

Spiritual Intelligence among Adolescents: Issues of Age and Gender

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Abstract

Background: The study was carried out to examine the development of spiritual intelligence among adolescents relating to the issues of age and gender in a homogeneous sociocultural background. **Materials and Methods:** Following a 2x5 factorial design respectively for gender and age, 500 college students from Odisha participated in the study. The sample consisted of 50 boys and 50 girls from each of the 5 classes in the college involving students of only science stream. Their average age across the classes increased from 16.21 in +2 1st year nearly by one year for each of the subsequent classes. With regard to socioeconomic background, the participants could be said to belong to a homogenous culture. King's SSRI-24 was administered on each of the participants to measure their critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion as core attributes of spiritual intelligence.

Results: Factorial analyses of variance were computed on each of attributes. The results pointed out that although girls are significantly better than boys in critical existential thinking, the development of this attribute is slow among both boys and girls. Personal meaning production is the most quickly developed attribute among both boys and girls without any gender difference. Boys and girls also have similar but slow development in transcendental awareness. Finally, conscious state expansion is another quickly developing attribute of spiritual intelligence among both boys and girls having a gender difference in favour of girls.

Conclusion: The conclusion of the study was that adolescence is a critical period for the development of spiritual intelligence involving the processes of socialization and gender role practices.

Key words: Critical existential, Transcendental, Meaning production, Conscious state expansion

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I. INTRODUCTION

According to King and Decicco (2009), spiritual intelligence is a mental capacity rooted in non-material and transcendental aspects of facts and reality. It is a set of intellectual capacities that contribute to adaptive awareness, integration and one's transcendental existence. King (2007) proposed a four-core ability model of spiritual intelligence, which includes critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. The Critical Existential Thinking is the capacity of the person to contemplate on the nature of existence, reality, the universe, space, time, and other existential / metaphysical issues, and the capacity to contemplate non-existential issues in relation to one's existence. Personal Meaning Production is the ability of a person to derive personal meaning and purpose from all physical and mental experiences, including the capacity to create and master a purpose of life. The meaning of Transcendental Awareness is the capacity to identify and transcendent dimensions / patterns of the self (i.e., a transpersonal or transcendent self), of others, and of the physical world (e.g., non-materialism) during normal states of consciousness, accompanied by the capacity to identify their relationship to one's self and to the physical. Finally, Conscious State Expansion refers to the ability to enter and exit higher states of consciousness (e.g., pure consciousness, cosmic consciousness, unity, and oneness) and other states of trance at one's own discretion as in deep contemplation, meditation, prayer, etc.

Gender Issue

In the research literature, the issue of gender difference in spiritual intelligence continues to be inconclusive. Some researchers have noted that development of spiritual intelligence is not influenced by gender. As spiritual intelligence requires higher level of thinking and abstraction, the role of gender factor is limited (e.g., Keating, 2009; Martin & Hafer, 2009; Ronel, 2008). Further, in some studies, when covariates

were eliminated from analysis, no significant differences were observed among men and women (e.g., Pant & Srivastav, 2019). However, some researchers have pointed to the methodological inappropriateness in the comparison (e.g., Gehlawat, 2011; Girum, 2012, Ahanger & Khan, 2015). They reported that there are significant gender differences in favor of women for some attributes of spiritual intelligence while in the other attributes males were found better. They explained it in terms of the gender roles played in different sociocultural settings. Hence, they argued that gender difference in the development of spiritual intelligence is a sociocultural process and the issue needs to be addressed as relevant to a culture and not as a universal phenomenon.

Kang (2010) from his studies on gender diversity in spiritual intelligence observed that women are spiritually more intelligent in late adulthood and old age, but not during adolescence and early adulthood. Moree (2009) from a cross cultural study reported that significant gender difference in spiritual intelligence were observed mostly in favour of women across several culture groups but differences were not similar across the cultures with respect to different attributes of spiritual intelligence. Using King's model of spiritual intelligence, he observed that while women are always better in personal meaning production and conscious state expansion, men are better in critical existential thinking and transcendental awareness. Even in some cultures in the African society, men were even found better in all the four attributes of spiritual intelligence. However, in general, low transcendental awareness was observed among both men and women in all the cultures sampled in his study. Several other researchers (e.g., Dillman, 2006; Wiley, 2006, Hermann, 2007, Yuen & Patneau, 2006) have also reported significant gender differences in spiritual intelligence in favour of women.

