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The Relationship Between Moral Disengagement and Religious Orientation: A Study on Theology Faculty Students

Nesibe Esen Ateş | 0000-0003-4259-9544 | nesen@cu.edu.tr

Asst. Prof. Dr. | Cukurova University | Faculty of Theology | Department of Psychology of Religion | Adana | Türkiye

https://ror.org/05wxkj555

Ahmet Rifat Geçioğlu | 0000-0002-9930-2505 | ahmetrifat@hotmail.com

Asst. Prof. Dr. | Cukurova University | Faculty of Theology | Department of Psychology of Religion | Adana | Türkiye

https://ror.org/05wxkj555

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Abstract

Religious orientations, one of the typological studies conducted on ways of living religiosity, and moral disengagement, which can be defined as making immoral behaviors seem reasonable, form the basic concepts of this study. In the literature on the psychology of religion, religious orientations have been theorized as three dimensions: extrinsic religious orientation, intrinsic religious orientation, and questioning religious orientation. Accordingly, the main problem of the study is defined as "Do the sub-dimensions of religious orientation predict moral disengagement?". The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between moral disengagement and religious orientation. The sample consists of 437 students currently enrolled at the Faculty of Theology at Çukurova University. The Moral Disengagement Scale and the Religious Orientation Scale were utilised in the collection of data. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis, one-way ANOVA and an independent groups t-test. The findings of the study indicate that the sub-dimensions of religious orientation serve as significant predictors of moral disengagement. The investigation revealed a negative correlation between internal religious orientation and moral disengagement, and a positive correlation between questioning religious orientation and moral disengagement. No significant relationship was found between external religious orientation and moral disengagement. An analysis of the variables in terms of gender revealed a significant difference between female and male students in terms of both internal and external religious orientation, with female students demonstrating higher scores. In contrast, male students demonstrated a significantly higher level of moral disengagement than their female counterparts. An analysis of grade levels indicated disparities in internal, external and questioning religious orientation. However, no differences were found in moral disengagement according to grade levels. The research results were evaluated in the context of existing literature and will inform future studies.

Keywords

Psychology of Religion, Moral Disengagement, Religious Orientation, Intrinsic Religious Orientation, Extrinsic Religious Orientation, Questioning Religious Orientation.

Highlights

- Subdimensions of religious orientation significantly predict moral disengagement.
- A negative significant relationship was found between internal religious orientation and moral disengagement.
- A positive significant relationship was found between questioning religious orientation and moral disengagement.
- Female students have higher internal and external religious orientation scores than male students.
- It was found that male students have higher levels of moral disengagement than female students.

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Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma ve Dinî Yönelim İlişkisi: İlahiyat Fakültesi Öğrencileri Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Nesibe Esen Ateş | 0000-0003-4259-9544 | nesen@cu.edu.tr
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi | Çukurova Üniversitesi | İlahiyat Fakültesi | Din Psikolojisi Anabilim Dalı | Adana | Türkiye
https://ror.org/05wxkj555

Ahmet Rifat Geçioğlu | 0000-0002-9930-2505 | ahmetrifat@hotmail.com
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi | Çukurova Üniversitesi | İlahiyat Fakültesi | Din Psikolojisi Anabilim Dalı | Adana | Türkiye
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Öz
Dindarlığı yaşama biçimleri üzerinde yapılan tipleme çalışmalarından biri olan dinsel eğilimler ile ahlaki olmayan davranışları akla uygun hale getirmek olarak tanımlanabilen ahlaki uzaklşma bu çalışmanın temel kavramlarını oluşturmaktadır. Din psikolojisi literatüründe dinsel eğilimler dıştan dinî yönelim, içten dinî yönelim ve arayış (sorgulayıcı) dinî yönelimi olmak üzere üç boyut olarak teorize edilmiştir. Buna bağlı olarak çalışmanın temel problemi, "Dinsel yönelimin alt boyutları ahlaki uzaklaşmayı yordamakta mıdır?" olarak belirlenmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı ahlâkî uzaklaşma ile dinî yönelim arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmaktır. Örneklem Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesinde öğrenim görmeye devam eden 437 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Veriler Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma Ölçeği ile Dinî Yönelim Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Toplanan veriler, çoklu doğrusal regresyon analizi, tek yönlü ANOVA ve bağımsız gruplar t testi kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Buna göre dinî yönelimin alt boyutları ahlâkî uzaklaşmayı anlamlı bir şekilde yordamaktadır. İçten dinî yönelim ile ahlâkî uzaklaşma arasında negatif yönlü ve anlamlı, sorgulayıcı dinî yönelim ve ahlâkî uzaklaşma arasında ise pozitif yönlü ve anlamlı bir ilişki vardır. Dıştan dinî yönelimle ahlâkî uzaklaşma arasında ise anlamlılık düzeyine ulaşan bir ilişkiye rastlanmamıştır. Cinsiyet açısından değişkenler incelendiğinde, kız öğrencilerin hem içten hem de dıştan dinî yönelim bakımından erkeklerden anlamlı derecede farklılaştıkları ve daha yüksek puanlar aldıkları tespit edilmiştir. Erkek öğrencilerin ise ahlâkî uzaklaşma düzeylerinin kızlara göre anlamlı derecede farklılaştığı ve kız öğrencilere göre daha yüksek puan aldıkları görülmüştür. Sınıf düzeylerine bakıldığında, sınıf düzeylerinin içten dinî yönelim, dıştan dinî yönelim ve sorgulama dinî yönelimine göre farklılaştıkları belirlenmiştir. Ahlâkî uzaklaşmada ise sınıf düzeylerine göre bir farklılaşmaya rastlanmamıştır. Elde edilen araştırma sonuçları, mevcut literatür çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiş ve ileride yürütülecek çalışmalara katkı sağlayacağı düşünülen önerilere yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler
Din Psikolojisi, Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma, Dinî Yönelim, İçten Dinî Yönelim, Dıştan Dinî Yönelim, Sorgulayıcı Dinî Yönelim.

Öne Çıkanlar
- Dinî yönelimin alt boyutları ahlâkî uzaklaşmayı anlamlı bir şekilde yordamaktadır.
- İçten dinî yönelim ile ahlâkî uzaklaşma arasında negatif yönlü anlamlı ilişki bulunmuştur.
- Sorgulama dinî yönelimi ve ahlâkî uzaklaşma arasında pozitif yönlü anlamlı ilişki bulunmuştur.
- Kız öğrencilerin erkek öğrencilere göre içten ve dıştan dinî yönelim puanları daha yüksektir.
- Erkek öğrencilerin kız öğrencilere göre ahlakî uzaklaşma düzeylerinin daha yüksek olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

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Etik Bildirim	artukluakademi@gmail.com
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Introduction

The concepts of religion and morality are perceived as being closely related. The assertion that religion constitutes the origin of morality, or that a religion devoid of moral foundations is fated to become extinct, are frequently advanced.[1] It is evident that a close relationship exists between these two phenomena.

However, the inherent complexity and multidimensionality of religion and morality renders them challenging to be defined, necessitating an examination of each aspect within a distinct context. At this juncture, typologies that focus on how religiosity is practised facilitate research, examining the relationships between religiosity and distinctvariables within a broad framework.[2] The study of morality is approached through a variety of perspectives, including the examination of maturity level, values, and corruption.[3] Furthermore, there are studies that examine the relationship between the two phenomena across different dimensions.[4] The present study is of this type and aims to examine the relationship between religiosity and morality in the context of religious orientations and moral disengagement.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Religious Orientation

In the psychology of religion, which is concerned with the religious lives of individuals, thelives of individuals can be studied either individually or grouped together based on commonalities. Therefore, religiosity, which is the main subject of scholarly research in the field of psychology of religion, is studied through certain typologies. The study of religiosity, which is characterised by its individual and variable structure, can be facilitated through categorisation, thereby enabling the attainment of generalisable results.

