CRITIQUING FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND ITS MEASUREMENTS FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Faith Development Theory (FDT), primarily grounded in cognitive development models, has made significant contributions to the understanding of religiosity and has explained the role of the human factor in the developmental trajectories of religion and spirituality. After James Fowler's original study, the theory was extended and revised by subsequent international researchers in terms of its theoretical framework, research instruments, and empirical findings. However, it has seldom been critiqued

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from an intercultural perspective. This study aims to critically evaluate both the conceptualization of FDT and the instruments used to measure it. An iterative, reflective critical review of related literature was employed as the research method in this theoretical study. The findings from the literature review suggest that the use of terms like "faith" or "religiosity" within FDT can be misleading and may create tensions between theology and psychology. It is argued that dimensions such as indifference to religion, doubt, and forms of conjunctive faith in religious contexts should be integrated into the theory. Furthermore, FDT's focus on cognitive structural development has led to the neglect of the interior dimensions of religiosity, including levels of commitment and emotional aspects. Additionally, FDT appears less relevant for analysing Muslim contexts. Finally, the theory promotes a secular approach to religious development, with "developed" stages predominantly reflecting a Eurocentric, Enlightenment-oriented perspective on religiosity.

Keywords: Faith development, Religiosity, Styles, Muslim, Critique.

İNANÇ GELİŞİMİ KURAMI VE ÖLÇÜM ÇALIŞMALARININ İSLAMİ PERSPEKTİFTEN ELEŞTİRİSİ

Öz

İnanç gelişimi kuramı, öncelikle bilişsel gelişim modellerine dayanan bir teori olup, dindarlık anlayışına önemli katkılarda bulunmuş ve din ile manevi gelişimin gelişim süreçlerinde insan faktörünün rolünü açıklamıştır. James Fowler'ın orijinal çalışmasından sonra, inanç gelişimi kuramı, teorik çerçeve, araştırma araçları ve ampirik bulgular açısından sonraki uluslararası araştırmacılar tarafından genişletilmiş ve revize edilmiştir. Ancak, kuram nadiren kültürler arası bir bakış açısıyla eleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışma, inanç gelişimi kuramının hem kavramsallaştırılmasını hem de onu ölçmek için kullanılan araçları eleştirel bir şekilde değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu kuramsal çalışmada araştırma yöntemi olarak, ilgili literatürün tekrarlı (iterative), düşünsel-eleştirel (reflective) bir incelemesi kullanılmıştır. Literatür taramasından elde edilen bulgular çerçevesinde, inanç gelişimi kuramı içerisinde kullanılan "inanç" veya "dindarlık" gibi terimlerin yanıltıcı olabileceğini ve teoloji ile psikoloji disiplinleri arasında gerilim ve belirsizlik yaratabileceğini öne sürülmüştür. Çalışmada dine yönelik ilgisizlik, şüphe ve dini bağlamlardaki birleşik inanç (conjunctive faith) biçimleri gibi boyutların kuramı zenginleştirecek şekilde yeniden entegre edilmesi gerektiği savunulmuştur. Ayrıca, inanç gelişimi kuramının bilişsel yapısal gelişime odaklanması, dindarlığın içerik boyutlarının, dine bağlılık düzeyleri ve duygusal yönler gibi boyutların göz ardı edilmesine yol açtığı ifade edilmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra, inanç gelişim kuramının,

Müslümanların yaşadığı kültürel bağlamlarda kültürel adaptasyon çalışması yapılmadığı takdirde dindarlığı analiz etmek için daha az geçerlilik kriterine sahip olabileceği belirtilmiştir. Son olarak, teorinin, dini gelişime seküler bir yaklaşımı teşvik ettiği ve "gelişmiş" olarak ifade ettiği aşamaların, çoğunlukla Avrupa merkezli ve aydınlanma (enlightenment) odaklı bir dindarlık anlayışını yansıttığı yönünde düşüncelere yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnanç gelişimi, Dindarlık, Tarzlar, Müslüman, Eleştiri.

Introduction

Knowing about the cognitive styles that people cultivate regarding religiosity and their lifespan development is beneficial in deciding on the curricula of religious education, identifying religious clients in counselling and clinical practice, predicting wider social movements and developing policy on public religious education. Developmental approaches to religion emerged from the 1980s onward, enriching our understanding of religion, faith, spirituality, worldview and ideology holistically and systematically (Goldman, 1964; Fowler, 1981; Oser and Gmünder, 1984; Reich, 1992). Among the studies done so far, the one developed by Fowler in particular has more widely been used in empirical investigations.

The faith development theory (FDT) made notable progress both theoretically and empirically after Fowler's initial qualitative works in research projects conducted at Bielefeld university (Streib, Hood, & Klein, 2010; Streib & Keller, 2018). However, it seems that the theory has been centred in the Christian understandings in terms of both scholarship and research population, with almost no ground-breaking research or critiques in other cultures.

In fact, the original version of the FDT has been severely criticised by a number of scholars (see Dykstra & Parks, 1986) but criticism from the perspective of other cultures is rare. Accordingly, evaluating the theory critically and questioning its intercultural competency from an Islamic perspective may contribute to its understanding with respect to other cultures.

