

Despair Is in My Heart; Is It in My Religion?: Associations between Personality Traits and Religious Orientations

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationships between personality traits and the psychological function of religion. Theological defensiveness facilitates psychological security through religion, so less anxiety is present because religion serves as a buffer. Religion as quest is the search for meaning through religion, but anxiety is present because of the lack of buffer. Research has revealed six salient personality characteristics: honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. It was hypothesized that there would be an inverse relationship between religion as quest and theological defensiveness; additionally, a pattern of correlations were expected among these religious orientations and each of the HEXACO personality traits. Students from two Christian universities and community adults were recruited to participate. From the sample of 357 participants, 72.5% were women (M age = 24.73, SD = 9.25). Participants completed the Defensive Theology Scale, Batson Quest Scale, and HEXACO-60. There was a negative correlation between religion as quest and theological defensiveness. Greater religion as quest was associated with less honesty-humility, less extraversion, less conscientiousness, and greater openness to experience. Greater theological defensiveness was associated with greater honesty-humility, greater extraversion, greater agreeableness, and less openness to experience. Clarity on the relationships between personality traits and religious motivations can help clinicians better understand how personality and religious orientation function within a client's life.

Keywords: Theological Defensiveness, Religion as Quest, Personality Characteristics

1. Introduction

In *The Authenticity of Faith*, Richard Beck further explores William James' notions of the healthy-minded (optimistic individuals who "[succeed] in ignoring evil's very existence") and the sick soul (realists who understand "the evil aspects of our lives are of its very essence") by employing a metaphor of summer and winter religious believers^{9; 13}. Summer Christians, also called defensive believers or security-focused believers, are more consistently content with the way the world is, unlikely to question their purpose in life, and are less welcoming to differing worldviews. The profile of summer Christians is therefore consistent with Freud's notion of religion as an existential anxiety buffer and James' category of the healthy-minded as an existentially aware orientation to religious faith^{11; 16}. Winter Christians, also called existential believers or growth-focused believers, are often searching for answers, asking questions about the meaning and purpose of life, and are more accepting of opposing worldviews. The profile of winter Christians is consistent with James' category of the sick soul and provides a critique of Freud's notion that all religious belief serves a narcotic function^{13; 14}. While these two seasons of Christian belief are proposed to exist on opposite ends of a spectrum, could there be a relationship between one's personality characteristics and their "season" of Christianity?

2. Literature Review

Awareness of the relationship between personality characteristics and religious orientations is important so that congregants and church leaders may have a greater sense of what prompts an individual's way of understanding and acting upon a religious worldview. This brief review of the literature highlights recent studies in the areas of theological defensiveness, religious quest theory, and personality theory, providing some context for the current study.

2.1 Theological Defensiveness

A Christian's orientation to faith can be understood on a spectrum ranging from defensive theology to existential belief⁷. Highly defensive religious people repress concerns and anxious thoughts about death and existential questions. Religion is often helpful in the repression of anxiety by enhancing a sense of life's meaning, increasing self-esteem through adherence to culturally-approved norms, and providing assurance of immortality and an afterlife^{7, 14}. Beck proposed that theological defensiveness includes five themes, which serve anxiety-buffering functions: special protection, special insight, divine solicitousness, special destiny, and denial of randomness. Special protection is the belief that God protects believers from all "illness, misfortune... bad things... and harm"⁸. Special insight is the understanding that God speaks clearly and directly to the believer about the will God has planned for him or her. Divine solicitousness is the belief that God hears and grants even the simplest desires. Special destiny refers to the belief that God has laid out a plan for one's life and that life's purpose is to find that plan. Lastly, denial of randomness is seeing that God does everything for His purpose and that nothing happens by chance.

The repression of death anxiety by the defensive believer results in more positive affect and higher presence of meaning of life. Higher meaning in life is linked with a reduction in uncertainty and anxiety within the defensive believer, compared to the existential believer. The tradeoff, however, is those who are highly defensive are more likely to outgroup people because of the posing threat to their worldview. In turn, this leads them to respond dogmatically to the opposition¹⁵.

