Family Resemblance in Variations of Contemporary Religiosity and Spirituality: Findings from a Cross-Cultural Study

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Chapter 4
Family Resemblance in Variations of Contemporary Religiosity and Spirituality: Findings from a Cross-Cultural Study

Peter Nynäs, Janne Kontala, Mika Lassander, Nurit Novis-Deutsch, Sofia Sjö, and Paul Stenner

Abstract How can we make sense of religion and spirituality in a cross-cultural perspective? Is it at all possible to compare what we are used to calling ‘religion’ across different cultures? In this chapter we use findings from Faith Q-studies (FQS) in 12 different countries to investigate variance of religion and spirituality from an international perspective. Our results shed light on themes and variations and show the capacity of the FQS to systematically recognize recurring themes while also remaining sensitive to unique but significant nuances across samples. We further propose that the term family resemblance catches well how to comprehend the complexity of variation and provides a conceptual contribution to the debate on universalism vs. particularism.

Keywords Faith Q-Sort · Family resemblance · Variance · Cross-cultural

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4.1 Introduction

How can we in a sensible way comprehend variations of religiosity across cultures or in a global perspective, i.e. make sense of a significant variety of distinct cultures from across the world? Our research within the project Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) has aimed to address certain limitations within the field of religious studies and move beyond Eurocentric assumptions by investigating beyond the cultural and religious boundaries of Europe and the West. This required us to traverse a difficult road and to contribute to new methodologies in the field. The background and the methodology of this study are addressed in more detail in Chap. 1 of this volume. Here we concentrate on presenting some of the core findings from using the Faith Q-Sort (FQS) in 12 different countries pertaining to the cross-cultural variation of religion and spirituality.

It is important to contribute to the study of contemporary religiosities with research of a systematic and cross-cultural nature. In a fast-changing and increasingly interconnected world, re-locations, re-configurations and transformations in the field of religion and spirituality have come to increasingly underscore the demand for a sensitive conceptual and methodological toolbox. Naturally, this claim taps into many on-going discussions about how to understand contemporary religion and spirituality, and many scholars also address the need for critical methodological reflection (e.g., Bowman & Valk, 2012; Bruce & Voas, 2007; af Burén, 2015; Droogers & van Harskamp, 2014; Gauthier, 2020; Gilhus & Sutcliffe, 2013; Lassander, 2012, 2014; McGuire, 2008; Nynäs et al., 2015; Woodhead, 2012). Altogether, it has become difficult to think “about religions which organizes them into a set of discrete traditions with a supposedly ‘global’ import” (Cotter & Robertson, 2016, p. vii) and to uphold a “World Religions Paradigm”. For instance, the distinction between Eastern and Western religions is questioned (Campbell, 2007). The debate on universality vs. particularism is of initial relevance for the methodological development presented here. Within the research field, religion has often been perceived one-sidedly as a transhistorical essence, while religion as a concept has often in practice been provincial (e.g. Asad, 1993, 2003; Balagangadhara, 2005; Chakrabarty, 2000; Masuzawa, 2005; Winzeler, 2008). Despite a growing awareness of these problems, scholars often presuppose a conceptual correspondence between religions that might be overstated or even illusory. A critical view of such premature assumptions of universality is essential to aspirations regarding cross-cultural studies on religion and spirituality. Nevertheless, we also, in contrast, need to stress the risks of becoming the victim of an opposite methodological and conceptual trap that is based on assumptions of, for instance, ‘the totally different western culture’ or the ‘totally different Asian or African culture’ or similar notions attributed to national and cultural geographies. This is equally problematic and challenging since it might become dependent on the process of essentializing differences and historicities in terms of incommensurable particularities. There are problems involved in cross-cultural comparative approaches. Yet they are important in order to bring in knowledge on religion from a “wider range of contexts” and to be able to “introduce significant variation” along different axes (Altinordu, 2013, p. 86).
Is there a third option beyond the dichotomous academic positions on universality versus particularism? de Roover claims that, “the contemporary study of religion has a unique opportunity to settle the debate on the cultural universality of religion” (de Roover, 2014, p. 7). Lambek (2014, p. 147) calls for a “moving balance between distinct epistemological positions”. Our ambition is not to settle the debate, but we do aim to contribute to this discussion. We suggest that the notion of family resemblance as introduced by Wittgenstein (1998) can shed some further relevant light on the play of themes and variations. This chapter therefore presents a bird’s-eye view and is by necessity limited to addressing the main categories related to religiosity with a focus on how they vary across cultures, and we refrain from in-depth analyses of such variations.

