



DEPARTMENT:

FACULTY SPONSOR:

STUDENT(S):

PROJECT TITLE:



Having Mystical Experiences? Identifying Variables Associated With Having Had A Mystical Experience

Elias Acevedo, Donald Flynn, Frederick Horn, Ahsera't Baldwin, Vy Vo, Jeremy Tost, Ph.D & Chelsie A. Hess, Ph.D



Colorado Mesa University

Introduction

- **Mystical experiences** have been a feature of many philosophies throughout history.
- These experiences have been characterized by a sense of **unity** (internal and external), **transcendence** of time and space, **sacredness**, positive mood, and an inability to put the experience into words.
- Such experiences often include feelings of **awe**, **mindfulness**, and **love**.
- Mystical experiences have been the subject of speculation in psychology since the early 20th century; renewed interest to research the causes and consequences of a mystical experience has recently emerged.
- Previous research suggests outcomes of a mystical experience include **increased subjective well-being** and a decreased “us-against-them” mentality.

Purpose

- This study explores the prevalence of having had a mystical experience and the relation between mystical experience and several variables; **personality**, **spirituality/religiousness**, and **moral foundations**.

Methods

Research Questions

- To what extent is/are an individual's...
 - Religious/spiritual affiliation
 - Personality variables
 - Moral foundations...associated with having had a mystical experience?

Sample

- Total Sample size $n = 126$
 - Class standing in college
 - Freshman: 9
 - Sophomore: 16
 - Junior: 30
 - Senior: 23
 - Not Applicable: 41

Procedure

- Several scales were gathered and constructed into a survey format
- Survey was distributed among social media
 - Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, e-mail
- Survey was created on Qualtrics

Instruments

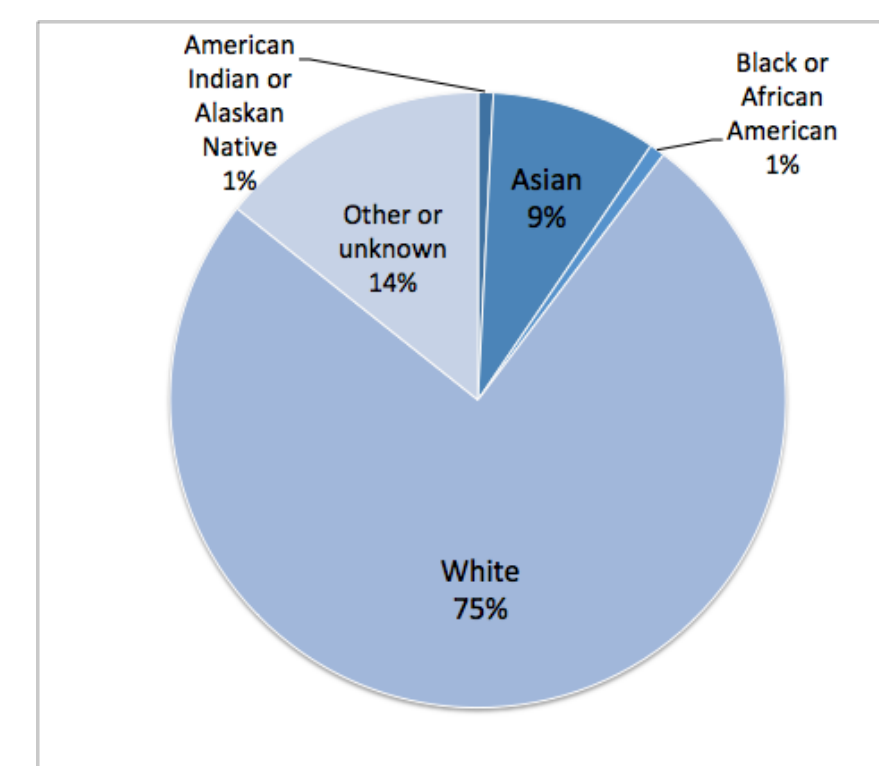
- Dependent Variable Scales
 - Mysticism Overall Scale, $\alpha = .949$
- Independent Variable Scales
 - Big Five Personality Scale
 - Ironson-Woods Spirituality/Religiousness Scale, $\alpha = .952$
 - Moral Foundations Questionnaire