Although existential believers are searching for meaning in life, they are not to be misunderstood as atheists because faith and relationship with God are still present, yet doubts remain. These people understand their faith to be more of a "leap of faith," including struggling to believe that God is all-loving and in full control. Because these doubts are present, existential believers have a more negative affect and are unable to repress their death-anxious thoughts. The tradeoff is that existential believers are more accepting when faced with opposing worldviews because they experience doubts about their own beliefs, so they are willing to try and understand others' worldviews⁷.

2.2 Religious Quest Theory

The "quest" dimension of religiousness is a second psychological dimension that has been developed to assess the psychological functions of personal religion⁴. Religion as quest is broken into three subdomains: existentialism, self-criticism, and openness to change¹⁶. The existentialism subdomain describes one's "readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity"⁵⁻⁶. The self-criticism subdomain describes one's ability to see religious doubt in a positive manner. The openness to change subdomain describes one's preparedness for change in their religious beliefs⁵. The elements of existential awareness, self-criticism, and openness to change enable a quest-oriented believer to continue deepening their understanding of religious purpose. Beck found a clear set of negative correlations between theological defensiveness and religion as quest⁷. The greatest distinction between the dimension of theological defensiveness and the dimension of quest is that quest focuses on one's religious/spiritual growth process while theological defensiveness focuses on one's security orientation¹⁵. In other words, the quest dimension refers to the extent of one's open and questioning search for meaning, while theological defensiveness refers to the extent to which religion functions as an existential anxiety buffer¹⁵. While a high score on theological defensiveness has been validated as an effective measure of the existential anxiety buffer function, a low score on theological defensiveness can be interpreted as either an existentially open and aware orientation to faith or the lack of faithful commitment to the religious tradition. Given this ambiguity regarding the meaning of low theological defensiveness, it is necessary to measure religion as quest directly, as a way to assess a more existentially open orientation to faith. Religious quest has been associated with mature, existentially aware orientations to faith, as evidenced by the results of a comparison study including college students and seminary students. Seminarians reported religion more as a quest than the undergraduate students reported⁵. These results supported the notion that a questing orientation operates as

a contrast to theological defensiveness while offering an emphasis on mature religious doubt and questioning, rather than anxiety buffering.

2.3 HEXACO Personality Theory

Contemporary research often studies six salient characteristics of personality: honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience³. Honesty-humility is the tendency to be genuine in relationships, not manipulate or exploit others, avoid corruption, have little interest in wealth or luxuries, and not request special treatment. Emotionality is the tendency to be fearful, avoid physical harm and danger, have anxious worries even about small details, seek emotional support, and express strong empathy. Extraversion is the tendency to be dramatic when speaking, lead conversations, feel confident when meeting new people, and exhibit high energy and enthusiasm. Agreeableness is the tendency to forgive, not remain in resentment, avoid judging others harshly, compromise, be slow to anger, and remain calm when provoked. Conscientiousness is the tendency to seek order, prefer structure and organization, work hard, be thorough, and remain self-controlled. Openness to experience is the tendency to find pleasure in natural and artistic beauty, seek knowledge about the world and people, innovate, and be receptive to new ideas³.

Personality studies have concluded that personalities are a strong predictor of one's subjective well-being. The extraversion and neuroticism characteristics of personality have shown to be particularly related to subjective well-being¹⁰. However, the subjective well-being literature does not take into consideration what the role of different religious orientations are in relationship to one's well-being. A few studies have explored the relationship between religiousness and personality characteristics. In samples of community and university students, a significant positive correlation was found between both honesty-humility and conscientiousness in relationship to religiousness. A significant negative relationship was found between openness to experience and religiousness. Emotionality, extraversion, and agreeableness did not significantly relate to religiousness¹. Although some preliminary research has been done on personality traits and general religiousness, no research has evaluated the relationships between particular personality traits and specific religious orientations.

3. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between an individual's personality traits and how religion operates psychologically in a person's life. Clarity on this relationship between personality traits and religious motivations can help people better understand and relate with individuals across diverging religious orientations. This common understanding is needed so ministry leaders may help church groups function in harmony without unfairly favoring a certain religious orientation.

