

## **Religious Schemas, Styles and Quest in Young Muslim Adults: Implications for Religious Tolerance in Practice of Islamic Faith**

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### **Abstract:**

The current study presents a relation between religious schemas and quest among young Pakistani Muslim adults. Religious quest means search and openness in religion. Incorporating questions relating to human existence and religious schema is a framework of meaning that traces an experience in a religious context for its understanding. Religious schemas of *truth of texts and teachings (ttr)*, *fairness, tolerance and rational choice (ftr)* and *xenosophia (xenos)* correspond to religious styles distinguished into *fundamentalist, mutual, Individuative-systemic*, and *dialogical* types (Streib et al., 2010). Quest Scale and Religious Schema Scale was administered to a convenient sample ( $N = 400$ ) of 179 young Muslim men, and 221 women which revealed a significant negative relationship between TTT and religious quest, and partially supporting a significant positive relationship of quest with FTR and xenos. Proposal to moderate religious tolerance through education is discussed.

**Keywords:** Islam, faith, quest, religious schemas, religious styles, tolerance

### **INTRODUCTION**

Faith is making of oneself and life (Fowler, 1981). As held by Jung (1928), the experience of the Divine reflects one's self. Religion touches all areas of personal, social, and existential life. Faith is a holistic concept that comprises understanding and guiding life experiences and molding them into thinking, feeling, and interacting in particular ways (Fowler, 1981) giving meaning to life (Fowler & Keen, 1978). Faith develops by transformations in experiences that increase complexity over time (Fowler 1986, 15). For instance, a child faith is based on religious stories literally; but with increasing cognitive capacity and complex life experiences, an understanding of faith changes where symbols in these stories are de-mythologized. Hence, faith contents remain the same, but their understanding is modified with time (Astley, 1991; 2000). This change involves redirecting capacities gained at initial stages of faith (Fowler, 1981), which means having a particular worldview and meaning of life as faith develops (Fowler 1996, 68).

### **Religious Schemas**

A schema is a functional cognitive structure and can be an interpretation of a religious experience that provides a framework of meaningful contextual experience and justifies it (Streib, Hood, & Klein, 2010). A stressful event may activate schema or schemas that justify a life plan ordained by God, with an understanding that it is He who knows what is best for us, this serves a coping function. Religious schemas are particular interpretive patterns embedded in a belief system and

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marked by religious style (Streib, 2010). A particular religious style emerges from repetitive use of these cognitive interpretation patterns or schema.

The Religious Schema Scale (RSS) developed by Streib, et al (2010) measures schemas to assess religious styles. The RSS comprises three subscales and include, *truth of texts and teachings* (ttt), *fairness, tolerance & rational choice* (ftr) and *Inter-religious dialog or xenosophia* (xenos). The TTT subscale measures concern unquestioned religious certainty and include items like, *What the texts and stories of my religion tell me, is absolutely true and must not be changed*. Items in this subscale relate to the mythic-literal faith, which incorporate instrumental-reciprocal religious style. The FTR subscale measures concern for peaceful co-existence of different religions, or individuated e-reflective faith. It indicates individuated-systemic style where one is becoming open to fairness and tolerance across religions and faiths, and includes items like, *We should resolve differences in how people appear to each other through fair and just discussion*. Finally, the xenos subscale measures concern for creative inter-religious dialogues with items like, *The truth I see in other worldviews leads me to reexamine my current views*; the subscale measures conjunctive faith and dialogical religious style.

### Religious Styles

Fowler (1981) proposed six discrete but sequential and hierarchical stages of faith development, labeled as intuitive-projective, mythic-literal, synthetic-conventional, individuated-reflective, conjunctive, and universal faith. Streib (2001, 2013), on the other hand, proposed a *style* approach to faith that is existential in nature, where individuals use more than one style of making meaning about their life at a given point in time. Styles are not strictly hierarchical as one can have more than one style of religious faith at a time; also, they are not sequential in contrast to Fowler's stages where one has to pass through one stage to get to another. Styles involve welcoming and sympathetic understanding of others' belief systems making each style relate to each stage of faith. The *subjective* religious style corresponds to *intuitive-projective stage* and is characterized by egocentrism, i.e., one sees oneself as the center of the world. Other people's perspectives are not understood at this stage, and thinking is like a monologue centering on one's own concerns only. Building up basic trust on significant others takes to get past this stage. The *instrumental-reciprocal* religious style seen in childhood (also termed as *do ut des*) or fundamentalist style, is a trade-based way of reward and punishment; where *good* is what God demands and rewards and *bad* is what God punishes, and an unquestioned obedience and literal understanding is economical, and corresponds to *the mythic-literal stage*. Religious belief, like other concerns at this stage, is mostly a matter of want satisfaction. Rewards and punishment are thus essential and morality is highly consequential in nature. Streib (2007) considers that educated people in universities who are capable of designing and controlling highly complexity machines still offer rigid and over-simplistic religious understandings guided by their fundamentalist leader. The *mutual religious* style characteristic of adolescence develop as one learns the mutuality of interpersonal relations and widening of social horizons; corresponds roughly to stage 3 or the *synthetic conventional stage*. It encompasses characteristics as concerns about interpersonal harmony within one's family, significant others and social affiliations. However, one is embedded in one's relationships and cannot think objectively about one's religion and system of values and lacks a critical view of one's own thinking and frame of reference. The *individuated-systemic* religious style can reflect on one's