The aim of this paper is firstly to critically evaluate the FDT using the Western literature and, secondly, using the example of the Islamic discourse and the thinkers debating within its tradition, suggest modifications regarding its conceptualisation. We first introduce the FDT briefly and, secondly, discuss in the next step its shortcomings with respect to issues of measurement and its application in a Muslim context. This paper argues that faith development theory neglected the content of faith, i.e. commitment and non-commitment, and such components as disbelief, quest/doubt. It also argues that the

theory is a secular approach to faith, which falls short to explain sophisticated religious styles in religious traditions in general and in Islam in particular.

1. The theory of faith development and its cognate religious styles perspective

Individuals, as members of a social group, are involved spontaneously in an ongoing process of evolving a grand theory about life, as a whole, with varying degrees of knowing, valuing, creating purpose and meaning and commitment regarding existential matters in the cosmos with implications in lifestyle, relations, and ethics. This universal orientation or a "life way" in the light of a perception of an ultimate being, deity or core principle in a community is called *faith* by Fowler (1981). In that sense, as a general term, faith can be taken in a Gestaltien perspective as an existential "ground" developed since childhood with each of the emerging religious traditions, ideologies, philosophies, lifestyles, or worldviews –secular or religious – constituting a "figure" standing on it and being regarded as a way of fulfilling it. Hence, religiosity may be understood as one way of having faith. The state of lack of faith, in this sense, could be a state of "existential depression" (Berra, 2021), total hopelessness and lack of meaning and purpose in life.

In Fowlerian FDT, it is assumed that, at the cognitive level, religiosity is represented partially by a constellation of a group of religious schemas which are cognitively organised way at a certain period of life. Together they constitute what is called a *religious style* (Streib, 2001), which was originally called a religious stage (Fowler, 1981). Religious styles evolve and take different forms across time and space. As Streib informs us, *religious style* is a term that has also occasionally been used by Fowler in place of the word *stage.* However, the main reason for shifting the term from stage to style is the fundamental critique of the Piagetian assumption of structural genetics, i.e. the notion that faith or religiosity develops (and thus, varies) across a lifespan in the form of coherent *stages*, in a unified, holistic cognitive pattern, that each of these stages is distinct from one another. that faith is consequential, i.e., a new stage does not emerge before the task of the previous one is not completed (see Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004, for more details).

A religious style differentiates the content domain (teachings of a religion) from cognitive structures (e.g., mythical, open, relativist) through which the content is processed. However, the division between the structure and content (symbols) of faith was seen as a distortion by Parks (1986).

Styles can mainly be evaluated according to one's relation to self (ways of reasoning, perspective taking, seeing the world in coherence), other people (drawing the boundary of one's group and moral thinking), as well as one's relation to what is seen as an 'ultimate power' (in attributing a transcendental dimension to the universe which is maintained by

accepting and interpreting the symbols of a religious tradition, and the source of authority in this realm).

Based on empirical findings, Streib (2001) and Streib et al. (2010) argued that the different styles may overlap each other in the same person, that they may not necessarily form a well-organised whole into a stage. A brief description of four theoretical, but at the same time empirically applicable, religious stages/styles are provided below for readers who are new on the theory:

Individuals (often children before puberty) with *mythic-literal religious style*s are not aware that they believe in a set of interconnected values called religion. Thus, religious discourse and practices imitated and habits formed through the process of acculturation. They follow what they see from their parents, understand narrations, including religious ones, in a *literal* and *mythical* way (Duriez et al., 2005; Fowler, 1981; Streib, 1999), identify with their family as a reference source, and classify people as "like us" and "those who are not". Furthermore, their moral judgments are based on instrumental reciprocity. Although the mythic-literal style is more common among children, it may accompany conventional religiosity (see below) among some adults.

In contrast, in the *synthetic-conventional religious style,* people show various degrees of a salient emotional bond and commitment to religion, but their faith is *synthetic,* i.e., borrowed from the conventions of society. They become aware of the fact that they hold a belief but are mostly unaware of how it is seen from an outside perspective as they are *embedded* in their faith. They think *tacitly* with a poor second-order reflection. Abstraction in their thinking is limited. They are overwhelmingly emotional rather than reflective about their beliefs. They often hold an exclusive "us versus they" approach regarding other faith groups.

With the start of questioning or "doubt syndrome", perhaps due to an overemphasis on rationality often during university years, conventional religious precepts are shaken and *demythologised,* paving the way to an *individuative-reflective* style. Young people with this style seek to draw boundaries through a selected, explicit, individualised and rationally defended religious discourse and adopt a systematic approach. They can see their religious position from the out-group's perspective and keep themselves at a distance from religious convention so as to act independently. As they are no longer embedded within their faith, they make their religion the object of their thought, conscience, rational argument and inner autonomy (Kegan, 1982, p. 161).

