

The Quest for Meaning: Religious Affiliation Differences in the Correlates of Religious Quest and Search for Meaning in Life

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Religious traditions are considered to provide their members with a way to integrate their experiences into a coherent, comprehensible whole; functioning as a meaning system. Given that religious traditions vary in certain ways, the meaning systems they provide to their members might also differ from one another. The present study was concerned with whether seeking existential meaning in religion and life is compatible with other expressions of religiousness across denominations. Using a multigroups application of path analysis, we investigated whether the relations of two forms of existential seeking, secular (search for meaning in life) and sacred (religious quest), with several religious and psychological well-being measures differed as a function of denomination in a sample of Catholic and Protestant young adults (Study 1; $N = 284$) and a sample of Catholic, Evangelical, and Non-Evangelical Protestant young adults (Study 2; $N = 454$). Although comparisons across studies are difficult because the “Protestant” category in Study 1 could have included both Evangelical and non-Evangelical Protestants, one consistent pattern did emerge: there were no denomination-based differences in any of the relations of search for meaning with any of the religiousness variables in either study. Also, in both studies, Catholics demonstrated a positive relation of search for meaning with religious quest and negative relations of search for meaning with presence of meaning in life and overall religiousness. Results for religious quest appeared unstable across studies, raising possible questions about its measurement qualities. Implications for the study of cultural and existential factors and religion are discussed.

Keywords: religious affiliation, religious quest, religiousness, search for meaning

The events that have unfolded worldwide in this new millennium have illustrated the continued influence religion appears to wield in the lives of hundreds of millions of people, includ-

ing the majority of Americans. From its invocation in the service of terrorism and warfare, to the images of monks in saffron robes demonstrating for democracy, to more placid manifestations in our national discourse, many people appear to view their world through religious lenses. During the typical political election cycle, for example, it is not uncommon to hear pundits discuss how candidates will appeal to Catholic voters, or how they’ll mobilize the Evangelical vote, or even whether the electorate will find a candidate’s faith palatable (e.g., John Kerry and Mitt Romney). This should not be surprising as one common denominator among religions is that they provide their adherents with more or less cohesive ways of determining

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what matters in the world around them. Different faith traditions seem to emphasize different things, and in conjunction with the intersection of religion and ethnicity and culture (Fouad & Brown, 2000), we should expect that people who adhere to different religious traditions may approach the world in somewhat different ways. The most populous religion in the United States is Christianity, which is claimed by roughly three-quarters of Americans (Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001). Even within Christianity, however, there are cultural and theological differences that may influence how Catholics, Evangelicals, and Non-Evangelical Protestants perceive the world and the role of religion in their lives. The present study sought to better understand any differences in how people from these three branches of Christianity engaged with existential issues, and whether people who are actively questioning the meaning of their religion or their lives experience different religious and well-being correlates as a function of religious affiliation.

Religion and Meaning

Religion is thought to serve as a meaning system for people, by which people interpret their experience and their existence (e.g., Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Exline, 2002; Silberman, 2005; Simpson, 2002). In this sense, religion provides people with answers about the meaning of their lives and the meaning of the life around them. Religion may contribute to people's beliefs about their self and the world, the relation between the two, and motivational beliefs centered on how to act in the future in order to obtain goals (Silberman, 2005). As such, religion can have both positive and negative effects on one's behavior, goals, emotions, and beliefs (Pargament, 2002). In this capacity, religion may provide people with answers about who they are, how the world works, and what life is really all about (e.g., Jonas & Fischer, 2006).

Developmental and personality theorists consider answering such questions to be a critical hurdle in achieving maturity and well-being (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Frankl, 1963). The idea that religion may provide these kinds of existential benefits is suggested in the literature linking a variety of religious dimensions with mental and physical health (Pargament, 2002;

Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003). A number of well-being indicators have been linked to stronger religious beliefs and associated practices (e.g., Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003; Laurencelle, Abell, & Schwartz, 2002), and meta-analyses have supported the positive relationship between religiosity and well-being (Witter, Stock, Okun, & Haring, 1985).

Because religion commonly has been understood to give people a way to make meaning from their experiences, attention has been paid to the relations between religious variables and meaning in life. Meaning in life refers to the sense that people feel their lives have purpose and that they comprehend their experience in life (Steger, 2009). Some research has already established links between this kind of meaning in life and intrinsic religiosity (e.g., Chamberlain & Zika, 1988; Poloma & Pendelton, 1990) and between meaning and beliefs in monotheism (Molcar & Stuempfig, 1988). The idea that religion provides people with meaning has been tested more directly following suggestions that meaning might be a promising mediator of the relation between religiosity and well-being (Baumeister, 2002; George et al., 2002; Pargament, 2002). Indeed, studies have supported the idea of meaning as mediator in a variety of samples ranging from New Zealand stay-at-home mothers (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988), American college students (Steger & Frazier, 2005), and Jewish Israeli college students (Vilchinsky & Kravetz, 2005). Thus, having a sense of one's life's meaning may be a vital expression of religious experience.

Existential Seeking

What happens when religion does not provide an existential answer? What happens when people continue to seek meaning in their lives and experience their religious lives not as an unimpeachable truth, but as a never-ending quest for deeper meaning and understanding? If Plato was right and humans are seekers of meaning, then grappling with existential issues may be fairly common, perhaps especially in the context of religion. We refer to people's search for truth underlying existential questions, whether sacred or secular, as "existential seek-

ing.” The concept of religious quest was introduced to highlight this orientation to religion, as a complement to the major orientations of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity (Batson, 1976). Batson, Schoerode, and Ventis (1993) defined quest as “the degree to which an individual’s religion involves an open-ended, responsive dialogue with existential questions raised by the contradictions and tragedies of life,” (p. 169). Research on religious quest has been relatively scarce, but there are some indications that experiencing religion in this way yields positive and negative effects. Religious quest is related to more mature, postconventional moral reasoning (Cottone, Drucker, & Javier, 2007; Glover, 1997; Sapp & Jones, 1986) and to greater cognitive complexity regarding religious questions (Batson & Raynor-Prince, 1983), and there are some indications that religious quest is related to greater spiritual well-being (Klaassen & McDonald, 2002). Religious quest also is related to greater reliance by widows on their religious faith for direction and purpose (Thompson, Noone, & Guarino, 2003). However, people who view religion as a quest also appear to endorse humility to a lesser degree (Rowatt, Ottenbreit, Nesselrode, & Cunningham, 2002), and may dislike interacting with people whom they perceive as intolerant of their values (Batson, Eidelman, Higley, & Russell, 2001). Finally, there are some indications that viewing religion as a quest may be precipitated by traumatic exposure, as trauma survivors have shown increases in religious quest (Burris, Jackson, Tarpley, & Smith, 1996; Krauss & Flaherty, 2001).

Analogous to religious quest is the psychological construct search for meaning in life, which concerns people’s efforts to establish and/or augment the degree to which they feel life is meaningful and purposeful (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008). Theoretical accounts have had differing views of whether the search for meaning is a normal, healthy impulse (e.g., Maddi, 1970) or a signifier of psychological problems (e.g., Baumeister, 1991). Existing research has tended to find that search for meaning is positively related to psychological distress (e.g., depression; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). However, as with religious quest, search for meaning appears to be somewhat complex and not clearly good or bad. For example, search for meaning is

positively related to the personality trait openness and negatively related to dogmatism (Steger, Kashdan, et al., 2008). In addition, the relation between worse psychological health and search for meaning only appears to be present among people who simultaneously feel their lives are bereft of meaning (Steger, Kawabata, Shimai, & Otake, 2008).

