual, or it shall not be” is attributed to French novelist André Malraux. Indeed, religion and spirituality are themes of profound importance to most contemporary societies (Peterson & Webb, 2006). Scholars recognize that the influence of religiousness/spirituality on people at the personal level is inadequately understood. Recently, psychology has been experiencing a renaissance, consisting of an expansion of the psychological literature on the impact of religiousness and spirituality on physical and mental health. In January 2003, the *American Psychologist* devoted a special edition to spirituality: religion and health as an indication of the renewed interest in the issue (Miller & Thoresen, 2003).

Numerous studies have shown that spiritual, consciousness-altering and non-traditional practices (from the standpoint of traditional healthcare) such as prayer, meditation, imagery, hypnosis, acupuncture, biofeedback, massage, laughter and play can have beneficial effects on physical and psychological health (Hostetler, 2002; Meyerstein & Ruskin, 2007; Underwood, 1999). To cite one example, spirituality is linked to positive physiological processes such as blood pressure and immune function. The strongest evidence for this relationship comes from randomized trials on the effects of meditation on physiological function (Davidson, 2004). Some of the positive effects of religiousness/spirituality found and quantified to date include a reduction in distress and symptoms of anxiety and depression; increased life satisfaction and psychological well-being; and a strengthened immune system. For people with disabilities and those in recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction, it offers meaning and purpose in life (Kalkstein & Tower, 2009; Lewis & Cruise, 2006; Reis, Baumiller, Scrivener, Yager, & Warren, 2007; Underwood, 1999).

Currently, the main scientific disciplines that have acknowledged the positive aspects of religion and spirituality are anthropology, nursing, philosophy, psychology, and social work. Neuroscience has also utilized the empirical approach to explain mental processes involved in religious and spiritual thinking (Boyer, 2001, 2008).

### **Religiousness and Spirituality**

There is a growing interest in definitionally distinguishing between spirituality and religiousness. The clear confusion regarding these concepts is possibly due to the fact that for at least the past two thousand years in Western history, religion has exercised a monopoly over spirituality (Elkins, 2001; Szasz, 2001). Zinnbauer and his research group (1997) made an important contribution toward disentangling these terms. They argued that part of the confusion resides in popular disillusionment with religious institutions, which have come to be regarded by some as obstacles to a direct experience of the sacred. Zinnbauer’s study found that the more people acknowledge being religious, the more they tend to minimize the difference between the two concepts. By comparison, persons who defined themselves as spiritual—but not religious—considered religiousness as negative, especially in association with orthodox Christian faith. Such a perception of orthodox religion has been explained in part by reference to the association of some forms of religious experience with prejudice, irrationality, authoritarianism, and guilt, which may lead to fanaticism and terrorism (Rogers et al., 2007).

Religiousness is often regarded as authoritarian and directive. By contrast, spirituality is associated with personal tolerance and openness to social and cultural experience (Kalkstein, 2006). There is also a tendency to characterize spirituality as good, private, and liberating; and to view religiousness as bad, institutionalized, limiting, and childish. Such a sharp distinction, however, is erroneous: both religiousness and spirituality can potentially inspire noble human qualities, such as altruism or caring for others, just as either can be used as a pretext for repulsive forms of human behavior, such as dogmatism, bigotry, and violence (Johnson, Kristeller, & Sheets, 2004; Underwood, 2005).

The goal of spirituality is *compassion*, literally meaning ‘to suffer with.’ It shines with actions of love for others. Compassion has always been the hallmark of true spirituality, and the highest teaching of religion. Indeed, “Loveless spirituality is an oxymoron and an ontological impossibility” (Elkins, 1998: 32-33). The

use of supernatural concepts in the definition of spirituality has been a point of intense debate. Some authors argue that it is essential to include the concept of the *sacred*. Others disagree, maintaining that the definition can be independent of any given religious affiliation and even of being atheistic (Johnson et al., 2004). For example, McSherry, Cash, & Ross (2004) suggest that spirituality can be classified into two major schools: those who believe in God and those who do not. Meraviglia (1999) describes two dimensions of spirituality, both of which reflect one's ultimate values or beliefs: (1) The vertical dimension in one's relationship with God or a supreme being. (2) The horizontal dimension in one's relationship with nature. Rayburn (2004: 53) defines the spiritual person as "caring for others," and "seeking goodness and truth, transcendence, and forgiveness/cooperation/peacefulness."