One such study is that of Allport and Ross, who categorised religious orientations based on the distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic orientations*.[5] The subject study in relation systematized the aforementioned typology in their study, which investigated the relationship between individual religious tendencies and prejudice. However, the concepts of intrinsic religious orientation and extrinsic religious orientation can be found in Allport's earlier works.[6]

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1 Enver Uysal, 'Dindarlığın Ahlâkî Temeli Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler', *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 14/1 (2005), 42; Lokman Çilingir, 'Din mi Ahlak mı?', *International Journal of Sport Culture and Science* 2/1 (2004), 713; Tuncay İmamoğlu, 'Paul Tillich Felsefesinde Din-Ahlâk İlişkisi', *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 10/28 (2006), 109.

2 Petruta-Paraschiva Rusu - Maria-Nicoleta Turliuc, 'Ways of Approaching Religiosity in Psychological Research', *The Journal of International Social Research* 4/18 (2011), 350; Ali Ulvi Mehmedoğlu, 'Din, Dindarlık ve Değerler', *İZÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 1/2 (2013), 172; Bart Duriez et al., 'Dindarlık Hayatımızı Hâlâ Etkiliyor mu? Çeşitli Dindarlık Tiplerine Göre Değer Yapılarının Farklılaşmasını Destekleyen Yeni Deliller', *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 24 (January 2003), 25; Asım Yapıcı, 'Dinî Yaşayışın Farklı Görüntüleri ve Dogmatik Dindarlık', *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 2/2 (1 June 2002), 75.

3 Mustafa Şengün - Mevlüt Kaya, 'Ahlaki Olgunluk Ölçeği: Geçerlik ve Güvenirlik Çalışması', *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 24/24–25 (1 July 2007), 51; Arzu Özyürek - Gizem Basar, 'Ergenlerde Ahlaki Olgunluk, Aile Aidiyeti ve Ergen-Ebeveyn İlişkilerinin İncelenmesi', *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10/1 (30 March 2021), 247; Metin Kocatürk - Tuğba Türk Kurtça, 'Akran Zorbalığı ve Mağduriyeti, Siber Zorbalık, Ahlaki Uzaklaşma ve Empatik İlgi Arasındaki İlişkilerin İncelenmesi', *Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 20/79 (1 July 2021), 1123.

4 Necmi Karslı, 'Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Manevi-İnsani Değerler ve Dindarlık İlişkisi', *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 50 (24 June 2021), 143; Maksut Çetin, 'Dindarlık-Ahlak İlişkisi ve Dini-Toplumsal Yansımaları', *Mizanü'l-Hak: İslami İlimler Dergisi* 13 (31 December 2021), 83; Kemal Coşkun, *İmam Hatip Lisesi Öğrencilerinde Din Anlayışı ve Sosyal Değerler Algısı* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2020).

5 Gordon W. Allport - J. Michael Ross, 'Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5/4 (1967), 432–443.

6 Gordon W. Allport, *Pattern and Growth in Personality* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 300–303; Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Washington: The Beacon Press, 1945), 455; Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan Pub Co, 1960), 59.

Allport initiated the systematisation of typification in question as "mature" and "immature", however it ultimately took its final form as "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" religiosity.[7] Allport, who posited that it is imperative to consider the theological, sociocultural, and personal-psychological context in order to comprehend religiosity, said that he borrowed the concepts of intrinsic value and extrinsic value, which are concepts of value philosophy, to explain the use of religion as an "ends" or "means" in human life.[8] According to Allport, extrinsic religious orientation is predominantly shaped by societal demands, whereas intrinsic religious orientation is characterised by faith as a supreme value in itself. In this context, faith has become so deeply ingrained that it effectively eradicates the individual's self-centred tendencies, thereby engendering a profound sense of communal solidarity. Religious doctrine is softened and accepted internally. It is evident that religious commandments constitute the fundamental source of motivation and value in life.[9] Accordingly, differentiation in religious life is shaped by the individual's motivation for approaching religion. In short, if religious life is a motivating factor for the individual, and if the motivations that give meaning to their life and influence their choices are derived from religion, then we can speak of intrinsically motivated religiosity. Conversely, if religious life is employed as a means for the individual to achieve alternative motivations and is used to satisfy these, then we can speak of extrinsically motivated religiosity. According to Allport, in the context of extrinsic religiosity, individuals tend to utilise religion as a means to achieve objectives such as establishing social connections, attaining status, securing stability, and making a positive impression on others.[10]

Batson and Ventis[11] expanded Allport's classification of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity by adding the dimension of "quest". According to this, religiosity is a way of life that can be typified in terms of means, ends, and quest. Means-oriented religiosity largely overlaps with extrinsic religiosity, while ends-oriented religiosity largely overlaps with intrinsic religiosity. The quest type is predicated on a way of life in which the search for answers to existential questions is prioritised. This type may be delineated as a religious way of life in which the individual seeks answers in the religious sphere to questions about the meaning and value of life, its beginning, and the afterlife. At this point, although they state that they are based on Allport, they point out that the quest type of religious life, which can find its place in mature religiosity, has not been able to establish its own field in intrinsic religiosity. Accordingly, they have pointed out that characteristics such as *flexibility*, *skepticism*, and *resistance to absolutist thinking*, which are present in mature religiosity, have not been given sufficient value and place in the construction of the concept of intrinsic religiosity. Ultimately, they asserted that religion is more strongly emphasized as an internalized and therefore fully followed primary motive.[12] It is contended by the authors that this shift in emphasis becomes even more pronounced when examining the scale used to measure extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity. Furthermore, it is claimed that the content of the quest dimension is not fully represented in the scale developed by Allport and Ross.[13] The main claims of Batson and Ventis, who based their scale development efforts on this type, are about developing it further and

7 Gordon W. Allport, 'The Religious Context of Prejudice', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5/3 (1966), 447–457.
8 Allport, 'The Religious Context of Prejudice', 454.
9 Allport, 'The Religious Context of Prejudice', 455.
10 Richard I. Evans, *Gordon Allport, the Man and His Ideas* (New York: Dutton, 1971), 71–72.
11 Daniel C. Batson - Larry W. Ventis, *The Religious Experience: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (Newyork: Oxford University Press, 1982).
12 Batson - Ventis, *The Religious Experience*, 144–145.
13 Allport - Ross, 'Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice'.

making it three-dimensional and more comprehensive.[14] The concepts of "means-oriented religiosity" and "ends-oriented religiosity" have been selected for utilisation. The typology has also been expanded to include a "quest" form of religiosity.[15]

Religious belief has characteristics such as doubt, confusion, and indecision, and these are not sufficiently addressed in intrinsic or extrinsic orientations. This observation naturally gives rise to the conclusion that religious belief can be considered a "questioning structure". However, this state of perpetual questioning necessitates a candid confrontation of existential inquiries, thereby underscoring an aspect that eludes definitive resolution. Individuals who approach religion in this way accept that they do not know the ultimate truth about such matters and probably never will. Nevertheless, the questions are considered important, and answers are sought, however temporary and subject to change they may be. Despite the absence of a explicit belief in a transcendent reality, there is nevertheless a transcendent religious dimension to the individual's life. This dimension is expressed as an unending quest. [16]

Batson and Ventis[17] highlight three main characteristics of people motivated by a quest orientation. The first of these is a willingness to confront existential questions without simplifying the complexity of religious life, the second is the ability to engage in self-criticism and view religious doubts positively, and the third is openness to change. Batson and Ventis[18] have noted that this type of quest is frequently found in the literature, and they have evaluated Fromm's concept of *humanistic religiosity*[19] and Niebuhr's concept of the *responsible self*[20] in this context. The identified primary issue is the absence of a scale with which to measure this aspect of religiosity, and the authors make an attempt to address this issue.