Religious Affiliation and Existential Seeking

Religious quest and search for meaning appear to be fairly complex variables, and perhaps people’s religious traditions help shape their likelihood of perceiving religious quest and search for meaning as vital components of a well-lived life, or as disturbing signs of a crisis of faith. This question has not previously been addressed to our knowledge. Because of the absence of directly applicable research, we look for guidance in studies providing evidence that people from different denominations are subtly different in potentially important ways.

Much of this research has focused on the overall religiousness of Protestants and Catholics. For example, Cohen, Hall, Koenig, and Meador (2005) found that Protestants reported greater intrinsic religiosity, whereas Catholics reported greater extrinsic religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity is concerned with people engaging in religion for its own sake, because it meets a genuine personal need, whereas extrinsic religiosity is concerned with secondary social (e.g., meeting friends) or personal (e.g., gives people something to do) needs (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). This finding supports the idea that Protestants and Catholics approach their religion differently. Other research suggests that there may be consequences to these different approaches. For example, intrinsic religiosity has been shown to buffer the deleterious effects of an uncontrollable stressor among Protestants, but not among Catholics (Park, Cohen, & Herb, 1990). Similarly, in a sample of college students, intrinsic religiosity was positively related to anxiety and depression for Catholics, but not for Protestants (Tix & Frazier, 2005). Furthermore, among a sample of women with breast cancer, there was a positive relation between religiosity and emotional distress among Catholic women, whereas this relation was negative among Evangelical women (Alferi, Culver, Carver, Arena, & Antoni, 1999). Finally, there

is research suggesting that the correlates of particular *uses* of religion differ depending on denomination. Among kidney transplant patients, religious coping was found to be more effective, related to higher life satisfaction, among Protestants than among Catholics (Tix & Frazier, 1998). Taken as a whole, there seems to be provocative support for the idea that people affiliating with different religious traditions have different ways of engaging with, thinking about, and using their religion. The consistent pattern suggests that religious coping and intrinsic religiousness are related to lower distress among Protestants and higher distress among Catholics.

The specific differences between religious affiliations that account for the pattern of results described above have not yet been identified. As noted in Tix, Johnson and Dik (under review), some scholars (e.g., Park et al., 1990; Tix & Frazier, 1998, 2005) have suggested that theological differences may account for these results. That is, Protestant traditions (particularly those in the more conservative and Evangelical traditions) often emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the role of grace in providing forgiveness from sins, whereas Catholics often focus on penance for one's sins and the importance of doing good works as a means to salvation; these differing emphases may in turn prompt differential psychological functioning. One implication of the similarity of findings across many of the studies reviewed here is that religiousness itself may be associated with some degree of struggle and anxiety for Catholics.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore the question of whether existential seeking, expressed as a search for meaning in life or a religious quest for spiritual truth, may have different implications for the psychological well-being and religious experience of people who affiliate with different religious traditions, namely the Catholic, Evangelical, and Non-Evangelical Protestant traditions within Christianity. The research literature also indicates that neither religious quest nor search for meaning are uniformly helpful or harmful, but that they are related to some desirable qualities as well as some undesirable qualities. As noted above, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that

individually emphasizing the search for meaning may be more or less compatible with different religious traditions. If existential seeking is incompatible with a particular religious tradition, we would anticipate a poor fit for people seeking meaning within that tradition, and existential seeking for such individuals should be negatively related to psychological well-being or positive expressions of religiousness. Previous research indicates that Catholics may already experience a certain degree of distress with regard to their religious lives. This could imply that Catholics already experience a questing, seeking component as part of their religious orientation. Thus, one might anticipate that the dimensions of existential seeking would be unrelated to the level of religiousness or well-being Catholics experience.

In comparison, the theological emphasis on the sufficiency of grace for Protestants (in contrast to the emphasis on active confession and penance in Catholic theology), could reasonably buffer Protestants from the discomfort of existential seeking (in which case existential seeking would be unrelated to well-being and religious variables). However, it could also create more dissonance among Protestants, where existential seeking might conflict with the notion that they are personally forgiven of sin by Jesus Christ (in which case existential seeking would be negatively related to well-being and religious variables). Pairing the notion of grace with the observation that intrinsic religiousness typically appears beneficial to Protestants—but not Catholics (e.g., Park et al., 1990)—it seems likely the existential seeking would undermine the typically positive experience of religion found among Protestants. This leads us to favor the prediction that Protestants would demonstrate more strongly negative relations than Catholics between existential seeking and well-being and religiousness. We tested these predictions in Study 1.

Little research has been conducted examining differences between Evangelical and non-Evangelical Protestants. However, Kelley (1972) argued that Evangelical traditions emphasize salvation as the ultimate goal, which promotes conformity and unity in purpose within the group to a greater extent than within non-Evangelical Protestant and Catholic traditions. Along these lines, Evangelical traditions may be less likely to promote openness to di-

verse perspectives than are the other traditions. If this is the case, then existential seeking should be relatively incompatible with Evangelical traditions. Thus, we would anticipate that, relative to non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics, Evangelical Protestants would report more strongly negative relations between existential seeking and well-being and religious variables. We tested this hypothesis in Study 2.

Despite some indications from previous empirical and theoretical writings, it is not altogether clear how people from different religious affiliations would differ with regard to existential seeking. Therefore we regard our hypotheses as somewhat tentative. Differences across religious affiliations in the direction or magnitude of relations between existential seeking and psychological well-being or religiousness would provide the first indications of the possible role people's religious backgrounds could play in how people pursue meaning in their religions and their lives.

Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to examine the extent to which existential seeking variables (religious quest and search for meaning in life) were differentially related to a range of well-being and religious measures as a function of religious denominations (i.e., Protestant or Catholic). Because this study was basically exploratory, we attempted to assess a wide range of religious measures. We selected commonly used measures of religious orientation (intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity), measures of behavioral engagement in religion (religious commitment), and nonspecific measures of spiritual experiences and attitudes, including the degree to which people report having personally important experiences of spirituality (phenomenological experiences), express beliefs in mystical or paranormal phenomenon (paranormal beliefs), and the extent to which they spend time thinking about their spiritual lives (cognitive orientations to spirituality). Thus, the present study was designed to identify religious affiliation-based differences across a diversity of conceptualizations of religious and spirituality variables.

Method

Participants

In Study 1, participants were recruited from the undergraduate psychology courses of a large Midwestern university. These data were collected as part of larger effort ($N = 631$); however, due to a technical problem with the web-based survey, only a slight majority of the sample was able to indicate their religious denomination ($N = 358$). These participants did not differ from those who were able to indicate their religious denomination on any of the variables assessed in the study ($ts < 11.13$, $ps > .26$). Because of the small numbers of people who specified other religion affiliations (e.g., Muslim as opposed to "other" or "none"), we focused on Catholics ($n = 143$) and Protestants ($n = 141$).

Measures

Two classes of measures were used in the present study: well-being and religious variables. Descriptive statistics for all scales are presented in Table 1, and alpha coefficients, as well as scale intercorrelations, are presented in Table 2.

Well-Being

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006) is a 10-item measure containing two, 5-item subscales, Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning. The Presence of Meaning subscale measures people's appraisals of meaning and purpose in their lives (e.g., "I have discovered a satisfying life purpose"). The Search for Meaning subscale evaluates an individual's tendency to seek out meaning and purpose in life (e.g., "I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life"). Items are rated from 1 (*absolutely untrue*) to 7 (*absolutely true*). Scores on each subscale range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater presence of, or search for, meaning. Previous research has supported the internal consistency, stability, and structural, convergent, and discriminant validity of the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007; Steger, Kashdan, et al., 2008; Steger, Kawabata, et al., 2008).