4.2 The Faith Q-Sort as a Lens to Contemporary Diversity

David Wulff (2019) developed the FQS with an explicit aim to methodologically meet a range of “understandings of faith”, encompassing both religious and non-religious attitudes in order to be used “with people of diverse traditions, experiences, and attitudes” (Wulff, 2019, p. 646). The chapter exemplifies this capacity by comparing the so-called prototypes and how they vary from one country to another. Prototypes are the results of an FQS-study and depict reoccurring patterns or schemes for being religious (or spiritual or secular) in a specific sample. We already presented the five global prototypes based on data from all participants (N = 562) in Chap. 3 of this volume. In this chapter, we compare similar results that we have received from country-specific samples with these global prototypes as a means of addressing themes and variations of being religious and spiritual in a cross-cultural perspective.

The methodological character and the novelty of the FQS are presented more in detail in Chap. 1 of this volume, and here we primarily underscore some features of relevance for this chapter in particular, namely FQS’s strength for being implemented in cross-cultural studies as well as for capturing contemporary religious diversity (for more on Q-methodology, see: Block, 1971, 1978, 2008; Brown, 1980; Gabor, 2013; McKeown, 2001; McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Nilsson, 2007, 2015; Stephenson, 1993/1994; Watts & Stenner, 2012). When David Wulff (2019) designed the FQS based on Q-methodology, he explicitly worked on the limitations and bias of earlier methodological approaches. He derived the FQS-set of 101 statements from a range of religious traditions including non-religion and from findings and literature in the psychology of religion and related fields. These reflect, for instance, attitudes towards religious texts, practices, and materiality; various scales of religiosity; different representations of God; and underlying cognitive dispositions and options for those holding non-religious and pluralist views. With cross-cultural applicability in mind, the FQS statements have been formulated using general terms so that the essential substance of the various religious traditions does not become a distinguishing factor. Particular and specific ideas and practices have
been incorporated without reference to the traditions they are part of. Instead of naming, for example, Jesus or Buddha, item 66 of the FQS reads: “Deeply identifies with some holy figure, either human or divine.” This means that at the stage of data analysis, the underlying disposition of identifying with a role model with a sacred status becomes the defining factor, not the name of the object of identification, or the particular religious/secular tradition. Statements that are based on earlier instruments with Christian overtones have been modified to be relevant for people from many different backgrounds and orientations.

To achieve true multi-cultural validity involves item-by-item international, multilingual, and cross-cultural validation – before scales are made or any items put together (cf. Wolf et al., 2020). This is also a concern for both the development and translation of any Q-set to be used in a cross-cultural setting. Despite Wulff’s attempts to widen the methodological horizon, our use of the FQS in case-studies in Finland (Kontala, 2016; Lassander & Nynä, 2016) brought to our attention remains of some potential limitations and biases. The FQS was therefore systematically revised and validated by cross-cultural and multidisciplinary teams of scholars that included international experts that also represented all 12 respective countries taking part in YARG. With regard to the religious and spiritual viewpoints in different countries, statements were revised, and new ones were included. Throughout this process, we strived to be attentive to more local forms of religiosity, non-religiosity and secular positions. It resulted in a new version of the FQS named the FQS-b (Appendix 1).

Translating the new set of statements into target languages was equally important for the cross-cultural adaptation and validity. The FQS-b was translated from English into Arabic, Bengali, Finnish, French, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish. The back-translation is perhaps the most widely used technique to detect item bias in surveys, i.e., when some items in a test might function differently for different groups in a study (Brislin, 1970, 1980; Geisinger, 1994; Harkness, 2003; Lin et al., 2005; Plake & Hoover, 1979). In our study, we used the double and back-translation process, i.e. the use of two independent parallel translations since this ensures even higher reliability (Hambleton, 1993, 1994; van de Vijver & Hambleton, 1996), because the researchers can better assess translations and select the ‘best’ version (Harkness, 2003). We could see that translating religious and spiritual vocabulary is marked by various forms of biases. Hence, the double and back-translation process provided a higher degree of sensitivity to subtle ambiguities, but in many cases, the translation process also required the expertise of our cross-cultural team.

Despite all the efforts put into defining the specific items used in the FQS-set, this remains a challenging project. The particular expressions still need to be generalized for a variety of different contexts. This means that the ambition to produce a version of the FQS that has multicultural validity requires modesty. It seems far simpler to design a Q-set for a well-defined small group of people that shares some specific interest, engagement or relationship. A related problem is that the process of producing a valid Q-set also pushes the linguistic expressions to a level of sophistication that not necessarily echoes the particular viewpoints and discourse of
relevance for people. If the statements in the Q-set become too distanced from a real-life discourse, they may end up hard to comprehend; inviting participants to play a guessing game or, alternatively, making them lose interest in the process.

