

# Enhancing the Waking Up App: Recommendations Based on Research Findings

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**WAKING UP**

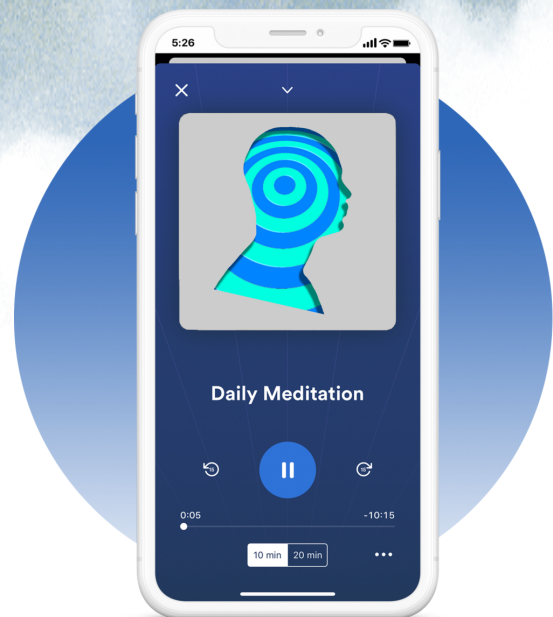
SAM HARRIS

## Problem, Context, and Approach

The Waking Up app aims to provide users with mindfulness practices for personal growth and spiritual development. However, there is a growing concern that some individuals may develop a sense of spiritual superiority rather than experiencing genuine benefits from these practices (Vonk & Visser). This issue is relevant not only for the Waking Up company but also for society, as it impacts individuals' well-being and the overall perception of mindfulness. <sup>17,18,23-25,28,37</sup>

Our research sought to address this problem by investigating the relationship between meditation practices, personality traits, and the development of spiritual superiority. By understanding how different meditation techniques and personality characteristics influence spiritual experiences, we aimed to have further recommendations on optimizing the Waking Up app's effectiveness and ensuring that users can truly benefit from their mindfulness practices.

By approaching this problem with a focus on practical solutions, our research provides valuable insights for the client and society. The findings and recommendations aim to ensure that mindfulness practices foster true personal growth instead of making people judgemental and giving them a sense of spiritual superiority.

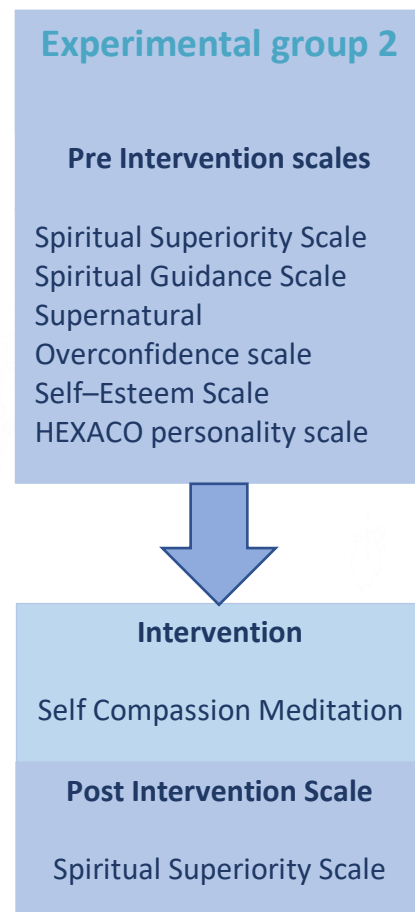
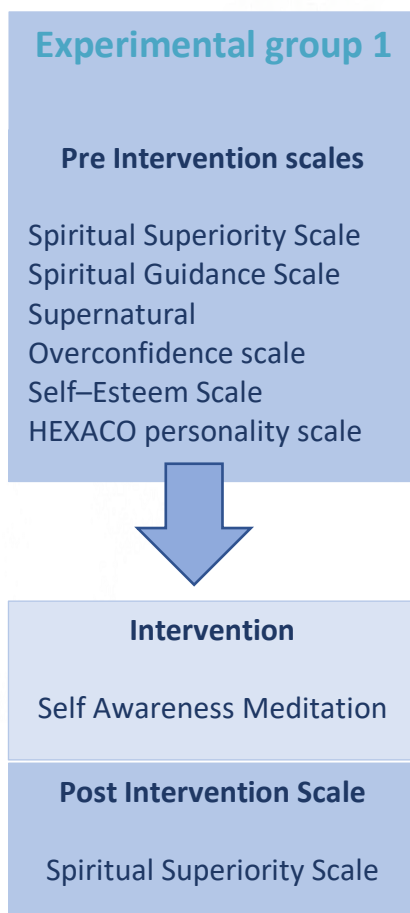