In general, religiousness is associated with an identifiable group of people (Christians, Muslims, Jews, etc.) who search collectively for feelings or perceptions that transcend material reality, and it consists of adherence to a (series of) doctrine and specified ritual practices (Johnson et al., 2004). Spirituality is different in its emphasis on experience of a personal relationship with God or a higher power, and on feelings of love, gratitude and mercy (Emmons & McCullough 2003; Underwood, 2005). Despite heated debate among scholars interested in this topic, for the time being, spirituality appears to be a concept less characterized by bias than is religiousness. At the same time, theoretically, the two concepts overlap and are characterized by multidimensionality, since each of them involves explorative processes that include emotional, cognitive, and behavioral forms of expression.

As a field of study within the broader discipline of psychology, "Spiritual psychology includes the study of the world's religious traditions and the integration of spiritual knowledge into psychological theory" (Elkins, 2001: 204). Often scientists with new ideas (for example, those who discuss the psychology of spirituality) have struggled to gain recognition from their more conservative colleagues. However, we should remember that science requires self-criticism (Feyerabend, 2008). Its progress necessitates openness to all points of view: "The sun will rise tomorrow, is a hypothesis; and what this means is: we don't *know* whether it will rise" (Nordmann, 2005: 132).

### Daily Spiritual Experience

One particularly active, perhaps even definitional, area of empirical study is the assessment of variables related to spirituality (Kalkstein, 2006; McCauley, Tarpley, Haaz, & Bartlett, 2008). Recent studies use a wide range of psychometric instruments to assess religious/spiritual variables (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Researchers have measured a host of religious/spiritual attitudes, experiences and behaviors (e.g., conversions), and their relation to well-being using various scales and questionnaires with a variety of samples (Lewis, Maltby, & Day, 2005). However, few authors have focused on assessing the influence of *routine* spiritual experiences on health and well-being.

According to Ellison & Fan (2008), the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) is one of the most significant, current innovations for the definition and assessment of religiousness and spirituality. The DSES, originally developed by Underwood and Teresi (2002), is a multi-item, self-report measure designed to capture how religiousness/spirituality is expressed in everyday life (Underwood, 2006). Daily spiritual experience is defined as an individual's perceptions and emotions related to the transcendent in daily life (Mayoral, Underwood, Laca, & Mejía, in press).

The construct of so-called daily spiritual experience signifies an important feature in the lives of many people. The DSES aims to assess an individual's perception of what he or she regards as transcendent in daily life (for example, God, the divine). The items attempt to measure one's personal spiritual *experience*, rather than introjected beliefs or specific behaviors, and hence it is not specifically tied to any particular religion (Underwood & Teresi, 2002). In addition, the items have been constructed so as to assess spiritual experience broadly defined rather than specific types of mystical or extrasensory phenomena (Underwood, 2006).

The scale assesses the breadth and depth of spiritual experience in its relationship with knowledge of the divine, as presently is in the various religions and spiritual traditions. Efforts were made to ensure that this measure was important and inclusive for a variety of populations, which would enable evaluation of groups of atheists or agnostics as well (Underwood, 2006). Whereas an assessment tool that attempts to measure the full spectrum of spirituality in terms of beliefs and practices should be multifactorial, the DSES does not aim to be a comprehensive measure of spirituality. It measures emotional and subjective experiences, and the experiences specifically evaluated are feelings and sensations, rather than the cognitive awareness of the beliefs (Underwood, 2006). One advantage of this instrument is that some of the feelings can be best expressed using a religious term (theistic), while others do not require religious language (secular or non-theistic).