3.1 Research Question and Hypotheses

This study assessed the relationships between religious orientations and personality characteristics. As a result of prior research, three hypotheses were developed. In addition to investigating hypothesized relationships between scale scores, exploratory analyses were conducted to investigate the relationships among religion as quest, theological defensiveness, and personality trait facets.

3.1.1 hypothesis 1. It was hypothesized that there would be an inverse relationship between religion as quest and theological defensiveness.

3.1.2 hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that openness to experience would be positively correlated with religion as quest and negatively correlated with theological defensiveness.

3.1.3 hypothesis 3. It was hypothesized that emotionality, extraversion, and agreeableness would be negatively correlated with religion as quest and positively correlated with theological defensiveness.

3.1.4 hypothesis 4. It was hypothesized that honesty-humility and conscientiousness would not be significantly correlated with religion as quest or theological defensiveness.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

In the current study, 357 participants (72.5% women, 26.9% men, 0.6% other) were surveyed. Their ages ranged from 18 to 76 years ($M = 24.73$, $SD = 9.25$). The participants varied racially and ethnically (72% White, 11% Hispanic, 8% Multi-Racial/Ethnic, 9% Other), religiously (90% Christian, 5% Other/Multi Religion, 5% Not Religious), educationally (70% high school completion or some college, 21% associate's degree or bachelor's degree, 9% graduate degree), and politically (47% Republican, 21% Democrat, 22% Independent, 10% Other). The sample was relatively active in religious practices; While 82% said they agree or strongly agree that religion is important to shaping their daily life, 66% go to church at least once a week, 25% attend church a few times a month or seasonally, and 9% rarely or never attend religious services.

4.2 Procedure

Students from two Christian liberal arts universities were recruited to participate in the current study. Course credit and extra credit in class were offered to students who chose to participate, while those who did not wish to participate were given an equal value assignment. Community adult participants were also recruited through social media. The participants provided informed consent and responded to self-report questions using an online survey platform. In addition to the scales described below, participants responded to demographic questions and other questions not associated with this study. After completing the survey, participants had the option to be entered into a random drawing for a gift card. Participants' survey data was stored separately from their identifying information.

4.3 Materials

4.3.1 theological defensiveness.

The Defensive Theology Scale was used to measure one's psychological function of religion (DTS)⁷. The DTS is a 22-item measure (e.g., "God clearly guides me along the path He wants me to take") to measure defensive religiousness using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = disagree strongly to 7 = agree strongly). According to Beck, high scores indicate higher religious defensiveness (security-focused beliefs) while low scores indicate higher existential religious beliefs⁷⁻⁸.

4.3.2 religion as quest.

The Batson Quest Scale was used to measure one's religiosity using a 12-item measure (e.g., "For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious") using a 9-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 9 = strongly agree). Subdomains of the Quest Scale include readiness to face existential questions, self-criticism, and perception of religious doubt as positive, and openness to change; these three subscales can be summed to create a total quest score. According to Batson and Schoenrade, high scores on the Quest Scale indicate an openness to addressing existential questions while low scores indicate avoidance of existential concerns⁵⁻⁶.

4.3.3 personality characteristics.

The HEXACO-60 was used to assess one's personality characteristics using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to rate each of the 60 items. The HEXACO-60 has six subscales that are further divided into 4 facets each, which are used to provide a more nuanced assessment of personality characteristics (Honesty-Humility: e.g., "Having a lot of money is not especially important to me"; Emotionality: e.g., "I sometimes can't help

worrying about little things”; Extraversion: e.g., “The first thing that I always do in a new place is to make friends”; Agreeableness: e.g., “I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me”; Conscientiousness: e.g., “People often call me a perfectionist”; Openness: e.g., “If I had the opportunity, I would like to attend a classical music concert”³.

5. Results

5.1 Main Analyses

It was hypothesized that people who score high on the Quest Scale would score low on the Defensive Theology Scale and that people who score low on the Quest Scale would score high on the Defensive Theology Scale. The result of a bivariate correlation supports these hypotheses. A significant negative correlation was found between questing and theological defensiveness, $r(355) = -.47, p < .001$. It should be noted that theological defensiveness was negatively correlated with all three subscales of the Quest Scale.

