

Cross-Cultural Advancements in Positive Psychology 15
Series Editor: Antonella Delle Fave

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi *Editor*

Toward a Positive Psychology of Islam and Muslims

Spirituality, struggle, and social justice

 Springer

Cross-Cultural Advancements in Positive Psychology

Volume 15

Series Editor

Antonella Delle Fave, University of Milano, Milano, Italy

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Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi
Editor

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Spirituality, struggle, and social justice

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About the Editor

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi PhD, has worked with international and marginalized populations for over 20 years in the United States and the United Arab Emirates. She has degrees in communications, education, and psychology and has co-edited three books addressing international Muslim populations (*Mirror on the Veil*, CCC Press; *An Introduction to Psychology in the Middle East (And Beyond)*, Cambridge Scholars; and *Positive Psychology in the Middle East/North Africa*, Springer). Her articles have appeared in numerous peer-reviewed journals including *Ethnicities*, *Learning Environments Research*, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, and *Psychology Learning and Teaching*. She has also presented her research at several international conferences including the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) Conference, Religion in Society Conference, National Women's Studies Association Conference, and the sixth World Conference on Women's Studies, The International Institute of Knowledge Management (TIKM). Dr. Pasha-Zaidi is an avid supporter of student research and community-based participatory approaches.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Psychology of Islam and Muslims: A Positive Psychology JIHAD



Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Abstract Positive Psychology 2.0 brings with it a focus on balancing the study of wellness to include negative conditions that also contribute to growth. Struggle is one such aspect that is inherent to positive change, both within individuals and across social systems. In Islam, struggle is a key component of life. The benefits of positive struggle include the development of character strengths and virtues on an individual level as well as engagement in collective actions toward social justice. This chapter provides a brief look into the ways in which Islamic psychology and Muslim psychology are differentiated in contemporary research. Consideration is given to the importance of Justice, Identity, Healing, Acceptance, and Dogma (JIHAD) as areas of struggle in Muslim communities. These also serve as organizational themes of the current compilation to showcase the move towards a positive psychology of Islam and Muslims.

1.1 Introduction

I would like to start by saying that I am not an Islamic scholar. I am an educator and researcher with a background in psychology, language, and culture. I am also a practicing Muslim. As my personal experiences of Islam may not fit with any singular school of thought or interpretative tradition, my objective in bringing forth this volume is to provide diverse viewpoints grounded in the social sciences that shape our understandings of Islam and the lived experiences of Muslims in different cultural contexts. As a South Asian heterosexual Muslim woman raised in the United States, I acknowledge those identities that are privileged within Muslim communities. From that positioning, I strive to provide a forum in this volume for Muslims who have been historically marginalized and those who continue to be minoritized in Muslim and/or non-Muslim spaces. Moving toward a positive

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psychology of Islam and Muslims requires a deep dive into a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, Islamic studies, global studies, communication and media studies, along with traditional and transcendental approaches to the science of all that is positive.

A Deeper Dive: Sources of Islamic Knowledge

Laila S. Dahan

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is a revelation from God sent down to Prophet Muhammad. The literal meaning of the word Qur'an is "recitation." This sacred book describes the way in which Allah (Arabic for "God") should be worshipped. It is divided into chapters (*surahs*) and further segmented into verses (*ayahs*). In addition to the Qur'an, Muslims obtain insight into how to conduct themselves as Muslims through the *sunnah* and *hadith*. The *sunnah* means "habitual practice" or way of life and encompasses traditional social and permitted practices of the Islamic *ummah*, or community of believers. The *sunnah* contains specifics from the Prophet's life, including his sayings, actions, implicit consent, decisions, and responses to legal and ethical queries (Duderija, 2015). The *hadiths* provide Muslims with the route to the *sunnah* and are much like the Christian gospels. The stories of the prophet and his companions (*sahaba*; Motzki, 2016) are transmitted through these collections, which are contained in six books that form the backbone of the *sunnah*. Although they are compiled in written form, for centuries the narratives of the *hadiths* were communicated orally. Thus, determining the accuracy of textual references is of prime importance and has led to a system of authentication that takes into consideration the chain of oral transmission as well the character and intellect of each member of that chain.