Daily spirituality on the DSES has been negatively correlated with measures of psychosocial stress, anxiety and depression, while it has been positively correlated with assessments of optimism, perceived social support, and satisfaction with life (Ellison & Fan, 2008; Kalkstein, 2006; Mayoral et al., in press; Underwood & Teresi, 2002). The largest study using this instrument within the United States has provided a useful framework for employing it in different cultural contexts, such as Brazil, Chile, China, France, Korea, Mexico, and Vietnam (Mayoral et al., in press; Ng, Fong, Tsui, Au-Yeung, & Law, 2009).

### **Basques**

The present sample consisted of Basques and Mexicans. It is important to note that the Basque population should not be equated with the Spanish, as the Basque Country is considered an independent region. In addition, the Mexican sample in this study is representative of Mexico and is distinct from the Basque sample. Basques differ from Mexicans in significant ways, including language and politics, among other cultural differences.

According to a Basque joke, “when God created the first man, he got the bones from a Basque graveyard” (Facaros & Pauls, 2009: 20). Genetic information and blood typing suggest that the Basques are an ancient people who inhabited the old continent before the arrival of other European groups. This suggests that they may be the oldest ethnic group in Europe (Kurlansky, 2001). The Basque area is known as *Euskal-Herria* (Land of the Basques) or *Euskadi*, and is divided between approximately 2.5 million inhabitants in northwest Spain and 0.5 million in southwest France.

The Basque language, called Euskera, is extremely difficult and complex; it is the oldest European tongue still spoken. It is unrelated to Spanish, French, Italian, or any other Romance language, and belongs to no other known language family (Kurlansky, 2001). In addition, there are in Spain a number of different dialects, which complicates the sociolinguistic issue. In Spain, three Basque provinces (Álava, Biscay, and Gipuzkoa) were unified in 1980 as the *Basque Autonomous Community*. Its people were granted partial independence, acknowledgment of their language and culture, and control over their schools and police force (Woodworth, 2007). Here it is noteworthy that by the 1950s, resistance groups had formed to achieve total independence, most notably the *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA), Basque Homeland and Liberty. The ETA have committed terrorist acts since the 1960s, which includes the present. Although the ETA represents a minority, it has continued to fight for full Basque autonomy.

The Basque culture presents fascinating paradoxes and enigmas, with a living folklore rich in archaic rituals and dances, excellent cuisine, and distinctive architecture. Likewise, the region has made important contributions to modern culture through the contributions of men of letters (e.g., Miguel de Unamuno), sculptors (e.g., Eduardo Chillida), painters (e.g., Ignacio Zuloaga), and cineastes (e.g., Julio Medem) (Woodworth, 2007).

Most Basques are Roman Catholic. In the past, an unusually high percentage chose to become priests or nuns. However, this number has decreased since the Second Vatican Council, as has church attendance in

general. Two renowned theologians of the Catholic Church, St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius Loyola (founder of the Society of Jesus or Jesuits) were of Basque origin. Basque Catholicism, like in many other areas of Spain, has been characterized by a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary (Collins, 1990).

The present study is aimed at examining quantitative aspects of daily spiritual experience, satisfaction with life, positive/negative affect, psychological well-being, and personality in populations with different cultural backgrounds, norms and values, such as Basques and Mexicans. It should be noted that the measures in this study were administered in Spanish to both groups, and not in the Basque language of Euskera. All of the Basque participants were fluent in Spanish.

## METHODS

### Participants

196 participants (85 male, 111 female) were invited to answer on a voluntary basis the questionnaires. Anonymity was guaranteed. The sample consisted of 30 participants from Guadalajara, Jalisco, and 66 from Colima (Mexico); together with 100 participants from the province of Gipuzkoa, Basque Country (Spain). Locals call themselves 'donostiaras.' An attempt was made to balance gender (43% male, 57% female). While the main objective of this research was not cross-cultural comparison, using samples from two countries allowed us to explore some cultural differences as potentially intervening variables.