Table 1
Scale Means and Standard Deviations by Denomination, Studies 1 and 2

Study 1	Total sample (<i>N</i> = 284)		Protestant (<i>n</i> = 141)		Catholic (<i>n</i> = 143)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Presence of meaning	21.2	5.1	21.6	5.1	20.8	5.1
Search for meaning	23.8	6.5	23.3	6.7	24.2	6.3
Life satisfaction	26.0	5.4	25.5	5.4	26.4	5.5
Religious quest	34.3	7.3	34.2	7.3	34.4	7.3
Extrinsic religiosity	16.7	3.8	17.1	3.9	16.3	3.6
Intrinsic religiosity	26.1	5.3	26.9	5.0	25.4	5.6
Religious commitment	24.4	10.1	25.5	10.1	23.2	10.0
Cognitive orientations	17.2	5.4	18.0	5.2	16.5	5.6
Experiential/phenomenological	11.7	5.1	11.8	4.9	11.7	5.4
Existential well-being	25.1	4.4	24.9	4.3	25.2	4.4
Paranormal beliefs	11.5	4.1	11.4	4.1	11.7	4.1
Religiousness	19.1	6.5	19.7	6.4	18.5	6.6

Study 2	Total sample (<i>N</i> = 312)		Protestant (<i>n</i> = 93)		Catholic (<i>n</i> = 148)		Evangelical (<i>n</i> = 71)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Presence of meaning	23.9	6.3	23.9	6.0	23.2	6.3	19.8	6.3
Search for meaning	24.5	6.2	24.5	5.5	25.4	5.8	25.3	7.4
Life satisfaction	25.5	6.4	26.4	5.5	24.8	7.0	26.1	6.1
Religious quest	35.8	7.3	35.4	7.8	36.6	6.9	34.7	7.6
Extrinsic religiosity	16.7	3.6	17.2	3.2	16.8	3.6	16.2	4.0
Intrinsic religiosity	25.9	5.3	26.1	5.2	24.9	4.8	27.8	5.9
Unbeliefs in an afterlife	19.4	8.1	19.0	8.1	20.3	8.1	17.9	8.1

Note. Means and *SDs* in boldface indicate differences in religious denomination group scores, significant at $p < .05$, with the exception of religious commitment where groups scores are significantly different at $p = .052$.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a 5-item measure assessing the cognitive appraisal of well-being (e.g., "In most ways my life is close to the ideal."). Items are rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Scores range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction. Previous research has supported the internal consistency, stability, and convergent and discriminant validity of the SWLS (Diener et al., 1985; for a review, see Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Religious Variables

The Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religiosity Scale (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989) is a 14-item measure containing two subscales, Intrinsic Religiosity and Extrinsic Religiosity. The 8-item Intrinsic Religiosity scale measures people's genuine investment in religion for its own sake (e.g., "My whole approach to life is based on

my religion"). The 6-item Extrinsic Religiosity scale measures people's involvement in religion for secondary social and personal reasons (e.g., social, "I go to church mainly because I enjoy seeing people I know there;" personal, "What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow"). Items are rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Scores on the Intrinsic Religiosity scale range from 8 to 40 and scores on the Extrinsic Religiosity scale range from 6 to 30, with higher scores indicating greater religiosity. Previous research has supported the reliability and discriminant validity of the subscales (Gorsuch & McPherson).

The revised Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a, 1991b) is a 12-item measure assessing people's approaches to existential questions (e.g., "Questions are far more central to my religious experience than are answers."), and expected stability of religious beliefs (e.g., "I do not expect my religious convictions to change in the next few years"). Items are rated from 1 (*strongly*

Table 2
Scale Intercorrelations and Alpha Coefficients

Subscale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Study 1, α	Study 2, α
1. MLQ-P	—	-.26**	.44**	-.17**	.06	.33**	.31**	.28**	.26**	.23**	.08	.25**	.82	.91
2. MLQ-S	-.25**	—	-.22**	.24**	.10	-.06	-.07	.01	.05	-.29**	.12*	-.02	.88	.81
3. SWLS	.55**	-.22**	—	-.13*	.09	.15*	.13*	.11	.10	.49**	.02	.10	.89	.91
4. RQ	-.18**	.26**	-.08	—	.18**	-.07	-.07	-.01	.08	-.17**	.03	-.13*	.81	.82
5. R-EXT	.10**	.09	.06	.12*	—	.35**	.31**	.23**	.19**	-.08	.03	.27**	.74	.68
6. R-INT	.42**	-.17	.18**	-.14**	.45**	—	.80**	.76**	.41**	.05	.03	.81**	.77	.75
7. R-COM							—	.82**	.50**	-.04	.12*	.83**	.95	—
8. ESI-COG								—	.59**	-.07	.20**	.87**	.81	—
9. ESI-PHE									—	-.26**	.55**	.48**	.85	—
10. ESI-EWB										—	-.32**	-.03	.87	—
11. ESI-PAR											—	.11	.69	—
12. ESI-REL												—	.91	—
13. UNBELF	-.32**	-.01	-.17**	.15**	-.24**	-.56**							—	.91

Note. Intercorrelations for scales used in Study 1 are located on upper diagonal; Study 2, lower diagonal. MLQ-*p* = Meaning in Life Questionnaire Presence Subscale; MLQ-*S* = Meaning in Life Questionnaire Search Subscale; SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale; RQ = Religious Quest; R-EXT = Extrinsic Religiosity; R-INT = Intrinsic Religiosity; R-COM = Religious Commitment; ESI-COG = Expression of Spirituality Inventory Cognitive Orientation; ESI-PHE = Expression of Spirituality Inventory Experiential/Phenomenological Dimension; ESI-EWB = Expression of Spirituality Inventory Existential Well-Being; ESI-PAR = Expression of Spirituality Inventory Paranormal Beliefs Dimension; ESI-REL = Expressions of Spirituality Inventory Religiousness Dimension; UNBELF = Unbelief in an Afterlife Scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

disagree) to 9 (*strongly agree*). Scores range from 12 to 108, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of questioning involved in people's religious beliefs and approach to their religion. Research has supported the internal consistency and convergent validity of the revised scale, and has demonstrated close links between the revision and the original (*rs* from .85 to .90).

The Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10; Worthington et al., 2003) is a 10-item measure assessing people's social (6 items, e.g., "My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life") and personal (4 items, e.g., "I enjoy working in the activities of my religious organization") involvement in and commitment to their religion. Items are rated from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 5 (*totally true of me*). We used the total score for the RCI-10. Scores range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater religious involvement and commitment. Research has supported the internal consistency and convergent validity of the RCI-10 (Worthington et al., 2003).

The revised Expressions of Spirituality Inventory (ESI; MacDonald, 2000) is a 30-item measure consisting of five, 6-item subscales: Cognitive Orientation Toward Spirituality (e.g., "My life has benefitted from my spirituality"), Experiential/Phenomenological Dimensions (e.g., "I have had an experience in which I seemed to be deeply connected to everything"), Existential Well-Being ("Much of what I do in life seems strained"), Paranormal Beliefs (e.g., "It is possible to communicate with the dead"), and Religiousness ("I see myself as a religiously oriented person"). Items are rated from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Scores on each subscale range from 0 to 24, with higher scores indicating greater levels of specific dimensions of spirituality. Previous research has supported the reliability, and the convergent and structural validity of the ESI (MacDonald, 2000).

Procedure

Participants were directed to the website containing the survey materials by the course instructor at the beginning of a Fall semester and given extra credit upon completion of the study.

Results

Religious Affiliation Differences and Demographics

No significant relationships were found between religious affiliation and participants' gender ($\chi^2 = 1.846, p > .10$) or race ($\chi^2 = 20.365, p > .10$). Protestants and Catholics did not differ significantly in terms of age, $t = 0.43, p > .10$. Independent sample t tests were conducted, comparing the mean scale scores of females and males. There were no statistically significant gender differences in any of the religious variables (i.e., quest, religious commitment), the search for or presence of meaning or life satisfaction.