own beliefs and worldviews taking an objective distance, while simultaneously yearning for connectedness to others. It corresponds to stage 4 or *individuating-reflective* stage. Since this style involves reason and rational thinking, there is always a probability that a person at this style/stage may leave what is not appealing altogether. Also, while thinking at this stage is critical, the individual may still wish to find closures around one's arguments rather than being comfortable with controversy and ambiguity. The *dialogical* style shows a positive involvement towards alternative faith orientations and perspectives overcoming egoistic religion and corresponds to *conjunctive faith stage*. But it is very uncommon that people attain this level. People attaining this level do not exclude others from a human belongingness; instead, they are open to creative inter-faith dialogue than defending their religious identity or finding others threatening to their faith.

### **Faith and Quest**

Quest represents an open-ended religious search with sensitivity to existential questions raised by the paradoxes, inconsistencies and tragic experiences of life and incorporates three factors namely the ability to address existential questions without decreasing their complexity (readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity), doubt (self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive) and tentativeness (openness to change in religious belief) as suggested by Batson et al. (1993). Also, other researchers as Beck and Jessup (2004) suggest that quest is also characterized by search and endorsement of others' point of view about ultimate reality.

Since quest is characterized by searching for a transcendent reality beyond egoism, it may have links with *xenosophia* which constitutes dialogue with other perspectives on faith beyond one's own and aspiring towards universalism. In contrast, the less mature religious style of the extremist or the fundamentalist style may have an inverse relationship with quest as the former is rigid and does not incorporate various ways of believing. With these assumptions, the current study aims at finding the relationship between religious schemas and styles and quest.

### **Rationale**

Faith development theory is not a part of psychology curricula in Pakistan. It is one reason stage theorists like Fowler are not discussed in psychology courses but Kohlberg and Piaget are. In this context, this study initiated an academic introduction to this stage theory and take it one step forward to link the theory to a Muslim cultural context and add newer developments of faith styles and schemas proposed by other theorists (Streib et al., 2010). Second, the study's objective is to use this model of faith, and assess religious maturity in young Muslims in Pakistan, where religious extremism has become a source of conflict in society. This theoretical paradigm hope to help address religious attitudes and surrounding issues.

### **Hypotheses**

Based on literature, it is expected that religious quest and religious schema would be positively associated, because the two factors are intertwined. Religious quest and its components, complexity, doubt and tentativeness should be negatively associated with TTT, and positively associated with FTR and xenos.

## **METHOD**

## Sample

A convenient sample ( $N = 400$ ) of 179(44.8%) young Muslim men and 221(55.3%) young women was used in this study (Table 1). The mean age of the sample was 20.69 years with participants who were educated, Pakistani and Muslim young adults; and illiterate individuals were excluded.

**Table 1**

*Sample ( $N = 400$ ) Demographics with a Mean Age of 20.69 ( $SD = 1.89$ ) Years*

Variable	$n(\%)$
Gender	
Male	179(44.8)
Female	221(55.3)
Education	
FA	10(2.5)
BA/BS	290(72.5)
MA/MSc	83(20.8)
MPhil	17(4.3)
Family System	
Nuclear	267(66.8)
Joint	133(33.3)
Socioeconomic Status	
Lower	17(4.3)
Middle	362(90.5)
High	21(5.3)
Residence	
Rural	47(11.8)
Urban	353(88.3)

*Note.*  $n$  = Sample Size

## Measures

**Sociodemographic Questionnaire.** “A questionnaire inquiring demographics comprised age, gender, education, family system, occupation, socioeconomic status, marital status, religion and area of residence.”

