Parenting Practices in Saudi Arabia: Gender-Role Modeling

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The aim of this chapter is to address the parenting practices of gender-role modeling in the context of Saudi Arabia. Specifically, the chapter addresses two of the main desirable child and adult outcomes: *Al-Birr,* which means full conduct and respect for one's parents, and the protector, or *Al-Wali,* which refers to a male who will offer protection and has legal responsibilities toward females in the household. Although *Al-Birr* is an outcome for males and females alike, *Al-Wali* is a male-specific outcome; parents who just have daughters will not focus on *Al-Wali* as a desirable outcome. The chapter starts by addressing the socioeconomic and cultural context of Saudi Arabia and the role of Islamic traditions and Arabic cultural values in shaping parenting practices. While few studies address parenting practices and child outcomes in Saudi Arabia, available research suggests that authoritarian parenting is common. Additionally, the sociocultural context and current family policy may have a role in encouraging the continuous parenting practice of gender-role modeling. This chapter contributes to the body of research on cross-cultural parenting and adding a new perspective to cultural similarities and differences in order to open our eyes to be cautious about drawing conclusions in regard to parenting and culture.

Saudi Arabia Historical and Social Context

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a Muslim-majority country located in the Middle East and bordered on the south by Yemen, with the Red Sea to the west and the Arabian Gulf to the east. Saudi Arabia is one of the largest countries in Western Asia and has a land area of approximately 830,000 square miles (CIA Handbook, 2017).

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Saudi Arabia is governed by an absolute monarch and has been ruled by the house of Saud since 1932 (Huyette, 1985).

Before the discovery of oil in the 1930s, the country's economic foundation was based on agriculture, sea trade, fishing, and pearl diving (Shaw & Long, 1982). Now, oil revenues account for about 90% of the export earnings and 80% of government revenues (Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority, 2015). Historically, the discovery of oil has fostered rapid changes in the country's economics, and foreign companies have started to invest in the oil industry. Families were affected by these economic changes, and many moved to big cities (Abou-Korin & Al-Shihri, 2015).

The Saudi population is estimated to be approximately 31 million; about 60% are Saudi citizens, and the rest are legal immigrants, immigrants without documents, or expatriate foreign workers (The General Authority for Statistics, 2016). About 80% of the population lives in big cities, such as the capital, Riyadh (The General Authority for Statistics, 2016). The Saudi population has a median age of 27 years, about 90% of Saudis can read and write, and approximately 60% of college graduates are females. Arabic is the official language and the most commonly spoken language (The General Authority for Statistics, 2016). Most Saudi family households consist of married couples with children (The General Authority for Statistics, 2016), and about 28% of these households are headed by females. The current average Saudi family size is about 2.4 (The General Authority for Statistics, 2016). Overall, family household size is getting smaller than it was 30 years ago.

Islam is the main religion in Saudi Arabia. The country is the home of Mecca and Madinah, the holiest Islamic cities, and the birthplace of the Prophet Mohamad. Sunni Islam is the main religion, followed by 80–90% of Saudis; the rest follow either Shia sects, other Islamic sects, or other religions (International Religious Freedom Report, 2004). The diversity of Islamic practices is due to the diverse ethnic groups in Saudi Arabia. For example, aside from Arab ethnic groups, which are the most prominent, there are Afro-Asian, Indian, Pakistani, Filipino, Bangladeshi, and others (CIA Handbook, 2017; General Authority for Statistics, 2016).

Core Cultural Values

The combination of both Islamic values and Arabic traditions shapes Saudi parents' parenting. The emphasis on certain child behaviors is based on the collectivist nature of the Saudi society, and any promotion of parenting message should be defined by the cultural beliefs. Before discussing the parenting practice of gender-role modeling, it is important to understand the cultural values that shaped this parenting practice. In the following section I discuss the core cultural values of religion, family and marriage, loyalty and group bonding, privacy, and gender roles and the way in which they shape the parenting practice of gender-role molding.

Religion Islam has a dominant role in the formation of the laws, policies, cultural beliefs, and traditions of the kingdom (Nevo, 1998). Worship practices and religious

symbols (e.g., dress code) are regulated by law. Family laws are also regulated by Islamic principles. For instance, civil marriage is illegal; marriage can only be legalized by certified religious leaders (Ministry of Justice, 2019). Islam holds an important position in individuals' daily lives and influences their beliefs and behaviors in various aspects, such as work, family, relationships, and socialization (Alfalih, 2016). In Saudi Arabia, public debates (e.g., about women driving) or the kingdom's future strategic plan (e.g., Saudi Vision 2030, 2016) must be justified and discussed according to the Islamic framework, since Islam is the vehicle that justifies why certain actions are taken.