Harlak and Eskin[21] view the questioning religious orientation as "the religious orientation of people who are not satisfied with definitive answers to problematic areas within religion". Accordingly, they summarise this orientation as involving the confrontation of existential questions in all their dimensions and complexity, the refusal to accept dogmatic and prescriptive answers, and the acceptance that absolute truth cannot be attained. In this type of religious orientation, questions take precedence over answers. This is attributable to an inherent self-doubt, giving rise to a sceptical and critical approach towards oneself and religion. When examining the Turkish literature on the psychology of religion, it appears that religious orientations have been studied in relation to many different variables. To give a few examples in this context, Kayıklık[22] has examined the relationship between religious orientations and various demographic variables and loneliness. Er-Ruveyte and Ayten[23] focused on the relationship between religious orientations and personality, while Yüce's [24]work can also be mentioned in the same context. Uysal[25] addressed

[14] C. Daniel Batson et al., *Religion and the Individual: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 158–169.
[15] Batson - Ventis, *The Religious Experience*, 149.
[16] Batson - Ventis, *The Religious Experience*, 149–150.
[17] Batson et al., *Religion and the Individual*, 160–165.
[18] Batson - Ventis, *The Religious Experience*, 151.
[19] Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950).
[20] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self; an Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).
[21] Hacer Harlak - Mehmet Eskin, 'Dini Yönelim ve Dindarlık Ölçeklerinin Geliştirilmesi ve Psikometrik Özelliklerinin İncelenmesi', *Yeni Symposium* 56/2 (2018), 24–32.
[22] Hasan Kayıklık, *Dinî Yaşayış Biçimleri Psikolojik Temelleri Açısından Bir Değerlendirme* (İzmir: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2000).
[23] Abdullah Er-Ruveyte et al., 'Dini Yönelim Boyutlarının Kişiliğin Beş Boyutu ile İlişkisi (Ampirik Bir Araştırm)', *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 39 (5 March 2014), 133–148.
[24] Fatma Yüce, *Gençlerde Dini Yönelim ve Kişilik* (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2009).

the topic of forgiveness and religious orientations. Eryücel[26] investigated the relationship between coping and religious orientations, while Gencer[27] investigated the relationship between well-being and religious orientations. Cirhinlioğlu[28] has worked on prejudice and religious orientations, while Erdoğan[29] has studied the relationship between the perception of God, psychological resilience, and religious orientations. Göcen[30] has addressed the relationship between religious orientations and psychological well-being in the context of adults, while Acar Çınar[31] has researched the same relationship in the context of religious officials. Öztürk[32] focused on the relationship between religiosity, optimism, and religious tendencies. Yüksel[33] examined the relationship between religious obsessions and religious tendencies. Salsman, Carlson, and Ayten[34] focused on mature faith, psychological disorders, and religious orientations. Pancar[35] researched the relationship between worship and religious tendencies among young adult.

1.2. Moral Disengagement

The concept of morality encompasses both the values that individuals should possess and the rules that must be followed in society. This duality is also evident when discussing the origin of morality. The question of whether morality is an inevitable result of people beginning to live together in groups, or whether it is an innate human ability, aims to determine the origin of morality. However, it also demonstrates its duality.[36]

Given the vagueness of concept definition in the social sciences -particularly in psychology- and the difficulties that this entails, it seems impossible to avoid encountering these issues when attempting to define morality. Morality is a concept so closely tied to selfhood, character, and nature that it cannot be confined to the mere definition of a set of rules. In the Islamic world, the question of whether these characteristics -summarized as virtues and vices- are innate or not, and whether moral behavior can alter one's nature over time, has been debated. Ultimately, as in psychology, it has been argued that morality can both originate from personality and transform personality.[37] A multitude of factors influence all of these values and behaviors, including social environment, psychological experience and structure, cultural interaction, and religion.

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25 Veysel Uysal, 'Gençlerde Empati Eğilimi, Anne-Baba Tutumları ve Dindarlık', *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, (15 April 2016), 7–40.

26 Sema Eryücel, 'Dini Yönelim ve Başa Çıkma', *Journal of Turkish Studies* 13/Volume 13 Issue 2 (29 August 2024), 393–412.

27 Nevzat Gencer, 'Dini Yönelimler ve PERMA İyi Oluş Modeli Arasındaki İlişki Üzerine Bir Araştırma', *İlahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi* 59 (30 June 2023), 82–97.

28 Fatma Gül Cirhinlioğlu, 'Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi', *Dini Yönelimler ve Önyargı* 7/1 (2010), 1365–1384.

29 Emine Erdoğan, 'Tanrı Algısı, Dini Yönelim Biçimleri ve Öznel Dindarlığın Psikolojik Dayanıklılıkla İlişkisi: Üniverite Örneklemi', *Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 12/29 (21 April 2015), 223–246.

30 Gülüşan Göcen, 'Pozitif Psikoloji Düzleminde Psikolojik İyi Olma ve Dini Yönelim İlişkisi: Yetişkinler Üzerine Bir Araştırma', *Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi* 13 (29 August 2024), 97.

31 Hatice Acar Çınar, 'Din Görevlilerinde Dindarlik Biçimleri ve Psikolojik İyilik Halleri: Sivas Örneği', *Journal of Turkish Studies* 13/26 (29 August 2024), 1–18.

32 Eyüp Ensar Öztürk, 'Üniversite Öğrencilerinde İyimserlik, Dindarlık ve Dini Yönelim İlişkisi', *İslâmî İlimler Dergisi* XII/3 (2017), 165–190.

33 Büşranur Yüksel, 'Dini Yönelim Biçimleri ile Dini İçerikli Obsesyon Düzeyleri Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi: İlahiyat Fakültesi Örneği', *İlahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi* 52 (December 2019), 217–239.

34 John Salsman et al., 'Dinî Yönelim, Olgun İman ve Psikolojik Rahatsızlıklar: Negatif ve Pozitif İlişkiler', *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 26 (23 January 2014).

35 Elif Pancar, *Genç Yetişkinlerde Dini Yönelim Farklilaşmasinin İbadet Tutumlarina Etkisi* (Bursa: Uludağ Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2024).

36 Nurettin Topçu, *Ahlak* (Dergah Yayınları, 2012); Abdulkadir Mahmutoğlu, 'Etik ve Ahlak: Benzerlikler, Farklılıklar ve İlişkiler', *Türk İdare Dergisi* 81/463–464 (2009), 226; Coşkun Can Aktan, 'Ahlak ve Ahlak Felsefesine Giriş', *Hukuk ve İktisat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1/1 (1 June 2009), 39.

37 Ebû Alî Ahmed b. Muhammed b. Ya'kūb b. Miskeveyh el-Hâzin İbn Miskeveyh, *Ahlakı Olgunlaştırma*, trans. Abdulkadir Şener et al. (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1983); Ali Çelebi Kınalızade, *Ahlâk-ı Alâ'î*, ed. Mustafa Koç (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma

Morality, defined as "the entire system of individual values,"[38] also indicates certain levels or stages of maturity. Moral maturity, otherwise known as moral perfection, is regarded as the pinnacle of moral development. The *post-conventional* level mentioned in Kohlberg's theory of moral development refers to this level.[39] Moral maturity can be defined as the individual's cognitive and behavioral equipment being at the highest level of development in moral terms, and the ability to respond competently in the face of moral disengagement or an immoral situation.[40]

If moral judgment, moral sentiment, moral values, moral cognition, moral behavior, and moral norms are at the highest level not only as defenders but also as implementers and builders, then the opposite is also possible. Kohlberg characterises this state as *pre-conventional*, considering it to be a form of moral primitiveness.[41] Mature morality is expected to be integrated with behavior. The mere mention of mature morality in terms of emotion, values, and cognition does not necessarily imply the existence of practical morality. In this context, it is possible to construct morality in terms of cognitive consistency. The identification of the moral structure that an individual has constructed cognitively in their daily actions demonstrates the positive existence of morality. Consequently, it is improbable that individuals who have not yet matured morally will display high-level moral behaviour. In this particular context, the concept employed to denote immature morality is moral disengagement.[42] Pre-conventional morality and moral disengagement have similar meanings. Referring to Kohlberg and Hersch[43], pre-conventional morality is a state of selective morality, where the existing moral structure cannot be reflected in behavior depending on the situation and conditions. At this point, individuals may exhibit different moral behaviors at the same or similar times, depending on environmental conditions and their own psychological state.