Shariah law is commonly referred to as Islamic law. However, *shariah* is not actually "law" as understood by the West (Quraishi-Landes, 2016), although it does inform law (Brown, 2012). *Shariah* law is not made up of regulations that are "adjudicated in court" nor is it a "book of statutes" (Quraishi-Landes, 2016), or a set of rules (Brown, 2012). *Shariah* is considered the ideal law; it is eternal and unchanging (El Fadl, 2012), divine and philosophical (Quraishi-Landes, 2016), and profoundly informed by "a set of moral goals" (Brown, 2012, p. 11). The word *shariah* literally means the "way" or "road" and as a legal term refers to "God's Way" or "God's Law," which communicates to Muslims how to conduct their lives (Qureshi, 2008; Quraishi-Landes, 2015). It is up to individual scholars to comprehend *shariah*, and that interpretation is called *fiqh*, which means "understanding" (Quraishi-Landes, 2016). So, while *shariah* is the eternal law, *fiqh* is driven by humans who are attempting to fulfill the eternal laws, and therefore is "subject to error,

(continued)

alterable, and contingent” (El Fadl, 2012, para. 52) The *shariah* was created by Islamic legal scholars using the Qur’an and the *sunnah* as their sources (Sabry & Vohra, 2013). Qureshi (2008) further elucidates:

Since the Qur’an and *sunnah* are unable to offer answers to every question that people encounter in life, the jurists-legal scholars within Muslim societies developed a science of interpreting those texts to come up with specific legal conclusions. And their conclusions . . . make up the doctrinal law that we think about when we think about Islamic law in the sense of the rules governing Muslim lives (pp. 164–165).

Therefore, the guidance that the faithful follow is not definitive, because it does depend on human decisions (Brown, 2012). The *fiqh* rules that are put forth “distinguish between the spiritual value of an action (how God sees it) and the world value of that action (how it affects others)” (Quraishi-Landes, 2016, para. 4). Although *fiqh* rules may compel devout Muslims to pray, a Muslim ruler does not have to enforce that rule. In fact, it is not the place of *fiqh* to help Muslim leaders “police morality” as is evident in Saudi Arabia (Quraishi-Landes, 2016). Ultimately, the accurate role of the state in a “modern *sharia* rule of law system would be to serve the public good” (Quraishi-Landes, 2015, p. 556). While many Muslims are influenced by the Qur’an, *sunnah*, and *hadith*, others are similarly influenced by the early Muslim philosophers and intellectuals who wrote extensively about the social and natural sciences.

While psychology is generally considered the study of the mind and human behaviors, many people are unaware that the term comes from two Greek words: *psyche* (meaning soul) and *logos* (meaning study). As such, psychology literally translates to “the study of the soul”. The soul was an intrinsic part of the study and practice of mental health among early Muslim scholars and physicians whose ideas expanded upon those of the ancient Greeks. However, unlike Greek scholars, who positioned their ideas in opposition to Christianity, early Muslim scholars incorporated Islamic perspectives into their theories and applications (Haque, 2004). Bearing in mind that psychology was subsumed within philosophical domains which provided the onus for the study of most human conditions, Table 1.1 provides an overview of some of the contributions that early Muslim scholars made toward understanding and healing the mind (Cohen & Bai, 2016; Haque, 2004; Robinson, 1998; Shuttleworth, 2010).