Religious Affiliation Differences and Psychological and Religious Variables

Independent sample t tests were conducted, comparing the mean scale scores of Protestants and Catholics. Protestants reported higher levels of extrinsic religiosity, $t = 2.09, p < .05$, religious commitment, $t = 1.95, p = .052$, and cognitive orientation toward spirituality, $t = 2.25, p < .05$ than did Catholics. There were no other significant differences between Catholics and Protestants.

Data Analysis Plan

We used multigroups application (see Byrne, Shavelson, & Muthén, 1989; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002) of path analysis using the software package AMOS 6.0 (Arbuckle, 2005). Of interest was whether the relations of MLQ-S and RQ with well-being, religious, and spirituality variables differed as a function of religious denomination (see Figure 1 for Model 1). We assessed for differences among three nested models. Model 1 consisted of a bidirectional path between MLQ-S and RQ, constrained to be equal across denominations to provide a degree of freedom, and unidimensional paths from both MLQ-S and RQ to religious and well-being variables. Prior to running this model, we freed the path between search for meaning and religious quest in order to estimate coefficients for this relation within each denomination. In Model 2, we focused on religious quest, constraining the path between RQ and each indi-

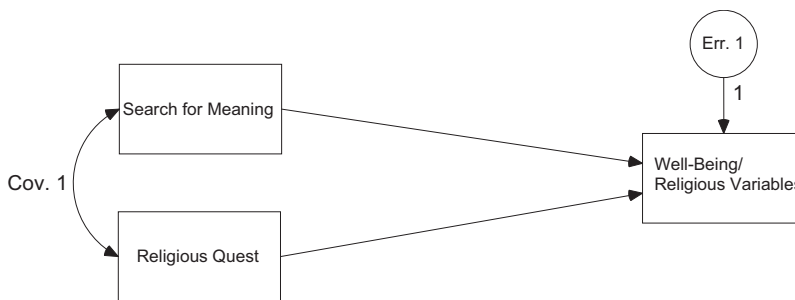


Figure 1. Model 1, testing relations among search for meaning, religious quest, and well-being/religious variables. Cov. 1 refers to the covariance between search for meaning and religious quest, which was fixed across denominations. Err. 1 is the uniqueness or residual for well-being and religious variables. In Model 2, the path between religious quest and well-being/religious variables was constrained to be equal across denominations. In Model 3, the path between search for meaning and well-being/religious variables was also constrained to be equal across denominations.

vidual religious and well-being variable in turn to be equal across denominations with a significant change in chi-square test from Model 1 to Model 2 indicating that paths associated with RQ differed across denominations. In Model 3, we focused on search for meaning, constraining the path from MLQ-S to each religious and well-being variable in turn to be equal across denominations (while still maintaining constraints on the path between RQ and the same dependent variable), with a significant change in chi-square test from Model 2 to Model 3 indicating that paths associated with MLQ-S differed across denominations. Consistent with the overall aim of understanding whether either secular (MLQ-S) or religious (RQ) existential seeking is differently related to religious and well-being variables, this sequence of analyses simultaneously evaluate the relative relations of MLQ-S and RQ to religious and well-being variables, and also test whether the strength and direction of these relations vary across religious denominations.

First, we consider existential seeking and well-being, followed by existential seeking and religious variables, concluding with existential seeking and spirituality variables.

Existential Seeking and Well-Being

MLQ-S and RQ were positively related for both Protestants ($\beta = .19, p < .05$) and Catholics ($\beta = .26, p < .05$), with no significant difference in the magnitude of the coefficients between de-

nominations. Because the single degree of freedom for Model 1 was gained by constraining this path, the chi-square value for Model 1 for all religious and well-being variables will be the same, $\chi^2(df = 1) = 0.25, ns$. The first two analyses examined relations between MLQ-S and RQ and presence of meaning, and between MLQ-S and RQ and life satisfaction. Because of the large number of analyses, only significant chi-square values have been reported.

Presence of meaning. Model 1 produced path estimates between search for meaning/religious quest and presence of meaning (see Table 3). There were significant, negative relations of both search for meaning and religious quest with presence of meaning among Protestants. Figure 2 graphs path coefficients for each of the analyses in Study 1. The negative relation of search for meaning with presence of meaning was marginally significant among Catholics. Model 2, which constrained the path between RQ and MLQ-P, resulted in a marginally significant deterioration in the model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(df = 1) = 3.29, p < .10$, indicating that Protestants tended to report an inverse relation between religious quest and presence of meaning whereas Catholics did not. Model 3, which further constrained the path between MLQ-S and MLQ-P, did not worsen the fit of the model. These findings can be taken to suggest that whereas searching for meaning is related to lesser presence of meaning among both Protestants and Catholics, religious quest is associated with lesser presence of meaning among Protestants.

Table 3

Path Coefficients From the Unconstrained Models (Model 1) Between Existential Seeking and Religious and Well-Being Variables Among Protestants and Catholics, Study 1

	Religious quest		Search for meaning	
	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic
Religious quest	—	—	.23*	.30**
Presence of meaning	-.17*	.06	-.22*	-.18 ⁺
Life satisfaction	-.12	.18 ⁺	-.09	-.04
RELIGIOUSNESS	-.14	.15 ⁺	.12	-.16 ⁺
Extrinsic religiosity	.06	-.01	.14 ⁺	.26*
Experiential/phenomenological	-.04	.27*	-.02	-.05
Existential well-being	-.02	.00	-.25**	-.20*
Paranormal experiences	-.03	.09	.18*	.09

Note. $N = 284$. Coefficients pairs presented in bold differ at $p < .10$ level, coefficients in bold and italics differ at $p < .05$ level. RELIGIOUSNESS is a latent factor comprised of intrinsic religiosity, religious commitment, and the cognitive orientation and religiousness subscales of the ESI.

⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Life satisfaction. There was a marginally significant, positive relation between RQ and SWLS among Catholics, with no other significant paths (see Table 3). Constraining the path between RQ and SWLS resulted in a significant deterioration in the model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(df = 1) = 5.52, p < .05$. This finding indicates that the moderate *positive* correlation between religious quest and life satisfaction Catholics was distinctive compared to the nonsignificant relation between the two variables among Protestants. Constraining the path between MLQ-S and SWLS did not worsen fit. These findings mean that although Protestants and Catholics differed on the relation between religious quest and life satisfaction, there was no relation between search for meaning and life satisfaction either group.

Existential Seeking and Religious Variables

Because correlations were very high among intrinsic religiosity, religious commitment, and the cognitive orientations and religiousness subscales of the ESI (see Table 2), we sought to create a latent factor. Combining variables in this way also reduces the number of analyses required, which in turn reduces the risk of Type I error. Fit was acceptable (Goodness of Fit Index = .96; Comparative Fit Index = .98), thereby reducing the number of analyses. We labeled this latent factor "Religiousness."

"Religiousness." RQ and "Religiousness" were marginally, positively related among

Catholics, whereas MLQ-S and "Religiousness" were marginally, negatively related among Catholics, with no other significant paths (see Table 3). Constraining the path between religious quest and "Religiousness" produced a significant deterioration in model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(df = 1) = 3.81, p = .051$. This finding indicates whereas there was a marginally significant positive relation between religious quest and general religiousness among Catholics, this relation was not significant among Protestants. Constraining the path from search for meaning to "Religiousness" did not produce a significant deterioration in model fit.

Extrinsic religiosity. RQ and R-EXT were significantly positively related among Catholics and marginally positively related among Protestants, with no other significant paths (see Table 3). Neither Model 2 nor Model 3 worsened the fit of the model, indicating no denominational differences in the relations of search for meaning and religious quest with extrinsic religiosity.

Finally, we examined relations between MLQ-S and RQ and the three remaining ESI subscales (experiential/phenomenological orientations, existential well-being, paranormal beliefs).