It was hypothesized that people who score high on the Quest Scale and low on the Defensive Theology Scale would score high on the openness to experience subscale of the HEXACO-60. These hypotheses were supported. A significant positive correlation was found between questing and openness, $r(355) = .40, p < .001$. A significant negative correlation was found between theological defensiveness and openness, $r(355) = -.36, p < .001$.

It was hypothesized that people who score low on the Quest Scale and high on the Defensive Theology Scale would score high on the emotionality subscale of the HEXACO-60. This hypothesis was not supported. No significant correlations were found between questing and emotionality, or theological defensiveness and emotionality.

It was hypothesized that people who score low on the Quest Scale and high on the Defensive Theology Scale would score high on the extraversion subscale of the HEXACO-60. This hypothesis was supported. A significant negative correlation was found between questing and extraversion, $r(355) = -.11, p < .05$. A significant positive correlation was found between theological defensiveness and extraversion, $r(355) = .14, p < .01$.

It was hypothesized that people who score low on the Quest Scale and high on the Defensive Theology Scale would score high on the agreeableness subscale of the HEXACO-60. This hypothesis was partially supported. No significant correlation was found between questing and agreeableness. A significant positive correlation was found between theological defensiveness and agreeableness, $r(355) = .13, p = .02$.

It was hypothesized that honesty-humility would not be significantly correlated with Quest Scale scores or Defensive Theology Scale scores. This hypothesis was not supported. A significant negative correlation was found between questing and honesty-humility, $r(355) = -.10, p = .05$. A significant positive correlation was found between theological defensiveness and honesty-humility, $r(355) = .14, p < .01$.

It was hypothesized that conscientiousness would not be significantly correlated with Quest Scale scores or Defensive Theology Scale scores. This hypothesis was partially supported. A significant negative correlation was found between questing and conscientiousness, $r(355) = -.11, p = .03$. A significant correlation was not found between theological defensiveness and conscientiousness.

5.2 Exploratory Analyses

Further analysis was done to investigate the relationships among religion as quest, theological defensiveness, and personality trait facets. In order to investigate the facets of openness to experience (i.e., aesthetic appreciation, inquisitiveness, creativity, and unconventionality) which correlate with questing and theological defensiveness, bivariate correlations were conducted. Aesthetic appreciation was significantly positively correlated with questing, $r(355) = .27, p < .001$, and negatively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = -.3, p < .001$. Inquisitiveness was significantly positively correlated with questing, $r(355) = .19, p < .001$, and negatively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = -.20, p < .001$. Creativity was significantly positively correlated with questing, $r(355) = .23, p < .001$, and negatively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = -.13, p = .02$. Unconventionality was significantly positively correlated with questing, $r(355) = .45, p < .001$, and negatively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = -.43, p < .001$.

In order to investigate the facets of emotionality (i.e., fearfulness, anxiety, dependence, and sentimentality) which correlate with questing and theological defensiveness, bivariate correlations were conducted. Fearfulness was not

significantly correlated with questing, but positively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = .11, p = .04$. Anxiety, dependence, and sentimentality were not significantly correlated with questing or theological defensiveness.

In order to investigate the facets of extraversion (i.e., social self-esteem, social boldness, sociability, and liveliness) which correlate with questing and theological defensiveness, bivariate correlations were conducted. Social self-esteem was significantly negatively correlated with questing, $r(355) = -.18, p = .001$, and positively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = .11, p = .04$. Social boldness was not significantly correlated with questing or theological defensiveness. Sociability was not significantly correlated with questing, but positively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = .19, p < .001$. Liveliness was significantly negatively correlated with questing, $r(355) = -.12, p = .02$, and positively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = .20, p < .001$.

In order to investigate the facets of agreeableness (i.e., forgiveness, gentleness, flexibility, and patience) which correlate with questing and theological defensiveness, bivariate correlations were conducted. Forgiveness was not significantly correlated with questing but was positively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = .12, p < .001$. Flexibility was significantly positively correlated with questing, $r(355) = -.12, p = .03$, and not significantly correlated with theological defensiveness. Gentleness and patience were not significantly correlated with questing or theological defensiveness.