Results

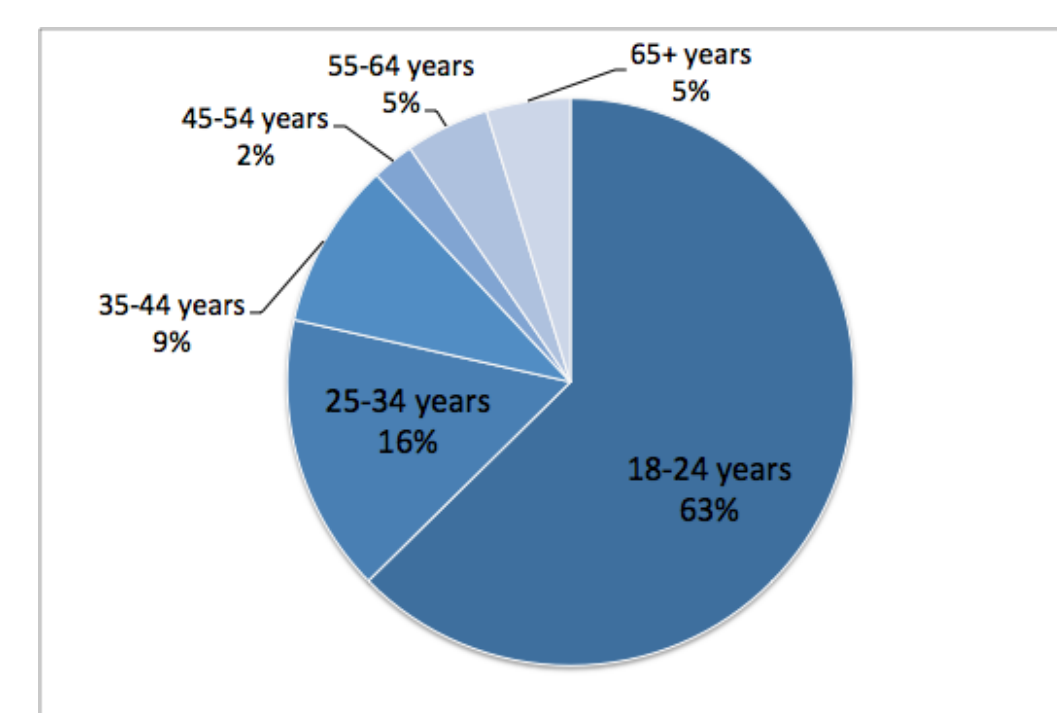
Descriptives

- **Race**
 - Most participants indicated being white, occupying 75% of participants
 - Other or Unknown: 14%
 - Asian: 8%
- **Age**
 - 60% of participants fell between 18 & 24 years old
 - Roughly 12% of participants were over 45
- **Gender**
 - Majority females (68%)

Race



Age



Mysticism & Personality

- **Extraversion**
 - There was a moderate, positive correlation between Mysticism and Extraversion, $r = .314^{**}$
- **Openness**
 - There was a moderate, positive correlation between Openness and Mysticism, $r = .305^{**}$
- **Agreeableness**
 - There was a moderate, positive correlation between Agreeableness and Mysticism, $r = .216^{*}$

Mysticism & Religiousness/Spirituality

- **Religiousness/Spirituality Global**
 - There was a strong, positive correlation between Mysticism and the Religiousness/Spirituality Scale, $r = .894^{**}$
- **Sense of Peace**
 - There was a moderate, positive correlation between Sense of Peace and Mysticism, $r = .293^{**}$
- **Compassionate View of Others**
 - There was a moderate, positive correlation between Compassionate View of Others and Mysticism, $r = .283^{**}$
- **Moral Foundations**
 - There were no significant correlations between Mysticism and any factors of Moral Foundations

Significant Correlations

Table 1

Hood's Mysticism Scale as Correlated with Personality, Religiousness/Spirituality, & Moral Foundations

Personality	r	Religiousness/Spirituality	r	Moral Foundations	r
Neuroticism	-.068	Religiousness/Spirituality Global	.894**	Harm/Care	.096
Extraversion	.314**	Sense of Peace	.293**	Fairness/Reciprocity	.082
Openness	.305**	Faith in God	.144	In-Group/Loyalty	-.035
Agreeableness	.216*	Religious Behavior	.158	Authority/Respect	-.162
Conscientiousness	-.091	Compassionate View of Others	.283**	Purity/Sanctity	.004

*Significant at the .05 level, ** significant at the .01 level

Discussion

Summary

- Mysticism was positively related to subscales of personality, religiousness/spirituality, but not moral foundations
- Of interest, is the possible arrow of causation. For instance, does openness predispose one toward having a mystical experience, or does the experience result in greater openness? There is good reason to think the causal direction could go both ways, but the correlational design of the current study cannot provide such insight. Therefore, this is an interesting question for future research.

References

- Alper, S., & Yilmaz, O. (2019). How is the Big Five related to moral and political convictions: The moderating role of the WEIRDness of the culture. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 145, 32-38. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2019.03.018
- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. (2008). The Moral Foundations Questionnaire. Retrieved from: www.moralfoundations.org.
- Hood, R. W. Jr., Morris, R. J., & Watson, P. J. (1993). Further factor analysis of Hood's mysticism scale. *Psychological Reports*, 73, 1176-1178.
- Ironson, G., Solomon, G. F., Balbin, E. G., O'Leirigh, C., George, A., Kumar, M., Larson, D., & Woods, T. E. (2002). The Ironson-Woods Spirituality/Religiousness Index is associated with long survival, health behaviors, less distress, and low cortisol in people with HIV/AIDS. doi: 10.1207/S15327436ABM2401_05

Future Research

- As this study aimed to collect preliminary data, future research will use that data to support experiments involving virtual reality and mysticism.
- In order to increase the generalizability the current study would need to be continued, including a wider range of age and ethnicity.

Limitations

- The majority of our participants were caucasian between the ages of 18 and 24, therefore this data may not be as applicable to other ethnicities or older adults.
- The nature of self-report data commonly has issues with demand characteristics and honesty in responding.

Contact Information

For references or further information please contact:

ecacevedo@mavs.coloradomesa.edu

vtquinn@mavs.coloradomesa.edu

ddflyn@mavs.coloradomesa.edu

fjhorn@mavs.coloradomesa.edu

chess@coloradomesa.edu

jtost@coloradomesa.edu