On the other hand, Singh (2008) reported that Spiritual Intelligence was found independent of gender when pre-Spiritual Intelligence and pre-emotional intelligence; pre-Spiritual Intelligence, pre-non-verbal intelligence; and pre-emotional intelligence; pre-Spiritual Intelligence, pre-self-confidence and pre-anxiety in combinations were considered as covariates. Likewise, Creel (2014) found no gender difference regarding spirituality. Newton (2016) indicated that previous studies using the spiritual well-being scale had not found any statistical difference in gender. In essence, gender difference in spiritual intelligence depends on several co-varying factors related to culture, gender role practices, socialization practices, socioeconomic status, religion and religious practices and so on.

Age Issue

The present research has focused on understanding the development of spiritual intelligence among adolescents. The concept of the study was derived from Mortazavi (2014) who strongly argued in favour of development of spiritual intelligence among adolescents. He observed that adolescence being a unique stage of transition is subject to stress and having few life experiences, they are not well equipped to cope with stress. In fact, they are highly vulnerable to stress and anxiety. Further, during adolescence, thoughts take more abstract forms and higher order cognitive processes become strong. This is the time when their inner processes shape their future directions of life and their foundations of spiritual intelligence largely grow up during this period. Mortazavi suggested that by guiding the adolescents to richer perspectives of life, to noble ways of thinking and acting, and by promoting hope and optimism, spiritual intelligence helps them to handle the pressure and stresses constructively. Spiritual intelligence among the adolescents can serve as building blocks for healthy social and emotional development (Gupta, 2012). Similarly, spiritual intelligence can provide the adolescents with positive coping strategies, help them to act bravely during trouble times, and prevent them from being violent and hopeless and from being low in self-esteem (Sood et al., 2012). Thus, there is a need for the adolescents to develop a right perspective of life; a healthy nature of enquiry; a sense of purpose in life, and a taste for reflective thinking, which would help them grow in spiritual intelligence.

Arising from the above discussions, development of spiritual intelligence is considered important in the life of the adolescents. Seybold & Hill (2001) reported that spiritual beliefs, practices, and commitments seem to be linked with psychological and physical health/well-being; marital satisfaction and stability; positive interpersonal performance/functioning; and better/improved quality of life among adolescents and young adults. Emmons (2000) observed that spiritual orientation about life protects adolescents against non-desirable and non-adaptive behaviours like acting in destructive ways, socially or even personally.

Edwards (2003) has pinpointed to characteristic use of spiritual intelligence to resolve dilemma/troubles, and employing them in solving non-spiritual problems. Of course, spiritual intelligence is not simply integrating one's intelligence with his/her spirituality. On the contrary, it represents a combination of the individual's personality characteristics, neurological processes, specialized cognitive capabilities, and spiritual qualities and interests. It helps people to outgrow their immediate ego selves and to reach beyond those deeper layers of potentiality that lie hidden within them. It helps them to live life at a deeper level of meaning. Finally, people can use spiritual intelligence to wrestle with problems of good and evil, problems of life and death, the deepest origins of human suffering, and often despair (Zohar et al., 2000).

In addition, it is worth mentioning that a number of the spiritual intelligence qualities like integrity, self-awareness, creative-reasoning, wisdom, and raising the question ‘why’ can be claimed to solve a wider range of issues and troubles that adolescents face in life (Emmons, 2000). For instance, these may be applied to solution of problems related to relationships, which has been a significant issue in the life of adolescents. Emmon (2007) reported that spiritual intelligence could be used in the work context of the adolescents to help them planning their goal related activities successfully. Hence, all these findings provide a strong rationale for the study of spiritual intelligence among adolescents.

Arising from the discussions above, it is pertinent to draw inferences that spiritual intelligence is a significant developmental process of the human being across the life span. Its importance lies in empowering the human being to a deeper and richer perspective of life. The process has its beginning in the early adolescence remarkably influenced by the sociocultural and economic factors including age and gender. Hence, it desirable that researchers should examine the development of spiritual intelligence of adolescents and young adults under different sociocultural frames of life and also thereby addressing the issues of age and gender in relation to the development of spiritual intelligence. Findings from such researches would not only help in understanding the cross-cultural perspectives in the development of spiritual intelligence, but would also help in contributing to a comprehensive theory about the development of spiritual intelligence among adolescents. The present research is an effort to understand the development of spiritual intelligence across the adolescent years as related to gender of the adolescents in a specific socio-cultural setting.