In order to investigate the facets of honesty-humility (i.e., sincerity, fairness, greed-avoidance, and modesty) which correlate with questing and theological defensiveness, bivariate correlations were conducted. Sincerity was significantly negatively correlated with questing, $r(355) = -.16, p = .002$, and positively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = .12, p = .02$. Fairness was significantly negatively correlated with questing, $r(355) = -.12, p = .03$, and positively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = .21, p < .001$. Greed-avoidance and modesty were not significantly correlated with questing or theological defensiveness.

In order to investigate the facets of conscientiousness which correlate with questing and theological defensiveness, bivariate correlations were conducted. Diligence was not significantly correlated with questing but was positively correlated with theological defensiveness, $r(355) = .13, p = .01$. Organization, perfectionism, and prudence were not significantly correlated with questing or theological defensiveness.

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of Findings

The statistically significant negative relationship between theological defensiveness and religion as quest is consistent with past research on the relationship between these two orientations of religion. Beck reported that the relationship between Quest religion is similar to the existential believer, but questing religiousness is a broader exploration of the believer. He also found a positive relationship between existential believers and those who believed in religion as quest⁷. In the paragraphs to follow, an interpretation of the relationships between religious orientations and each of the six personality characteristics will be explored, including an analysis of the facet scores for each personality trait.

Openness to experience and each of its facets were significantly positively correlated with religion as quest and significantly negatively correlated with theological defensiveness. These results strongly support the theoretical constructs of religion as quest and defensive theology. The aesthetic appreciation facet assesses one's interest in artistic and natural beauty, which is stronger among those high in quest and low in theological defensiveness; these correlations suggest a link between the experience of awe and openness to religious mystery and doubt. The inquisitiveness facet assesses one's interest in gaining new knowledge. This too supports the theoretical assumptions that those high in quest and low in theological defensiveness are open to new religious perspectives and sources of meaning. The creativity facet assesses one's interest in creating art and innovating solutions to problems. This innovative capacity is consistent with greater psychological flexibility in the face of worldview threats and existential challenges, which is found among those with quest and growth-focused orientations to religion⁷. The unconventionality facet explores one's interest in discussion about philosophy and other thought-provoking conversations. This also supports the theoretical assumptions that those who are high in quest and low in theological defensiveness are more open and willing to discuss religious differences and controversial topics, while those low in quest and high in theological defensiveness are motivated to suppress worldview threats and avoid existentially challenging content. This avoidance generates a feeling of safety and decreases the potential of having their worldview attacked.

Of all the personality traits, openness to experience had the strongest and most consistent correlations with both religion as quest and theological defensiveness. It is important to note, however, the unique contributions of religion

as quest and theological defensiveness beyond openness to experience. While openness to experience functions as a broad psychological construct, which impacts responses to a variety of stimuli in everyday life, the constructs of theological defensiveness and religion as quest are narrower and pertain particularly to religious motivations and existential exploration. It is possible that a person could be generally high in openness to experience while responding to existential and theological threats with defensiveness, due to the function of cultural worldviews in maintaining esteem and identity. Therefore, assessing theological defensiveness and quest, in relation to openness to experience, adds clarity to our understanding of openness in the lives of religious individuals. Given the broad acceptance of the HEXACO personality traits among psychological researchers and their appeal among laypeople, it is beneficial to assess theological orientations in light of these popular and well-researched personality constructs.

Emotionality was not significantly statistically related to religion as quest or theological defensiveness. The fearfulness facet was not significantly related to religion as quest but was significantly positively related to theological defensiveness. The items that are asked about fear are about physical danger, rather than emotional dangers or negative thoughts. Those questions do a good job of clearly exploring one's physical fear compared to the next facet, anxiety. Anxiety has no significant correlations with either religion as quest or theological defensiveness. Theologically defensive people may report higher physical fear than psychological anxiety because their anxiety is suppressed by their religious motivation, while their physical fears seem automatic and overpowering even though they believe that God has special protection for them. Neither dependence or sentimentality are significantly related to religion as quest or theological defensiveness. The items used to explore dependence refer only to human dependence. If one of the questions mentioned dependence on a supernatural figure like God, there may have been a significant positive correlation between theological defensiveness and dependence. The items exploring sentimentality refer to sentimental situations involving people and do not refer to the sentimental value in objects or memories. These specifications are important for understanding that there is no relationship between the sentimentality of relationships and questing and theological defensiveness.