1.2 Islamic Psychology and Muslim Psychology

Much of the work of early Muslims was eclipsed during the growth of psychology in the twentieth century in Europe and the Americas, partly due to a lack of access to the Arabic language in which this work was published, and partly as a reflection of Western psychology’s attempt to create a science separate from philosophical and

Table 1.1 Contributions of early Muslim scholars to the science of the mind

Muslim scholar (year of birth- year of death)	Contributions to psychology	Select written works
Al-Kindi (801–866)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive strategies for sadness (depression) • Functions of the soul and intellect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Sleep and Dreams • First Philosophy • Eradication of Sorrow
Al-Tabari (838–870)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychotherapy and counseling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paradise of Wisdom (<i>Firdaus al Hikmah</i>)
Al-Balkhi (850–934)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classification of neuroses into four disorders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fear/anxiety - anger/aggression - sadness/depression - obsession • Classification of depression as normal sadness, endogenous depression (originating from the body), and reactive depression (originating from external environment) • Cognitive therapy, including spiritual therapies • Psychosomatic medicine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustenance for Bodies and Souls (<i>Masalih al-Abdan wa al-Anfus</i>)
Ibn Zakariya Al-Razi (864–932)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychotherapy • Psychosomatic medicine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Comprehensive Book of Medicine (<i>Kitab al-Hawi fi al-Tibb</i>) • On Spiritual Medicine (<i>al-Tibb al-Ruhani</i>)
Al-Farabi (870–950)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social psychology • Therapeutic effect of music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enumeration of the Sciences (<i>'Ihsâ' al-'Ulûm</i>) • Treatise on the Aims of Aristotle's Metaphysics • The Book of Music (<i>Kitab al-Musiqa</i>)
Al-Majusi (d. 995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anatomy and physiology of the brain • Mental illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Royal Notebook (<i>Al-Kitab Al-Malaki</i>)
Ibn Sina (980–1037)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensation and perception • Mind-body connection • Intuition and intellect • Symptoms and treatment of mood disorders • Memory and processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Book of the Cure (Kitâb al-Shifâ')</i> • The Canon of Medicine (<i>Al-Qânûn fî al-Tibb</i>)
Al-Ghazali (1058–1111)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualization of the self • Physical and spiritual diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revival of the Religious Sciences (<i>Ihyâ' 'Ulûm al-Dîn</i>) • Alchemy of Happiness (<i>Kimiya'-yi Sa'adat</i>; shorter version of Revival of the Religious Sciences) • The Niche for Lights (<i>Mishkât al-Anwâr</i>) • The Forty Chapters on the

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued)

Muslim scholar (year of birth- year of death)	Contributions to psychology	Select written works
		Principles of Religion (<i>Kitab al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din</i>)
Ibn Bajjah (1095–1138)	• Active intelligence	• The Regime of the Solitary (<i>Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid</i>)
Ibn Al-Ayn Zarbi (d. 1153)	• Mind-body connection • Mental health	• Book of Medicine (<i>Al-Kaḥfi fi-Tibb</i>)
Ibn Rushd (1126–1198)	• Sensation and imagination • Learning • Types of intellect	• The Decisive Treatise (<i>Fasl al-Maqal</i>)
Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149/ 50–1209)	• Pleasure and pain • Human needs • Emotional conditions and treatments	• Book on the Soul and the Spirit (<i>Kitab al Nafs Wa'l Ru</i>)
Muhammad Ibn Ali (Ibn Arabi) (1164–1240)	• Perception and imagination • Intellect • Desires and dreams	• The Bezels of Wisdom (<i>Fusus al-Hikam</i>) • The Meccan Illuminations (<i>al-Futuhat al-makkiyya</i>)
Ibn-Khaldun (1332–1406)	• Personality • Social cohesion	• Introduction: Multivolume work on History, Sociology, Economics, Politics, and Education (<i>Muqaddimah</i>)