Family and Marriage The role of the family is powerful for Saudi individuals. In both Islamic traditions and the Arabic culture, family is perceived as the core social unit for human development and where members are expected to support and protect each other (Al-Hakami & McLaughlin, 2016). Family laws and policies regarding marriage, divorce, child custody, child-rearing, and gender roles are based on the Islamic foundation of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* as the constricts of Islam. Accordingly, family is not just the main social unit in which child development takes place but is also religiously valued. According to *Sunnah* teachings, the Prophet Mohamad said: "No house has been built in Islam more beloved in the sight of Allah than through marriage."

Types of marriage in Saudi Arabia are different from those in the West; cousin marriage is the most common type of marriage in Saudi Arabia and it is arranged through family agreement, although recent generations have had more of a say about their future partners (Al-Hakami & McLaughlin, 2016; Moaddel, 2006). Although there are a growing number of nuclear families, an extended family structure is still preferred and is common because of the benefits it provides, especially connectedness and social support (Al-Hakami & McLaughlin, 2016). With the growing urbanization in Saudi Arabia expected to reach 90% by 2050 (Abou-Korin & Al-Shihri, 2015), many Saudi families live in smaller housing units, fitting the nuclear family structure; however, urbanization does not decrease the role of extended family. Polygamy, where men can have up to four wives at the same time, is legal in Saudi Arabia, and about 1% of the total families in Saudi are polygamous ("Over half million," 2016).

Parents and extended family members are heavily involved in the marriage process, from arranging the marriage to providing couples' accommodations, taking care of the wedding expenses, and, later, usually helping with child-rearing (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000). This involvement is culturally believed to strengthen the unity of the family and provide grounding for the next generations to follow (Almalki & Ganong, 2018). Elders are greatly respected, and in-laws contribute to the child-rearing process (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000). Islam emphasizes that family must be established on a solid ground of piety, empathy, and equal fair treatment of children regardless of their gender (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000). In this context, fathers and mothers play the main role of providing a healthy environment for children. A mother's role is significant in the early years, during which she provides the basic

needs. Fathers usually become more involved as the child reaches age three or four, where involvements include playing and doing outside activities (Ahmed, 2013).

Loyalty and Group Bonding From an Islamic perspective, the concept of loyalty is about maintaining trust, strong bonding, and being supportive of all members in the community, even disconnected ones (Nevo, 1998). In this context, family members are the main source for seeking support and unity and should maintain ties via regular visits and phone calls. Additionally, the social structure of Saudi Arabia is mainly tribal (Nevo, 1998), with more than 69 different tribes populating the country. Tribalism is mainly used to define the patterns of social organization in the Saudi society. Saudi tribes are usually made of different households; each household includes groups of families. Together, this group creates their extended families, which call themselves a specific name, for example, my last name, "Almalki", is the tribe name, then every individual with the same last name is part of the "Almalki" tribe. Each tribe has its characteristics, for example, the geographical location, the way they speak, their ethnic food, and traditions. Loyalty to the group is a predominant component of the collective cultural identity for Saudis and one of the fundamental ways of forming communities and building trust (Maisel, 2014). Loyalty to the family is an obligation and is deeply rooted in Arabic cultures. Individual social reputation is linked to how loyal and committed people are to their community and extended family. Moving outside the group or seeking freedom outside the community is stigmatized and might result in isolation of individuals and families (Maisel, 2014).

Privacy The stigma of family failure prevents many Saudis from turning to therapists or psychiatrists for assistance in problem solving; many Saudis do not want to be perceived as having a failed familial support structure (Algahtani, Buraik, & Ad-Dab'bagh, 2017). The foundation of the privacy concept consists of maintaining a good reputation about one's behavior, the body, and the home, as well as upholding the honor and good status of one's extended family and the tribal name (Nevo, 1998). Privacy includes the requirement of modesty and self-representation in public including clothes, verbal and nonverbal communication, body language, and behaviors. The concept of privacy extends to *shame*, referring to the fear of judgment from society when someone does not follow the cultural norms (Algahtani et al., 2017). Among family members, the Islamic teachings emphasize that one has to ask for permission before entering his or her parents' bedroom (Rassool, 2014).