4.3 Variation and Family Resemblance of Prototypes

For this chapter we conducted country-specific analyses on samples from the 12 countries included in the YARG project, namely Canada, China, Ghana, Finland, India, Israel, Peru, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Turkey and the United States. The results from these analyses have been carefully investigated for defining and labelling the country specific prototypes respectively. Yet, the narrative descriptions we have produced for this study are very short, and many nuances have by necessity been disregarded in our presentations in order to facilitate a bird’s-eye view. We comprehend our country-specific studies as case studies and as a snapshot of a certain time and place; our results address a meaningful and significant variation within each sample, but this is necessarily neither exhaustive nor representative of respective countries.

In Chap. 3 we presented the five global prototypes from our analysis of the total sample, including all respondents from all countries \(N = 562\): (1) the Secular Humanist; (2) the Active Confident Believer; (3) the Noncommitted Traditionalist; (4) the Spiritually Attuned; and (5) the Disengaged Liberal. These findings indicate that some religious subjectivities can be seen as categories that are more or less universally valid. For our purpose in this chapter, we see them as reoccurring main themes, and in light of these we can investigate how the prototypes from our case study in the 12 countries stand out. In some countries we could identify only three prototypes (Finland, Peru and Sweden), whereas in China and Israel there were six prototypes and in India eight. The level of diversity differs across countries. Altogether we identified 57 different prototypes representing to a greater or lesser extent variations of these main themes. These findings are summarized in Table 4.1 below, including the sample size for each analyzed sample \(n\), the number of prototypes received from each analysis (prototypes found), and the percent of variance they explain including the cumulative percentage for each sample. The average amount of variance accounted for (taking into consideration all the different Q analyses undertaken) was approximately 50% with rather significant differences between single prototypes.

The 57 prototypes are not presented and discussed here in detail. This would not be in accordance with our aim in this chapter. Short narrative descriptions of the 57 country specific prototypes are found in Appendix 2. Here we focus on to what extent and how the FQS helps us to identify reoccurring patterns and variations.

The quality of the FQS is, of course, dependent on how the Q-set is designed. In general, a well-designed Q-set will allow the participants to sort the statements in ways that generate variety. A first measure of this is the distribution of cards in the initial three piles done by the participants. This gives a rough indication of how
balanced the Q-set is, with the ideal being an equal proportion of items that are identified with and distanced from. In Kontala’s (2016) study of atheists, the respondents could experience problems finding statements in the FQS which they identified with, because the sample was very secular and the majority of items in the FQS refers to religion in positive ways. In our study, with a slightly revised version of the FQS (FQS-b), we found that in some rare cases, participants identified only 15 statements for the positive or the negative pile. In general, however, the distribution was slightly uneven and varied amongst the samples, with some showing a slight skew to the negative, and some to the positive. In sum, the concourse of the FQS worked well across these 12 countries and different traditions. This observation and the explained variance across cultures both indicate that the FQS has a relevant degree of validity.

A closer look at our results affirms that, despite the great variation between the country specific prototypes, it is possible to detect a certain and relevant degree of family resemblance in how certain prototypes vary from one sample to another across cultures. The members of a family reflect the main themes of the global prototypes. Thus, most country specific prototypes can be seen in relation to the global prototypes we have identified and as reflections of these. Yet, members in one family are not necessarily connected by one essential common feature. Rather, and following Wittgenstein’s view, family resemblance is a matter of a series of overlapping shared features, where none of them is common to all of the members, and the taxonomies are dynamic (Wittgenstein, 1998, pp. 77, 84, 112, 247; Andersen, 2000). This indicates that within a family of prototypes, we might find some individual prototypes that do not necessarily have much in common when compared separately. Their family resemblance becomes evident only when investigated in light of all the members in the family. Hence, the taxonomies might also be subject to

Table 4.1  The table lists samples and sample sizes with the amounts of prototypes found in each sample and explained variances in each country case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study (prototypes found)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Explained variance (%)</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prototype number</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global (5)</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>17 10 5 6 5</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada (5)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16 9 11 13 8</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (6)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15 12 6 7 10 6</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland (3)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19 15 15</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana (4)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>21 7 6 5</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India (8)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12 6 8 5 5 5 7</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel (6)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>9 14 9 11 5 4</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru (3)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20 12 9</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland (4)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17 18 5 11</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia (5)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9 18 6 8 6</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden (3)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30 10 9</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey (5)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9 20 5 19 5</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA (5)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19 10 7 6 7</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
change, and should be considered open in contrast to a closed definition (Andersen, 2000).