Finally, in the *conjunctive* religiosity style, often the educated, middle-aged people interpret religious texts in a mainly symbolic way (see also Duriez, Fontaine, & Hutsebaut, 2000) as they are able to appreciate multiple perspectives with an emerging sense of relativism. They tend to be more flexible in matters of beliefs; sophisticated in the sense that their views and interactions are complex and multi-dimensional. They show openness

to the hermeneutics of their faith, coherent and incoherent; and are tolerant of diversity, complexity, and ambiguity in religion than people with a non-symbolic religiosity style. They are more analytical and keep a critical distance in evaluating religious matters, with a greater interest in the historical roots of religiosity. They accept the relativity of symbols and their interpretations and are able to look "wisely" from the perspectives of totally different religions or ideologies. They are able to hold a method of combining seemingly contradictory arguments regarding faith without feeling anxious (see Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004 for details).

From a theoretical perspective, the strength of Fowler's theory is its focus on the cognitive structures underlying the content. This emphasis paved the way for the study of religious behaviour from the cognitive perspective of the fields of social and developmental psychology. Second, the theory generated various definitions of religiosity. To illustrate, it interrelates and explains such approaches as religious attitudes (Francis & Stubbs, 1987; Ok, 2016), orthodoxy, saliency (Felling et al., 1986; Huber & Huber, 2012), and the frequency of religious practice, among other multiple-dimensional definitions of religion (Vaillancourt, 2008; Smart, 1969). It also includes vastly different cognitive schemas as literal, plural, fundamentalist, authoritarian, symbolic, flexible, questioning and open ways of religiosity (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Hutsebout, 1997; Streib et al., 2010) under a comprehensive theory.

In the practical or applied perspective, another strength is its capacity to remove disagreements in the definitions of religiosity by shifting discussions from the level of culture-specific religious commitments to more comprehensive cognitive styles, from a lower levels of maturity to higher levels. In this way, it transfers the understanding of religiosity as a stable and normative cognitive mindset into a rich, dynamic human orientation that differentiates according to development over the lifespan. The implication of this is that the theory has a role in preventing oppressions by those historical theologies, which may impose on believers a single and often orthodox perspective and one type of theological explanation, usually referring to those of historical figures as the only truth norm.

2. Criticism of the Theory of Faith Development

Faith development theory (FDT) has been criticised in a number of ways.

(1) *Unclear definition of faith*: The theory has been criticised for not having a clear definition of what constitutes 'faith' and for relying on a subjective interpretation of the concept.

(2) *Inadequate empirical foundation*: Some researchers have questioned the empirical validity of Fowler's stages of faith development, particularly the evidence for the transition from one stage to another.

(3) *Missing Elements*: As can be derived from the observations on the definitions of religiosity in other models, FDT pays inadequate attention to the processes of individual transformation in faith, to the content of faith, (commitment/non-commitment), and in lack of interest in and opposition to religiosity.

(4) *Cultural preconceptions*: Critics argue that the theory is Eurocentric and does not take into account the specific socio-historical experience of non-Europeans (see Parks, 1992). For our purposes, it is the critique of Eurocentrism that is relevant both for the lack of attention in scholarship on these questions so far, as well as the specific inelegant outcomes of using this theory to understand Muslim empirical contexts.

2.1. Drawbacks in the Conceptualisation of Faith and its Development

The first problem is the indistinctiveness of faith as proposed by theorists of FDT. As indicated above, *faith* has been defined as "ways of experiencing self, others and the world (as they construct them) as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence" (Fowler, 1981, p. 92). It is obvious that it refers to individuals' beliefs, values, and attitudes and their commitment to a particular worldview regardless of being necessarily religious. This broad definition of faith, regardless of religion, has been found ambiguous and not easily distinguishable from such individual characteristics as personality (Parks, 1992), life orientation or worldview, amongst others. Similarly, the phrase "ultimate conditions of existence" is not specific enough to deliberate upon. It's rather general than precise.

The second problem lies in the apparent attempt to combine psychology with theology. Although faith has been an important cognitive and behavioural determinant of the life of religious people in overwhelmingly religious societies, textbooks on cognitive development and social psychology do not say much about it. One reason could be that synthesising a hermeneutics-based theology with an empirically-founded psychology is not an easy task, in that there is always a risk of reducing theology into psychology or, otherwise, reducing psychology into theology. In this regard, one of the criticisms levelled at Fowler is about using theological terminologies such as faith, covenant, radical monotheism, ultimate power, and transcendence, among others.

Considering that each religious tradition has its own understanding and pre-conditions for faith, such a definition of faith will be received as extraneous to their faith tradition. Furthermore, psychologists who are keen to be independent from any value systems when defining a social construct and its operation will be unlikely to adopt it. In fact, the FDT claims that it mainly studies the ways in which faith is held cognitively by individuals, not the nature of faith itself. However, it is impossible to study cognitive styles independent of certain religious content. What is meant by 'faith' should be redefined in a way that addresses both psychological and theological expectations.