The notion of privacy is related to the role of the family. For example, when family problems or conflicts arise, parents try to keep the matter within the family circle. Research shows limited professional help-seeking behaviors among Arab individuals and their families (Al-Krenawi, Graham, Dean, & Eltaiba, 2004). Seeking professional help can be stigmatized and can affect the family's reputation in the community.

Gender Roles Gender is key to understanding the social structure of Saudi Arabia and serves as an important lens to address the cultural practices of parenting. The Saudi family is patrilineal in structure. Married couples are expected to live near the

husband's family, and children take their father's family name and Islamic sect. Married women do not adopt their husband's family name. In this context, passing on of the family heritage and wealth is through the sons and mostly involves patrilineal custody over children (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

The sociocultural and Islamic traditions and values also have strong influences on shaping the gender dynamics in Saudi families. It is culturally and religiously believed that men are the financial providers. Women, culturally, are expected to contribute to child-rearing and the house, but they can work outside the house. Historically, women were discouraged from seeking divorce because it was stigmatized; often, women were blamed for their marriage's failure; however, new generations may not follow this traditional view (Saleh & Luppicini, 2017).

Statistics show that about 60% of Saudi college graduates are women, yet they make up only 13% of workforce participants (Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan, & Rajasekar, 2017). Al-Asfour et al. (2017) identify barriers such as limited employment opportunities and negative perceptions of women's professional capability and commitment as some of the reasons for this (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Gender stereotypes about Saudi women being incapable of handling tasks professionally negatively impact women's chances of becoming actively involved with decision-making (Hodges, 2017). Nowadays, governmental and nongovernmental institutions in Saudi Arabia are pushing back against the gender stereotypes, especially since the development of the *Saudi Vision 2030* in 2016 (SaudiVision_2030, 2016). On September 26, 2017, the ban on women drivers was abandoned; thus, women's mobility and appearance in the public sphere are increasing. Women are holding high positions and becoming actively involved with decision-making (e.g., the appointment of the first woman as the deputy minister of labor and social development occurred in 2018; "First Saudi Women Appointed," 2018).

Gender separation is still a marked feature of the culture and in some situations regulated by law. For example, education is sex-segregated at all levels (Geel, 2016). Saudi children are exposed to the notion of gender from an early age. I argue that this domestic and the public contexts shape children's experiences because boys play and socialize with other males mostly in public, while girls do much of their activities with other females in private (Baki, 2004).

Research findings in the West clearly indicate the link between early socialization and gender roles on child outcomes and the children perceptions of doing gender (e.g., Witt, 1997). These findings are supported in a cross-cultural context (e.g., Bornstein, 2012). The Arabic cultures, like other Western and non-Western cultures, still value gender-specific outcomes in children. For example, expression of emotions for females includes emotions of weakness, fear, and seeking protection, while males are usually encouraged to express emotions such as anger, as well as taking actions and seeking revenge (Abu Baker, 2003). Although empirical evidence is lacking in the Saudi context, it is an observed phenomenon that parenting practices are influenced by this gender context.

Specific Parenting Practices in Saudi Arabia

Parenting practices exist in all cultural contexts and take many different forms. Many societies regard gender-specific child outcomes as "natural" (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000). This chapter argues that societies have encouraged certain child outcomes through the construction of culturally preferred gender roles and norms. The following sections provide examples on how some of these gendered child outcomes are associated with males (e.g., *Al-Wali*), while others are associated with both genders (*Al-Birr*).

Overview of Parenting Practices in the Saudi Context The existing research examining parenting practices and child outcomes in the context of Saudi Arabia remains limited. Moreover, the previous studies have failed to examine the cultural-parenting nexus of gendered children outcomes. The majority of the available research has typically focused on parenting style and physical punishment (i.e., Achoui, 2003; Dwairy et al., 2006; Hatab & Makki, 1978). For example, research findings show that Saudi parents mainly use an authoritarian parenting style (e.g., Dwairy et al., 2006). Baumrind (1966, 1991) argued that the authoritarian parenting style emphasizes parents' control of their children and the children's obedience. In this case, parents might be more assertive, expect children to follow their orders, and have authority over children. They might use physical punishment to encourage or discourage specific child outcomes. The outcomes of this parenting style are varied across cultures; however, among a sample of Arab children and youth, findings show that the majority of the sample were satisfied with their parent's authoritarian parenting style (Hatab & Makki, 1978).