In the following section, we will look first at some of the variation of being religious, and thereafter explore spirituality. Non-religious and secular worldviews are investigated in a separate chapter in this volume (Chap. 8), and are not discussed here.

4.4 The Variety of Being ‘Religious’

In (almost) all 12 countries included in this study, we find at least one prototype that reflects some central characteristics of the global prototype 2 Active Confident Believer. These cases are often defined by agreement with the theistic statement FQS53 (“Believes in a divine being with whom one can have a personal relationship”). This is a distinguishing statement ($p < .01$) for the global prototype 2 Active Confident Believer with a $z$-score that is higher than in all other prototypes in the sample. Among the country specific prototypes of a similar religious character, we find that this statement is often accompanied by statement FQS74 (“Feels personally protected and guided by a spiritual being”) and statement FQS41 (“Thinks of the divine as a sheltering and nurturing parent”).

In Fig. 4.1 we have presented some examples of the cross-cultural variation. From this we can see how certain aspects emerge as relevant to the religious prototypes in respective country. Turkey 4 and USA 2 affirm the relevance of being personally protected (FQS74) and viewing the divine as a parent (FQS41), whereas we do not find this to be central to China 2 and Poland 2 where other statements are...
defining of the prototypes. In other words, we can see that they all, to some extent, share distinguishing or defining statements with global prototype 2, but in addition they simultaneously also present unique features that are crucial to asserting their character, such as taking “for granted that particular religious claims are true” (FQS92), which is the case for both China 2 and Poland 2.

In both Ghana and Peru, two of the prototypes are defined by the same two statements as global prototype 2, indicating a similar theistic position. Yet, in Ghana, we can see that prototype Ghana 1, which could be called a “Confident and Devout Believer”, expresses a strong faith in a way that differs from the global prototype 2. One “has a thorough knowledge of religious scriptures or texts” (FQS42), “has dedicated his or her life to serving the divine” (FQS36), and “feels confident of attaining eternal salvation” (FQS38). Ghana 3 in contrast “is consumed by day-to-day responsibilities, leaving little or no time for spiritual matters” (FQS43). Still, one puts emphasis on ritual or practice and “gives substantial amounts of time or money to some religious organization or worthy cause” (FQS1). This prototype also views “personal self-realization as a primary spiritual goal in life” (FQS93) and “feels spiritually moved and deeply sustained by music, art, or poetry” (FQS33).

Ghana 1 and 2 both express variations of being religiously anchored in the idea of a personal relationship with a divine that one also feels personally protected and guided by. Even though both prototypes Peru 2 and Peru 3 share this position, they also present other features. Peru 2 embraces “elements from various religious and spiritual traditions” (FQS29) and identifies “with some holy figure, either human or divine” (FQS66). One further “furnishes one’s living space with objects for religious or spiritual use or inspiration” (FQS65), and “observes with great care prescribed religious practices and laws” (FQS67). In contrast to Peru 2, Peru 3 does not show any such features. Rather, one is “critical of the religious tradition of his or her people” and has “frequent doubts about long-held religious convictions” even though one, like many other theistic prototypes, thinks of the divine as a “sheltering and nurturing parent”.

From the Indian sample, we find one prototype that shows a family resemblance to the theistic prototype, but in this case (India 3) we lack statement FQS53 (“Believes in a divine being with whom one can have a personal relationship”) as a defining statement. Rather, a family resemblance with global prototype 2, the Active Confident Believer, is primarily anchored in the notion of feeling “personally protected and guided by a spiritual being”. In both Russia and Canada, we lack this altogether.

This cross-cultural variation is evident from the Table 4.2 below, where factor score ranks for statement FQS23, FQS41, FQS53, FQS74, and FQS97 are compared between the Global, Russian and Canadian prototypes. In none of the prototypes from the Russian and Canadian sample do we find any of these statements; they have not in the analysis received sufficient z-scores to receive a defining ranking, and do not stand out as distinguishing. The statements have not been relevant to how the Canadian and Russian prototypes have been defined. However, the statement FQS23 (“Engages regularly in religious or spiritual practices in private”) is included in Table 4.2. In the global theistic prototype 2, this statement is also among
the distinguishing statements ($p < .01$), the z-score is also higher than in all other prototypes in the sample, and it is lacking below. Here Canada 2 makes an exception. For this prototype, it is important to engage “regularly in religious or spiritual practices in private” (FQS23), but as part of an experience-oriented spirituality and not as part of a theistic view.

