

The Role of identity processing styles in religious beliefs

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between identity processing styles (Informative, Normative and Diffused-avoidant styles) and religious beliefs. The subjects included 200 (105 females, and 95 males) students of Shiraz University that were selected randomly by cluster sampling method. Instruments were: Identity Styles Questionnaire (ISI-G6) and Religious Orientation Questionnaire based on Islam. The result of this research showed significant positive correlation between Informative and Normative identity styles and religious beliefs (rituals-beliefs and Moralities components). The result of regression analysis showed that informative identity style predicts significantly the moralities component. Normative identity style positively and significantly, and Diffused-avoidant style negatively and significantly predict religious beliefs and its components. This research generally highlights the important role of Normative and Diffused-avoidant identity styles in university students' religious beliefs.

Key words: Islamic Religious Orientation, Identity Processing Styles, Religious beliefs, Identity

Introduction

In recent decades psychologist pay more attention to the role of religious on human behaviors. The religious beliefs is an important source of attitudes and behaviors; So it's study can answer a lot of psychologist questions about the causes of human behaviors. Religious beliefs and performing rituals can create inner peace and mental health by creating hope and encourage having positive attitudes (Wong-Mcdonald, & Gorsuch, 2004, Bahrami-Ehsan, & Tashk, 2005, Salehi et al., 2007). Having goal and meaningful life, feeling of related to a higher source, and being hopeful to god help in tough situation of life, are the sources that religious people can overcome to stressful events of life by relying on them (Yang, & Mao, 2007). A lot of environmental factors effect religious beliefs. For example family climate and its values, school climate, cultural atmosphere and etc. It seems that individual factors have an important effect on religious beliefs too; Individual factors include: 1. Motivational factors, e.g.: human's attitude to life, and their goals and concern. 2. Cognitive factors, e.g.: reasoning's method, using of various cognitive sources, and information processing type. 3. Self-knowledge, e.g.: The human looking over its "Self", Human's knowledge about its talents and features. Overall this factor, humans looking over its "Self" that is formed during the process of identification is very important. During the process of identification, people gather information to understand "Who am I?", and to set goals. Religious texts pay a lot of attention to these concerns.

Erikson (1968), believed people confront to identity crisis in adolescent. In this stage, because of having abstract thinking, adolescences interest to philosophical and religious topics; and confront with questions such as "Who am I?", "What is the end of my life?", and "What goals should I set in my life?" Adolescences use various information processing methods, in order to answer this questions. These methods of processing information are named as "Identity Processing Styles" (Berzonsky, 1994). Identity styles are a reflection of information processing orientations; Adolescences use their identity styles to form their identity and commitment to their beliefs and values (Pooralifard, 2004). There are three types of identity styles: 1. Informative style, 2. Normative style, 3. Diffused-avoidant style (Berzonsky, 1994). People with informative processing style, are active, explorer, and assessor; they seek for appropriate information in order to forming their identity (Parker, 2011). They doubt about their mental structures, and interest in testing different aspects of their beliefs (Fooladchang et al., 2010); especially when they face to beliefs against theirs. The result of researches shows people with informative identity style often are self-reflection; It means that they review their beliefs all the time, they are cautious in decision-making, open-mind, dutiful, and serious (Samani, & Fooladchang, 2006). People with normative identity style just accept values that are confirmed by authentic people. This people are commitment to accepted values, and reject the information that is contrary to values (Berzonske et al., 2003). This people desire to prepared mental structures and values (Berzonsky, & kani, 1995, cited in Samani, & Fooladchang, 2006). People with diffused-avoidant identity style avoid the situations that need to decision making; they avoidant to face to personal decisions and problems. If they face any interpretation, they show behavior reaction; and are controlled by encourages and demands of environment (Fooladchang et al., 2010, Ghazanfari, 2003).