## Our Intervention

Our research was conducted online and involved 52 participants with diverse genders, ages, ethnicities, and levels of familiarity with mindfulness practices. Within the Waking Up app, we implemented two carefully chosen meditation practices: self-awareness and self-compassion meditation. These practices were selected based on their relevance to the research question, popularity, and alignment with the app's objectives and principles of mindfulness.<sup>3-10,15,16,20,22,31,32,39,40</sup>

During the study, participants engaged in these meditation practices. They completed surveys assessing their mindfulness levels, personality traits, and sense of spiritual superiority as well as two related constructs related to spiritual superiority (spiritual overconfidence, spiritual guidance and self-esteem)<sup>37</sup>. To measure personality traits, we employed the HEXACO personality scale, which provides valuable insights into six dimensions: honesty/humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience.<sup>1, 2, 21, 26, 30, 36</sup>

Below you can see what the study looked like.



## Results

The results of our research revealed several important insights:

- We found positive correlations between **spiritual superiority and related concepts**, such as spiritual guidance, self-esteem, and supernatural overconfidence: Individuals who perceived themselves as spiritually superior exhibited behaviours associated with guiding others spiritually, expressing overconfidence in supernatural abilities, and possessing higher levels of self-esteem. These findings support the notion that spiritual superiority encompasses multiple dimensions beyond a simple sense of superiority.
- Neither **meditation practice** showed a significant trend towards increasing spiritual superiority among participants, indicating that engaging in these meditation practices did not lead to a noticeable increase in spiritual superiority.
- **The choice of meditation practice** (self-compassion and self-awareness) did not significantly influence participants' development of spiritual superiority.
- **Individual differences** in personality traits did not substantially influence the changes in spiritual superiority resulting from engaging in various meditation techniques.
- A positive and significant correlation was found between **honesty/humility** and spiritual superiority post-test.
- Individuals with higher levels of **extraversion and consciousness** exhibited significantly higher spiritual superiority after the meditation intervention, regardless of the type of meditation they practised.

The study's results offer valuable insights for the Waking Up company, the scientific community, and society. They contribute to a deeper understanding of the multidimensional nature of spiritual superiority and shed light on the potential influences of meditation and personality types on its development. Further elaboration and discussion can be found in the Recommendations section.

## Recommendations

After evaluating the research findings and carefully assessing their validity and reliability, we offer the following recommendations for the Waking Up company and future researchers in the field:

- **Exploration of Multidimensional Aspects:** Based on the finding that individuals with high levels of spiritual superiority also exhibited high levels of spiritual guidance, supernatural overconfidence, and self-esteem, it is recommended that future research further explores or takes into account the multidimensional nature of spiritual superiority. This recommendation is supported by previous research as well.<sup>37</sup> Researchers should delve deeper into the distinctiveness and overlap of these related constructs, seeking a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of spiritual superiority. This approach will enrich the existing theoretical framework and contribute to advancing knowledge in the evolving field of spiritual superiority.
- **Validation and Replication:** Conducting replication studies to validate the observed associations is advisable to strengthen the evidence base.<sup>29</sup> Researchers can replicate the study with diverse samples and contexts to confirm the robustness of the connections between spiritual superiority and its related constructs. By repeating the findings, the reliability of the results can be bolstered, enhancing confidence in the conclusions drawn from the research.
- **Exploring Diverse Meditation Practices:** Although our study did not find significant effects of self-compassion and self-inquiry meditations on the development of spiritual superiority, it is essential to acknowledge the potential impact of other meditation practices on this aspect.<sup>10</sup> Future research should expand its scope by exploring a wider range of meditation techniques beyond those studied here. By investigating different meditation