The above Table 4.2 from which we can see that our samples from Canada and Russia do not present us with any prototypes where statements usually associated with theistic forms of religiosity are defining should not, of course, be interpreted as meaning that there is no ‘religious’ prototype in Canada and Russia. Rather, our results with a specific sample present prototypes from these countries that are configured somewhat differently, and other statements dominate as distinguishing statements. Nevertheless, in Russia we do find a ‘religious prototype’ who “thinks that certain specific beliefs are crucial for salvation” (FQS22) and “believes in some way but does not view him- or herself as religious” (FQS28), but this seems not to be rooted in the idea of a positive personal relationship with a divinity. This prototype 5 from Russia is of a more anxious nature and puts strong emphasis on “a sense of guilt and personal inadequacy” (FQS69). From the short narrative also some ambiguity and tension is evident:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2</th>
<th>Factor Score ranks for defining statements of being religious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FQS Statement Number</td>
<td>Prototype 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Z Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>−1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>−0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>−0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>−1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>−1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>−0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>−0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>−1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>−0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>−0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>−0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>−1.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Z refers to z-scores in the analyses and Rank shows how statements are ranked in respective prototypes. The statements are FQS23 (“Engages regularly in religious or spiritual practices in private”); FQS41 (“Thinks of the divine as a sheltering and nurturing parent”); FQS53 (“Believes in a divine being with whom one can have a personal relationship”); FQS74 (“Feels personally protected and guided by a spiritual being”); and FQS97 (“Is an active, contributing member of a religious or a spiritual community”)*
Short narrative description of Russia prototype 5, Anxious Believer.

Russia 5 expresses insecurity as part of one’s religious beliefs. One thinks that certain specific beliefs are crucial for salvation and feels confident of attaining salvation even though one cannot see oneself as facing the prospect of death with courage and calmness. One feels foreign to being critical of the religious tradition of one’s people, yet one does not think religion should play the central role in the ruling of the nation. One claims that one rather believes in some way, than views oneself as religious and rejects religious ideas that conflict with scientific and rational principles. Dedicating one’s life to serving the divine feels foreign, and one does not give substantial amounts of time or money to some religious organization. Rather, one sees personal self-realization as a primary spiritual goal in life and supports individual freedom of choice in matters of faith and morality.

Subjective forms of being religious, spiritual or secular are seldom as clear-cut as the making of distinctions between given categories such as religious, spiritual and secular might make us expect, and some subjectivities might at a closer look qualify for all labels. From the above we have still seen that such categories, and in this case the category of being religious, is universal and reoccurring in our samples. At the same time the contextual configurations through which these are reflected are just as important. FQS is a good tool for identifying the balance between the universal and the particular.

4.5 A Fractal Analysis of ‘Being Religious’

The prototypes extracted from samples from different countries vary with regards to what ‘being religious’ involves. Each sample adds individual features and emphases to the family resemblance. In order to shed light on this diversity further, we also conducted a fractal analysis of the individual Q-sorts (N = 154) from both global prototype 2 Active Confident Believer and 3 Noncommitted Traditionalist. In Chap. 2 of this volume, we argued that also global prototypes 3 Noncommitted Traditionalist stood out as religious and aligned with prototypes 2 Active Confident Believer in light of many other measures. It was therefore included in this analysis in order to enhance the potential diversity even more. This analysis amply demonstrates how a further analysis of larger factors can yield a ‘fractal’ effect, displaying renewed internal complexity and differentiation, while also exposing more nuanced aspects of the family resemblance in question. By nature, however, these differentiated religious prototypes (DRP) are of course relatively homogenous and show relatively high levels of intercorrelation (see Table 4.3 below).

A closer look at these ‘religious’ prototypes reveals that many of the dimensions discussed above also differentiate these prototypes. A more theistic belief-orientation seems to unite DRP 1, DRP 3 and DRP 4. DRP1 is characterized by e.g. feeling “personally protected and guided by a spiritual being” (FQS74), and “confident of attaining eternal salvation” (FQS38). Persons of prototype DRP3 emphasize “that certain specific beliefs are crucial for salvation” (FQS22), and tend to affirm that they have “experienced moments of intense divine, mysterious, or supernatural presence (FQS10). DRP4 is more about the role of “religion as a central means for
becoming a better and more moral person” (FQS3), an ascetic willingness to “give up worldly or bodily pleasures for religious or spiritual reasons” (FQS98). In Table 4.4 we summarize these prototypes briefly with a focus on distinguishing statements but without providing any labels.