Experiential/phenomenological. RQ and experiential/phenomenological dimensions of spirituality were significantly positively related among Catholics, with no other significant paths (see Table 3). Model 2 significantly worsened the fit, $\Delta\chi^2(df = 1) = 5.53, p < .05$. This

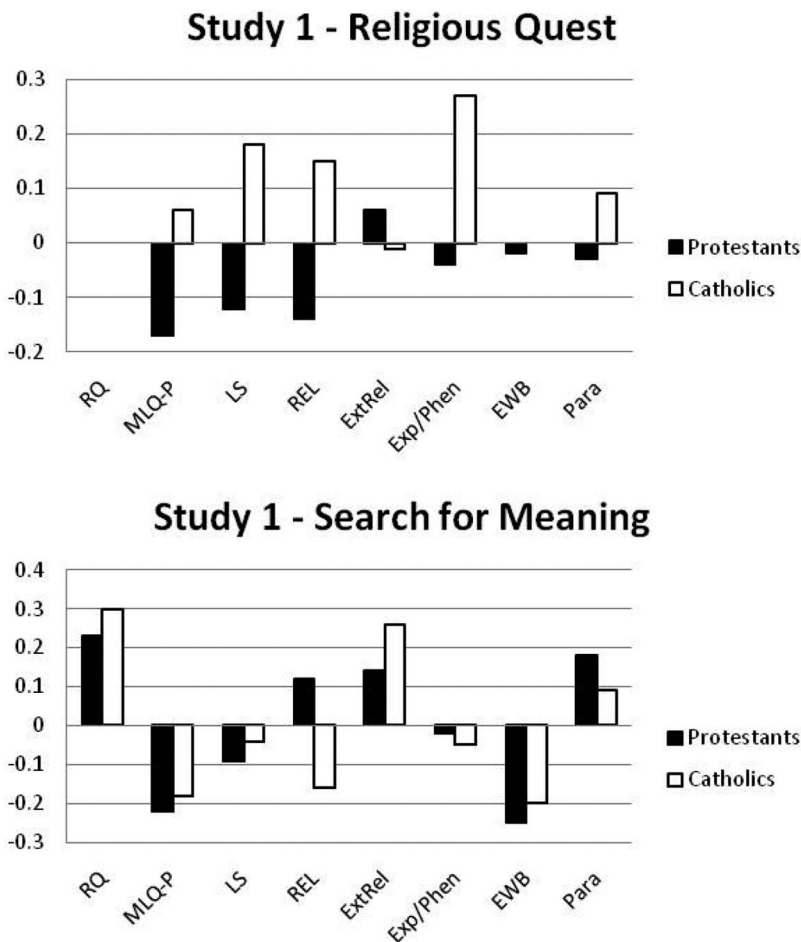


Figure 2. Graph of path coefficients for Study 1 indicates the relations between religious quest (panel A) and search for meaning (panel B) with religious quest (RQ), presence of meaning (MLQ-P), life satisfaction (LS), the “RELIGIOUSNESS” latent factor (REL), extrinsic religiousness (ExtRel), experiential/phenomenological dimensions of spirituality (Exp/Phen), existential well-being (EWB), and paranormal beliefs (Para).

finding indicates that the positive relation between religious quest and the tendency to have strong, personal spiritual experiences was distinctive to Catholics, as opposed to Protestants. Model 3 did not worsen the fit.

Existential well-being. MLQ-S and existential well-being were significantly inversely related among both Protestants and Catholics, with no other significant paths (see Table 3). Neither Model 2 nor Model 3 worsened the fit of the model, indicating no denominational differences in the relations of search for meaning and religious quest with existential well-being.

Paranormal beliefs. MLQ-S and paranormal experiences were positively related among Protestants, with no other significant paths (see Table 3). Neither Model 2 nor Model 3 worsened the fit of the model, indicating no denominational differences in the relations of search for meaning and religious quest with paranormal beliefs.

Discussion

Study 1 was conducted to examine whether people affiliating with different religious traditions reported differing relations between what

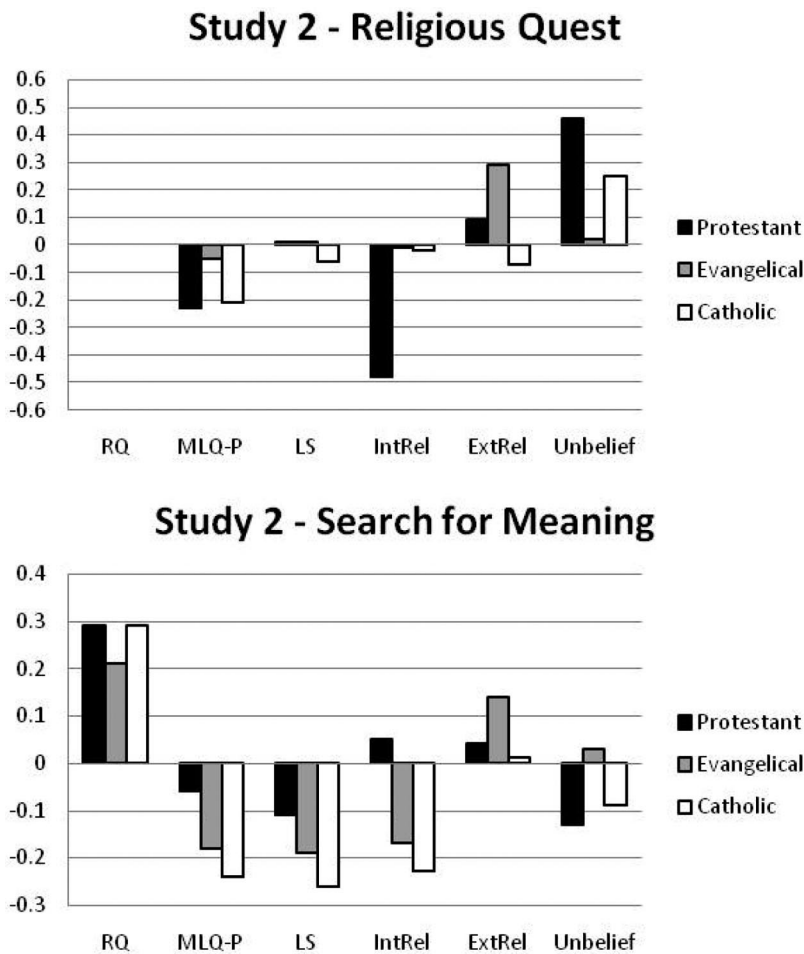


Figure 3. Graph of path coefficients for Study 2 indicates the relations between religious quest (panel A) and search for meaning (panel B) with religious quest (RQ), presence of meaning (MLQ-P), life satisfaction (LS), intrinsic religiousness (IntRel), extrinsic religiousness (ExtRel), and unbelief in the afterlife (Unbelief).

we have termed existential seeking (religious quest and search for meaning) and a number of important well-being and religious variables. In Study 1, we focused on Protestants and Catholics. Our data suggest that, in this sample, Catholics and Protestants both seem to experience the same degree of meaning in their lives, and also seem to engage in similar levels of existential seeking. This study also suggests that Protestants in this sample were more committed to their religion, including a stronger endorsement of participating in religion for secondary social or personal gains. Thus, people who identify with either broad Christian affiliation report

similar existential profiles despite differing degrees of engagement in their faith traditions.