Bandura[44] argues that morality will be activated based on an internal structure and that it will be possible for a person to refrain from behavior that is incompatible with human dignity through a cognitive structure that, so to speak, is internalized. This process is facilitated by an internalised cognitive structure. It is imperative that this internal moral system is consciously activated. In the event of selective activation of this intrinsic moral system, an individual may exhibit moral behaviour. Conversely, complete deactivation of the conscientious system, or self-reproach, may result in the disablement of moral behaviour, thereby facilitating the emergence of immoral behaviour. It is at this juncture that *moral justification mechanisms* become operative.

In the event of an individual engaging in morally reprehensible behaviour, rather than experiencing a sense of self-reproach as dictated by their conscience, they undergo a shift in their interpretation of the behaviour. At this point, they may resort to *advantageous comparison* by contrasting their own behaviour with that of others, which can have much more serious consequences. In the context of interpreting their ethical transgressions, the legitimisation process

Eserler Kurumu Yayınları, 2014); Osman Şimşek, *Yeni Ahlak Toplumu İnşası* (Ankara: Gazi Kitabevi, 2013); Ali Akdoğan, *Ahlak - Medeniyet ve İslam* (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2011).

38 Akdoğan, *Ahlak - Medeniyet ve İslam*.

39 Lawrence Kohlberg - Richard H. Hersh, 'Moral Development: A Review of the Theory', *Theory into Practice* 16/2 (1977), 54; Lawrence Kohlberg, 'Development of Moral Character and Moral Ideology', *Review of Child Development Research*, ed. Martin L. Hoffman - Wladis L. Hoffman (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964).

40 Şengün - Kaya, 'Ahlaki Olgunluk Ölçeği'.

41 Kohlberg, 'Development of Moral Character and Moral Ideology'.

42 Albert Bandura, *Moral Disengagement: How People Do Harm and Live with Themselves* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2016).

43 Kohlberg - Hersh, 'Moral Development', 57.

44 Bandura, *Moral Disengagement*; Albert Bandura vd., "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71/2 (1996); Albert Bandura, "Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities", *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3/3 (01 Ağustos 1999).

can be facilitated through the utilisation of *euphemistic labeling*. This language serves to obfuscate the destructive or unacceptable aspects of the behaviour that is morally disapproved of, and may reference a "better" or "sacred" purpose or result. This is the point at which the *legitimizing language* begins to develop. The language employed is passive, creating the impression that the immoral action is beyond the individual's control. The image created is of a non-human entity performing the morally reprehensible act. The focus of control becomes externalized, and the area of responsibility narrows. A sense of responsibility is a key factor in preventing moral disengagement. At this point, May[45] emphasizes that evil in the world will never end, that the individual's primary responsibility is to persevere despite all this evil, and that this responsibility will bring compassion and sensitivity with it. Fromm[46], on the other hand, emphasizes that individuals seek justice as much as freedom. Based on this point, it can be argued that the pursuit of justice brings with it moral responsibility. In conclusion, it can be said that individuals who attribute responsibility for their actions to themselves are able to engage with the process of self-reproach in a healthier manner. However, when *responsibility is attributed to another*, individuals find it easier to engage in immoral behavior. [47] The Milgram experiment[48], which is predicated on obedience to an authority figure who assumes responsibility for the behaviour of others, provides a useful clarifying example in this regard. It is evident that when an authority assumes responsibility for unethical behaviour, the moral burden created is concomitantly attributed to that authority. This provides a legal context for moral disengagement.

Notwithstanding the absence of any assumption of responsibility on the part of the authority, the *attribution of responsibility for the incident to an external entity* has the effect of legitimising moral disengagement by virtue of the fact that it removes the burden from the individual. It has been demonstrated that individuals who perceive themselves as victims rather than perpetrators may attribute blame to the actual victim or to the circumstances and conditions. A similar situation is seen when *the responsibility for immoral behavior is distributed among the crowd*. In the context of group responsibility, if all members of the group are considered responsible, no individual member is held accountable for their actions. Situations in which the consequences of immoral behaviour are *ignored*, *simplified* or *distorted* also have an impact on the activation of the moral judgement mechanism. The failure to empathise with those harmed by immoral behaviour, the undervaluing of these individuals as human beings, and the *perceiving of them as non-human entities* are strategies employed to prevent the emergence of a sense of responsibility or guilt.[49]

Moral disengagement is not a sudden phenomenon; rather, it is a gradual process that unfolds over time. According to Bandura, when individuals initially exhibit inappropriate behavior, they continue to activate their internal control mechanisms, and feelings of guilt are effective in this situation. However, as these practices continue over time, they begin to use legitimization mechanisms more easily and perform behaviors that they would not have initially considered with much greater ease.[50] This situation appears to be consistent with the concept of cognitive dissonance. This concept posits that humans seek cognitive consistency. An individual experiencing inconsistency between their judgments, beliefs, moral principles and behaviours is

[45] Rollo May, *Özgürlük ve Kader*, trans. Ali Babaoğlu (İstanbul: Okuyan Us Yayın, 2011), 306–308.
[46] Erich Fromm, *Özgürlükten Kaçış*, trans. Şemsa Yeğin (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2017), 294.
[47] Bandura et al., 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency'.
[48] Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
[49] Bandura et al., 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency'.
[50] Bandura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities'; Bandura et al., 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency'.

likely to experience anxiety. The individual then commences the process of identifying coping mechanisms to address the anxiety experienced. In this case, the individual has three possible courses of action. The first of these is to relinquish behaviour that does not align with cognitive truths and endeavour to avoid its repetition. The second approach involves modifying the cognitive structure that gives rise to the contradiction. The third option is to establish conditions that align with the context, thereby legitimising the behavior.[51] Where moral disengagement first begins, the individual feels the anxiety-induced contradiction more intensely and decides which of these attitudes to choose. The method of moral legitimisation, once initiated, facilitates the normalisation of the conflict-generating situation, thereby enabling the individual to engage in other immoral behaviours. The person disengages from this situation without feeling any responsibility, anxiety, and therefore conflict.

2. Research

2.1. Method and Model

The study is a descriptive and quantitative research conducted in a survey model. As a result of the applied survey, it is attempted to determine whether the religious orientations of theology students predict their levels of moral disengagement. The fundamental variables employed in the present study encompass moral disengagement (MD) in conjunction with the sub-dimensions of the religious orientation scale, namely internal religious orientation (IRO), external religious orientation (ERO), and questioning religious orientation (QRO). Furthermore, the study seeks to ascertain whether these variables vary according to the students' gender and grade level.

2.2. Problem

The relationship between morality and religion is a long-standing topic of philosophical debate. In this context, the debate has been shaped by two core views: the idea that religion is the source of morality and the opposing view that it was morality that laid the groundwork for the formation of institutional religion. Finally, the view that the two phenomena are completely independent has also been defended.[52] The areas in which morality and religion converge serve to reinforce the idea that they influence each other. It is noteworthy that the principles defined by Kohlberg[53] as universal moral principles are accepted by religions as desirable characteristics, albeit under certain conditions, which suggests a shared foundation. In summary, the reciprocal relationships between these two elements are indicative of a close association between them.[54] The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between religious orientation and moral disengagement.

2.3. Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

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51 Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962); Monica K. Miller et al., 'Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger)', *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2015), 562–565.

52 Uysal, 'Dindarlığın Ahlâkî Temeli Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler', 43.

53 Kohlberg - Hersh, 'Moral Development', 58; Kohlberg, 'Development of Moral Character and Moral Ideology'.

54 Çilingir, 'Din mi Ahlak mı?', 714–718.

H_1: The sub-dimensions of religious orientation, namely internal religious orientation, external religious orientation, and questioning religious orientation, significantly predict moral disengagement.
H_2: Students' moral disengagement scores differ significantly according to their grade levels.
H_3: Students' intrinsic religious orientation scores differ significantly according to their grade levels.
H_4: Students' external religious orientation scores differ significantly according to their grade levels.
H_5: Students' questioning religious orientation scores differ significantly according to their grade levels.
H_6: Students' moral disengagement scores differ significantly according to gender.
H_7: Students' intrinsic religious orientation scores differ significantly according to gender.
H_8: Students' external religious orientation scores differ significantly according to gender.
H_9: Students' questioning religious orientation scores differ significantly according to gender.