Besides expressing a theistic orientation, DRP6 is especially distinguished by a tendency to express “his or her religion primarily in charitable acts or social action” (FQS27). This is shared with DRP7 where the social action is coupled with societal activism. This prototype is also more geared towards the ritual side of religion and “engages regularly in religious or spiritual practices in private” (FQS23). Only in this prototype can we find an affirmation of having “used methods of attaining altered states of consciousness” (FQS50), even though this is very mildly ranked. Also DRP2 is more ambiguous, namely believing “in some way” without viewing “him- or herself as religious” (FQS28) while affirming relatively strong traditionalist values such as the need to “remain loyal to the religion of one’s nation” (FQS46) and maintaining “continuity of the religious traditions of family and ancestors” (FQS58). Persons of DRP 5 are, on their part, among the few who “understands and relates to the divine as feminine” (FQS19) and “often keenly aware of the presence of the divine (FQS78). They have “experienced a profound change in religious or spiritual understanding or commitment” (FQS37), and also view “the divine or a higher reality as a deep mystery that can be pointed to but never fully understood” (FQS88).

The fractal analysis illustrates variations within the religious family, and reproduce some essential aspects of the global prototypes. Interestingly, these are not limited to the two religious prototypes only. Also, for example, pluralism characteristic to global prototype 4 Spiritually Attuned is reflected in differentiated religious prototypes 5 and 6 who “embrace elements from various religious and spiritual traditions” (FQS29). The two global prototypes 2 and 3 that provided data for the fractal analysis are either negatively \((r = -.27)\), respectively weakly \((r = .03)\) correlated with global prototype 1 Secular Humanist. From this should follow that the latter prototype is only weakly present in the differentiated religious prototypes. Still, the tendency to reject “religious ideas that conflict with scientific and rational principles” (FQS70) that distinguishes global prototype 1 Secular Humanist is central also to DRP4. The fact that prototypes can be internally contradictory or inconsistent is further obvious from how prototype DRP4 also “takes for granted that particular religious claims are true” (FQS92).

### Table 4.3  
_factor correlations for differentiated religious prototypes_

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<tr>
<td>1. DRP 1</td>
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<td>3. DRP 3</td>
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<td>4. DRP 4</td>
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<td>5. DRP 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. DRP 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. DRP 7</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.29</td>
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<td>.48</td>
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The Variety of Being Spiritual

The global prototype 4 was labelled Spiritually Attuned, a label that resonates with Wulff’s (2019) findings. The term spirituality has many different meanings and Huss claims that we today need to account for spirituality as a new cultural category (Huss 2014). When referring to a contemporary trend spirituality usually differentiates itself from religion in a value-laden way and puts the individual, seeking, openness, and holism at the center. It is often in discussions of current forms of being religious and secular associated with an emphasis of practices and means to attain insights, and sustains a connection to progressive liberal values and activism (Woodhead, 2013). How is the category ‘spiritual’ reflected in light of our data and results? This is a more difficult question and the reason for this is evident already.
when we look at the global prototype 4 and how this is configured. In the case of the theistic global prototype 2 we found a relatively small number of defining statements, and these were also reoccurring in the country specific studies (with some exceptions). They constituted a rather distinct pattern of family resemblance.

For ‘the spiritual’ prototypes the pattern of family resemblance unfolds somewhat differently. First, the global prototype 4 Spiritually Attuned is characterized by nine distinguishing statements out of the 13 statements that are ranked on the highest level 3 or 4, and we can claim that a more complex multidimensionality is at play. Second, and as a consequence of the way in which they are replicated across different cultures, they show even more variation than what was the case for the religious prototypes. This is evident from Fig. 4.2 below.

A family resemblance based on a combination of statement changes from one country to the other is evident also in this case. Yet, the fact that the pattern is determined by a greater number of features or, in this case statements, the pattern could be defined as more vague. The quality of the FQS is also evident from the extent to which it allows us to observe empirically religious subjectivities and spiritualities in contexts where they are unclear or difficult to access with other instruments.

The Chinese results provide an interesting example since they, on the surface, tend to be rather secular but still are distinguished by other features. In Chap. 2, we could see that measures of religiosity in China in general were relatively low. For instance, less than 10% of the Chinese respondents \(n = 309\) considered themselves as “belonging to one or more religious groups, communities, or traditions”. This

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**Fig. 4.2** Examples of cross-cultural variety of being ‘spiritual’

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**SWEDEN 3**

... deeply identifies with some holy figure, either human or divine and being religious or spiritual is central to whom he or she is. One senses universal luminous element within oneself and affirms the idea of reincarnation.

**RUSSIA 3**

... thinks about the ultimate as a life force or creative energy rather than a supernatural being, and views symmetry, harmony, and balance as reflections of ultimate truth. One sees religion as the illusory creation of human fears and desires and considers hypocrisy to be common in religious circles.

**GLOBAL 4**

... sees personal self-realization as a primary spiritual goal in life and is inclined to embrace elements from various religious and spiritual traditions. One has a strong sense of a spiritual or higher order of reality in the midst of nature, and is committed to following a spiritual path that is in harmony with the environment...