### Measures

**Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)** (Spanish version by Laca, Verdugo, & Guzmán, 2005. English original by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Satisfaction with life refers to an individual's conscious evaluative judgment of his or her life by using the person's own criteria (Pavot & Diener, 1993). This instrument consists of five affirmative items (e.g. 'If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing'), on which the person may choose on a Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Two decades of research on this scale shows an acceptably high level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). The maximum possible score is 35 with a mean of 7, and the minimum score is 5 with a mean of 1.

**Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)** (Spanish version by Sandín et al., 1999. English original by Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). This is a measure using two scales that assesses positive and negative affect. Each scale consists of ten concepts, which produces a sum: one measures positive affect (active, alert, attentive, determined, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, interested, proud, strong); the other, ten indicative of negative affect (afraid, scared, nervous, jittery, irritable, hostile, guilty, ashamed, upset, distressed). Given these terms, respondents indicate the frequency with which they experience these emotions, from 1 (*Very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*). This gives two scores, one of which might be called positive affectivity ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ), and the other, negative affectivity ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ). As a whole, the PANAS has an alpha reliability index of 0.72.

**Psychological Well-Being Scales** (Spanish version by Lloret & Tomás, 1994. English original by Warr, 1987). This assesses psychological well-being across three scales: 1) Anxiety-Comfort, 2) Depression-Enthusiasm, and 3) Displeasure-Pleasure. Each scale has six items in the form of adjectives alluding to the feelings or moods that are intended to be measured. Three are typical of the positive axis, and three, of the negative. The eighteen items are preceded by the question: *How often have you felt in recent weeks that expressed by each of the following words?* The items are answered on a Likert scale from 1 (*Never*) to 6 (*Always*). The scores of the items that correspond to the negative poles are reversed prior to calculating the total score, so that the higher the total scores, the higher the level of reported well-being. The reliability of

the instrument is 0.89, with subscale reliabilities of 0.81 for Anxiety-Comfort, 0.80 for Depression-Enthusiasm, and 0.77 for Displeasure-Pleasure.

**Daily Spiritual Experience Scale-Spanish (DSES-S)** (Spanish version by Mayoral et al., in press. English original by Underwood & Teresi, 2002). This consists of sixteen items scored on a Likert six-point scale ranging from *many times a day*, to *never (or almost never)* (e.g. 'I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.') The last item ('In general, how close do you feel to God?') is assessed on a Likert scale of 1 (*Not at all close*) to 4 (*As close as possible*). As mentioned earlier, the items assess the experiences, rather than particular beliefs or behaviors, in order to transcend the boundaries of religion (Underwood 2006; Underwood & Teresi, 2002). As the measure assesses common spiritual experience rather than extraordinary mystical experiences, it provides an assessment of religiousness/spirituality in familiar terms of daily life. According to the directionality, scores of the items are inverted before calculating the total score. In the case of the Likert scale of four points for item 16, it would be added to the total score after inverting. A higher total score would indicate a lower level of daily spiritual experience (Underwood, 2006). The index of reliability in Spanish version was considerably high ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

**Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ)** (Spanish version by Bermúdez, 1995. English original by Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Perugini, 1993). This measures five major personality factors as dimensions, each composed of two subdomains: Extraversion,  $\alpha = 0.75$  (Dynamism,  $\alpha = 0.68$ , and Domination,  $\alpha = 0.66$ ); Agreeableness,  $\alpha = 0.73$  (Cooperation,  $\alpha = 0.60$ , and Cordiality,  $\alpha = 0.62$ ); Tenacity,  $\alpha = 0.79$  (Conscientiousness,  $\alpha = 0.71$ , and Perseverance,  $\alpha = 0.76$ ); Emotional Stability,  $\alpha = 0.87$  (Control of Emotions,  $\alpha = 0.79$ , and Impulse Control,  $\alpha = 0.78$ ); Open-mindedness,  $\alpha = 0.76$  (Openness to culture,  $\alpha = 0.67$ , and Openness to experience,  $\alpha = 0.64$ ). Each scale consists of twelve items, plus a distortion scale (0.77) which assesses social desirability. The questionnaire has one hundred thirty-two items presented as Likert scales from 1 (*Completely false for me*) to 5 (*Completely true for me*). It presents the results in T scores categorized by a normal distribution with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Values between 25 and 34 are considered 'very low,' between 35 and 44 'low,' between 45 and 54 'average,' between 55 and 64 'high,' and between 65 and 75 'very high.'