Achoui (2003) studied Saudi female college students who reported physical punishment by parents at different stages of their lives, and around 61% of the students justified their parents' physical punishment. Studies also show that authoritarian parenting is common in Saudi Arabia and is used more with male children than female children (Al-Khawaja, 1999). Factors such as education and social class have mixed effects on authoritarian parenting. For example, educated Saudi mothers are less likely to use an authoritarian or controlling parenting style (Blissett & Haycraft, 2008); however, other studies have indicated that economic level and education have minor effects on the Saudi parents' parenting style (Dwairy et al., 2006). Such findings may suggest that the sociocultural context has an influence on parenting practices regardless of the social class and education of the family. For instance, family policies might be a factor of the preference for authoritarian parenting. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the mistreatment or rejection of one's parents is considered a crime. This might be a factor to consider when looking at the Saudi context of parenting and child outcomes; such offspring might feel that they are obligated to be considerate of their parents' needs.

The current chapter seeks to address some of the limitations in the literature by discussing the cultural-parenting nexus specifically the gender-role modeling as one of the notable parenting practices in Saudi Arabia. I use social learning theory and

gender schema theory to provide a theoretical foundation for the gender-role parenting practices; furthermore, I explain the parental activities and behaviors that might promote desirable child outcomes among Saudi families.

Gender-Role Modeling

Parenting in Saudi Arabia happens in a heterosexual context according to Sharia law (Yip, 2009). Heterosexuality refers to attraction to the opposite sex to form romantic relationships (Ward & Schneider, 2009). Any forms of relationship outside of the heterosexual marriage context are not allowed (Yip, 2009). Although this chapter may seem to be addressing parenting practices from the traditional gender framework, which might be one of the chapter's limitations, this framework best fits the Saudi Arabian context. Parenting in the Saudi context is imbedded within religious conservative traditions and sociocultural context (Dwairy et al., 2006). Parents reinforce gender-specific child outcomes based on the roles they play in society. As discussed earlier, gender roles and cultural expectations about men and women shape parenting practices in Saudi Arabia. Women are expected to be responsible for housework, although contemporary Saudi women may choose to fulfil roles other than being caregivers (Aldosari, 2017), yet men are the main financial providers for the household, regardless of the women's work status. Men's roles also include protection and decision-making (Saleh & Luppicini, 2017). Saudi parents may easily reinforce gender roles through their parenting style, including purchasing gendered toys (Mansoor, 2018).

Another factor that influences the practice of gender-role modeling in Saudi Arabia is gender separation. Children learn this mostly through observation. Sons observe other adult males' behaviors and play specific roles, which may involve expression of masculinity such as fighting, playing soccer, and using loud voices. Daughters learn from observing their mothers and other females. House chores, caregiving, and domestic activities are seen as main female responsibilities, and mothers are culturally expected to train their daughters to help them with these activities.

The Theoretical Perspective

The aim of this section is to provide a theoretical foundation of gender-role modeling as one of the parenting practices in Saudi Arabia. This parenting style aims to raise children with culturally valued gender attributes. Several theories have been proposed to explain gender development. In this chapter, Bandura's (1971) social learning theory and Bem's (1981) gender schema theory are the main focus because they both have cross-cultural applications in research (Starr & Zurbriggen, 2017). Both social learning theory and gender schema theory provide important explanations

of the role of parenting practices in the development of gender in children. I address each theory's assumptions regarding the cultural-social structure construction of gender-specific attributes and behaviors and how parenting practices can be key to this development.

Social Learning Theory According to Bandura's (1971) social learning theory, social relations and activities account for the behavioral development of gender appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in children. In this context, through direct experience and/or observation of the behaviors of others, children imitate and learn certain behaviors that are then reinforced by the rewarding and punishing consequences (Bandura, 1971). Through the concept of reward and punishment, children imitate and model the behaviors that speak to their sex identity. Social learning theory explains the key role of observation by which children learn which behaviors get positive responses and which behaviors have negative consequences and should be avoided. For example, if a boy plays with a doll, parents may direct him to pick a truck to play with instead of a "feminine" toy. Through this reinforcement process, children learn what is and is not seen as socially and culturally appropriate.