2.4. Population and Sample

The study population consists of students at Çukurova University Faculty of Theology. In this study, the convenience sampling method was used as a non-random sampling method. A total of 437 undergraduate students currently enrolled at the Faculty of Theology at Çukurova University participated in the study. Of the participants, 343 (78.5%) were female, 93 (21.3%) were male, and 1 (0.2%) did not specify their gender. Sixty-one (14%) students were from the preparatory class, 88 (20.1%) were from the first year, 102 (23.3%) were from the second year, 73 (16.7%) were from the third year, and 113 (25.9%) were from the fourth year.

2.5. Data Collection Tools

The present study utilised the *Moral Disengagement Scale*, a tool developed by Bandura and his associates in 1996. This scale was translated into Turkish by Gezici Yalçın and his colleagues.[55] The scale is composed of 32 items and utilises a 5-point Likert scale. The Turkish version of the scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .86 and a split-half reliability of .78. The analysis yielded a single-factor structure, consistent with the original version, and it was determined that the model exhibited adequate fit indices.[56] It is evident that as the score on the scale increases, there is a concomitant tendency to exhibit immoral behaviour. Conversely, as the score decreases, there is an observed decrease in immoral behaviour.

Another scale employed in the study is the *Religious Orientation Scale* developed by Harlak and Eskin.[57] The scale consists of 25 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale. The scale consists of three dimensions: *internal religious orientation*, *external religious orientation*, and *questioning religious orientation*.[58] The first dimension comprises 12 items, the second has 6 items, and the third has 7

[55] Meral Gezici Yalçın et al., 'Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma Ölçeğinin Türkçeye Uyarlanması', *Kalem Eğitim ve İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi* 6/1 (2017), 309–332.
[56] Gezici Yalçın et al., 'Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma Ölçeğinin Türkçeye Uyarlanması', 309–310.
[57] Harlak - Eskin, 'Dini Yönelim ve Dindarlık Ölçeklerinin Geliştirilmesi ve Psikometrik Özelliklerinin İncelenmesi'.
[58] The theoretical part of the study includes Allport and Ross's (1967) intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity and Batson and Ventis's (1982) quest religiosity. In the Religious Orientation Scale used in the application part, internal religious orientation corresponds to intrinsic religiosity, external religious orientation corresponds to extrinsic religiosity, and questioning religious orientation corresponds to

items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be 0.76 for the internal religious orientation dimension, 0.70 for the external religious orientation dimension, and 0.67 for the questioning religious orientation dimension.

2.6. Data Collection Process

The questionnaire form prepared in line with the main problem and objective of the study was administered online to undergraduate students studying at the Faculty of Theology at Çukurova University in July 2025. The application process was carried out after obtaining the necessary ethical permissions in accordance with the approval of the Çukurova University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board in the Field of Social and Human Sciences dated 09.07.2025 and numbered E.1355583. The digital survey form, distributed via the Google Forms platform, included an informed consent form, and participants were asked to respond to the survey sincerely and honestly.

2.7. Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed using SPSS v25 software. The study examined whether the subdimensions of religious orientation predicted moral disengagement using multiple linear regression analysis. Whether moral disengagement and sub-dimensions of religious orientation differed according to students' grade levels was examined with One-Way ANOVA analysis, and whether they differed according to gender was examined with the Independent Groups t-Test. The data were analyzed at a 95% confidence level and a 5% significance level. The findings were interpreted in a neutral manner, in accordance with scientific principles and from the perspective of the psychology of religion.

3. Findings

3.1. The Relationship Between Moral Disengagement and Religious Orientations

Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to reveal the relationship between moral disengagement and the subdimensions of religious orientation (internal religious orientation, external religious orientation, questioning religious orientation). The results are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Values Related to Moral Disengagement and Subdimensions of Religious Orientation

Variable	$\bar{X}$	S	1	2	3
Moral Disengagement	59.68	15.27	-.16**	-.03	.08
Predictive Variables					
Internal religious orientation (1)	50.90	5.87	-	.55***	.10*
External religious orientation (2)	23.08	4.43	-	-	.07

quest religiosity. In order to remain faithful to the original scale, the names of the sub-dimensions of the scale were preferred in the findings and discussion section.

Questioning religious orientation (3)	20.31	4.30	-	-	-

*** p< .001; ** p< .01; * p< .05

Table 2

Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis on the Relationship Between Moral Disengagement and Subdimensions of Religious Orientation

Variable	B	Standard Error	β	t	p	Zero Order	Partial
Constant	74.169	6.896	-	10.756	.000	-	-
IRO	-.530	.147	-.204	-3.604	.000	-.155	-.171
ERO	.251	.194	.073	1.289	.198	-.032	.062
QRO	.331	.169	.093	1.962	.050	.078	.094

$R = .191$, $R^2 = .036$, $F_{(3-433)} = 5.450$, $p = .001$

IRO: Internal Religious Orientation; ERO: External Religious Orientation; QRO: Questioning Religious Orientation

The sub-dimensions of the Religious Orientation Scale (intrinsic religious orientation, extrinsic religious orientation and questioning religious orientation) have been found to be significantly related to moral disengagement scores. These three predictor variables significantly explain approximately 3.6% of the total variance in moral disengagement scores ($R = .191$, $R^2 = .036$, $p < .05$).

When looking at the standardized regression coefficients (β), the relative order of importance of the predictor variables on moral disengagement is internal religious orientation (1), questioning religious orientation (3), and external religious orientation (2). An examination of the t-test results pertaining to the significance of the regression coefficients discloses that internal religious orientation ($t = -3.604$, $p<.05$) and questioning religious orientation ($t = 1.962$, $p<.05$) emerged as significant predictors of moral disengagement, while external religious orientation proved to be non-significant ($t = 1.289$, $p>.05$). The strongest predictor of moral disengagement is the internal religious orientation ($\beta = .204$) variable, which also has a negative relationship with moral disengagement. On the other hand, the questioning religious orientation ($\beta = .073$) has a positive relationship with moral disengagement.

3.2. Moral Disengagement and Religious Orientations According to Grade Levels

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to ascertain whether there were any differences in moral disengagement and religious orientation according to grade level. The results of the study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Values and One-Way ANOVA Results Regarding Moral Disengagement and Religious Orientations According to Grade Level

Var.	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Tukey
MD	Prep.	61	56.36	12.33	Between	1486.770	4	371.693	1.602	.173	

	1	88	58.73	14.20	Groups					
	2	102	59.30	12.94						
	3	73	60.33	15.70	Within Groups	100211.651	432	231.971		
	4	113	62.15	18.63						
	Prep.	61	51.90	4.29	Between Groups	327.225	4	81.806		
	1	88	51.67	4.70						
IRO	2	102	51.45	5.49					2.408	.040
	3	73	49.92	6.57	Within Groups	14675.544	432	33.971		
	4	113	49.90	7.01						
	Prep.	61	24.03	4.45	Between Groups	253.530	4	63.382		
	1	88	23.33	3.85						
ERO	2	102	23.83	4.30					3.304	.011
	3	73	22.15	5.11	Within Groups	8287.825	432	19.185		
	4	113	22.28	4.29						
	Prep.	61	19.23	4.46	Between Groups	202.351	4	50.588		
	1	88	19.52	4.35						
QRO	2	102	20.75	4.14					2.786	.026
	3	73	20.48	3.95	Within Groups	7843.324	432	18.156		
	4	113	21.01	4.39						

Prep.>3 Prep.>4 1>4	
Prep.>3 Prep.>4 2>3 2>4	
Prep.<2 Prep.<4 1<2 1<4	

Prep.: Preparatory; 1: 1st grade; 2: 2nd grade; 3: 3rd grade, 4: 4th grade

MD: Moral Disengagement; IRO: Internal Religious Orientation; ERO: External Religious Orientation; QRO: Questioning Religious Orientation

As illustrated in Table 3, the arithmetic mean for moral disengagement is 56.36 for the preparatory class, 58.73 for the first grade, 59.30 for the second grade, 60.33 for the third grade, and 62.15 for the fourth grade. Looking at the one-way ANOVA results, no significant difference was found between the moral disengagement scores of the grade levels (F_{4-436}: 1.602, p>.05).