**Sociodemographic Data.** Data collected from each participant included age, gender, relationships, occupation, educational level, social class, and religion. This sociodemographic data helped to establish intergroup differences.

## HYPOTHESIS

1. High daily spirituality would be related to high scores on the SWLS, PANAS, and Psychological Well-Being Scales.
2. High daily spirituality would be related to high scores on the personality factors of Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Open-mindedness.

## RESULTS

### Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 14.0 for Windows. We performed a series of analyses linking the DSES-S to each sociodemographic data, measure of psychological well-being (SWLS, PANAS, Psychological Well-Being Scales) and personality variable. First, to obtain the main effects ( $F$ ) of the sociodemographic data on the variables of the study, we carried out an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Student's t-test for independent samples. We used Dunnett's C test to

establish intergroup differences. Second, to examine the relationships among variables, we used bivariate correlations with the Pearson correlation coefficient and two-tailed significance test.

**Main effects and Means**

The Basques showed a greater frequency of daily spirituality than did the Mexicans ( $t_{(194)} = -9.00, p < .00$ ) (Table 1). The group of 29 to 62 years old seemed to have greater spiritual experience ( $F_{(1, 47)} = 2.72, p < .00$ ). There were no gender differences in terms of spirituality.

**Table 1.** Means in DSES-S of Basques and Mexicans ( $N = 196$ ; 100 Basques, 96 Mexicans).

| Basques  |           | Mexicans |           | Total    |           |
|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| 2.14     | .85       | 3.49     | 1.22      | 2.80     | 1.24      |

*Note.* Low scores reflect higher levels of spirituality; high scores indicate lower levels of spirituality.

People with a regular partner experienced greater spirituality ( $F_{(2, 195)} = 3.74, p < .02$ ). With regard to occupation, students showed the highest degree of spiritual experience ( $F_{(4, 195)} = 7.46, p < .00$ ), specifically those attending high school ( $F_{(3, 195)} = 6.17, p < .00$ ). People in the middle-high class experienced greater spirituality ( $F_{(3, 195)} = 2.88, p < .01$ ).

Finally, there was a significant effect for religion on the spiritual experience ( $F_{(4, 195)} = 13.42, p < .00$ ). For this analysis, we excluded the Bahá’í and Buddhists, because the subsamples were too small to make inferences (Table 2). The mean differences between groups indicate that Atheists reported greater spiritual experience (1.84), followed by Agnostics (2.73). Catholics (3.19) and Protestants (3.18) reported lower levels of spiritual experience. Religion itself had effects on the three factors of psychological well-being. Religion and Anxiety-Comfort ( $F_{(4, 195)} = 4.33, p < .00$ ) were associated for Catholics, Protestants, Atheists and Agnostics. Religion was associated with Depression-Enthusiasm ( $F_{(4, 195)} = 2.35, p < .04$ ) and Displeasure-Pleasure ( $F_{(4, 195)} = 3.79, p < .00$ ), mainly for Atheists and Christians. Active practice of religion was significantly associated only with Anxiety-Comfort ( $F_{(2, 195)} = 4.80, p < .03$ ).

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristics of participants ( $N = 196$ ).