Result of studies confirms the relationship between identity and religious. For instance Moghanloo, Agilar vafae, & Shahrarai (2009), through a research on university students, showed that religiosity has positive relationship with informative and normative styles, and negative relationship with diffused-avoidant style. In another study, the mediator role of identity styles between religiosity and personality factors in middle and late adolescents was investigated; the result of this research showed that the relationship between personality factors and religiosity was mediated by the informative and normative styles (Soenen, & Duire, 2006). Khodarahimi, & Cothran (2009), investigate the relationship between identity styles and Islamic religiosity. Their observations showed significant and positive relationship between identity styles and Islamic religiosity. Also Karimi (2010), during a research, that investigate the relationship between family functioning with identity styles and religious orientation in students, showed that informative and normative identity styles have positive and significant relationship with internal religious orientation and negative and significant relationship with external religious orientation; also, Diffused-avoidant identity style has a positive and significant relationship with external religious orientation, and negative and significant relationship with internal religious orientation. Parker (2011) studied the effect of identity styles on religious orientation; the finding of his research showed that identity styles have a direct significant effect on internal and external religious orientations; in addition, informative identity style has a moderate role between openness and quest orientation, and normative identity style has moderate role between openness and internal religious orientation.

It is worth to mention that based on Islamic foundations, in the stage of adolescent, which starts with puberty, adolescences should do religious duties; and its prerequisite is accepting of religion principles knowingly. When we look over Islamic principles, we find out that they answer well to adolescences basic questions that looking for their identity. "Monotheism principles" teach to adolescences "who she/he is; she/he is a creature that is created by eternal unique god. This creature, in spite of all its virtues, will have different fate; it depends on (voluntary) following up the physical and sensual dimension or the spiritual dimension. "Prophecy principle" answers to adolescence question about its life direction; Islam orders teach us how to live that includes not only a world success but also heavenly happiness. And finally "principle of resurrection", resolve adolescences concern about purpose and end of life. In fact, all human's efforts is achieving to god nearness, that is a symbol of all goodness and beauty, and reaching calmness in the world after here. According to these principles, the reasons of Islam emphasis on accepting religious principles knowingly, is become clear. In fact, the aim is that adolescences explore various information and resources before committing to religious rituals; in identification theory of Marcia, he named that as "exploration" and "commitment" stages. In exploration stage, adolescences research in different options in order to identification; and in commitment stage they select one of those options and commit to it (Sigelman, & Rider, 2012).

All people use a special identity process style in order to achieve identity. On the other side religious beliefs are the most important elements of identity; so it seems that individual's identity styles effect on religious beliefs. According to this fact, the aim of present study is the investigation of relationship between identity processing styles and religious beliefs.

Research questions

1. Is there any significant relationship between identity processing styles (Informative, Normative, and Diffused-avoidant styles) and religious beliefs?
2. Do identity processing styles (Informative, Normative, and Diffused-avoidant styles) predict religious beliefs and its component (Morality and Rituals-Beliefs)?

Materials and methods

The subjects in this study were bachelor's students of faculty of education and psychology of Shiraz University; Included 200 students (105 females and 95 males) who were selected randomly by cluster sampling method. At first 6 bachelor's classes were selected and then all of their students were examined.

Instruments:

1. **Identity Styles Questionnaire (ISI-G6):** In order to measure the identity styles, the 30 items form of identity styles questionnaire (White et al., 1998) was used. This questionnaire contains 3 components (Informative style, Normative style, and Diffused-avoidant style). For example the item: "I spend a lot of time to study and debate around religious problems", shows informative style; "I never doubt seriously about religious beliefs", measures normative style; and the item: "I am not sure about what I do in my life" presents the diffused-avoidant style. In this questionnaire each item contains 5 options in a range from "completely disagree (1)" to "completely agree (5)". 10 items of this questionnaire that measure the "commitment" aren't used in this research.
Sheikholeslami (2006), in her study, reported coefficient of Cronbach's alpha for informative, normative, and diffused-avoidant styles respectively: 0.58, 0.47, and 0.64. Moghanloo et al., (2009), confirmed the questionnaire's validity. In this study the coefficient of Cronbach' alpha was used to measure the reliability. The result of Cronbach's alpha was 0.71, 0.64, and 0.57 for informative, normative, and diffused-avoidant styles, respectively. The questionnaire's validity has been calculated by the correlation between each item and the whole score of the subscales. The range of coefficient was 0.31 to 0.66 for informative style, 0.33 to 0.62 for normative style, and 0.34 to 0.54 for diffused-avoidant style. All the coefficients were significant in the level of 0.001.
2. **Religious Orientation Questionnaire based on Islam:** Religious orientation questionnaire based on Islam was used for measuring religious beliefs. It was produced by Azarbayejani (Karami et al., 2006). This questionnaire contains 60 items and 2 components: Morality, and rituals-beliefs (Karami et al., 2006). For instance, the item "Islam has presented the most completely program for human happiness" shows "rituals-beliefs" component.; and the item "I always adhere to my promises" indicates "morality" component. In this questionnaire each item contains 4 options in a range from "completely disagree (1)" to "completely agree (4)". This study used the 50 items questionnaire (Hashemi, & Jowkar, 2010). Hashemi, & Jowkar (2010)

used the Cronbach's alpha method to investigate the questionnaire's reliability; and the coefficient of Cronbach's alpha was 0.90 for rituals-beliefs, and 0.67 for moralities. These researchers confirmed the questionnaire's validity by using factor analysis method. Cronbach's alpha was used for assessing the reliability in this study; the coefficient of alpha was 0.70 for rituals-belief, 0.74 for moralities, and 0.94 for the whole items. The validity of the questionnaire examined by calculating the correlation coefficients between score of subscales and the total score of questionnaire; was 0.97 for rituals-beliefs and 0.80 for moralities component.

Analysis method

Pearson's correlation Coefficient was used in order to investigate the first question of research. The multiple regression analysis was applied to answer the second question of study.

Result

The descriptive findings of the research variables are reported in table number 1.

Table 1: Descriptive findings of the research variables

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum
Informative	200	38.84	6.76	14	55
Normative	200	29.34	5.62	10	45
Defuse-avoidant	200	26.84	5.58	11	50
Rituals-beliefs	200	77.29	15.65	28	98
Morality	200	35.35	5.81	18	44
Religious beliefs	200	112.64	19.93	51	142

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to answer the first question of research. As shown in table 2 religious beliefs have positive and significant relationship with informative and normative styles.

Table 2: The Matrix of correlation between religious beliefs and identity processing styles

Variables	Informative	normative	Diffused-avoidant	Religious beliefs
Informative	1			
Normative	0.55*	1		
Diffused-avoidant	0.24*	0.24*	1	
Religious beliefs	0.35*	0.60*	-0.01	1

*P< 0.0001

In order to answer the second question of research, three simultaneous multiple regressions was applied. The result of regression analysis (table 3) showed that normative identity style, positively and significantly ($\beta=0.60$, $p < 0.0001$) and diffused-avoidant style, negatively and significantly ($\beta= -0.12$, $p < 0.03$) predict rituals-beliefs component. Informative style can't predict this component. Also, informative identity ($\beta=0.24$, $p < 0.001$), and normative identity ($\beta=0.43$, $p < 0.001$) styles positively and significantly, and diffused-avoidant style ($\beta=-0.25$, $p < 0.001$) negatively and significantly predict moralities component. In addition, as it shows in table 3, the total score of religious beliefs can be predicted positively and significantly by normative identity style ($\beta=0.60$, $p < 0.0001$), and negatively and significantly by diffused-avoidant style ($\beta=-0.17$, $p < 0.003$). Informative identity style couldn't predict the total score of religious beliefs. It worth to mention that identity processing styles explain 34 percent of rituals-beliefs variance, 40 percent of moralities variance, and 41 percent of religious beliefs.