styles, researchers can gain valuable insights into how diverse mindfulness practices may influence individuals' sense of spiritual superiority, as existing literature suggests that various mindfulness practices can lead to different psychological outcomes.<sup>10</sup> This comprehensive approach will enrich our understanding of the intricate relationship between various meditation techniques and spiritual experiences, contributing to a more holistic perspective on the effects of mindfulness practices.

➤ **Exploring Personality Trait Interactions:** Based on the significant findings of our study, indicating an increase in spiritual superiority among individuals with certain personality traits before and after meditation, future research must delve deeper into the relationship between personality traits and spiritual experiences during meditation. Understanding the mechanisms through which honesty/humility, consciousness, and extraversion influence spiritual superiority will allow for the **customization of meditation practices** to avoid fostering a sense of spiritual superiority in individuals. This exploration is vital to ensure that mindfulness interventions remain inclusive and promote positive spiritual development without inadvertently causing feelings of superiority in participants.

➤ **Integration of Personality Trait Assessments:** The significant correlations between three personality traits and spiritual superiority in our study underscore the importance of integrating personality trait assessments into mindfulness and meditation programs. This is suggested by previous literature on spiritual superiority and outcomes of mindfulness practices as well.<sup>8,11,13,14,27,33,34</sup> By doing so, facilitators can gain valuable insights into participants' responses to different meditation techniques. Understanding the interplay between personality traits and spiritual experiences may allow facilitators to create a more inclusive and enriching environment for individuals' spiritual exploration. Utilizing validated personality measures will deepen our understanding of individual



differences and enable the facilitation of personalized meditation

interventions tailored to each practitioner's unique needs and preferences.

➤ Incorporate **long-term intervention programs and long-term follow-up assessments**: In our current research, we utilized 10-minute meditation practices as an intervention due to their popularity in society and the practical time constraints we faced. However, future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to gain a more nuanced perspective on the impact of mindfulness practices on spiritual superiority. By examining changes in spiritual experiences over an extended period and with longer meditation durations, researchers can offer valuable insights into the potential long-term effects of meditation <sup>12,19,35</sup>. Longitudinal investigations will help determine whether the lack of significant effects observed in this study is attributed to the intervention's relatively short duration and one-time measurement or if sustained engagement with meditation leads to noticeable changes in spiritual superiority. Such studies will contribute to a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of meditation practices over time.

➤ **Incorporate other methods of measurements**: because of practical reasons, self-report measures were utilized in this study, which is subject to response biases and potential distortions in self-perception <sup>29</sup>. Future research could incorporate more objective measures, such as observational data, to complement self-report measures and provide a more comprehensive assessment of spiritual experiences and personality traits.

➤ **A bigger sample size** when conducting similar research would be beneficial. The relatively small sample size ( $n = 52$ ) in our study may have limited the statistical power and the ability to detect small but meaningful effects <sup>40</sup>.

While our recommendations are based on the research conducted within this study, it is essential to consider the field's dynamic nature and continue exploring new insights and emerging theories. Regular evaluation and assessment of the recommendations' effectiveness will contribute to ongoing improvement and refinement of the Waking Up app.

In conclusion, our research aims to offer valuable insights for the Waking Up team in navigating the evolving field of spiritual superiority. By implementing the recommendations, the Waking Up research team can optimize future research and interventions for the app, maximizing the genuine benefits of meditation practices while mitigating the risk of fostering a sense of spiritual superiority.



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