**ISRAEL 6**

... being religious or spiritual is central to whom one is and one views symmetry, harmony, and balance as reflections of ultimate truth. One seeks to intensify one's experience of the divine and has used methods of attaining altered states of consciousness.

**CANADA 2**

... views a higher reality as a deep mystery that can be pointed to but never fully understood. One feels spiritually moved by music, art, or poetry, and by the atmosphere of sacred places. One engages regularly in religious or spiritual practices in private.
confirms the findings of previous surveys on religion in China, such as the results from the World Values Survey; among all national contexts studied as part of this project, China has the lowest number of individuals reporting that religion is very important (3%) or rather important (8%) to them (Inglehart et al., 2014). We are in other words dealing with a highly secular context. Also, many defining statements for the Chinese prototypes reflect a secular position.

Yet, another picture emerges when we turn to the results from the FQS. Common to several of the prototypes is a salient identification with believing “in some way but [the person] does not view him- or herself as religious” (FQS28). This item surfaces as central in the majority of the Chinese prototypes, even though they differed in terms of the relevance which they additionally gave to societal activism, personal belief or experience, or religious or spiritual matters. Four out of the six Chinese prototypes embrace in different ways spirituality as a potential valuable life-source, without making this a very prominent part of their own life-view. This supports recent research pointing to a highly diverse and vibrant religious landscape in China, despite heavy secular regulation (e.g. Yang & Hu, 2012, p. 96; Sun, 2013).

Let us look closer at a Chinese prototype that primarily should count as spiritual.

Short narrative description of China prototype 4, Experience-Oriented and Spiritually Inclined Traditionalist:

For China 4, spiritual experiences are essential. One has a sense of a spiritual or higher order of reality in nature and has experienced moments of intense divine, mysterious, or supernatural presence. One is moved by the atmosphere of sacred places, spiritually moved and sustained by music, art, or poetry. Feeling contempt against religious institutions, ideas and practices is alien to whom one is and one also finds it foreign to reduce religion to a creation of human fears and desires. Still, one has not dedicated one’s life to serving the divine, nor used methods of attaining altered states of consciousness. One does not take comfort in thinking that those who do not live righteously will suffer. One believes that one can be deeply moral without being religious and works towards making the world a better place.

This spiritual prototype from China is unique in the sense that it is the only prototype among the Chinese prototypes that affirms the idea that “religion should play the central role in the ruling of the nation” (FQS71). The statement is not ranked very highly, but still becomes distinguishing since it presents a clear contrast to other prototypes that rank this statement negatively. This detail also makes the Chinese spiritual prototype 4 stand out in relation to the global prototype 4 Spiritually Inclined where we find this statement ranked as −4, that is to say among the most negatively ranked. In other prototypes where this idea is ranked positively, it usually surfaces as part of a more theistic or religious viewpoint. This exemplifies that in terms of family resemblance, there are no fixed boundaries between the categories and they can involve tensions and contradictions.

The Chinese prototypes defined by the notion of “believing in some way” (FQS28) without being religious all lacked the strong identification with religious belief and engagement that is characteristic of the Chinese prototype 3 which could be labelled “Committed and Communally Engaged Believer”. From Fig. 4.2 above we recall that persons of this prototype tend to affirm a personal relationship to a
god, and find it important to participate in religious services. Religion is also “a central means for becoming a better and more moral person” (FQS3). In addition to the FQS’ capacity to uncover the complex multidimensional side of a worldview, the Chinese case shows that it can thereby also help us to expose more hidden aspects that may fall in the shadow when using other methods. The FQS assists in nuancing our comprehension of what it can mean and not mean to hold a non-religious or secular view and just “believe in some way”.

4.7 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have investigated how religiosity and spirituality varies in samples from 12 different countries worldwide: distinct patterns of being religious, spiritual and non-religious in country-specific samples were identified, and resulted in three to eight prototypes per country. We compared some of these with our results from the analysis based on a sample consisting of all participants, i.e. five global prototypes. Based on this we concluded that both religion and spirituality is respectively constituted by a range of elements that vary in significant ways from one context to another and in relation to the global prototypes. A fractal analysis of the two global prototypes of a religious character exposed more of the internal variation that can constitute ‘being religious’.

The term family resemblance that was introduced by Wittgenstein (1988; Andersen, 2000) presents a way to conceptualize this dynamic well. It accounts for how religion and spirituality are constituted by overlapping shared features, without any of them necessarily being common to all manifestations. The taxonomies of being both religious and spiritual are dynamic, open and subject to change. Our observations show that the FQS can produce systematically comparable results that strike a significant methodological balance between the universal and the particular. The term family resemblance seems to further strengthen the called-for dialogical position between the two epistemological positions which the FQS enables.