Objectives

- (i) To examine the nature and characteristics of development of each the King’s four attributes of spiritual intelligence among the adolescent boys and girls.
- (ii) To study gender differences in the development of spiritual intelligence across the years of adolescence in a homogeneous culture group.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out on 500 college students randomly selected from 10 nearby coeducation colleges in the Puri and Cuttack district of Odisha. From each of five classes in the science stream, five boys and five girls were randomly selected to include 25 boys and 25 girls from each college. The colleges were selected from specific localities so that all students share a similar socio-cultural background and socialization practices. The sample of the study can be said to broadly belong to a homogeneous society. The study followed a 2 x 5 factorial design having boys and girls as two levels of gender and five classes in the college as five levels of age. The average age of the participants were respectively 16.21, 17.35, 18.18, 19.06, and 20.12 for +2 1st year, +2 2nd year, +3 1st year, +3 2nd year, and +3 3rd year students. King’s SSRI-24 was used to measure the four domains of spiritual intelligence namely; Critical Existential Thinking (CET), Personal Meaning Production (PMP), Transcendental Awareness (TA), and Conscious State Expansion (CSE). Response to each of the 24 items was obtained on a five-point scale (0-4) resulting in a maximum score of 96 in the test. However, the maximum score for CET, PMP, TA and CSE are respectively 28,20,28, and 20, because there are 7 items for CET, 5 items for PMP, 7 items for TA, and 5 items for CSE. King’s SSRI is a widely used popular test having reported sound psychometric properties.

III. RESULTS

The data were analysed to find out the means and standard deviations for each group of participants (Table 1) for the four core attributes of spiritual intelligence. Further, two-way ANOVA along with Tukey’s HSD test were computed to examine significance of group differences and the results are reported in Tables (2, 3, 4, & 5). The group means for each of the four attributes are also presented in graphs (Figure 1, 2, 3, & 4) to help visual understanding about group differences.

Table no1: Means And Standard Deviations of Boys and Girls Across The Classes On Four Dimensions Of Spiritual Intelligence.

Class			+2 1 st yr.	+2 2 nd Yr.	+3 1 st Yr.	+3 2 nd Yr.	+3 3 rd yr.
Critical Existential Thinking (28)	Boys	Mean	6.17	6.54	7.89	9.95	10.67
		SD	1.17	1.09	1.46	2.11	2.08
	Girls	Mean	7.23	8.19	10.36	11.97	13.22
		SD	1.25	1.33	1.64	1.82	1.78
Personal Meaning Production (20)	Boys	Mean	9.97	9.84	11.63	13.65	16.28
		SD	2.21	2.17	2.56	2.55	2.94
	Girls	Mean	9.38	9.41	12.30	14.28	15.27
		SD	2.09	1.95	2.11	2.68	3.15

Transcendental Awareness (28)	Boys	Mean	4.45	4.83	6.73	8.11	8.97
		SD	0.84	1.07	1.19	1.63	1.55
	Girls	Mean	4.19	4.36	6.83	7.95	8.36
		SD	0.98	0.69	1.14	1.86	1.48
Conscientious State Expansion (20)	Boys	Mean	7.86	8.09	8.89	10.47	13.55
		SD	0.92	1.17	1.06	2.18	2.14
	Girls	Mean	8.54	8.77	9.26	11.45	14.67
		SD	1.18	2.07	1.78	2.34	2.56