If religious traditions are viewed as *providers* of meaning, what is it like to experience questions and doubts about meaning in life and even in religion itself? The present results suggest that the answer to this question partially depends on the religious tradition people ascribe to. In contrast to our predictions, Catholics did not reveal a consistent pattern of nonsignificant relations between existential seeking and well-being and religious variables. Surprisingly, whereas search for meaning was generally negatively related, or unrelated, to the other vari-

ables, religious quest was generally positively related, or unrelated, to the other variables. Catholics appeared to make a real distinction between search for meaning in life and religious quest. In contrast to the positive and neutral relations between religious quest and religious variables, search for meaning was associated with less of an orientation to religion for internalized spiritual reasons among Catholics. This difference in patterns can be seen clearly in Figure 2. This suggests different manifestations among Catholics of search for meaning (incompatible with religiosity) and religious quest (compatible with religiosity). Alternatively, this distinction between religious quest and search for meaning in life could suggest that Catholics who search for meaning in life typically do so outside of their religious tradition.

We had predicted that Protestants would demonstrate more strongly negative relations than Catholics between existential seeking and the other variables. In contrast, the groups were fairly similar. However, Protestants did report a distinct, negative relation between religious quest and presence of meaning in life, bearing out our predictions. Although we had predicted a pattern of stronger *negative* relations for Protestants, the primary pattern we found was that of a number of significant *positive* relations for Catholics that were not found for Protestants. The overall impression created by these results is that there may be a better epistemological match between religion as an enduring quest and Catholic faith traditions.

However, given that the present study was conducted in a single sample of Midwestern undergraduates, it is premature to draw any definitive conclusions. In addition, the extent to which any conclusions drawn from this study extend to what is currently the largest Protestant tradition in the United States, Evangelical Christianity (26.3% of Americans; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008), is unclear. The influence of Evangelical Christian movements has been felt in many spheres of public life, including politics (e.g., Mead, 2006). In Study 1, participants were not provided with the opportunity to identify themselves as Evangelical Christians, and given the diversity within Protestant denominations, it is not possible to code for Evangelical status by self-reported religious affiliation alone. One issue to bear in mind about Study 1, then, is that our "Protestant" group may have been com-

prised of both Evangelical and non-Evangelical Protestants. If there are differences between these two traditions, they could have been obscured by having the traditions aggregated under the Protestant moniker. Therefore, we conducted a second study to examine the consistency of the present results regarding Protestants and Catholics, as well as to extend the scope of inquiry to include self-identified Evangelical Christians relative to Non-Evangelical Protestants.

Study 2

In the previous study, we assessed how existential seeking related to well-being and religious variables among Protestants and Catholics. In Study 2, we provided participants with the opportunity to identify their religion as Evangelical Christian by their response to the question: "Are you an Evangelical Christian?" Study 1 showed that many of the spirituality variables derived from the ESI conformed to other measures of religiousness (as in the case of the ESI subscale, Religiousness) or well-being (as in the ESI subscale, Existential Well-Being). Therefore we chose to eliminate the ESI from a second round of data collection and add a scale testing a more centrally existential manifestation of religious beliefs, namely, beliefs in the afterlife. Some have argued that it is the promise of some form of immortality that explains one of religion's most potent contributions to psychological welfare (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). The confluence of existential seeking with religious beliefs about existence after death seemed likely to provide fertile opportunity to identify any differences in how people raised in different religious traditions experienced their existential seeking. The measure of beliefs in the afterlife selected for this study focuses on anxiety and uncertainty about life after death, and therefore we hypothesized that, as was the case with measures of religiosity in Study 1, Protestants would demonstrate relations between existential seeking and beliefs in the afterlife more pronouncedly aversive (in this case a stronger positive correlation between existential seeking and the beliefs in the afterlife scale). However, we also explored the possibility that relations may differ for Protestants depending on whether or not they identify as Evangelical Christians.

Method

Participants

A total of 454 participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses at a large midwestern university. Of those reporting a religious denomination (22.2% of the sample left this item blank or endorsed "other"), 148 were Catholic, 71 were self-identified Evangelical Christians, and 93 were Protestants who responded "no" to the question: "Are you an Evangelical Christian?" Thus, we analyzed data from 312 participants (65.6% female; 78.6% European American, 8.7% Asian American, 3.2% Asian, 1.5% African American, 1.5% Hispanic/Latino, <1% other responses) with a mean age of 19.7 ($SD = 1.8$ years).

Measures

Measures were, again, completed via Internet for course credit. Participants completed the MLQ, SWLS, Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religiosity Scale, as well as the Beliefs in Afterlife (Osorchuk & Tatz, 1973).

Unbelief in an afterlife. The Belief in Afterlife Scale-Form A (Osorchuk & Tatz, 1973) is a 10-item scale that measures the degree to which beliefs in an afterlife might help people deal with anxiety in regards to death (e.g., "Humans die in the sense of 'ceasing to exist';" "The idea of there existing somewhere some sort of afterlife is beyond my comprehension"). Items were rated on 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate more distress and anxiety regarding, and less endorsement of, the existence of an afterlife. Previous research has supported good reliability and convergent validity of the scale (Osorchuk & Tatz, 1973). To avoid confusion in interpreting results regarding this scale, hereafter, we refer to this measure as an "Unbelief in an afterlife" measure.

Procedure

As in Study 1, participants were provided with a link to a website hosted survey materials at the beginning of a Spring semester. After completing the surveys, participants received class credit.

Results

Religious Affiliation Differences and Demographics

Evangelicals were more likely to be female than were Non-Evangelical Protestants, $\chi^2(df = 2) = 6.02, p < .05$, with no significant relation found between broad religious affiliation and race, $\chi^2(df = 9) = 12.57, p > .10$. Catholics, Evangelicals, and Non-Evangelical Protestants did not differ significantly in terms of age, race, or gender, $F(2, 285) = 0.07, p > .10$.

Independent sample t tests were conducted to compare the mean scale scores of males and females. There were no statistically significant gender differences in any of the well-being or religious variables measured in the present study.

Religious Affiliation Differences and Psychological and Religious Variables

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to determine whether or not differences existed among the three categories of religious affiliation on any of the well-being or religious variables measured. According to Tukey's B post hoc tests, Evangelicals reported lower levels of search for meaning than Catholics, $F(2, 285) = 4.27, p < .05$ and significantly higher levels of intrinsic religiosity than did both Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics, $F(2, 285) = 7.26, p < .001$. The omnibus F test was marginally significant for presence of meaning, $F(2, 285) = 2.829, p = .06$, but Tukey's B post hoc tests did not reveal any significant differences. There were no other differences related to religious affiliation.

Existential Seeking and Well-Being

As in Study 1, we used multigroups application of path analysis, with three groups (Catholics, Evangelicals, and Non-Evangelical Protestants).

MLQ-S and RQ were positively related for Catholics ($\beta = .29, p < .05$), Evangelicals ($\beta = .21, p < .05$), and Non-Evangelical Protestants ($\beta = .29, p < .05$), with no significant difference in the magnitude of the coefficients between religious affiliations. The chi-square value for Model 1 for all religious and well-

being variables will be the same, $\chi^2(df = 2) = 0.86$, *ns*. The first two analyses examined relations between MLQ-S and RQ and presence of meaning, and between MLQ-S and RQ and life satisfaction.

Presence of meaning. MLQ-S was significantly inversely related to MLQ-P among Catholics and RQ was significantly inversely related to MLQ-P among Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics, with no other significant paths (see Table 4). Neither Model 2 nor Model 3 significantly worsened model fit. Thus, these findings indicate that both search for meaning and religious quest are similarly, inversely related to presence of meaning across religious affiliations. Figure 3 graphs path coefficients for each analysis.

Life satisfaction. MLQ-S was significantly inversely related to SWLS among Catholics, with no other significant paths (see Table 4). Neither Model 2 nor Model 3 significantly worsened model fit. Thus, these findings indicate that search for meaning and life satisfaction are similarly, inversely related across the three categories of religious affiliation.

Existential Seeking and Religious Variables

We next examined relations between MLQ-S and RQ and intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and unbelief in an afterlife.