Extraversion was significantly negatively correlated with religion as quest and significantly positively correlated with theological defensiveness. The social self-esteem facet was significantly negatively correlated with religion as quest and significantly positively correlated to theological defensiveness. This correlation is likely because of the more positive affect, enhanced meaning, and heightened self-esteem that the defensively religious have compared to the existential believer¹². The social boldness facet, which measures a person's comfort and confidence in social situations, was not significantly related to religion as quest or theological defensiveness; these items may not be specific enough to trigger significantly different responses between people on opposite ends of the two religious orientation spectrums. The sociability facet was not significantly related to religion as quest but was positively correlated with theological defensiveness. This strong correlation between sociability and theological defensiveness could be linked with the relationship between defensive theology and social self-esteem. As social self-esteem increases, sociability also increases. Liveliness was significantly negatively correlated with religion as quest and significantly positively correlated to theological defensiveness. The items refer to high energy and an optimistic outlook. Those high on quest religiousness likely do not have an optimistic view of the world because of their awareness of evil and doubts; security-oriented believers tend to report a more positive outlook due to a strong sense of existential security⁷.

Agreeableness was not significantly correlated to religion as quest but was positively correlated with theological defensiveness. The forgiveness facet, though not significantly correlated with religion as quest, was significantly related to theological defensiveness. This is an interesting result because it has been found that theologically defensive people are dogmatic and at times denigrating in reactance to out-group members⁷. The significant positive correlation suggests that perhaps theologically defensive people are motivated to present themselves as forgiving or that theologically defensive people think about forgiving their in-group members when answering items regarding forgiveness, rather than thinking about forgiving out-group members. The link between religious orientations and forgiveness should be empirically tested more directly in order to determine whether this surprising finding is related to social desirability bias, perceptual differences, or some other factor. The gentleness facet was not significantly related to religion as quest or theological defensiveness. It should be noted that the items that assess gentleness do not refer to physical gentleness, only social gentleness. Perhaps religious people across the spectrum of quest and defensive orientations are motivated to present themselves as kind and lenient toward others. Flexibility was positively correlated with religion as quest, but not significantly related to defensive theology. Theoretically, high scorers on quest would be more open to differing opinions. The opposite would be expected for theological defensiveness, but the empirical results did not reflect this parallel theoretical assumption. Terror management theory predicts that theologically defensive people will become emotionally reactive when primed with a differing worldview. In the present study, a worldview threat was not presented, which may account for the lack of difference between security-focused and growth-focused believers on self-reported flexibility. The patience facet was not significantly correlated

with quest or theological defensiveness. It seems that people vary regarding their self-reported tendency to remain calm or to become angry when enduring delay or disappointment, and this variation is not directly associated with religious orientation but may instead be moderated by other factors.

The honesty-humility personality characteristic was significantly positively correlated with religious defensiveness and negatively correlated with questing religion. Only two of the four facets of honesty-humility were significantly correlated with defensive theology and questing religion: sincerity and fairness. Both facets are negatively correlated with religion as quest and positively correlated to theological defensiveness. Greed-avoidance and modesty facets were not significantly correlated to either religious orientation. Sincerity is likely negatively correlated with religion as quest because those who score high on the quest have many doubts about the world. One of those doubts may be about what it means to be sincere or their personal ability to be sincere, given the connection between the concepts of truth, certainty, and sincerity in the English language. Sincerity is positively correlated with theological defensiveness perhaps because someone who is defensive is likely to be confident in the ways that they view the world, thus fostering a subjective perception of sincerity. Fairness may be negatively correlated with questing religion because the fairness facet assesses a person's tendency to report avoidance of fraud and corruption; questers may be more attuned to the frailties of human nature and therefore more likely to admit to lapses in personal integrity. Those who are highly theologically defensive may be motivated to present themselves in a more socially desirable and favorable light, given the Christian emphasis on the fair treatment of others. The questions that are used to measure greed-avoidance refer to disinterest in both monetary wealth and a wealth of luxury goods. This facet of honesty-humility does not seem to elicit any large differences between highly defensive or questing people, perhaps because a desire for material possessions is typically criticized among religious people across the spectrum of quest and defensive orientations. Similarly, modesty was not significantly related to either questing or theological defensiveness, perhaps because modesty is highly valued among religious people across the spectrum of these two orientations. Furthermore, the two questions used to explore one's modesty were reversed-scored. The item phrasing may have played a role in participants' interpretation of and responses to the items.