(i) Critical Existential Thinking. The critical existential thinking is found to have consistently grown across the adolescent years. The boys’ mean changed from 6.17 in the +2 1styear to 10.67 in +3 3rdyear, and the girls’ mean changed from 7.23 to 13.22 during the same time. Hence, with respect to the maximum score of 28, the growth level is about 38.12% for boys and 47.21% for girls by the end of adolescence. From this result, it may be pointed out that there is lots of further scope for the development of critical existential thinking among boys and girls even beyond the adolescent years. Girls have also shown consistent development in critical existential thinking across the adolescent years. Further, the nature of change in the girls’ means points to the fact that they grow up faster in critical existential thinking than boys. The results of ANOVA for the main effect of gender [F (1, 490) = 86.31, p = <.01] is also found significant to corroborate the above conclusion. However, the results of Tukey’s HSD test showed no significant difference in critical existential thinking between boys and girls during early adolescence. Around 18 years of age, girls become quicker in critical existential thinking than boys do. This may be explained by the sociocultural fact that in the concerned culture, adolescent girls have more existential issues and problems than boys for which they tend to become psychosocially more matured which could be resulting in their better critical existential thinking. With regard to the development of critical existential thinking across the adolescent years, the main effect of ANOVA is also significant [F (4, 490) = 71.93, p = <.01]. The results of Tukey’s HSD test showed that all the systematic comparisons between groups from +2 1styear to +3 3rdyear, are significant for both boys and girls. Hence, it may concluded that there are consistent improvements in critical existential among the adolescent boys and girls. Therefore, adolescent period may be considered as a critical stage of the lifespan for the development of this core skill of spiritual intelligence.

Table no 2: Results of Two-way ANOVA (2: gender X 5: Age groups) for Critical Existential Thinking.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	
Gender (A)	463.51	1	463.51	86.31**	
Class (B)	1544.98	4	386.25	71.93**	
AXB	54.66	4	13.67	2.55	
Error	2629.74	490	5.37		
Significant HSD tests for class groups	Boys	1 vs. 2**	2vs.3**	3vs.4**	4 vs.5**
	Girls	6vs.7**	7vs.8**	8vs.9**	9vs.10**
Significant HSD tests for Gender groups		1 vs.6	2vs.7	3vs.8**	4vs.9**
				5vs.10**	

Note. * p<.05, ** <.01

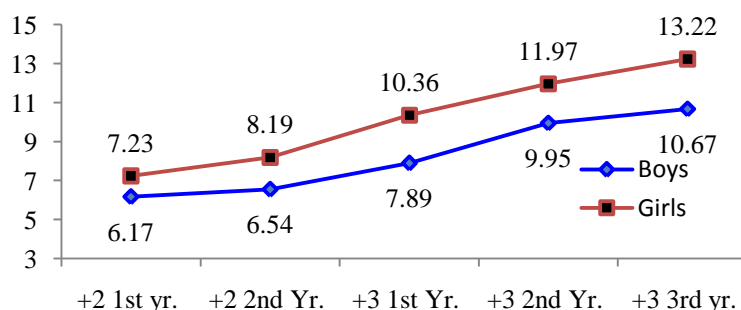


Figure 1. Development of Critical Existential Thinking

(ii) Personal Meaning Production. Personal meaning production is found to have consistently grown only after +2 2ndyear for both boys and girls, which point to the fact that personal meaning of the participants somewhat relate to their +2 career and it may be specific for the college students. The boys’ mean changed from 9.97 to

16.28 while the girls' mean changed from 9.38 to 15.27. With respect to the maximum score of 20, the growth level is about 81.4% for boys and 76.35% for girls by the end of adolescence. Hence, it may be assumed that by the end of adolescence, both boys and girls gain substantial meaning about their goals and purposes of life. Therefore, adolescence should be considered as the most critical period for the development of this core skill. The results of ANOVA for the main effect of gender [$F(1, 490) = 3.08, p = >.05$] is not significant to point out that during adolescence, boys and girls are equally concerned about creating meaning for their life. Results of Tukey's HSD test also showed no significant differences between comparable groups of boys and girls. With regard to the development of personal meaning production across the adolescent years, the main effect of ANOVA is significant [$F(4, 490) = 58.81, p = <.01$]. The results of Tukey's HSD test showed that excepting comparisons between +2 1st year and +2 2nd year for both boys and girls, all other systematic comparisons between groups are significant. Hence, it may be concluded that there are consistent improvements in personal meaning production among the adolescent boys and girls after their +2 career. Therefore, this period of adolescence may be considered as a critical stage of the lifespan for the development of personal goal and meaning in life.