As demonstrated in Table 3 for the internal religious orientation variable, the arithmetic mean was 51.90 for those in the preparatory class, 51.67 for those in the first grade, 51.45 for those in the second grade, 49.92 for those in the third grade, and 49.90 for those in the fourth grade. When looking at the one-way ANOVA results, a significant difference was found between the internal religious orientation scores of the grade levels (F_{4-432}: 2.408, p<.05). The Tukey test was applied in order to ascertain which groups differed in their internal religious orientation levels. According to this, it was understood that the preparatory group had higher internal religious

orientation than the third and fourth grades, and the first grade had higher internal religious orientation than the fourth grade.

As illustrated in Table 3, for the external religious orientation variable, the arithmetic mean for the preparatory class is 24.03; for the first grade, 23.33; for the second grade, 23.83; for the third grade, 22.15; and for the fourth grade, 22.28. When looking at the one-way ANOVA results, a significant difference was found between the external religious orientation scores of the grade levels ($F_{4\text{-}432}$: 3.304, $p<.05$). The Tukey test was then applied in order to ascertain whether there were any differences in external religious orientation levels between the groups. Consequently, students in the preparatory class and those in the second grade demonstrated higher levels of external religious orientation compared to those in the third and fourth grades.

As shown in Table 3, for questioning religious orientation, those in preparatory class have an arithmetic mean of 19.23, those in first grade have 19.52, those in second grade have 20.75, those in third grade have 20.48, and those in fourth grade have 21.01. When looking at the one-way ANOVA results, a significant difference was found between the questioning religious orientation scores of the grade levels ($F_{4\text{-}432}$: 2.786, $p<.05$). The Tukey test was applied to determine which groups had differences in their levels of questioning religious orientation. According to this, both second and fourth grade students' questioning religious orientation levels are higher than those of preparatory and first grade students.

3.3. Moral Disengagement and Religious Orientations by Gender

An independent groups t-test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in participants' scores for Moral Disengagement, Intrinsic Religious Orientation, Extrinsic Religious Orientation, and Questioning Religious Orientation according to gender, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Results of Independent Groups t-Test for Moral Disengagement, Intrinsic Religious Orientation, Extrinsic Religious Orientation, and Questioning Religious Orientation Scores by Gender

Variables	**Groups**	**N**	**$\bar{X}$**	**S**	**t test**		
					t	**df**	**p**
MD	Female	343	57.29	14.42	-6.475	434	.000
	Male	93	68.33	15.22			
IRO	Female	343	51.60	5.50	4.866	434	.000
	Male	93	48.34	6.48			
ERO	Female	343	23.40	4.36	2.956	434	.003
	Male	93	21.88	4.53			
QRO	Female	343	20.47	4.22	1.575	434	.116
	Male	93	19.68	4.52			

MD: Moral Disengagement; IRO: Internal Religious Orientation; ERO: External Religious Orientation; QRO: Questioning Religious Orientation

Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference between the levels of moral disengagement among women and men (t_{434}: -6.475, p<.05). Men have higher levels of moral disengagement than women.

As demonstrated in Table 4, there is a statistically significant difference in levels of internal religious orientation according to gender (t_{434}: 4.866, p<.05). Internal religious orientation levels are higher in women than in men.

The results in Table 4 also demonstrate that external religious orientation varies significantly according to gender (t_{434}: 2.956, p<.05). The mean score attained by female participants in the external religious orientation category exceeds that of their male counterparts.

When looking at the questioning religious orientation variable in Table 4, it was found that this variable did not reach a significant difference according to gender (t_{434}: 1.575, p>.05).

Conclusion

A field study was conducted to ascertain the relationship between moral disengagement and religious orientation. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study was confirmed. The study found significant relationships between internal and questioning religious orientation types and moral disengagement. Consequently, it can be posited that as internal religious orientation intensifies, there is a concomitant decline in moral disengagement. In this context, it can be considered that religiosity functions as a protective factor against moral disengagement as it becomes more individualized and internalized. The individualization of religion refers to the integration of religious messages into a person's daily life through individual preferences and interpretations[59]. At this point, it becomes more likely that moral choices will be based on an internal source. It is possible to interpret that internal religious orientation serves morality, especially in the context of values, develops conscience, and thus strengthens Bandura's *internal control mechanism*[60], thereby strengthening morality. Koçak's findings[61] yielded a comparable outcome. In his study, the researcher examined the relationship between religiosity and moral disengagement among students of the Faculty of Theology. The study found an inverse relationship between religiosity, especially its moral dimension, and moral disengagement. Hacıkeleşoğlu[62] found an inverse relationship between religiosity and moral disengagement in his study. In a similar vein, the study conducted by Çetin[63] on secondary school students also established a negative correlation between moral disengagement and religiosity. In considering the issue within the framework of moral maturity -understood as the antithesis of moral disengagement- a congruent outcome has been ascertained by Aktaş and Kartopu.[64] It has been determined by the research that individuals who self-identify as religious are more morally mature. In line with the research results, Demirci[65] states that intrinsically motivated religious individuals have higher levels of moral maturity.

[59] Kamile Oya Paker - Selda İçin Akçalı, 'Dinin Bireyselleşmesi: Üniversite Gençliği ile Bir Ölçek Çalışması', *Gaziantep Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 11/4 (2012), 1443.

[60] Bandura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities'.

[61] Ali Koçak, 'İlahiyat Fakültesi Öğrencilerinde Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma ve Dindarlık İlişkisi Üzerine Nicel Bir Araştırma', ed. Emine Güzel - Ramazan Meşe (İslam ve Yorum IV, Malatya: İnönü Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2020), 3/121.

[62] Hızır Hacıkeleşoğlu, 'Ergenlerde Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı, Dindarlık ve Ahlaki Kayıtsızlık İlişkisi Üzerine Bir Araştırma', *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 21/2 (30 September 2021), 898.

[63] Rabia Çetin, *Ortaöğretim Öğrencilerinin Dindarlık Düzeyleri ve Ahlaki Çözülme Eğilimleri* (Konya: Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2019), 54.

[64] Hamza Aktaş - Saffet Kartopu, 'Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Dindarlık Eğilimlerine Göre Ahlaki Olgunluk Düzeylerinin İncelenmesi: Gümüşhane Üniversitesi Örneği', *Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 4/35 (2016), 134.

[65] Emine Demirci, *Ahlâki Olgunluk ve Dindarlık Arasındaki İlişki* (Bursa: Uludağ Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2014), 91.

It is evident that the fundamental motivation of the individual in internally oriented religiosity is to live the religious doctrine in its entirety.[66] Consequently, it can be interpreted that the moral emphasis of religious teaching is also internalised by the individual. The pervasive emphasis on mature morality in both the Qur'an[67] and the hadiths[68] may have facilitated the development of a moral framework for individuals with an internal orientation, with these teachings serving as the underlying principles for their ethical reasoning. The commandments and prohibitions of religion are also binding in terms of moral principles in the index of halal-haram and sin-reward. At this juncture, it can be posited that the internalised religious doctrine in question is characterised by clearly delineated boundaries that preclude the utilisation of moral legitimisation mechanisms. In Koçak's words, it is possible to say that sincere religiosity is realized through mature morality.[69] In a similar vein, Uysal[70] posits that religion can be practised on a moral foundation. In circumstances where this foundation is lacking, individuals who have not assimilated religious values may encounter substantial moral deficiencies.

In summary, it can be posited that the internalisation of religious beliefs engenders a moral control mechanism that regulates behaviour. In accordance with Allport and Ross's theory,[71] individuals who are religious to an intrinsic degree place their beliefs at the centre of their lives. These beliefs then go on to shape their attitudes, decisions and value judgements. Therefore, it can be interpreted that internal religious orientation enables individuals to identify religious principles with their own conscience, regardless of social expectations. This can engender a greater resilience in individuals when confronted with moral inconsistencies and deviations in values.