The third issue is the alternate use of faith and religiosity. Although it is claimed that 'faith' refers to a supra-religious phenomena in addition to a universal human commitment to a certain set of values, meaning-making and cognitive ability, it is often expressed in religious terms and is usually practised within a certain religious community. Compared to its being mainly a religious term, faith, as defined in the theory looks like a utopian idea and, accordingly, an empirically less than an operationalizable term. In addition, what is understood by the category of religiosity, in turn, is the conventional form of religiosity one finds as readily available its synthetic form in society. Therefore, it is assumed that the signifier "religious" in the expression of "religious style" does not serve the original aim of the theory and what was meant by faith as understood by Fowler. Therefore, it cannot be the subject of empirical investigation without specific content. Even if faith is defined more specifically within psychological or theological discourses, definitions could be quite controversial due to fact that theological assumptions are different from psychological ones.

Furthermore, the core concept of faith and the idea of transcendence or ultimate being in its definition has an obvious root in the Abrahamic tradition. The term faith which, today, symbolise one's strong dedication and commitment shown in a socially approved religion or worldview. This dogmatised and conventional form of religion can be seen as an alienation from the original and authentic feelings that can be found in the lives of originators of most religions, such as *awe* and *inspiration*. These were experienced during the meditation and in esoteric conditions, which are observed in the biographies of prophets, saints an other religious behaviour models. Therefore, three versions of faith should be distinguished from each other: (a) holding conventional and dogmatised norms and forms of established religiosity; (b) authentic, original and natural feelings in and around the topics of the universe, god or ultimate being as it is expressed in the idea of holy by Rudolph Otto (Rank, 1923); and, (c) knowing of, committing to, and attaching importance to a set of values in the light of a higher power (as defined by Smith, 1963).

The notion of *development* in the theory has also been criticised particularly because of normativity. The term development suggests a "progressive series of changes in structure, function, and behaviour patterns that occur over the lifespan of a human being or another organism" (APA Dictionary, n.d.). The term progressive refers to a notion of maturity and functionality. In fact, there has been a real interest in formulating a *mature* form of religiosity in the past. In this regard, *intrinsic* religiosity was initially intended to define a 'mature' form of being religious by Allport and Ross (1967) as opposed to utilitarian, extrinsic religiosity. This construct was criticised by Batson (1976), who argued that it is not a mature form but a conventional mode of religiosity. His alternative presentation of the concept of *Quest* religious orientation, i.e. openness to change in religiosity, valuing doubt as intrinsically positive and asking existential questions, as a "mature" form was, in turn, criticised by Donahue (1985) as that it measures cognitive religious conflict rather

than a mature form of religiosity. In the end, it appears that it is not clear which faith style is more functional or mature for individuals. Therefore, being open to other religions, and having a good dialogue with their members may be an ideal expectation from religions by people who take a more "liberal" or indifferent approach to religion. Surely, religiously mature persons could be open to other faiths as a result of their maturation in their perspective of their religion, but their maturity is not distinguishable from the maturity of liberal people, whose aim is to soften the "rigidity" of conservativism in religion.

Furthermore, "development" constitutes a *normative* evaluation of faith. Although the 'hard' conceptions of *the structure* and *the stage* was softened by replacing the name faith development with religious styles perspective. Keeping the idea of 'development', the notion of religious style still values personal autonomy and a multi-perspective approach to religions as end-points, despite the fact that the terms "mature" and "adequate" apply equally to both "self-control" and "virtues", the latter being emphasised in religious traditions. Virtues cannot reach its optimal level simultaneously with the characteristic of "multiple perspective", because virtues entertain both practice and a normative pattern. Therefore, the idea of conjunctive faith is limited to or insufficiently inclusive of varieties of religiosity.

2.2. Drawbacks in the Quantitative Measurements of Faith

The FDT is a product of qualitative research. It has been a difficult task to demonstrate the criterion validity of these qualitative findings with quantitative measurements (i.e., empirical validity). In fact, by their nature, although it is relatively simple to determine the levels of commitment to a certain religious convention quantitatively, it has not been an easy errand representing all four cognitive religious styles in measurements.

In this respect, there have been several attempts to measure faith development (see Streib et al., 2010; Harris & Leak, 2013; Leak, 2003 and 2008; Ok, 2007b, 2009 and 2012; Leak, Loucks, & Bowlin, 1999; Leak, 2009) but their successes have been limited. Although several scales were developed to measure faith styles/stages in empirical studies, the authors give the misleading impression that these individual styles explain an individual's "status" of faith itself. Squeezing individuals into a single *stage* by observing their scores on a certain scale does not reflect an accurate picture of that person's spirituality in its variety. Moreover, faith is a *process* that always ongoing, not a *status* that is frozen in place. People's positions on a single scale may not show their dynamic faith positions, even across their own lives. In other words, people may be holding different combinations of schemas from different styles, which should be examined by observing individual performances on multiple scales followed by profile analyses (see Streib et al., 2020).