religious enquiry (Haque, 2004; Watson, 1960). Although contemporary psychology has begun to incorporate a wider lens that reflects non-Western and indigenous ways of knowing and being, mainstream subdisciplines generally continue to follow Western, usually American, models (Arnett, 2016; Thalmayer, Toscanelli, & Arnett, 2020). Of these, social and personality psychology appear most diversified, and clinical and cognitive psychology the least (Thalmayer et al., 2020). The hesitation to include religion and spirituality (R/S) in psychology may stem in part from the division of science and theism, with each proclaiming a designated space in intellectual enquiry. From this perspective, science is limited to natural events and phenomena, while R/S is the concern of philosophers and theologians. As such, psychologists who attempt to incorporate R/S into the discipline often continue to be met with disdain. Unfortunately, by defining psychology as a neutral enterprise, free from the biases of philosophy, culture, and religion, the universals that psychologists have attempted to discover have instead resulted in creating a privileged set of norms favoring Western, particularly North American, individualistic societies against whom the majority of the world’s population is judged (Slife & Reber, 2009).

The division between science and religion makes it particularly difficult to address the behaviors, attitudes, and mental processes of religious individuals who may attribute a significant portion of their identity to their system of faith. In terms of better understanding Muslim populations, who account for approximately 24% of

the world, psychology researchers in the past few years have begun to reinvigorate the study of the self, personhood, and human nature as defined by Islamic paradigms. This has resulted in an Islamic psychology movement that seeks to incorporate Islam and psychology into a single framework by revisiting the contributions of early Muslim scholars to mental processes, disorders, and treatments (Al-Karam, 2018; Rothman & Coyle, 2018; Skinner, 2019). Given this focus, much of the contemporary Islamic psychology literature has been dedicated to clinical and counseling psychology, with some recent calls for expansion into other subdisciplines (Al-Karam, 2020; Pasha-Zaidi, 2019). At the same time, Muslim and non-Muslim psychologists and researchers have been exploring the lived experiences of Muslims for several years using psychological theories developed primarily in the West. In a review of empirical studies from 2006 to 2015, Haque et al. (2016) noted the incorporation of R/S into mainstream psychology by Muslim researchers as well as the acceptance of Western approaches and culturally sensitive adaptations of Western models and tools to study psychological phenomena among Muslim populations. As Muslim psychology is inherently built on the literature available in Western science, studies can be found across existing subdisciplines, with empirical studies being conducted in clinical, counseling, social/personality, industrial/organizational, cultural psychology, and neuroscience.

Despite the somewhat different foundations upon which knowledge is built, both Islamic psychology and Muslim psychology contribute important theories and findings about Muslims to the social science literature. In an earlier article (Pasha-Zaidi, 2019), I suggested expanding the term “Islamic Psychology” to “Islamic Psychologies” (Rothman & Coyle, 2018) in order to open the field to other, particularly non-clinical applications of psychology. While I still believe in broadening the field of study for Islamic psychology, given the foundational work of both indigenous and Western approaches, I think it is equally important to create an umbrella term that allows Islamic psychology and Muslim psychology to develop as separate yet related lines of enquiry. This is in line with Kaplick and Skinner (2017), who suggest a “distinction between *Islamic psychology* (referring to the psychology developed from Islamic sources, i.e., Islam’s version of psychology); and *Islam and psychology* (referring to the broader movement that relates Islam to psychology in general)” with topics related to Muslim mental health, lived experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and religious interactions “better categorized under Muslim psychology” (pp. 199–200).

For the purposes of this book, I have chosen the term, “Psychology of Islam and Muslims”. Figure 1.1 provides a model for beginning this dialogue. Bearing in mind that Islam considers all human beings to begin their life in submission to God (Joshanloo, 2013) and that “there is no compulsion in religion” (Qur’an 2:256), creating two branches of psychology can hopefully bring greater clarity and organization to the scholarship that focuses on Muslim populations. Additionally, employing a single umbrella term may promote greater collaboration between Muslim researchers with different specializations, while reminding non-Muslim researchers and practitioners of the importance of implicit and explicit norms that