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-----------------|------------------|----------|
| <b>Country</b>  |                  |          |
| Basques         | 100              | 51       |
| Mexicans        | 96               | 49       |
| <b>Gender</b>   |                  |          |
| Men             | 85               | 43       |
| Women           | 111              | 57       |
| <b>Age</b>      |                  |          |
| 16-22           | 104              | 53       |
| 23-28           | 44               | 23       |
| 29-62           | 48               | 24       |

|                                    |     |    |
|------------------------------------|-----|----|
| <b>Relationships</b>               |     |    |
| With regular partner               | 100 | 51 |
| Without a partner                  | 96  | 49 |
| <b>Occupation</b>                  |     |    |
| Study                              | 85  | 44 |
| Work                               | 57  | 29 |
| Study and Work                     | 44  | 22 |
| Unemployed                         | 4   | 2  |
| Other                              | 6   | 3  |
| <b>Education</b>                   |     |    |
| Low                                | 25  | 12 |
| Middle                             | 117 | 60 |
| High                               | 54  | 28 |
| <b>Social Class</b>                |     |    |
| Middle-low                         | 25  | 13 |
| Middle                             | 121 | 62 |
| Middle-high                        | 50  | 25 |
| <b>Religion</b>                    |     |    |
| Catholic                           | 73  | 37 |
| Protestant                         | 33  | 17 |
| Bahá'í                             | 8   | 4  |
| Buddhist                           | 2   | 1  |
| Atheist                            | 52  | 27 |
| Agnostic                           | 28  | 14 |
| <b>Active practice of religion</b> |     |    |
| Yes                                | 44  | 22 |
| No                                 | 152 | 78 |

### Correlations

Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the correlations between DSES-S, PANAS, SWLS, Psychological Well-Being Scales, and BFQ. Scores on the DSES-S were significantly correlated with scores on each scale except for the BFQ.

**Table 3.** Correlations between DSES-S and PANAS ( $N = 196$ ).

| Scales                     | Positive Affect | Negative Affect |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Daily Spiritual Experience | .19**           | -.15*           |

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$  (Two-tailed).

**Table 4.** Correlations between DSES-S, SWLS, and Psychological Well-Being Scales ( $N = 196$ ).

| Scales                     | Satisfaction With Life | Anxiety-Comfort | Depression-Enthusiasm | Displeasure-Pleasure |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Daily Spiritual Experience | .35**                  | .29**           | .24**                 | .28**                |

\*\* $p < .01$  (Two-tailed).

**Table 5.** Correlations between DSES-S and BFQ ( $N = 196$ ).

| Scales                     | Extraversion | Agreeableness | Tenacity | Emotional Stability | Open-Mindedness |
|----------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Daily Spiritual Experience | .03          | .03           | .07      | .02                 | .00             |

## DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship between daily spiritual experience and a variety of variables, including satisfaction with life, positive/negative affect, psychological well-being, and personality in a sample of Basques and Mexicans.

While daily spiritual experience was found to be positively associated with the relationship variable of having a regular partner, the absence of significant effects on some demographic characteristics suggests that daily spirituality is an experience relatively autonomous and independent of the objective conditions of life, at least in the samples presented here. The results are consistent with those found by McCauley et al. (2008) in a sample of older adults in the United States, for which daily spiritual experience was not significantly associated with age, education, social class or employment.

Catholics and Protestants scored lower on daily spirituality whereas Atheists and Agnostics scored higher. It should be noted that the Basques in this study, of whom 96% self-reported as Atheists or Agnostics, reported more daily spiritual experience than the Mexicans. Although it is difficult to distinguish religiousness from spirituality, this result strengthens the view that spirituality is a characteristic of the person, and that it is not dependent upon any specific religious creed. Similarly, religiousness was associated with greater happiness and less anxiety for Catholics, Protestants, Agnostics and Atheists. This also indicates that no particular religious affiliation is necessary for psychological well-being.

There was a trend among Mexicans to support their spiritual experience through their religious beliefs. Among the Basques, religiousness and spirituality were different concepts, but they were interdependent in the Mexican sample. The Basque sample was characterized by responses indicative of their spirituality without religious affiliation, so the few responses framed in religious terms did not have much salience. In liberal societies like the Basque, religion seems to be a private matter, and the effect that it has on spiritual life is very different from that which occurs in more conservative societies such as Mexico.