Streib et al. (2010) initially developed the religious style scale (RSS) with three religious schemata (i.e. subscales), each representing one of the three religious styles: the truth of texts and teachings (*ttt*), fairness, tolerance and rational choice (*ftr*), and

xenosophia/inter-religious dialogue (*xenos*); which are assumed to be corresponding mainly to mythic-literal, individuative-reflective, and conjunctive religious styles, respectively. However, this model too has some limitations: first, the schema of conventional religiosity does not appear in this model, although it is deemed as the most common style among religious populations (see the concept of modal level of development in Fowler, 1981). Second, the claim that *ftr* corresponds mainly to individuative faith lacks robust evidence, as its strong correlation with *personal growth* (r=.51) was not confirmed in a second sample (Streib et al., 2010). Furthermore, the wording of *ftr* items do not include in its content the concepts of faith or religion whatsoever, which makes it difficult to integrate it into the name of "religious styles". In addition, it is an important question relating to why literalism/absoluteness, fairness/rationality and openness to other religions were selected as the contents of the religious style instrument and why other structural aspects were not integrated into the three schemas of the religious style measurement, such as "moral judgement" or "social awareness". In addition, *xenos,* which is considered as a schema of *conjunctive faith*, revealed an insufficiently strong link to *personal growth* in two different samples (Streib et al., 2010, p. 164).

Nonetheless, the strength of *ttt* is that it supports a consistent connection with religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism; and that *xenos* strongly negatively linked to the same variables. It is also worth considering that *xenos* can also be an indicator of secular orientation rather than a version of conjunctive "religious" belief. Furthermore, *ttt* could be measuring a marginal aspect of *mythic-literal*, or even perhaps *conventional* religiosity rather than a typical main character of either styles. In other words, normally, mythic-literal faith aims to represent the naïve nature of thinking about religion, but the content of *ttt* represents a rather aggressive tendency of adults or late young adults. In the end, it is viable to put forward that the number of schemas and the semantic structure of the religious schemata scale are somewhat limited and blurry and, thus, need further thinking.

In sum, the scale suffers significantly in terms of content validity. Its criterion validity, which has been tested against a number of variables such as openness (personality theory) and personal growth (positive psychology), did not provide strong and consistent evidence.

Another wave of quantitative studies has been conducted by Leaks and his colleagues (Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 1999; Harris & Leak, 2013). They developed a unidimensional scale to measure faith styles. The scale consisted of eight pairs of items, each of which either reflected a lower (mythic-literal or synthetic-conventional religiosity) or a higher level of faith outlook (individuative-systemic or conjunctive religiosity), and participants were asked to choose from the pairs the one which fits best to their position. In the end, the scale measuring one dimension with two poles intended to tap either higher forms or

lower forms of religious thinking (i.e. stages) overall. However, it does not differentiate, for instance, stage 2 from stage 3 or stage 4 from stage 5. In addition, as in the case of RSS scale, it is not clear whether higher stages measure a secular attitude to religion or any mature or developed form of religiosity. Although Leak (2013) claimed the construct validity of the instruments in a longitudinal study, the sample size of the study was small, and thus, the study needs replication. Furthermore, the instrument's validity has not yet been corroborated by previously employed qualitative data or a second different quantitative instrument measuring faith development (see Leak, 2009). To sum up, the ambiguities in the conceptualisation of the FDT make it difficult to establish a satisfying quantitative measure. However, concrete alternative measures of Muslim religiosity are offered by Ok (2009; 2012)

2.3. Drawbacks Concerning Missing Components in Faith Development Theory

In this part, the FDT was compared with alternative conceptualisations of religiosity. It was observed that faith development contains the majority of such approaches. This is basically taken as a strength of the theory in that some of these definitions or approaches can be evaluated as supportive, at least partially, of the cognitive style in religiosity purported by the FDT and be seen as integrative. However, these definitions also shed light on such missing components of the FDT as lack of interest in religiosity, transition in religiosity, the religious vs non-religious content of faith, and finally, an emotional aspect within faith. These points may be evaluated in the light of two major approaches to religiosity: *Religious identity statuses* (see Griffith and Griggs, 2001; Fulton, 1997; Grajales & Sommers, 2016) and the *post-critical belief* models. (see also Perry, 1970; Kegan, 1982; Parks, 1986 for other qualitative studies).

The theory of Religious Identity Statuses (see Marcia, 1966, 1980; Visser-Vogel et al., 2015; Meeus, 2011) argues that an individual's philosophical-ideological viewpoint (career selection, political preference, religious beliefs, and philosophical view) together with interpersonal relations are central to their identity (Erikson, 1968; Baltazar & Coffen, 2011; Bennion & Adams, 1986). A brief set of characteristics of religious identity statuses (Griffith and Griggs, 2001), which bears some resemblance to faith stages, is as follows: people with *diffusion identity status* show no commitment to any form of religiosity or life view. They neither show interest in that direction. In contrast, in *foreclosure* religious identity status, commitment is based on little or no exploration of alternatives. People commit to available family-given religious values and act according to their family's expectations without reflecting much on it.

In the *moratorium religious identity* status, the individual explores choices, experiences an intellectual crisis, and active struggle in terms of independently selecting a life aim and deciding to develop commitment. A decreased commitment to conventional religiosity accompanies critical and reflective thinking on religious matters. Experiencing doubt on

the way to a successful religious identity is seen as fundamental in young people's life (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011). Finally, the *achieved religious identity statutes* represent a commitment to a choice after exploring alternatives. Young adults appropriate and revise their parents' religion in their life and make it idiosyncratic and consciously meaningful for themselves (Grajales & Sommers, 2016). They gain a coherent sense of self by integrating diverse ideas about religion. They can examine the teachings of their religion from a critical perspective and try to keep ideas in a cognitively organised system. This gives them a strong sense of autonomy. Successful religious identity achievement is described as "the totality of the gradual change in the content and strength of commitments in relation to the way one looks at life" (Bertram-Troost et al., 2006).