Table 3: The prediction of religious beliefs and their component based on identity processing styles

Criterion variables	Predictor variables	R	R ²	β	t	p
Rituals-beliefs	Informative	0.58	0.34	-0.01	0.18	NS
	Normative			0.60	8.70	0.0001
	Diffused-avoidant			-0.12	2.15	0.03
Moralities	Informative	0.63	0.40	0.24	3.66	0.001
	Normative			0.43	6.46	0.001
	Diffused-avoidant			-0.25	4.45	0.001
Religious beliefs	Informative	0.65	0.41	0.06	0.92	NS
	Normative			0.60	9.02	0.0001
	Diffused-avoidant			-0.17	3.06	0.003

Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study show the positive and significant relationship between informative and normative styles and religious beliefs in university students. This result consistent with previous research (Soenen, & Duurs, 2006, Parker, 2011, Moghanloo et al., 2009). In interpreting this result, we can say people with informative identity style, adhere to their beliefs and values because they selected them knowingly; Specially this people review their beliefs all the time, so their knowledge is up to date and they can find reliable answers for their questions. On the other hand, people with normative identity style, gain their knowledge from reliable sources and are commitment to them. For this reasons, there is positive relationship between informative and normative styles and religious beliefs in university students.

Another finding of this research showed that informative identity style predicts significantly moralities component in university students. In justified this finding should be mentioned that moralities have three components: emotions, cognition, and behavior (Sigelman, & Rider, 2012). Psychological literature represent that all three components are educable and trainable. In other words moralities development can be improved by educating people. Seeking knowledge and cognition about reasons of actions and behaviors and their consequences can result to commitment to moralities. Especially studies of Piaget and Kohlberg present a close relationship between

cognitive development and morality. So the prediction of moralities component by informative identity style is expectable.

Another finding of this study indicated that, informative identity style can't predict significantly ritual-beliefs component. Regarding to this result, it can be said since in the "religious orientation questionnaire", that is used in this research, ritual-beliefs component referring to group relatedness and adhering to specific rituals of each religion (e.g. prayers, fast,...) and it present individuals' similarities at each religious (Rafiee-honar, & Janbozorgi, 2010). So informative identity style hasn't crucial effect on these beliefs. In otherwise, in Islam, on the assumption that religious principles are accepted based on knowledge and cognition, performing rituals are done based on imitation and obedience from clergymen which is named as religion's branches.

Result of this study also showed normative identity style predicts positively and significantly religious beliefs and its component. This finding is coordinated with studies of Moghanloo et al., (2009), Soenen, & Duiers (2006), and Khodarahimi, & Cothran, (2009). As it noted before, people with normative identity style accept values that approved by authoritative people, since the clergymen have a high creditity in our society, most of the people turn to this clergymen in order to gain the information and awareness about religious concepts. Parents have prestigious position too, and are sensible about performing norms and encourage them toward religious beliefs and implementing them. So individuals with normative identity style, have more commitment to religious beliefs.

According to the results of this research, diffused-identity style is a negative and significant predictor of religious beliefs and its component among university students. This finding is in line with previous studies (e. g. Parker, 2011, Karimi, 2010, and Moghanloo et al., 2009). Generally people with diffused-avoidant can't make an organized decision about their identity, meaning and aim for life (Berzonsky, 1994); so it is obvious that this people have weaker religious beliefs. In addition to, since these people don't have any commitment about themselves and the delayed decisions that make for themselves (Sheikholeslami, 2006), they can't develop in moralities fields.

The result of this study can help education and training experts in order to enrich the religious beliefs of young. According to positive relationship between informative identity style and religiosity, we can help young in gain awareness about religious principles and its foundation by providing strong and well-founded religious sources; and in this way, their commitment to religious beliefs is guaranteed. Also according to important role of normative identity style, in comparison with other styles, in predicting religious beliefs of university students, it should be answered reasonably to young religious questions and concerns, by making accessible, reliable sources and expert, in religious knowledge. It worth to mention that since the sample of present study just includes the students of psychology and education faculty, the results can generalize limitedly to other groups.

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