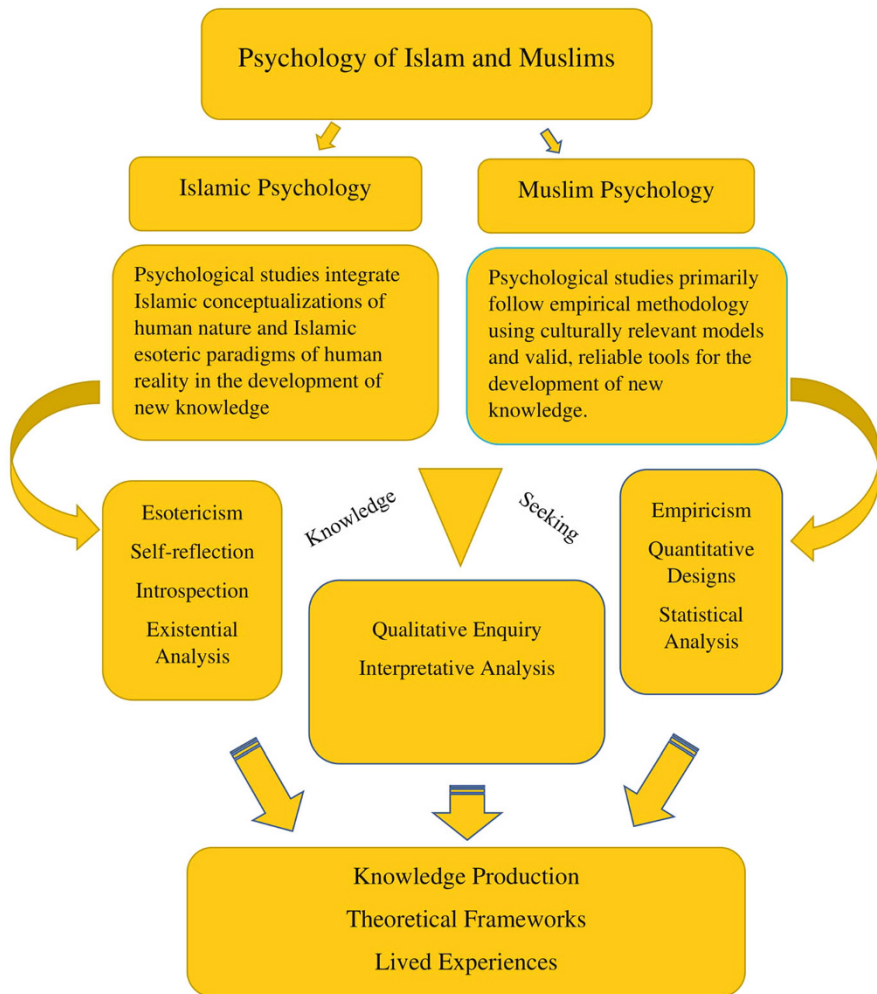


Fig. 1.1 Psychology of Islam and Muslims knowledge seeking and production model

Muslims may bring to their experiences, regardless of their level of religiosity or the nuances of their practice.

1.3 The Importance of Struggle in Positive Psychology

In the positive psychology literature, struggle lays the foundation for the behaviors, attitudes, and perspectives that can lead to virtue, meaning, resilience, and wellbeing (Wong, 2011) within individuals and can encourage movements toward social

justice at societal levels. A core value of the move towards Positive Psychology 2.0 (PP 2.0) is the emphasis on balance to correct the “tyranny” of positivity (Held, 2002), which created an artificial separation between the positive and negative aspects of human experience (Wong, 2011). Proponents of this phase of positive psychology prefer the integration of both positive and negative forces to understand the complexities of human life (Ryff & Singer, 2003) using metaphors associated with Eastern faith traditions, particularly the Taoist symbol of the yin and yang—the coexistence of duality in nature. The role of struggle in Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, and most wisdom traditions is inherent in the development of spirituality, a construct that is most often reflected in discussions about meaning of life and purpose.