Regarding its similarity to the FDT, the definition of identity and characteristics of statuses greatly overlap with the definition of faith and its stages. For instance, achieved identity status overlaps with *individuative-systemic* faith; *foreclosed faith* is similar mainly to *mythic-literal* faith characteristics in children and *conventional religiosity* in adolescents. Besides, identity statuses are seen as developmental (Luyckx et al., 2008; Meeus et al., 2012; Grajales & Sommers, 2016; Marcia, 1966; Visser-Vogel et al., 2015). In addition to its emphasis on transition (i.e., *moratorium*), e.g. transformation from a conventional style to an individuative one, diffusion could be taken as ignored part of the FDT perspective, particularly in terms of quantitative measurement. Therefore, the religious styles perspective could cover both, the crises in faith and aloofness, as well as unfriendliness towards religiosity in its operationalisation.

The second theory, the *post-critical belief* approach to religiosity (Hutsebaut, 1996), is a quantitative model, and it contrasts people's being religious versus non-religious (i.e., Exclusion vs Inclusion of Transcendence) with the *ways* these two positions are cognitively processed (i.e., literalism vs symbolism) (Duriez et al., 2005), resulting in four types of religiosity: Literal-religious, literal-anti-religious, symbolic-religious, and symbolic anti-religious.

It is assumed that *symbolic* and *literal* faith corresponds to conjunctive and mythic-literal faith constructs, respectively. Despite the fact that *synthetic-conventional* and *individuative-reflective* religiosity styles are only partially matched by the religious versus anti-religious dichotomy in this model, the main advantage is that it simultaneously combines both cognitive structure (symbolic versus literal) and the content (religious and non-religious commitment) in the quantitative measurement of religiosity, which is missing in measurements of FDT. In the end, both religious and anti-religious dimensions can well be integrated into the measurement of the FDT in future studies.

Finally, it is argued that with the acceptance of the stable notion of the stage, the theory also over-emphasises cognition in favour of the abandonment of *emotional dimensions* as processes of transition and transformation from stage to stage (Coyle, 2011). This priority

of cognition over emotions results in a bias with respect to women's development in religiosity, as they are arguably more attentive to emotions and social relations compared to their need for cognition (Broughton, 1986). Similarly, it also results in the disregard of social relations on account of its overemphasis on individuals, alongside its de-emphasizing of the existential dimension in faith. These dimensions need to be holistically taken in understanding faith development, which will become clear in the next section Having assessed the strengths and weaknesses of FDT, let us now examine the theory in Muslim empirical contexts.

2.4. Drawbacks in terms of Generalizability to Muslim Populations

Although the FDT argues the universality of faith, as it is seen as culturally biased, as it was mainly developed and applied in a Western Christian culture, which does not allow one to apply, as it is, to other cultures and religious traditions (Coyle, 2011). Besides, the theory was developed mainly by collecting data from theistic religions, ignoring non-theistic or multi-theistic Eastern religious. In addition, each religious tradition has its own understanding of 'maturity' in religiosity which is clear from examining a Muslim context. There are a number of differences in religious styles in both empirical studies and in the biographies of prominent historical Muslim personalities or figures mentioned in the Qur'an. Although the Islamic holy text will not be used here as a reference in itself for truth confirmation, the characteristics of individuals mentioned in the Qur'an and the autobiographies of leading Muslim figures concerning their religiosity could be used as illustrations of diversity in religious styles.

De/confirming empirical works. First, the results of several studies, both qualitative and quantitative, conducted on faith development with Muslim participants (Aygün, 2012, Ok, 2007a, 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2016) confirmed the four *main* religious styles, as suggested by the findings of faith development. However, it was also found that conventional religious thinking could be of two types, either a complete imitative mode of religiosity; or it could be imitative but supported with a serious level of awareness and some sort of restricted or conditional rationality. This is called conscious religiosity (*şuurlu dindarlık*) style, which refers to the employment of limited rational reasoning to only support the already-committed-to conventional religiosity.

Furthermore, the studies also show that quest religiosity put by Batson, which was neglected in the theory, could be one version of conjunctive faith (Ok, 2012). In addition, it is also shown that conjunctive religiosity can be measured with the components of *openness to religious diversity* and *tolerance to other religions*, the *relativity of religious truth claims* and accepting the *historicity of religious teachings* (Ok, 2012).

Secular bias. Furthermore, as one of the reviewers of the book published on faith development (Ok, 2007a) in Turkey pointed out, "Nobody who performed obligatory daily prayers in Islam took place in the category of *conjunctive* faith in this study". This

observation refers to the theory's failure to show examples of practising believers who proceeded from conventional faith to a form of a "more mature or adequate" *conjunctive* faith. In this way, the theory can be criticised in its exclusive emphasis on the secular roots of maturity, i.e., *openness to diversity* and *interreligious tolerance*, as the pioneering forms of maturity in religiosity and which overwhelmingly represent secular but not "religious" versions of "maturity". Even such a notion of openness of diversity or tolerance could contain the element of left-wing authoritarianism and be biased against conventional religiosity (Ok, 2022). In addition, this openness-related construct may represent *diffusion* and *moratorium* styles of religiosity mentioned above.