Despite the importance of social learning theory in explaining gender development in children, most of the research has been done in Western societies such as the United States (Ross-Gordon, 1999), and this is a limitation as the reinforcement of certain behaviors varies across cultures. Culture and environment play a key role in children's learning process. Children in some cultures are encouraged to model certain behaviors that are culturally desirable, while in other cultures, the same behaviors are not perceived as desirable. For example, not only do parents in Saudi Arabia reinforce gender-specific behaviors in children to match cultural expectations, I argue that the sociocultural context of the country might be one factor that contributes to the reinforcement of gendered personality traits, skills, activities, and behaviors. For instance, children learn from an early age that it is okay to interact and play with the opposite sex until a certain age (e.g., 13 years), and by the time children reach school age, which is 7 years, they go to a gender-specific school, have same-sex teachers and peers, and do school activities and curricula that match their gender roles according to the cultural norms. One study suggests that Saudi mothers might not have an active role in teaching their sons social skills in public due to the masculine sociocultural context of the country (Al-Qarni, 2011). From a social learning theory standpoint, through socializing, reinforcement, and modeling, boys and girls come to prefer certain sex-appropriate behaviors and avoid sex-inappropriate behaviors defined by the culture.

Gender Schema Theory The gender schema theory is a social-cognitive theory and a combination of both social learning theory and cognitive development theory (Bem, 1981). The basic assumption of the gender schema theory is that, from an early age, individuals have gendered concepts of their cognitive process and specific categorical ideas about what it means to be masculine or feminine. The gender schema theory proposes that children organize and encode gender-type behaviors

based on the cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity (Bem, 1983). Gender schema theory implies that children's cognitive processes are organized by these sex-type behaviors. These behaviors are acquired through socialization processes and cultural norms. Once the schema is developed, children are expected to behave according to their gender roles in their culture.

Similar to social learning theory, gender schema theory emphasizes the role of the sociocultural context in learning gender-appropriate behaviors, and these behaviors are inevitable and can be modified (Bem, 1983). Instead of looking at how gender roles operate, gender schema theory focuses on how culture constructs gender schemas (Starr & Zubriggen, 2017). The gender schema process includes continuous constructing and categorizing of information into masculine, feminine, and neutral/androgynous; in this process, children use their preexisting gender schema to determine which behaviors are perceived as appropriate (Bem, 1981). Gender schema theory proposes that children learn to link these attributes to themselves; the gender schema becomes the standard or guide and regulates the children's behavior, so it conforms with the cultural definitions of masculine and feminine (Bem, 1983). Gender schema theory has been extended to cross-cultural contexts, such as international non-English contexts, to explore various areas (e.g., stereotypes, marginalized populations; Starr & Zubriggen, 2017).

From both theoretical perspectives, parents play an active role in setting up the gender-specific desirable outcomes of their children. Through structuring, modeling, reinforcing, and instructing their children, parents set up the conception of gender. Gender roles are deeply ingrained culturally in Saudi society, and parents play an important role through their treatment of boys and girls. In the following section, I discuss some of the desirable child outcomes of gender-role modeling.

Culturally Valued Child Outcomes

Gender-role modeling is one of the many traditional parenting practices in Saudi society, as Saudi children are provided with different models for gender development. In this context, boys are expected to grow up assertive and not emotional (masculine outcomes), while girls are raised to grow up as caring (feminine outcomes). However, both genders grow up to be dutiful, kind, and respectful toward their parents. The current chapter addresses *Al-Birr,* an outcome that is expected from both genders and the specific roles that are expected to be fulfilled by males and females. The other parenting outcome is the protector or *Al-Wali*, a culturally valued masculine child outcome for males. Implications for practice are provided. The chapter concludes with several recommendations for future directions.

Al-Birr *Al-Birr* is an Arabic word that means devotion and dutifulness and having full conduct and respect for one's parents (Bukhari & Khan, 1997). *Al-Birr* includes obeying parents' orders, unless those orders conflict with Islamic teachings (e.g.,

drinking alcohol). *Al-Birr* indicates the obligation for children to fulfill their parents' needs and requirements. *Uquq* is the opposite of *Al-Birr* and means mistreatment and neglecting to fulfil parents' needs. From an Islamic perspective, *Al-Birr* is the parents' reward for their investment of time and effort in raising and supporting their children (Bukhari & Khan, 1997).