Intrinsic religiosity. MLQ-S and intrinsic religiosity were significantly inversely related among Catholics, and RQ and intrinsic religiosity were significantly inversely related among Non-Evangelical Protestants (see Table 4), with no other significant paths. Model 2 was signif-

icantly worsened fit, $\Delta\chi^2(df = 2) = 12.66$, $p < .01$, indicating that the strong, inverse relation between RQ and intrinsic religiosity was distinctive to Non-Evangelical Protestants. Model 3 did not worsen fit. These findings indicate that, relative to other affiliations studied, Non-Evangelical Protestants demonstrate a more robust, inverse relation between approaching religion as an ongoing quest for truth and orienting toward religion in a genuine way.

Extrinsic religiosity. RQ and extrinsic religiosity were significantly positively related among Evangelicals, with no other significant paths (see Table 4). Model 2 marginally worsened fit, $\Delta\chi^2(df = 2) = 5.78$, $p < .10$, indicating that the positive relation between RQ and extrinsic religiosity was distinctive to Evangelicals. Model 3 did not worsen fit. These findings indicate that approaching religion as an ongoing quest for truth was positively related to orienting toward religion for the sake of secondary gains only among Evangelical Christians.

Unbeliefs in an afterlife. RQ and B-AFT were significantly positively related among Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics (see Table 4). Model 2 significantly worsened the fit, $\Delta\chi^2(df = 2) = 7.16$, $p < .05$, indicating that Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics demonstrated a stronger positive relation between religious quest and beliefs in the afterlife than did Evangelical Christians. Model 3 did not worsen the fit. These findings indicate that among Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics, those who approach religion as an ongoing quest for truth also express doubts or worries over the existence of an afterlife.

Table 4

Path Coefficients From the Unconstrained Models (Model 1) Between Existential Seeking and Religious and Well-Being Variables Among Protestants, Catholics, and Evangelicals, Study 2

	Religious quest			Search for meaning		
	Protestant	Evangelical	Catholic	Protestant	Evangelical	Catholic
Religious quest	—	—	—	.29*	.21*	.29*
Presence of meaning	-.23*	-.05	-.21*	-.06	-.18	-.24*
Life satisfaction	.01	.01	-.06	-.11	-.19	-.26*
Intrinsic religiosity	-.48***	-.01	-.02	.05	-.17	-.23*
Extrinsic religiosity	.09	.29*	-.07	.04	.14	.01
Unbelief in an afterlife	.46***	.02	.25*	-.13	.03	-.09

Note. $N = 454$. Coefficients pairs presented in bold differ at $p < .10$ level, coefficients in bold and italics differ at $p < .05$ level.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

In Study 2, rather than examining Protestants as one group, we compared Catholics to Evangelical Christians and Non-Evangelical Protestants. There were a number of points of agreement across studies. As in Study 1 (i.e., “Religiousness” latent factor), Catholics demonstrated a significant negative relation between search for meaning and intrinsic religiousness. Also in line with Study 1 was the observation of a split for Catholics between existential seeking along religious (RQ) and personal (MLQ-S) lines. Finally, as in Study 1, there were no differences between groups in terms of relations with search for meaning.

However, there were some results that differed, particularly in respect to the path estimates found for Catholics on the measure of religious quest. For example, there were some apparent reversals in the direction of path coefficients for the relations between RQ and presence of meaning, life satisfaction, intrinsic religiosity, and extrinsic religiosity. These reversals were from near-zero coefficients to small coefficients, and could reflect unstable estimates of generally nonsignificant relations. Further, they appeared to be limited to quest scores, as the pattern of path coefficients for the MLQ-S was very similar from Study 1 to Study 2. It is not clear why Catholics appear to have responded differently to questions about religious quest, but it is possible that these results reflect previously noted instability of the quest scale (Kojetin, McIntosh, Bridges, & Spilka, 1987).

With regard to hypotheses, in Study 2, our hypothesis of nonsignificant relations between existential seeking and other variables for Catholics was supported for religious quest, but not for search for meaning in life. Our hypothesis of more strongly negative relations between existential seeking and well-being and religious variables among Protestants was partially supported in that Non-Evangelical Protestants reported a significant negative relation between religious quest and intrinsic religiosity, whereas this relation was not significant among either Evangelical Protestants or Catholics. Both Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics reported a significant positive relation between religious quest and unbelief in an afterlife, whereas this relation was not significant among Evangelical Protestants. Our hypothesis of Evangelicals

demonstrating the strongest negative relations between well-being and religious variables was not supported. In fact, there was no evidence of significantly negative relations between existential seeking and any of the well-being and religious variables studied among Evangelicals.

Taken as a whole, the results from this study suggest that Non-Evangelical Protestantism and Catholicism are more similar to each other than either is to Evangelical Christianity, at least in terms of how their existential seeking related to well-being and religious variables. People who self-identified as one of these two traditional Christian denominations significantly differed from each other in only one analysis (intrinsic religiosity).

Finally, compared to Evangelicals, Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics demonstrated larger positive correlations between religious quest and worries about the afterlife, suggesting that such concerns about the hereafter may comprise a notable proportion of the questions people from these affiliations have about their religious faith. In fact, results call attention to the importance of distinguishing between Evangelicals and Non-Evangelicals when investigating Protestants. As part of this, it worth considering whether Study 2 can serve as a reasonable test of the replicability of the results from Study 1. If Evangelicals and Non-Evangelicals were aggregated under the “Protestant” label in Study 1, yet they differ from each other, as is shown in Study 2, to which group does the “Protestant” group from Study 1 best correspond?

General Discussion

Many scholars have contended that religious traditions provide their adherents with robust and comprehensive ways of understanding their experiences and perceiving meaning in their lives and the world around them. If this is so, one reasonable question is whether people affiliating with different religious traditions feel they have similar levels of meaning in their lives. The present studies suggest that Catholics, Evangelicals, and Non-Evangelical Protestants experience similar levels of meaning, and that no religious tradition was “better” at promoting meaning. The question at the heart of these studies, however, was what happens when people from different traditions experience

abiding questions regarding the meaning of their lives or religious faith? Do religious affiliations, at least at this broad level, appear to differ in the way such existential seeking manifests among their followers? In the present studies, we explored these questions by looking at the correlates of religious quest orientation and search for meaning in life among undergraduate Catholics and Protestants, and among Catholics, Evangelicals, and Non-Evangelical Protestants. Overall, there were several significant denominational differences in correlates of religious quest, but with no replication of correlations within any denomination. In contrast, there were no denominational differences in correlates of search for meaning, but most of the correlations within denominations were replicated. Compared to religious quest, participants from all three denominations reported similar patterns of relations between search for meaning and religious and well-being variables, suggesting that search for meaning really does capture personal, secular, or psychological processes independent of religious affiliation and identity.

Results indicated that viewing religion as an enduring quest for truth, rife with doubts and uncertainty, was distinctively, negatively associated with the presence of meaning in life for Protestants as compared to Catholics (Study 1). This result was not replicated in Study 2. This could be due to the previously noted instability of the Religious Quest measure (Kojetin et al., 1987), or it could be due to the fact that participants were not able to identify themselves as Evangelicals in Study 1. In Study 1, Non-Evangelical Protestants significantly differed from Evangelical Protestants on measures of intrinsic religiousness, extrinsic religiousness, and unbelief in an afterlife. If there were substantial numbers of Evangelicals identifying themselves as Protestants in Study 1, it could cloud the pattern of relations. Future research should provide participants with the opportunity to self-identify as Evangelicals. Given questions about whether "Protestants" in Study 1 were Evangelical, Non-Evangelical, or both, looking at responses from Catholics provides the best chance to look for replications of results. An examination of Tables 3 and 4 and Figures 1 and 2 reveals that, as noted above, results were more consistent for search for meaning than for religious quest. Catholics in both studies reported

negative relations between search for meaning and presence of meaning and positive relations between search for meaning and existential quest. In addition, if we accept both intrinsic religiousness (Study 2) and our latent, composite variable of religiousness (Study 1) as tapping into general religiousness, then Catholics in both studies also reported negative relations between search for meaning and religiousness.