Religious styles are derived from the illustrations in the Qur'an. Muslim thinkers have historically differentiated between unquestioned imitative faith (*iman al taqlidi*) and rationally chosen and well-founded faith (*iman al-tahqiqi*) (Ünverdi, 2009). Imitative faith is criticised by the Qur'an itself, which quotes those who follow others blindly: "We will follow such things as we found our fathers doing. What? And if their fathers had no understanding of anything, and if they were not guided?" (Qur'an, 2:170).

With regard to questioning and doubt, we see at least two styles in the Qur'an. The questioning in the sense of the search for the truth is seen the case of the prophet Abraham in the early years of his life. Abraham tries to find the truth to commit himself to, or to choose the most authentic form of it. Abraham then undertakes to examine out different hypotheses of truth, testing their validity with observation, ratiocination and evidence. In the second version, this type of constructive, well-intentional questioning by Abraham is differentiated from ill-intended, reactionary doubts and questioning by the disbelievers (Quran, 2:10).

Finally, the more developed form of faith is attributed to the groups of scholars, *ulama*, wise people, who were granted *hikmah* (wisdom; understanding) (Qur'an, 2:269) and those who are well-rooted in their knowledge, i.e. *rasihun*. Religious maturity, then, is commonly understood in Islam, for instance, with the formation of character founded on virtue. However, high levels of self-control and virtuous behaviour are not taken as developmental goals within FDT. A reformulation of conjunctive faith, however, in a semantic of virtue can possibly conflict with the original content of this stage/style. To sum up, the conjunctive faith needs to be extended to include maturity both within religious traditions and outside them (see for a solution of this shortcoming Ok & Gennerich, 2024a).

Normative Muslim Groups. In fact, each of the religious groups in Islamic history represents different faith styles, such as the *kharijites,* who were known for strict and uncompromising views of Islam, fanaticism and literalism, declaring death to all sinners and their families (Britannica, 2021). *Mu'tazilism*, associated with an eponymous ninth-century intellectual movement, is a type of Muslim rationalism, proposing that the

application of *Sharia* should change in different times and places specially when a certain law contradicts reason ('aql)" (Fakhry, 1983). In contrast, the conventional orthodox faith has two forms: one group is conventionally religious, but their religiosity is based on "the use of reason and speculative theology" (or transmitted knowledge, *naql*) together such as the the position of the *Ash'ariyyah* school (Britannica, 2021). The second group, "the *Maturidi* school is characterised by its reliance on the Qurʾan mainly and considering reasoning or free interpretation as secondary" (Britannica, 2020). In this sense, *Khawarijite, Ash'ariyyah/Maturidi,* and *Mu'tazilite* are similar to literal, conventional and individuative religious styles, respectively.

In terms of symbolic religious style, when the autobiographies of leading Sufi figures, such as al-Rumi (see Mevlana, 1988) are examined, it will be seen that their discourses are very similar to the symbolic interpretation of conjunctive faith put forward by Fowler. By employing a different epistemology, i.e., "bestowed" intuition/*nubuwwah* combined with reasoning (Alam, 2021), they became masters in the symbolic interpretation of the traditional text. This new source of epistemology and process gives birth to *irfan* or what can be called gnosis, i.e. specific knowledge, awareness or wisdom regarding existence.

The autobiography of the eleventh-century philosopher and intellectual al Ghazali (Gazali, 1990) illustrates a typical example of the developmental religious styles available in Islamic tradition. He argues that after the stage of the imitative period, he learned the skill of reasoning called methods of *istidlal* (ratiocination/inference) and *burhan* (evidence-based proof) in his approach to understanding religion. He used this method, particularly when teaching religion in the madrasah, schools which are equivalent to universities today, and responded to ancient philosophers' arguments. However, after a period of time, he recognized feeling the insufficiency of using reasoning alone to understand religion. Then he was engulfed in a deep intellectual crisis, *wasvasa* – a type of religious scrupulosity, during which he felt total helplessness. When he gradually recovered from this state, he came to the decision to join a Sufi group away from home. During about 11 years of this self-segregation, the insight dawned on him that the intellectual effort he had shown until then was, in fact, a kind of showing-off. After recognizing the insufficiency of using reason alone in theology, he realized the importance of *irfani* (gnostic) epistemology, which was common among Sufis in his time. This was the beginning of a paradigm shift in his intellectual journey. Sufis give priority to the resources of intuition, inner enlightenment (*kashf)*, and inspiration in understanding and practising religion instead of certifying the truth via logical reasoning alone or merely evidence-based proofing and deductive methods. At around age 50, he argued in his book *Al Munqith*, that the best way of life is the way of the Sufis.