Al-Birr is a desirable child outcome for both genders, yet the role of sons in *Al-Birr* is slightly different from that of daughters. Signs of *Al-Birr* include but are not limited to taking good care of parents, listening to parents, respecting parents' opinions, visiting parents regularly, and helping them financially if needed (Bukhari & Khan, 1997). Although both males and females are expected to express *Al-Birr* to their parents, females are usually expected to provide the physical and emotional care for parents, especially when parents get older. Males, on the other hand, are expected to provide financial assistance for parents if needed and accommodations or a place to live, as well as showing kindness and respect. Parents are important in society, and children must be obedient and respectful to them. For both genders, this quality is highly valued religiously and culturally. Saudi children are responsible for treating their parents with respect and gratitude, especially when parents get old ("Ugug: One of the Mine crimes," 2018).

Al-Birr takes place between family generations. The parental role of transmitting their beliefs about *Al-Birr* to their children occurs both theologically and through actual involvement with teaching kids through everyday practice. For example, parents usually show their children early on how they themselves practice *Al-Birr* with their own parents (i.e., the children's grandparents) so that children can follow the model provided. It is believed that devotion to parents must be strengthened through deliberate parenting actions and strategies. For example, it is common that Saudi fathers intentionally provide financial support to the grandparents, and mothers take care of their in-laws' house or provide emotional support.

Al-Wali **(The Protector)** One of the culturally valued outcomes of parenting practices in Saudi Arabia is raising a strong male who can protect the family. *Al-Wali* is an Arabic word describing the role of the protector. *Al-Wali,* or protector, must be a male who is in charge of his relatives. In Saudi Arabia, the practice of *Al-Wali* is institutionalized and legally a male becomes a *Wali* when he reaches the age of 18. I address *Al-Wali* from both perspectives, as a child outcome and as a family law. *Al-Wali* is a male-specific outcome; families who just have daughters may not choose to reinforce this child outcome. Men under this condition are obligated to provide the family with protection, personally and financially (Alharbi, 2015).

Children, in general, pick up a strong message about who they are and how society wants them to be from their parents' behaviors. In this context, parents—especially fathers—provide the model for their sons of being the protector. In the Saudi context, the same-gender parent and child interactions, especially for sons, may more easily establish the role model of the protector. The sociocultural context of

the country encourages fathers to spend more time with their sons in public. Even males who grow up in households with absent fathers learn from other alternative models in society through extended family members who are usually involved with the child-rearing ("Strengths of the Saudi Arabian Family," 2019). Parents may also encourage the outcome of the protector *Wali* through sibling interactions. In this context, males, regardless of their birth order, can have higher values (Joseph, 1994). Additionally, male siblings are encouraged to take care of fulfilling their sisters' needs by providing financial assistance and transportation (Joseph, 1994). Cultural and religious values are used as the basis of shaping the parental practice of raising a male guardian. According to the Qur'an, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means" (Al-Nisa, 4:34).

The existence of the protector or *Al-Wali* is also one of the Islamic family laws in relation to the consent of male authority for women's marriage (Alharbi, 2015). However, contemporary Muslim scholars have argued that *Al-Wali* rules have shifted from the original positive meaning and in some cases can negatively affect women's accessibility to health care, travel, and education (Wadud, 2006). For example, in some classical Islamic schools, the practice of the *Wali* has extended to mean that Allah has granted women to be guarded by their *Wali*; ideally the father or brothers, in this case a man is the guardian for all practical purpose. Accordingly, women's choices for seeking employment opportunities or those who wish to travel abroad can be restricted by the *Wali*. Women under this institutionalized guardianship system, which called *Welayah,* need written permission from the *Wali* to travel abroad or marry.