1.3.1 Jihad al Nafs

In developing an empirically grounded Islamic conceptualization of the self or soul, Rothman (2020) found that the theoretical relationship between the discipline of psychology and the individual Muslim is primarily influenced by *jihad al nafs*, the struggle of the soul to return to its natural state of *fitrah*. *Fitrah*, the innate human connection to God, is central to Islamic psychology and serves as the starting point from which all human experience begins. As the trials of life in this world (*dunya*) cause human beings to get further from the innate purity of their *fitrah*, psychological distress ensues. From this perspective, struggle is not only responsible for negative affect and mental disease, it is key to achieving psychological health and wellbeing. Abdullah (2015) notes that strengths-based perspectives are consistent with the framing of *fitrah* in Islam as both undergird a positive view of humanness and highlight the importance of resilience in the face of struggles, with the growth of one’s character and virtue being an integral part of this journey (Rothman, 2020).

1.3.2 Character Strengths and Virtues in Muslim Populations

Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined character strengths as a family of core virtues that have a positive influence on our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. The Values in Action (VIA) classification consists of 24-character strengths organized by six virtue categories recognized across historical, religious, and cultural boundaries (Table 1.2).

A study of Muslim American youth found that religiosity was correlated with character strengths (kindness, equity, leadership, self-regulation, prudence, gratitude, hope/optimism, spirituality, and forgiveness) that provided protection against stressors (Ahmed, 2009). To better understand the applicability of these conceptualizations across international samples, Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2006) looked at character strengths in 54 countries, including 6 with Muslim majority populations. McGrath’s (2015) follow up study of 75 countries also featured a set of Muslim

Table 1.2 VIA classification of character strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

Virtue categories	Strengths
Wisdom	Creativity, curiosity, judgment, love-of-learning, and perspective
Courage	Bravery, honesty, perseverance, and zest
Humanity	Kindness, love, and social intelligence
Justice	Fairness, leadership, and teamwork
Temperance	Forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation
Transcendence	Appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality

majority nations. Table 1.3 shows the top five strengths in the Muslim majority countries examined. Across the sixteen data points, the strengths identified most often were fairness and judgment. This is consistent with the description of a virtuous society (*al-ijtima' al-fadil*) proposed by Al-Farabi in his treatises on social psychology and political statehood (Macarimbang, 2013) in which justice is of prime importance (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005).

As a model, the VIA classification has been used to further an understanding of the relationship between character strengths and struggles, such as the loss of a loved one (Blanchard, 2021), illness (Umucu, Tansey, Brooks, & Lee, 2020), daily stress (Niemiec, 2019), depression (Acosta, 2013), trauma from public shootings (Schueller, Jayawickreme, Blackie, Forgeard, & Roepke, 2015), war (Shoshani & Slone, 2016) and terrorism (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). The Arabic word for struggle or striving is *jihad*, a term that has become synonymous with warfare and terrorism in political discourse. While military intervention within the precepts of Islamic law is the primary interpretation of the term within the *hadith* of Sahih Al Bukhari,¹ this is not the only meaning of *jihad*. In fact, *jihad al nafs*, the struggle within oneself, is considered to be the “greater *jihad*,” particularly within Sufism (Streusand, 1997), the mystical branch of Islam that several authors in this collection discuss. This inner struggle is also the one I focus on in this chapter.

While the VIA categories provide a standardized set of key words to investigate character strengths across diverse populations, to explore Muslim strengths and struggles, it would be helpful to have a classification system that is specific to Islamic virtues. Given that the Arabic term for character is *akhlaq*, which is related to *khaliq* (the Creator) and *makhluq* (the creation), it is important to also consider specifying strengths that build on the relationship between human beings and God (Rahim, 2013). Aligning the Qur'an with the VIA virtue categories, my colleague and I (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019) added tolerance, purity/cleanliness, and repentance to the list as a starting point for indigenizing Islamic character strengths. However, strengths like *iman* (faith), *taqwa* (God-consciousness), *ihsa'n* (spiritual awareness), and *islam* (surrender to God's will) along with honor, pride, and hospitality, which are of immense importance in Muslim majority regions (Lambert, Passmore, & Joshanloo, 2015), are also salient to the discussion (Hirschkind, 2001).