Looking at the findings, a significant relationship was found between questioning religious life and moral disengagement, albeit at a low level. Consequently, as moral disengagement rises, so too does questioning of religiosity. When interpreting this situation, it may be useful to focus on the use of cognitive activity depending on personality type. Cüceloğlu[72] defines personality as "a consistent, structured, distinctive form of relationship that an individual establishes with their internal and external environment." The concept of "consistency" in this definition signifies that personality traits are stable. In the event of an individual developing a personality type in which cognitive characteristics predominate, it can be expected that these characteristics will spread to all areas of life. Spranger's[73] *theoretical type* of personality values reasoning, critical thinking, and scientific thought. In this context, the characteristics of being critical and rational and valuing intellectualism become particularly salient. Due to the consistency of scientific thinking in personality, individuals can shape their religious life through questioning, criticism, and reasoning. This can manifest itself as questioning religious orientation. This is because cognitive activity is also at the basis of questioning religious life.[74] Bandura's[75] moral disengagement mechanisms emerged as a result of cognition coming into play to relieve the anxiety caused by immoral behavior. In this context, it may be possible to interpret that individuals whose

66 Allport, 'The Religious Context of Prejudice'.
67 *Kur'an-ı Kerim Meali*, trans. Halil Altuntaş - Muzaffer Şahin (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2009).
68 Ebû Abdirrahmân Abdullâh b. Ahmed b. Muhammed b. Hanbel eş-Şeybânî Ahmed b. Hanbel, *El-Müsned II*, trans. Rifat Oral - Süleyman Sarı (Konya: Ensar Yayıncılık, 2004).
69 Koçak, 'İlahiyat Fakültesi Öğrencilerinde Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma ve Dindarlık İlişkisi Üzerine Nicel Bir Araştırma', 3/145.
70 Uysal, 'Dindarlığın Ahlâkî Temeli Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler', 57.
71 Allport - Ross, 'Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice'.
72 Doğan Cüceloğlu, *İnsan ve Davranışı: Psikolojinin Temel Kavramları* (İstanbul, 2010), 404.
73 Eduard Spranger, *İnsan Tipleri: Bir Kişilik Psikolojisi*, trans. Ahmet Aydoğan (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2001).
74 Batson - Ventis, *The Religious Experience*, 149–150.
75 Bandura et al., 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency'.

personality type is based on logical propositions and intellectual effort more easily accept the intense cognitive activity underlying moral disengagement. Furthermore, questioning religious orientation may not be expected to have as much effect on conscience as internal religious orientation. This is because this orientation is based on intellectual rather than emotional characteristics. As such, it is not possible to expect questioning religious orientation to provide the same support and conscientious resilience in terms of moral disengagement as internal religious orientation.

Quest-oriented religious life involves the process of questioning and reconstructing one's belief system by critically distancing oneself from traditional religion. While this orientation contributes to the establishment and development of a more profound and more personal belief system in some individuals, the process does not always manifest itself in the expected direction, sometimes leading to a weakening of the individual's existing moral structures or a temporary dissolution within the individual. This situation can be explained by the increase in moral uncertainty during the process of redefining the normative structure related to faith. Therefore, although the questioning orientation does not directly bring moral disintegration to the agenda, it can trigger a cognitive conflict that may lead to moral confusion in some believers. In conclusion, when it comes to religion, it is possible to say that individuals who prioritize critical thinking may adopt a more questioning approach to authority and traditional norms, may be more distant from these structures, and may therefore occasionally disengage from moral norms. It can be interpreted that the emotionally-weighted potential present in individuals with an intrinsic religious orientation shifts to a cognitive structure in questioning religious orientation. However, it should be noted that since this relationship is quite weak in the study findings, it would not be correct to generalize this interpretation to all religious individuals of the quest type.

The findings of the study indicate that religious orientations stemming from external motivations do not exert a profound influence on the moral decisions of individuals. The anticipated outcome of this study is that an escalation in external religious orientation will concomitantly lead to an augmentation in moral disengagement. In collective cultures, including our country, situations where religious practices function as social acceptance, status acquisition, need for belonging, etc., may suggest that external orientation points to a more superficial religious life. However, no relationship was found between these variables in the study. Consequently, given that this particular religious orientation tends to engender a superficial and ostentatious belief structure, the ineffectiveness of external religious orientation on moral disengagement serves to reinforce the notion that religious behaviours may not necessarily entail moral consequences when performed based on form rather than on intention. Even if an individual's religious behaviors continue to exist formally, their positive or negative relationship with moral norms may not have become a principle in their inner life.

As grade level increases, both internal and external religious orientation decreases, while questioning religious orientation increases. Therefore, the third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses were confirmed. It is a noteworthy result that as class level increases, internal and external religious orientation decreases, while questioning religious orientation increases. According to Allport and Ross[76], internal and external religiosity are generally categorized on a dichotomous plane and appear as opposite types. At this point, Batson and Ventis' criticism[77] of Allport and Ross, that

[76] Allport - Ross, 'Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice'.
[77] Batson - Ventis, *The Religious Experience*, 149–151.

religious belief requires doubt, indecision, and an effort to understand, may facilitate the interpretation of the findings. It appears conceivable that the multifarious information, interpretations and discussions concerning religion provided by undergraduate-level religious education may engender certain epistemological and ontological conflicts and quests in individuals, and consequently lead to an escalation in questioning religious orientation. It is notable that disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and theology tend to prioritise the individual, social and rational dimensions of religion, as opposed to its more conventional aspects. This shift in focus may have contributed to students' shift away from emotional and traditional foundations during their education, leading to the development of a religious life based on cognitive effort. Kayıklık's findings[78] indicated that the degree of intrinsic religiosity exhibited by individuals was inversely proportional to their educational attainment. The present study suggests that religiosity has undergone a transformation in form rather than a decline. Therefore, the decline in internal and external religious orientation as the grade level increases should be interpreted in conjunction with the increase in questioning religious orientation. On the other hand, no relationship was found between grade level and moral disengagement. Thus, the second hypothesis was not confirmed. A close examination of the mean values for each grade level reveals a conspicuous disparity, with moral disengagement scores demonstrating a marked increase with each successive grade level. However, this difference has not reached a significant level. The underlying cause of this phenomenon may be attributable to two factors: firstly, the data set may exhibit uneven distribution across grade levels; secondly, the sample size may be inadequate. Based on the increasing average scores as the grade level increases, it can be said that as the influence of traditional internal and external religious orientation decreases, the tendency to question increases, and moral values begin to be included in this questioning. The questioning mindset is not limited to religious beliefs but can also be reflected in morality, and in this context, Bandura's moral disengagement mechanisms[79] may begin to seem more reasonable to individuals. Moreover, when the situation is examined in terms of developmental stages, as university life progresses, there is a possibility that young people's desire for freedom and independence may increase as they move away from authority. The discord between these desires and moral values has the potential to engender anxiety in individuals, and the urge to evade this anxiety can result in a moral disengagement. Koçak's study[80] also demonstrated that levels of moral disengagement increased with increasing grade level. At this point, the quality of theology education can also be considered a factor. Given that current theology education focuses more on cognitive and knowledge-based content rather than emotionally grounded education, it can be argued that this situation not only weakens internal religious orientation but also paves the way for moral indifference. In this context, focusing more on the individual's conscience and values education during the educational process could change the situation. However, this goes beyond the scope of the current study and appears to be a subject for research in its own right. It can be interpreted that while theological education increases the level of knowledge, it does not have the same effect on the level of awareness, as stated by Yapıcı and Zengin.[81] Kaya and Aydın[82] also state that, in line

78 Kayıklık, *Dinî Yaşayış Biçimleri Psikolojik Temelleri Açısından Bir Değerlendirme*, 87–88.

79 Bandura, *Moral Disengagement*.

80 Ali Koçak, *Ahlâkî Olgunluk – Dindarlık İlişkisi: Adana Örneği* (Adana: Çukurova Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2022), 145.