The practice of *Welayah* in the Saudi context has been criticized as it can put the mother under her minor son guardianship (Al-Fassi, 2016; Fatany, 2013). Some records (e.g., the National Family Safety Program) show that this practice increases the number of women suffering from domestic violence and the perpetrators are predominantly the *Wali* (Fatany, 2013). Despite this extreme practice of the *Wali* role, Saudi women have made significant gains where they increase their economic participations and their visibility in the media and in nontraditional roles such as the appointment of 11 women as air traffic controllers (SACA, 2019). The outcome of *Wali* is very important in formulating the parenting practice in the Saudi context. It is an Islamic family law which was mentioned in hadith in the context of marriage; according to the Prophet Mohamad, "There is no marriage contract without a *Wali.*" What contemporary Saudi and Muslim scholars (i.e., Al-Fassi, 2016; Wadud, 2006) have argued is that this classical patriarchal interpretation of *Al-Wali* role in the family has been constructed on the basis of gender dualism which has high gender imbalances. The purpose of this chapter was to highlight some of the culturally "positive" parenting practices and child outcomes; however, it is my contention that these culturally valued gendered outcomes cannot be meaningfully addressed without questioning their hierarchical and differentiated nature and their impact on women and family.

Implications for Practices

Family scholars and practitioners can benefit from the current theoretical narrative of this chapter and are encouraged to conduct cross-cultural comparisons on actual parenting practices of gender-role modeling across contexts and generations. Specifically, the theoretical argument of the current chapter highlights the importance of gender-specific child outcomes (*Al-Birr* and *Al-Wali*), yet we know little about how these outcomes may differ among younger Saudi generations or Arab and Muslim families. The information of this chapter can be used as strength-based perspective to develop culturally specific parenting interventions that help to strengthen the contemporary Saudi family, particularly, programs targeted toward the younger Saudi generation who might have a more modern view toward gender. The information presented in this chapter might help practitioners who work with Saudi family and Arab families and individuals living outside their predominate cultures, such as Arab-American families.

Saudi children may be continuing to be socialized into specific gender practices, which might not be favored by Western readers/scholars. However, it is important for scholars and practitioners across fields of study to acknowledge these cross-cultural differences in parenting practices and educate themselves about each context's similarities and differences to enrich our understanding of the deep-rooted cultural practices of parenting. Different from Western cultures, which may value child outcomes that embrace individual autonomy, in the Saudi context gender-specific child outcomes such as *Al-Birr* and *Al-Wali* are emphasized through parenting practices and favored by the society and believed to have great benefits for individuals and family.

Conclusion and Future Directions

It is important to continue examining parenting practices in Saudi Arabia and see how any future changes in family policies can influence these practices. For example, right now, a Saudi woman needs the *Wali's* permission to get a passport and travel abroad, which might arguably be a strong factor on why *Al-Wali* is seen as a favorable child/adult outcome. We can question how the advancement of this family policy would change the parenting emphasis on the role of protector (*Al-Wali*) as a positive child outcome. Policy makers in Saudi Arabia should explore ways to develop more contemporary family policies that reflect the diversity of gender dynamics in the Saudi family, especially for the younger generations who may not follow this traditional gender framework. It is hoped that this chapter provides insight for academics, researchers, practitioners, educators, and policy makers to strengthen their research base and their family policy framework to reflect the contemporary Saudi family.

At a practical level, more research is needed to understand other parenting practices and child/youth outcomes in the Saudi context. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to enhance our understanding of the issue. Future research should look at the parenting outcomes of single-parent households because statistics show an increase in female-headed households (GAS, 2016). An examination of mothers' parenting practices would enable viewing these differences and is worth the investigation.

Glossary

Al-Birr "The Birr toward parents entails obeying their orders, expect when that orders is in disobedience of Allah" ("Meaning of Birr toward parents," 2012). This includes taking care of them and fulfilling their needs and interests, and they must be accompanied by the offspring, even if they are not affiliated with Islam ("Meaning of Birr toward parents," 2012).

Uquq "*Uquq* entails neglecting parents and withholding one's kindness from them" ("Immense hurting of one's parents *Uquq,*" 2018). "*Uquq* against parents pertains to unfulfilling their needs and requirements that are within their rights, while Birr pertains to fulfilling these needs and requirements. Therefore, if the parents or one of them order their offspring to do something, it is necessary to obey their order as long as what they order does not contain disobedience (of Allah)" ("Immense hurting of one's parents *Uquq,*" 2018).

Al-Wali *Wali* is an Arabic word that means the "custodian" in English. It refers to a near male relative whom it is unlawful to marry because of the close blood relationship, which includes but is not limited to fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, sons, grandsons, brothers, and stepbrothers. The *Al-Wali* should provide protection to his family ("Al-Wali," 2018).

Welayah A word that means giving the authority to a male over female relatives. It is also another word for guardianship. It is the system in which the *Wali* practices the *Welayah* ("Al-Wali," 2018).

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