It has been proposed that Protestant traditions place greater emphasis on faith in religious practice, whereas Catholic traditions place greater emphasis on guilt reduction through active confession and atonement (Park et al., 1990; Tix & Frazier, 1998). Based on the theoretical and empirical literature we reviewed (e.g., Park et al., 1990; Tix et al., under review), we anticipated that experiencing religious doubts may conflict with the Protestant emphasis on the importance of faith and upon grace bestowed upon believers through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, interfering with the typically positive relation between religiousness and well-being. This hypothesis received only partial support. Although the relation between religious quest and general/intrinsic religiousness among Protestants was negative in both studies, it was only significant in Study 2 among Non-Evangelical Protestants. Of course, a larger relationship for Non-Evangelical Protestants might have been attenuated by the potential inclusion of Evangelicals within the "Protestant" category in Study 1. Future research should consider whether Non-Evangelical Protestants who have many questions about their beliefs feel that they've lost faith or grace, and therefore have lost some of their commitment to their religion. Among Catholics, the relationship between religious quest and general/intrinsic religiousness was unstable (positive in Study 1; nonsignificant in Study 2). Adding to this confusing picture, there was a significant positive relation between religious quest and directly experienced spiritual phenomenon among Catholics in Study 1. A positive relationship among these variables would support the idea that experiencing religious doubts may not conflict as much with the somewhat more anxious and distressing experience many Catholics appear to have in their faith tradition (e.g., Tix & Frazier, 1998). Catholics may be more accustomed to experiencing religious doubts, or may even associated doubts with their faith

tradition, and may also have a procedure for addressing concerns—perhaps through confession and atonement—that could be employed to maintain religious commitment. However, given the instability of results concerning religious quest, drawing any such conclusions would be premature.

An alternative account of the religious differences that emerged in these studies focuses on the two major ways in which people are thought to construe themselves: individualism and collectivism. Protestants appear to be more individualistic, whereas Catholics appear to be more collectivistic (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Perhaps in more collectivistically oriented faiths, religious doubts are carried by the community, making them more tolerable. On the other hand, perhaps Catholics who are seeking meaning in their personal lives feel isolated or alone in their quest, explaining the consistent differentiated patterns of results for religious quest versus search for meaning among Catholics. Catholics might seek personal meaning outside the support of their faith tradition, whereas Non-Evangelical Protestants might seek both personal and religious meaning outside of their faith traditions due to their more individualistic self-construal. We did not measure self-construal in these studies, unfortunately, and future research might examine self-construal as a possible moderating variable.

In comparison with Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics, Evangelicals were notable for the absence of significant correlations between existential seeking and well-being and religious variables. This pattern of findings suggests that Evangelical traditions are neither compatible nor incompatible with existential seeking. This finding is somewhat surprising given the degree to which Evangelical traditions generally assert the authority of the Christian Bible, seemingly leaving little room for enduring religious questioning. However, this finding was consistent with the pattern of nonsignificant relations between searching for meaning and other variables. The only significant correlate among Evangelicals was a positive relation between religious quest and engagement in religion for secondary, extrinsic reasons. Evangelicals were unique in demonstrating this relation, compared to Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics. In forming hypotheses for this investigation, we relied on the differing emphasis on penance, grace, and salvation among Catholic, Non-Evangelical Protestant, and Evangelical tra-

ditions, respectively. To some degree, the results from these studies conform with some of the expected effects of emphasizing penance and grace. Along these lines, Catholics might conceivably have procedural means to deal specifically religious questioning in penance, whereas Non-Evangelical Protestants may struggle somewhat more in reconciling their embodiment of grace with existential seeking. Other explanations for the pattern of findings observed for these two denominations undoubtedly exist. However, the results observed for Evangelicals was unanticipated and suggest that the theological emphasis on salvation may not be psychologically relevant to adherent's existential seeking. Evangelical traditions have received relatively lesser research attention, and more research is needed to understand how Evangelical Christians experience existential seeking in their faith traditions.

One dimension on which religious traditions may vary is the degree to which they endorse fundamentalist orientations to their practices and beliefs. More orthodox traditions should be more likely to promote a set of practices and beliefs as being unequivocally and unquestionably true. In many ways, fundamentalism and orthodoxy appear antithetical to existential seeking. Indeed, religious quest correlates negatively with fundamentalism and Christian orthodoxy, as well as the related, secular variable of authoritarianism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). More directly, members of a traditional Bible study group, seeking definitive answers in the Bible, reported significantly lower quest scores than members of a charismatic Bible study group that was characterized as emphasizing religion as a shared search (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a). Search for meaning may be similar in that one study reported a negative correlation with dogmatism, although that same study found a nonsignificant correlation with authoritarianism (Steger et al., 2008). From these studies, it appears that "existential seekers" would be less likely to be fundamentalist or orthodox on a personal level, but perhaps more likely to be charismatically oriented. It may be fruitful to examine fundamentalism and charismaticism of individuals within each religious tradition as potential moderators of the relation between existential seeking and well-being and religious outcomes. Such an investigation could be part of a broader effort to understand whether particular religious traditions actively encourage or discourage existential seeking, or whether they may be mute on

the topic. Even within these broad traditions, variations likely exist in how specific churches, pastors, and even families entertain questions of faith. Being able to integrate the broad, theological themes of various faith traditions with the idiosyncratic expressions of each tradition would shed new light on how people grapple with existential issues in their religious contexts.

Although the results from the present studies suggest some differences in how people raised in the major American Christian affiliations experience existential seeking, several limitations suggest caution in generalizing results. First, both samples were comprised of undergraduate students. Some research suggests that search for meaning plateaus across emerging adulthood through young adulthood, dropping in later years (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, in press). Perhaps people of this age are more likely to question their faith, leading to biased estimates of relations between existential seeking and well-being and religious variables among older populations. Second, we only examined Christian traditions. It would be even more informative to investigate how existential seeking unfolds among members of non-Christian religious traditions. Some research suggests that Catholics and Jews are similar in how they view themselves (Cohen & Hill, 2007), and perhaps they would demonstrate similar relations between existential seeking and other variables. However, it is difficult to speculate how Christians would compare with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, or other religious people. If previous findings regarding how people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures manage opposing ideas (Steger et al., 2008), then perhaps members of religions grounded in collectivistic cultures would demonstrate positive relations between existential seeking and religious commitment. It would also be informative to conduct similar research among people dramatically differing in religious devotion, such as Christians-in-name-only and people who have devoted themselves to working in religious capacities, such as seminarians. Finally, because all data in the present studies are correlational, it is impossible to know whether religious quest leads to changes in well-being or religiosity or whether the opposite trend happens. Longitudinal research would provide a better opportunity for testing competing causal hypotheses.

The present investigations explored the question of whether existential seeking was associated with differing levels of well-being and religious-

ness among Protestants and Catholics, and among Evangelicals, Non-Evangelical Protestants, and Catholics. Our study cannot address theological or moral questions like whether it is all right to have enduring religious questions or whether it is better to be one religion or the other. Although the purpose of religion is not to promote happiness, an argument can be made that one purpose of religion is to promote meaning and purpose in life, and our data suggest that people from different religious traditions experience similar levels of meaning. Nonetheless, we would argue that psychological data are generally mute with regard to whether some religions are "better" than others—such questions are personal or theological, based on faith, culture, history, and venerable belief systems, not the correlations among a collection of psychological surveys. The present study merely provides some initial indications that one of the ways in which religious traditions may differ is in the degree to which they seem to accommodate those members who are experiencing religious doubts or who are seeking answers regarding the meaning of their lives and of their religious experiences.

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