81 Asım Yapıcı - Zeki Salih Zengin, 'İlâhiyat Fakültesi Öğrencilerinin Değer Tercih Sıralamaları Üzerine Psikolojik Bir Araştırma: Çukurova Üniversitesi İlâhiyat Fakültesi Örneği', *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 1/4 (1 October 2003), 202.

with the results of this study, first-year university students generally have higher moral maturity than other grades. Çetin[83], who examined the moral disengagement of secondary school students, found that high school seniors showed a higher tendency toward moral disengagement than high school freshmen. In this context, it may not be the case that religious education is the only variable affecting theology students. Accordingly, it can be interpreted that moral disengagement increases with age and independence, especially during adolescence and early youth. In this case, many factors such as disengagement from authority, the influence of friends and peer groups, social media based on showing off and being liked, popular culture, and expectations for the future can cause differences in the moral structure of early youth.

A gender-based analysis of the data reveals that female students demonstrate higher levels of religiosity, both internally and externally, when compared to their male counterparts. Hence, the seventh and eighth hypotheses were confirmed. The results of the study indicate that religious orientation is more prevalent among female adolescents than their male counterparts. In this context, the negative relationship between internal religious orientation and moral disengagement is also evident in the context of female students. Similar results have also been found by Koçak[84] and Uysal.[85] The prevailing tendency for women to exhibit higher levels of religious commitment than their male counterparts has been a recurring theme in extant literature on the subject. Yapıcı[86] found in his meta-analysis study on gender-religiosity that women are more religious than men, but added that this difference is very small. Korkmaz[87] found a result in favor of women in his meta-analysis study on the same subject. Doğan and Karaca[88] posit that the prevailing notion that women exhibit a greater degree of religiosity in comparison to men in both Western and Eastern societies is not a universal phenomenon, citing studies that contradict this assertion. When evaluated in terms of religious orientation, the fact that women score higher than men in terms of both internal and external religious orientation supports the findings in the literature. This is because the fact that women's internal religious orientation is higher than that of men does not result in their external religious orientation being lower than that of men. Therefore, even though there are different types of religiosity, women score higher than men. On the other hand, questioning religious orientation does not differ according to gender. So that the ninth hypothesis was not confirmed. While female participants demonstrated a mean score that was marginally higher than their male counterparts, this difference did not attain statistical significance. This situation can be explained by the emergence of different developmental areas during adolescence and early adulthood. The notion of autonomy from authority, which has been known to develop with age, may have been a contributing factor in this phenomenon, irrespective of gender. A further finding in the context of gender is that the moral disengagement scores of boys differ significantly from those of girls. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis was confirmed. The evidence presented here indicates that levels of moral disengagement are higher among male subjects than

[82] Mevlüt Kaya - Cüneyd Aydın, 'Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Dini İnanç ile Ahlaki Olgunluk Düzeyleri Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi', *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 30/30 (1 April 2011), 30.

[83] Çetin, *Ortaöğretim Öğrencilerinin Dindarlık Düzeyleri ve Ahlaki Çözülme Eğilimleri*, 50.

[84] Koçak, 'İlahiyat Fakültesi Öğrencilerinde Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma ve Dindarlık İlişkisi Üzerine Nicel Bir Araştırma', 3/120.

[85] Uysal, 'Gençlerde Empati Eğilimi, Anne-Baba Tutumları ve Dindarlık', 35.

[86] Asım Yapıcı, 'Türk Toplumunda Cinsiyete Göre Dindarlık Farklılaşması: Bir Meta-Analiz Denemesi', *Fırat Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 17/2 (30 December 2012), 21.

[87] Sezai Korkmaz, 'Cinsiyete Göre Dindarlık: Bir Meta-Analiz Çalışması', *Bilimname* 2020/43 (30 November 2020), 447.

[88] Murat Doğan - Faruk Karaca, 'Cinsiyetin Dindarlık Üzerine Etkisi: Bir Meta Analiz Çalışması', *Bilimname* 45 (31 October 2021), 236.

among female subjects. Similar to the findings of this study, Wang et al.[89], Özalp and Yirci[90], Çetin[91], Birinci[92], Kağan and Yazıcıoğlu[93], Gencer[94] and Koçak[95] also demonstrate that female students displayed a reduced propensity for moral disengagement in comparison to their male counterparts. Kaya and Aydın[96] found that male students' levels of moral maturity were lower than those of female students. Bandura[97] states that there is no significant difference between the sexes in terms of moral disengagement at an early age, but that in older age groups, boys begin to use moral disengagement mechanisms more than girls. The findings in question appear to support this statement. This situation can be explained by many different factors, such as the society's child-rearing style, differences in gender roles, and the differentiation of morality in female and male gender roles. Kalav [98] states that the patriarchal order subjects girls to stricter conditioning, particularly in terms of sexual morality. Women's response within this conditioning may be to accept the role assigned to them. Similarly, Üskül Engin[99] states that throughout history, women's social and individual lives have been restricted by certain moral and legal sanctions. At this point, it can be said that girls are given more moral responsibilities and duties than boys. All of these factors may be interpreted as reasons why girls exhibit a more determined attitude towards moral alienation.

Recommendations of The Study:

1. The study is designed as a cross-sectional study. In order to demonstrate more strongly whether theological education has an effect on moral disengagement and religious orientations, a longitudinal design may be preferred in future studies.

2. A quantitative research method was used in this study. In order to obtain more in-depth data and better interpret quantitative data, conducting qualitative research or mixed-method studies would yield more robust results.

3. Since the variance explained in the study (3.6%) is quite low, it can be said that religious orientations remain peripheral in explaining moral disengagement. In this context, the relationship between other factors such as psychological, sociological, and environmental factors and moral disengagement may guide future studies.

4. Although some analyses showed observable average differences, no meaningful differences were detected. This may be due to the data set not being closely distributed (e.g., in terms of gender and grade level) and not reaching a sufficient number. Therefore, taking these circumstances into

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89 Cixin Wang et al., 'Longitudinal Relationships between Bullying and Moral Disengagement among Adolescents', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 46/6 (June 2017), 1313.

90 Uğur Özalp - Ramazan Yirci, 'Meslek Lisesi Öğrencilerinin Ahlaki Uzaklaşma Algılarının Çeşitli Değişkenler Açısından İncelenmesi', *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 20 (5 April 2019), 950.

91 Çetin, *Ortaöğretim Öğrencilerinin Dindarlık Düzeyleri ve Ahlaki Çözülme Eğilimleri*, 50–51.

92 Ali Birinci, 'Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretmen Adaylarının Ahlaki Uzaklaşma Algılarının İncelenmesi', *Çukurova Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10/2 (2 January 2025), 40.

93 Mücahit Kağan - Müfide Merve Yazıcıoğlu, 'Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Ahlaki Uzaklaşma Tutumunun Çeşitli Değişkenler Açısından İncelenmesi', *Uluslararası Türk Kültür Coğrafyasında Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 6/1 (5 August 2021), 9.

94 Nevzat Gencer, 'Gençlik ve Ahlaki Kayıtsızlık: Lise Öğrencilerinin Ahlaki Kayıtsızlık Düzeyleri Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme', *Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Akademi Dergisi* 3 (25 June 2020), 326.

95 Koçak, 'İlahiyat Fakültesi Öğrencilerinde Ahlâkî Uzaklaşma ve Dindarlık İlişkisi Üzerine Nicel Bir Araştırma', 3/120.

96 Kaya - Aydın, 'Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Dini İnanç ile Ahlaki Olgunluk Düzeyleri Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi', 30.

97 Bandura, *Moral Disengagement*.

98 Ayşe Kalav, 'Namus ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet', *Akdeniz İnsani Bilimler Dergisi* 2/2 (30 December 2012), 160–161.

99 Zeynep Üskül Engin, 'Hfsa Hukuk Felsefesi Ve Sosyolojisi Arkivi', *Toplumsal Ahlak ve Hukukun Kesiştiği Noktada Kadın Sorunsalı* (XI. Hukuka Felsefi ve Sosyolojik Bakışlar Sempozyumu, İstanbul: İstanbul Barosu Yayınları, 2014), 26/135.

account in future studies will increase the likelihood of revealing some differences and relationships that were not detected in this study.

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