Al-Ghazali ascertained *nubuwwah* as the source of a new epistemology in this period. He argued that reason *(aql)* is only one of the human states. In this state, a new 'eye' may emerge, which enables the beholder to see what s/he could not see in the stage of

senses/*muhsusat*. Similarly, *nubuwwah* is a state in which an individual can gain a new spiritual eye during the time of reasoning. It conveys a light/*nur* by which individuals can perceive the metaphysical (ghayb) and that which mere rationality cannot grasp (Gazali, 1990, p. 66). To him, seeing beyond the sphere of rationality is only one feature of many others granted by the *nubuwwah*. This unique perspective which emerged after the period of rationality could be taken as the religious equivalent of conjunctive faith in the Islamic tradition. As can be noticed, there is loyalty to the religion of his childhood but with an extended view of Islam in the light of a new epistemology. Considering that al-Ghazali has not been criticised by most Muslims for this new approach to religion in his time, it could be taken as an example of a conjunctive/symbolic (Islamic) religiosity in its nature. As a result, the FDT can be extended so that it can integrate both symbolic religious and symbolic-non-religious aspects of faith into the theory.

To sum up, empirical studies with Muslim samples and observations of the figures both within the Islamic text and its history, alongside autobiographies of individuals, show that FDT (a) should distinguish between the search for truth and destructive questioning in terms of transition. (b) There could be a religious version (i.e., gnostic) of conjunctive religious style as well as an unidentified or unassigned version of symbolic faith. (c) There could be wide varieties within both conventional and individual religious styles. In addition, it is also observed that (d) the projection of religious development on the lives of individuals may differ in terms of the ways that religious development is expressed and harbours its own varieties.

Conclusion

The thesis of the paper was that the FDT, belatedly called religious styles, displays a number of shortcomings in terms of conceptualisation, quantitative measurement and generalisability with respect to other cultures. It was argued that FDT could be developed and extended by integrating both religious and non-religious content in its formulation and explaining indifference to religiosity and religious doubt syndrome or the state of 'moratorium'. It has also been argued that theological terms could be explained in psychological terms and concepts, and what is meant in the definitions of faith or religiosity could be made operationally clear without falling in the traps of reductionism. Its normative aspects can be transferred into a more descriptive form. The quantitative instruments developed to measure it tend to be formed from somewhat arbitrary constructs and could further be sharpened in line with the revised definitions in psychological terms.

Thorngate (1976) formulates a dilemma with which all theories and models are confronted: They cannot fulfil the claim of being "general", "simple", and "precise" to the same degree. This is also true for FDT. Fowler's theory is a compromise of all three claims. It is rather "general" and "simple"; therefore, it is less precise. The difficulties in adapting

precise quantitative measurements to the theory illustrate the limitations in the precision of the theory. On the other hand, to keep the theory rather simple (as a theory also utilized by non-scholarly experts), Fowler's model could not maximise its generalizability. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are some limitations or unsatisfying aspects in applying the theory in a Muslim context. Given this situation, further theoretical and methodological developments on the topic of faith development are desirable (see Ok & Gennerich, 2024a and 2024b for further elaboration on this point).

The definition of faith is too broad and not simple and specific. However, replacing it with the term 'religious' means slipping away from the original conceptualisation of faith. The definition of faith by Fowler refers to a commitment to a *weltanschauung*, worldview, or ideology orientation, to use non-religious terms. This worldview or ideology could be Christian, Marxist, humanistic, or Islamic. Synthesising the definitions of *commitment*, *faith*, and *religious faith* in the APA dictionary, devotion to a worldview could be defined as an unwavering commitment, loyalty, trust or devotion, and orientation of the entire self to a perceived person or deity, cause, ideology, doctrine, core beliefs, individually or as a member of a certain membership group. This devotion is reinforced and strengthened with a notion of cementing or bolstering a holistic sense (uniting the parts together) and is practised by following a (usually conventionalised) set of standards of conduct and rituals.

The maturity of such devotion could lie in its functionality and utility for individuals and, at the same time, for the membership and non-membership groups. According to this definition, one attempt at defining religious maturity, considering the teachings of established religions, could be that religious people with maturity could show some level of commitment to a set of principles, conventional or non-conventional, follow its universalizable ethical standards consistently, get strengths from their commitment to it in coping with the problems in their lives, have a sense of flourishing and growth, enjoy social solidarity and positive relations among its members, and be altruistic to other people.

The construction of a systematic scale does not simply mean that it serves the purpose. Likewise, arranging and interpreting data in a meaningful way does not guarantee that they represent the reality. Measuring faith development via FDI interviews is not parsimonious. Nor do the results of the findings have utility for public use unless they are well evaluated.

Future studies can focus on the revision of the theory and the conceptualisation of what constitutes 'religious' in the expression of 'religious styles' before attempting how to measure it. The measurements are strongly in need of robust content, construct and criterion validity which should be tested with external instruments. The devised instruments could be more concrete, specific, content-laden and generalizable to other

cultures. It is also suggested to reflect on the possibility of the source of a new epistemology, such as the *nubuwwah*, besides the discussed varieties in rational thinking (see for our own developments to resolve the shortcomings addressed in this paper Ok & Gennerich, 2024a and 2024b).

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