In Europe, despite growing religious indifference and secularization, the spiritual quest is a recurrent phenomenon. Using the European Values Survey and other social surveys, Yves Lambert showed that the influence of religion in Europe is very weak (Francis, 1998). Spain, and the Basque Country in particular, has been slowly transforming into what Popper (2006) called an *open society*: a society in which members are characterized by their critical capacities, in which reason prevails over (seemingly) unfounded beliefs, and in which, above all, each seeks to minimize avoidable suffering. Here, “Presumably, spiritual bonds can play a major role where the biological or physical bonds are weakened” (Popper, 2006, p. 191, our translation). Although the Basque Country is not the best example of an open society, as might be the Nordic countries, compared with Mexico the difference is significant. We venture to hypothesize that spirituality is part of an open society in which freedom and progress depend upon choices that people make in the course of a nation’s evolution. There is no ideal way (e.g., particular religious path) to achieving inner well-being or a perfect society. Individuals in an open society must question authority, dispute what they have always taken for granted, and assume responsibility for acts that affect themselves and others. A democratic society is one in which most enjoy social rights, and its citizens seek to mitigate distinctions between class, social status and religious beliefs, which do not define the human essence. This means a faith in human dignity. Perhaps there are strong links between spiritual experience and welfare policy, human rights and social change. Spirituality provides the compassion, flexibility and courage required in the struggle for social change (Jiliberto, 2004; Razeto, 2004).

On the basis of previous studies (Ellison & Fan, 2008; Kalkstein, 2006; McCauley et al., 2008; Underwood & Teresi, 2002), we expected to find that women had more spiritual experiences. However, men and women did not differ in their degree of spiritual experience in this study. The role of gender in spiritual experience remains open for future research.

We found that people who have a steady partner experience greater daily spirituality. However, what has been called the dark side of relationships (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004) (e.g., difficulties generating love; jealousy; anger; or anxiety) (Rivera, 2000) could interact with daily spirituality. Future studies could investigate the associations among destructive/constructive relationships, daily spiritual experience and mental health.

High educational level was associated with less spiritual experience in this study. Various interpretations have been offered for this phenomenon. One is that higher education can often lead to re-examination of fundamental beliefs, and consequent rejection of religious principles and spiritual values, entailing a decrease in daily spiritual experience (Kalkstein, 2006).

There was a very clear relationship between positive affect and daily spirituality. People who are more spiritual indicated less negative affect and more satisfaction with life.

Is spirituality an experience, a skill, or a personality trait? Hypothesis 2 was not supported. We expected that one or another personality factor would explain any difference in experienced spirituality. Hills, Francis, Argyle, & Jackson (2004), and Piedmont (1999) posited that spirituality could be a new factor not found in traditional models of personality. In one of the few studies linking religion, spirituality, values and personality (assessed with the Big Five Questionnaire) in Spanish students, Saroglou and García (2008) argued that spirituality is quite independent of traditional personality factors. These authors found that certain values were the only predictors of religion/spirituality in their sample. When these values were combined with religion/spirituality, they intensified prosocial behavior and consciousness. Many scholars disagree with the suggestion that spirituality is a personality factor. There may be inherent predispositions to be religious in particular ways, but daily spiritual experience may change over time, as when one undergoes spiritual growth (L.G. Underwood, personal communication, October 3, 2008).

Spirituality may involve intrapsychic processes more unintelligible and difficult to examine than other aspects of human evolution. Perhaps, to understand spirituality as a universal phenomenon, we must look not to personality, but to several complex cognitive processes: “Religious thought and behaviour can be

considered part of natural human capacities, like music, political systems, family relations or ethnic coalitions” (Boyer, 2008: 1038). Knowing this, we should set for ourselves the task of finding these natural cognitive dispositions that promote religiousness/spirituality.