Table no 3: Results of Two-way ANOVA (2: gender X 5: Age groups) for Personal Meaning Production.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	
Gender (A)	27.93	1	27.93	3.08	
Age Group (B)	2128.97	4	532.24	58.81**	
AXB	98.46	4	24.62	2.72	
Error	4435.62	490	9.05		
Significant HSD tests for class groups	Boys	1 vs. 2	2vs.3**	3vs.4**	4 vs.5**
	Girls	6vs.7	7vs.8**	8vs.9**	9vs.10**
Significant HSD tests for Gender groups	1 vs.6	2vs.7	3vs.8	4vs.9	5vs.10

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

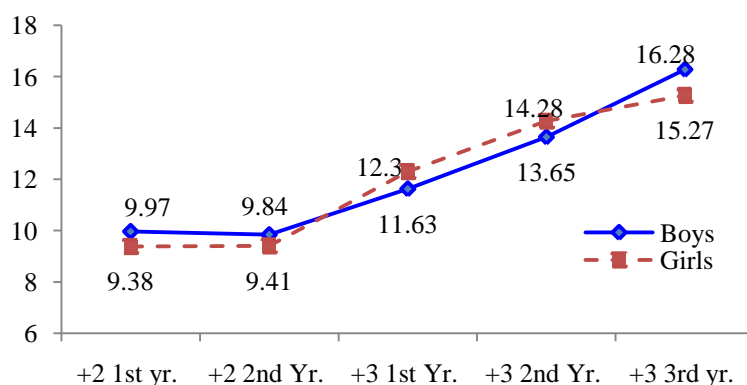


Figure 2. Development in Personal Meaning Production

(iii) Transcendental Awareness. Although the participants showed consistent improvement in transcendental across the period, it is found to have very limited development during adolescence. The boys' mean changed from 4.45 to 8.97 while the girls' mean changed from 4.19 to 8.36. With respect to the maximum score of 28, the growth level is about 32.03% for boys and 29.86% for girls by the end of adolescence. Hence, it may be assumed that transcendental awareness is a hard skill of spiritual intelligence, which may find an adequate development in the later life of people. The results of ANOVA for the main effect of gender [$F(1, 490) = 2.75, p = >.05$] is not significant to point out that during adolescence, boys and girls are not much concerned about transcendental awareness. Results of Tukey's HSD test also showed no significant differences between comparable groups of boys and girls. With regard to the development of transcendental awareness across the adolescent years, the main effect of ANOVA is significant [$F(4, 490) = 54.96, p = <.01$]. The results of Tukey's HSD test also showed that all the systematic group comparisons for both boys and girls are significant. Hence, it may be concluded that there is small but consistent development of transcendental awareness among adolescents. Therefore, the adolescent period may be considered as a prelude to the development of transcendental awareness.

Table no 4: Results of Two-way ANOVA (2: gender X 5: Age groups) for Transcendental Awareness.

Source	SS	df	MS	F		
Gender (A)	13.54	1	13.54	2.75		
Age Group (B)	1872.62	4	468.15	54.96**		
AXB	19.17	4	4.79	0.97		
Error	2417.56	490	4.93			
Significant HSD tests for class groups	Boys	1 vs. 2**	2vs.3**	3vs.4**	4 vs.5**	
	Girls	6vs.7**	7vs 8**	8vs. 9**	9vs.10**	
Significant HSD tests for Gender groups		1 vs.6	2vs.7	3vs.8	4vs.9	5vs.10