**Quest Scale (QS).** Developed by Batson and Schoenrade, (1991-a); this measure consists of three subscales, i.e., Complexity (C), Doubt (D) and Tentativeness (T) with four items in each subscale (subscales names based on Maltby & Day, 1998). Each item is to be answered on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). After taking permission from the authors (Batson & Schoenrade-a), an Urdu version of Quest Scale was developed and approved by two bilingual experts with forward and backward translations. The Urdu version was tested on 20 participants for understandability and clarity of item, instructions, and rating choices. Minor modifications were done wherever necessary. Reliability measures of the composite scale and subscales for the study data ( $N = 400$ ) was satisfactory (See Table 2) however, lower than Batson and Schoenrade (1991-b) where Cronbach’s alpha ranged from .75 to .81.

**Religious Schema Scale (RSS).** Developed by Streib, Hood and Klein, (2010) RSS has been designed as a measurement of schemas in order to assess religious styles. The subscales TTT, FTR and xenos, each consist of 5 items, where TTT has an inverse relation with FTR and xenos scale. "The total RSS score is obtained by reverse scoring TTT and adding this to the other two subscale totals" (Streib et al, 2010). TTT was reverse scored while computing for the RSS total. The focus was RSS total scores and individual schemas of TTT, FTR and xenos in observing their relation with quest and its subscales. Urdu version of RSS developed and validated by Tarar (2017) was used in this study, with reliability measured for the current sample (See Table 2).

**Table 2***Psychometric Properties of QS and RSS (N = 400)*

Scale/Subscale	k	M	SD	$\alpha$	Range		
					Potential	Actual	Skew
C	4	19.66	63.36	.62	4-36	4-36	.12
D	4	20.42	71.66	.64	4-36	9-36	.12
T	4	22.47	47.32	.51	4-36	9-36	.12
QST	12	61.90	311.57	.74	12-108	22-107	.12
Ttt	5	9.87	11.69	.68	5-25	9-25	.12
Ftr	5	10.22	13.05	.70	5-25	5-22	.12
Xenos	5	10.63	11.38	.70	5-25	5-23	.12
RSST	15	30.07	17.06	.69	15-95	19-91	.12

*Note.* C = Complexity, D = Doubt, T = Tentativeness, QST = Quest Score Total, ttt = truth of texts and teachings, ftr = fairness, tolerance & rational choice, xenos = xenosophia, RSST = RSS Total, k = Number of Items,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's Alpha, M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

## Procedure

After taking permission from departmental authorities, written consent of the participants was sought. Instructions are delivered to all participants to complete the measures and asked to return them within two to three days. Confidentiality about identity and personal information was ensured to every participant. Also, participants were guaranteed right to ask any questions. Furthermore, it was made clear that they could withdraw from research any time, and the information will only be used for academic and research purposes.

## RESULTS

Pearson correlation was calculated to see relationships between various aspects of Quest and RSS scale. For correlations, the original score of *TTT* (rather than the reverse score which was calculated for obtaining total score of RSS) was used. However, for the total score of RSS, the reverse score on *TTT* was used. The results in Table 3 show that *TTT* has a negative correlation with all dimensions of quest and the rest of the two scales of RSS. Also, the results show a positive correlation between the composite score of QS and RSS, which suggests that as religious quest increases it also elevates the maturity of religious style.

**Table 3**

*Inter-Correlation between Quest Dimensions and Religious Styles (N = 400)*

Variable	C	D	T	QST	ttt	Ftr	xenos	RSST
C		.32†	.41†	.77†	-.19†	.10*	.15†	.13*
D			.49†	.76†	-.10*	.01	.00	.08
T				.80†	-.15†	.05	.12	.10*
QST					-.19†	.07	.09	.12*
Ttt						-.37†	-.32†	-.79†
Ftr							.63†	.77†
Xenos								.79†
M	22.09	22.62	22.46	64.75	20.77	10.22	10.63	30.07
SD	6.84	6.87	6.87	16.87	3.83	3.61	3.37	11.31

*Note.* C = Complexity, D = Doubt, T = Tentativeness, QST = Quest Score Total, ttt = truth of texts and teachings, ftr = fairness, tolerance & rational choice, xenos = xenosophia, RSST = RSS Total, M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

\* $p < .05$ , † $p < .01$

The original structure of RSS was also replicated (Streib et al, 2010), where *TTT* was significantly negatively correlated with *FTR* and *xenos*, and *FTR* and *xenos* were significantly positively correlated. Furthermore, all subscales of QS had significant positive correlations with each other and a total score (Streib, Hood & Klein, 2010). A discussion of Muslim cultural contexts can further illuminate these results.