Just thirteen years ago, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) were among the first to quantitatively study differences between religiousness and spirituality. Empirical advances in the areas of spirituality and transpersonal psychology are still modest given the complexity of analyzing and testing spiritual constructs. The most important contribution of the present research is that it is the first to investigate and compare relationships between daily spiritual experience and psychological well being among Mexican and Basque populations.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Limitations

First, the study could have benefited from a larger and more heterogeneous sample. In order to establish contrasts, it would be desirable to have greater representation than that of religious groups that characterize populaces in general. As the construct of daily spiritual experience was designed to apply to people of different religious traditions (Kalkstein, 2006, Underwood & Teresi, 2002), it could be more fully explored by gathering data from among the full range of religious and spiritual orientations.

The results indicate an urgent need to further examine intercultural aspects of spirituality. Perhaps an instrument could be used to specifically assess cultural differences, as in other Basque and Mexican studies in which cultural variables have been shown to influence the variables of interest (Laca, Mejía, & Mayoral, in press). Additional measures could also be employed, because Likert scales can be methodologically limiting for cross-cultural comparison (Henry, Moffitt, Caspi, Langley, & Silva, 1994; Oishi et al., 2005). The descriptive and inferential statistics did reveal some significant effects, but more complex multivariate tools, such as Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) or multiple regression (Path Analysis) might reveal additional patterns of relationship.

As it is not clear how daily spiritual experience mediates between religiousness and psychological well-being (Ellison & Fan, 2008), it would be desirable to use additional instruments to assess psychological well-being. In future research with the Basque population, we suggest applying the DSES in Euskera.

### Implications

The relationship between spirituality and health has important societal implications. Depression is a case in point. The effect of depression on the workforce is very serious. It is estimated that by 2020, it will become the second leading medical or psychiatric cause of disability (Kramer et al., 2007). It has been previously shown that higher spirituality is correlated with fewer depressive symptoms (Kendler et al., 2003, McCauley et al., 2008). In general, therapies for depression and anxiety in older adults that incorporate religious/spiritual beliefs produce faster recovery than traditional therapies (Hawkins, Tan, & Turk, 1999, Koenig et al., 1992). The present study provided cross-cultural support for the broader relationship between spirituality, affect and well-being.

It has been found that the frequency of daily spirituality can be very useful in dealing with the advanced stages of serious illness such as cancer (Noguchi et al., 2006; True et al., 2005). The frequency of spiritual experiences helps in cases of acute hospitalization, as it does for instance in the case of kidney surgery. Spiritual beliefs may contribute to the amelioration of anxiety related to medical conditions, such as in the case of diabetes mellitus type 2 (Zavala, Vázquez, & Whetsell, 2006). Similarly, religiousness/spirituality helps people with disabilities to cope with life challenges (Underwood, 1999).

Integrating aspects of spirituality in the workplace can greatly enhance personal well-being and creativity, thereby promoting harmony and continuous improvement within organizations (Butts, 1999;

Marques, 2004). Similarly, spirituality can facilitate problem solving, negotiation and decision-making at the corporate level (Shakun, 2006; Fernando & Jackson, 2006).

It has been found that people with less time for recreational activities are less likely to experience their spirituality, and that time and life balance are needed to develop spirituality (Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). In other words, time pressure in everyday life can hinder contact with the spiritual. People who have lost sight of the spiritual dimension in their lives due to the pressures and hassles of daily life could use their free time to restore their spirituality. One way to maximize the benefit of free time is to visit natural areas (parks, green areas) to encourage spiritual experience. This possibility was suggested by research on the psychological aspects of time spent in natural environments (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). A good example of this occurs in Canada, where some managers of parks and natural areas have been encouraged to plan opportunities to enhance spiritual experience, which in turn benefits recreation.

Activities such as prayer or reading sacred texts, in addition to promoting spiritual growth, encourage rest and relaxation, which in turn can help cope with the stresses of working life, family responsibilities or illness (Hostetler, 2002; Underwood, 1999).

To date, research on the relation between daily spiritual experience and physical/mental health has been conducted mainly on clinical samples, primarily in the United States (Ellison & Fan, 2008). The present study has demonstrated that the same relationship occurs in the culturally rich Basque and Mexican societies as well. Future research in this area should take into account culture-specific variables, social processes, difficult life circumstances and other factors that may benefit or hinder spiritual experience in daily life.

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