A key asset of FQS is that it is anchored in self-reference rather than in preconceived theories or systems of classification. The Q-set is at the core of validity of any application of Q-methodology, and needs to reflect a variety of relevant viewpoints. It is evident to any scholar of religion that this remains a challenging ambition, especially in light of cross-cultural variations. Yet, the FQS includes a broad variety of statements pertaining to religion, spirituality and non-religion that fosters the process of making meaningful distinctions, and presents important qualities in this respect. For example, also ideas that at the stage of designing the FQS-b were expected to be more particularistic and marginal came to resonate in unexpected ways with our samples. The statement referring to the idea of believing “in some way” (FQS28) that was derived from a Nordic context stood out as surprisingly salient for the participants in China, and the statement “Values his or her own purity and strives to safeguard it” (FQS48) was relevant in several samples.
Nevertheless, also some critical remarks regarding the design of the FQS are required. Kontala (2016) illustrates the Q-set’s problem with help of Legos. The sorting process could be compared to a test, where the respondents are given 101 pieces of Lego and a task to build something out of these blocks. The possibilities are almost endless, yet at the same time constrained by the available blocks. The respondents cannot suddenly wish to manifest their preferences by constructing a mini railway, or a game of softball, and furthermore, in actual fact people tend to produce variations on a quite finite number of recurrent themes, such as an airplane, a house, a car and a boat. Of those who build cars, no two cars are absolutely the same, and in this sense there are many variations on the car theme. Some of the variations may actually be hard to classify as to whether they are a car or a boat (and come close to being a hovercraft). Some houses acquire wheels and start to become more like caravans. In understanding the prototypes and the variations, it is obvious that they are each built from many individual pieces, and so the prototype is always more than the sum of its pieces – it is the pieces arranged into a particular pattern. Some pieces, however, come to define a prototype more than others. Round pieces, for example, might suggest wheels, but for some who first got attracted to the flat wing like pieces, these round pieces are the wheels of an airplane, whilst for others they are the wheels of a car. For those who built boats, they become the safety life-rings on the side of the boat. Obviously, a different set of Lego pieces might prompt different models to be built. These variations cannot be reduced to single features or items. Rather, the notion of family resemblance seems to be relevant in understanding the complex configurations of multiple features or items, as a matter of a series of overlapping shared features, where none of them is necessarily shared by all members.

Some prototypes were built on what we tend to see as conflicting or incompatible elements, such as being both religious or secular, or rooting spirituality in nationalism. A specific quality of the FQS is that it has proven to be sensitive to such ambiguities, liquidities and simultaneities in how religious subjectivities are configured. Nevertheless, this also has to be critically discussed in terms of how we understand the method, what we can achieve with it, and how it relates to an empirical reality of e.g. everyday discourses and practices. We cannot neglect that in the more radical end of the discussion of reliability in Q-methodology, McKeown and Thomas (2013, p. 5) cite Heisenberg (1962, p. 58) on the interpretative nature of measurement: “We have to remember that what we observe is not nature itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning”. When we design or revise a Q-set for a certain research purpose, we tend to make assumptions about what is universal, particular, reoccurring, central or peripheral. These assumptions affect our understanding of the concourse, and the choices we make. This means that the universal and particularistic features between which we would like to strike a balance are also dependent on the idea of a difference that is constructed by us and others. Or in other words, the question “what is a pattern and who can define this?” lies at the core of the notion of family resemblance. The results we receive need to be critically viewed in this light.
The FQS differs from many methodological approaches used in the study of religions, and it is the first instrument for assessing religiosity that is based on Q-methodology. It is designed to be sensitive to both commonalities in religious beliefs and practices, while at the same time exposing the limitations of thinking in terms of universal patterns and categories. The FQS can help us identify some new relevant ways of being religious, spiritual, or secular, or perhaps even more importantly, it can assist us in observing emerging forms combining these points of view. It also reveals that worldviews present a dynamic family resemblance across cultures that have a multidimensional nature, often constituted by simultaneity, ambiguity and even contradictions.

The FQS opens up new vistas in light of challenges posed by religious change and religion in a global cross-cultural perspective. The FQS has the potential to produce relevant systematical observations that are well grounded empirically. As is the case in every academic study, we need to be attentive to the limitations of the instruments and approaches we use, but on a methodological level, the FQS designed by David Wulff (2019) represents a promising pragmatic and dialogical instrument. It helps us navigate the global landscape with regards to religion, spirituality and secular views in spite of epistemological pitfalls associated with ideas about universalism and particularism.

References


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