Conscientiousness was significantly positively correlated with questing religion and not significantly correlated with theological defensiveness. The organization, perfectionism, and prudence facets were not significantly related to religion as quest or theological defensiveness. None of these facets were theorized to be correlated with religious orientations because the trait of conscientiousness does not seem to directly relate to one's openness with religious doubt or with one's motivation to defend against existential anxiety. Diligence, however, was significantly positively correlated with theological defensiveness. This may be explained by the need of the defensive person to always do their best because of their underlying fear of failure; alternatively, this finding may be related to a strong cultural value known as the Protestant work ethic, which permeates the teaching of many theologically conservative churches in the United States.

6.2 Implications

The results of this study support the theorized connections between personality traits and religious orientations, and they are consistent with prior findings regarding religiousness and personality¹⁻². The current study, however, delves into religious motivations more specifically than prior studies. Conclusions from this research can be used in congregational settings. A church minister or leader can use this information to understand the types of religiously-motivated people in a congregation and how their personalities influence their orientations toward their religious beliefs and behaviors. This awareness is important so that the congregation may be aware of their possible biases. Biases related to religious motivations can influence the day-to-day functioning of a congregation, particularly when fundamental differences in motivation create disagreements between congregants, when strong differences in orientations exist between church leaders and parishioners (e.g., when a pastor is highly growth-focused and laypeople are highly security-focused), and when the majority of a congregation favors one end of the spectrum to the exclusion of the other end of the spectrum (e.g., a security-oriented congregation is inhospitable to a quest-oriented visitor). If a minister's goal for the church is to have religious and personality diversity, then this research could shed light on the factors that influence diversity, illuminating a way forward toward empathically understanding differences, valuing differences, and cultivating dialogue across differences.

6.3 Strengths of the Study

This study's main strength was the facet analysis of the HEXACO personality inventory in relation to the varying religious motivations. The facet analysis contributed a more sophisticated understanding of the main correlations.

Importantly, some personality facets strongly correspond with religious motivations while other facets underlying the same personality trait do not. This more detailed approach to personality analysis, as well as a nuanced appreciation of the dimensions of religiousness, should be replicated in the future. The results were generally consistent with theoretical models and past research on religion and personality while offering some novel findings. Another strength of the study was the number of participants (357) and the relevance of the mostly Christian sample to the goal of exploring religious motivations among Christians.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

Although the sample size was fairly large, it was not diverse religiously or racially. While the Christian sample provided a snapshot of a particular religious tradition from a particular part of the United States, the results may not be generalizable to more diverse populations. Another limitation of the study is that all questions were answered by self-report, which is sensitive to the limits of a person's conscious self-awareness and desire to respond openly and honestly, as well as potential motivations to provide socially desirable responses. Furthermore, the correlational and cross-sectional nature of the study impacts the interpretation of the results because causal links between variables and directions of causality cannot be confidently inferred.

6.5 Directions for Future Research

A variation of this study could be to change the order in which the measures were given. The researcher could assess for a difference in the correlations depending on which comes first, the religion measures or the personality measures. This assessment would be to assess if one measure served as a prime for the next. In addition to the religious dimensions of quest and defensiveness, religious commitment could be investigated as another dimension related to personality; for instance, conscientiousness, although not related to questing or theological defensiveness, may be related to one's religious commitment and could, therefore, account for a portion of the diversity in religious behaviors among congregants. Future research can also be done experimentally by exposing one group of participants to reminders of mortality in order to compare their reactivity to opposing worldviews to participants who are not reminded of their mortality. A longitudinal study could also be performed to assess the links between personality differences and religious orientations in light of existential threats such as challenges to worldview or self-esteem over time.

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