## DISCUSSION

The current study investigated the relationship between religious quest dimensions and religious schemas and styles, revealing several relationships that could help understand religious development in young Pakistani Muslims. The religious schema of *TTT* corresponding to a fundamentalist style showed inverse correlation with quest and its dimensions of complexity, doubt and tentativeness, linking previous research where religious fundamentalists or extremists were found to be authoritarian and closed to new ideas (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992) therefore, rigid in thinking and non-questing. Furthermore, fundamentalists have simple thought and avoid deep reflection (Hunsberger et al., 1996). Therefore, readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity is a related factor in scoring low. While these findings illuminate thinking patterns involved in religious extremism, research on educational strategies can be used to foster complex thinking, self-reflection and search for new ideas that can reduce religious extremism. The fundamentalist or the instrumental-reciprocal style also has an inverse correlation with *FTR* and *xenos* validating the structure of RSS in Pakistani culture. Both the latter show not only fairness towards other religious affiliations but also a positive dialogue with them. While Islam is welcoming an inter-faith dialogue and giving respect to followers of other minority religions in a Muslim country. However, religious extremists in such situations are closed to rational choices and positive involvement with different other religions. This is reported in previous research, where religious fundamentalists show authoritarianism and prejudice (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005). Both authoritarianism and prejudice force religious extremists to scapegoat easy targets of particular sects to express hatred towards them satisfying their own psychological needs. Religious

extremism or fundamentalist style results from beliefs and commitments restricted to a closed group not welcoming alternative ways of reaching God. The high mean value of TTT schema in young Pakistani Muslims corresponds to fundamentalist beliefs not accepting texts and teachings of other sects as authentic. This strong affiliation to the adhered group can be countered by self-reflection where every individual has a unique relationship with God. Mulqueen & Elisa (2000) report that adulthood brings such reflective changes that compel people towards an inward focus on self. Similarly, Helminiak (1987, p.77) talks about self-transcendence that is "... impulse-dominated self-centeredness to a conformist identity with one's social group and finally to post-conventional self-determination and integration of internal and external reality" enhancing movement towards FTR and xenos.

Complexity showed a significant positive relationship with FTR and xenos. The religious schema FTR is related to individuated-systemic religious style in which one is flexible and tolerant of other religious affiliations and likes rational and fair treatment of others. A biographical analysis of religious styles (Tarar, Hassan & Keller, 2017) reveals that individuals who become open to questions of human existence as a result of a trauma also become more open to humanity, and their perspective taking on reality is broadened. Further research taking into account individual biographies informs on life trajectories that shape particular religious styles.

Xenos is one step beyond FTR and is related to dialogical style and involves not only an acknowledgment but also a positive inter-faith dialogue looking for shared meaning across religious traditions. Its significant positive relationship with an existential quest dimension also indicates that individuals who understand religion on a broad canvas are open to reality found anywhere supporting spiritual openness and lowering prejudice. Kelly (1995) found, people high on the spiritual openness had greater positive feelings towards other group members. Saroglou (2002) holds that the religious meaning of the universe is open and does not restrict one way of experience. The spirit of life is one light, but its particular color refracts through a stained glass window through which many colored lights split received by everyone differently. Spiritual openness is an awareness that leads to acceptance of alternative ideas and experiences.

This calls for religious education in countries like Pakistan promoting tolerance but creativity in religious experience for Islam is a religion for a global world and acknowledges other religions with great reverence as stated in the Holy Quran. Furthermore, Islam is loud and clear on a positive inter-faith dialogue with other religious traditions. For instance:

And argue ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better than mere argument, apart from those among them who inflict wrong and injury upon you. Tell them that we believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you: our Allah and your Allah is One and it is to Him we submit (29:46).

Islam teaches not only fairness and tolerance but also fair treatment of others. Despite the teachings of Islam, religious extremism has seeped into our psyches due to the promotion of egocentric and prejudiced discourses. The current study provides a psychological explanation of how a dearth of religious quest which can be associated with a religious style that is feeble in maturity. Further research needs to look into religious goading that could cultivate tolerance in Pakistani society.

### Limitations and Suggestions

The current study consists of limited sample of 400 young Muslims from Lahore and an older sample has not been tested to see if religious tolerance increases with age (Fowler 1986, 15). Given the individual differences, further research is needed in the area of Faith Development Theory (FDT) and spiritual quest in Pakistan to further study how religious beliefs are held towards other faith groups. Future research should include a large number of samples with various age groups in order to make better sense of these findings.

### Implications

The study has implications for religious education and practice in Pakistan. First, learning religion should involve existential question of whole humanity as Islam is a universal message to all humanity. Second, in order to promote tolerance, closed minded narratives need to be deciphered and prohibited to improve a healthy way to look at other's beliefs. To do this fairness, rational choice, and creative engagement with other religious groups can be fostered through broad-based religious education.

### CONCLUSION

The current study suggests marked differences in the style in which Islamic beliefs are held by Pakistani youth. The present study brings forward the role of the spiritual quest in religious understanding and its relation to fundamentalism and how religious education can promote inter-faith harmony in Pakistan.

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