Note. * p<.05, ** <.01

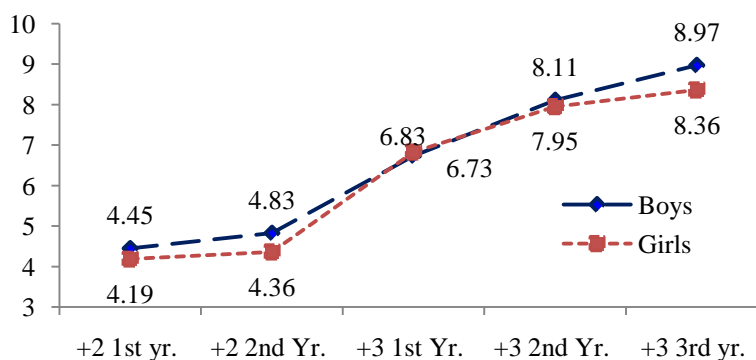


Figure 3. Development of Transcendental Awareness

(iv) Conscious State Expansion. Conscious state expansion is found to have grown across the adolescent years for both boys and girls. The boys' mean changed from 7.86 to 13.55 while the girls' mean changed from 8.54 to 14.67. With respect to the maximum score of 20, the growth level is about 67.75% for boys and 73.35% for girls by the end of adolescence. Hence, both boys and girls have substantial development in their expansion of states consciousness during their period of adolescence. In other words, adolescence is a critical period for the development of conscious awareness. The results of ANOVA for the main effect of gender [F (1, 490) = 26.44, p = >.05] is significant to suggest that girls have higher state of conscious awareness compared to their counterparts among boys during adolescence. However, the results of Tukey's HSD test showed that excepting at the level +3 3rd year; gender difference is not significant at any other level of comparison. Hence, it may be concluded that girls are better than boys in conscious awareness only in later years of adolescence and not in early adolescence. With regard to the development of conscious state expansion, across the adolescent years, the main effect of ANOVA is significant [F (4, 490) = 73.73, p = <.01]. The results of Tukey's HSD test also showed that all the systematic comparisons for both boys and girls across adolescent period are significant. Hence, it may be concluded that there are consistent improvements in the conscious state expansion among the adolescent boys and girls. Therefore, this period of adolescence may also be considered as a critical stage of the lifespan for the expansion of conscious awareness.

Table no 5: Results of Two-way ANOVA (2: gender X 5: Age groups) for Conscious State Expansion.

Source	SS	df	MS	F		
Gender (A)	168.40	1	168.4	26.44**		
Age Group (B)	1878.56	4	469.64	73.73**		
AXB	43.44	4	10.86	1.71		
Error	3119.87	490	6.37			
Significant HSD tests for class groups	Boys	1 vs. 2**	2vs.3**	3vs.4**	4 vs.5**	
	Girls	6vs.7**	7vs 8**	8vs. 9**	9vs.10**	
Significant HSD tests for Gender groups		1 vs.6	2vs.7	3vs.8	4vs.9	5vs.10**

Note. * p<.05, ** <.01

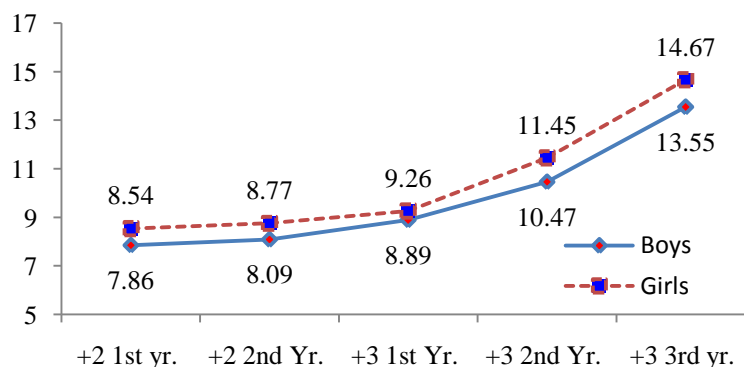


Figure 4. Development of Conscious State Expansion

IV. DISCUSSION

Relating to the issue of gender difference in spiritual intelligence, researchers are divided in three opinions. (i) Women are better in some of the attributes of spiritual intelligence while men are better in others. (ii) Women are better than men in spiritual intelligence independent of their sociocultural facts. (iii) Gender is not a factor of spiritual intelligence but it is gender role practices and socialization processes varying across cultures that influence the development of spiritual intelligence. In fact, the findings of the present study did not exclusively support the first two opinions. For example, while women are significantly better than men in two of the attributes of spiritual intelligence, men are not better in the other two. Further, women are not also better in all four attributes of spiritual intelligence. Hence, by and large, the third opinion is more likely to be true about gender difference in spiritual intelligence. However, relating to the issue of development of spiritual intelligence across the span of adolescence, each of the four attributes shows consistent development but the rate of development varies for different attributes.

V. CONCLUSION

- (i) Adolescence is a critical period of the life span for the development of spiritual intelligence.
- (ii) Gender difference in spiritual intelligence is a matter of sociocultural processes.
- (iii) Attributes of personal meaning production and conscious state expansion grow up strongly during adolescent years while critical existential thinking and transcendental awareness develop slowly among them.

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