¹Sahih Al Bukhari is one of the most commonly referenced in the collection of *hadith*.

Table 1.3 Top 5 VIA classification strengths in select Muslim majority countries (Park et al., 2006; McGrath, 2015)

Country	Park, Peterson, & Seligman (2006) Ranking of top 5 VIA strengths (1 = highest)	McGrath (2015) Ranking of top 5 VIA strengths (1 = highest)
Azerbaijan	1. Fairness 2. Curiosity 3. Learning 4. Judgment 5. Kindness	N/A ^a
Bahrain	1. Judgment 2. Learning 3. Curiosity 4. Fairness 5. Honesty	N/A
Egypt	N/A	1. Kindness 2. Fairness 3. Honesty 4. Gratitude 5. Teamwork
Indonesia	N/A	1. Fairness 2. Hope 3. Judgment 4. Spirituality 5. Honesty
Iran	N/A	1. Honesty 2. Gratitude 3. Fairness 4. Kindness 5. Judgment
Malaysia	1. Fairness 2. Judgment 3. Learning 4. Honesty 5. Curiosity	1. Fairness 2. Judgment 3. Honesty 4. Teamwork 5. Curiosity
Pakistan	N/A	1. Fairness 2. Kindness 3. Honesty 4. Spirituality 5. Teamwork
Qatar	N/A	1. Fairness 2. Kindness 3. Curiosity 4. Honesty 5. Gratitude
Saudi Arabia	N/A	1. Fairness 2. Gratitude 3. Kindness 4. Honesty 5. Judgment

(continued)

Table 1.3 (continued)

Country	Park, Peterson, & Seligman (2006) Ranking of top 5 VIA strengths (1 = highest)	McGrath (2015) Ranking of top 5 VIA strengths (1 = highest)
Turkey	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning 2. Honesty 3. Judgment 4. Kindness 5. Curiosity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Honesty 2. Fairness 3. Judgment 4. Kindness 5. Perspective
United Arab Emirates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning 2. Judgment 3. Gratitude 4. Curiosity 5. Fairness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fairness 2. Judgment 3. Kindness 4. Curiosity 5. Honesty
Uzbekistan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Judgment 2. Learning 3. Curiosity 4. Fairness 5. Forgiveness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fairness 2. Judgment 3. Curiosity 4. Kindness 5. Honesty

^aCountry data unavailable

A Deeper Dive: Humor as a Character Strength for Muslim Populations?

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

As a proponent of indigeneity, I believe it is important to gauge the applicability of constructs normed on individuals from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) countries to non-WEIRD contexts. Thus, in proposing a set of Islamic strengths based on the Qur’an and aligned with the VIA categories, my colleague and I (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019) eliminated humor from the list. In the VIA classification, humor falls within the virtue of transcendence, which also includes appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, and spirituality. While transcendence is a key virtue from an Islamic perspective, the placement of humor within that category may not easily fit the centrality of God as understood by most Muslims. As such, it is not surprising that humor does not appear in the top ten strengths identified by any of the Muslim majority countries in Park et al.’s (2006) study and only appears in the top 10 for three countries (Iran, Egypt, and Uzbekistan) in the McGrath (2015) study. A researcher or practitioner unfamiliar with Muslim norms may infer from this that Muslims are discouraged to find joy in life. However, this is not completely accurate. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is characterized as someone who was always smiling, and Muslims are taught that smiling is a form of charity to others. At the same time, the Qur’an cautions against using humor to denigrate others:

(continued)

O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent – then it is those who are the wrongdoers (49:11).

As such, humor, when used in a positive manner to uplift others and make adversities more bearable, would certainly fit as an Islamic strength. However, it also makes sense that as a reflection of transcendence, humor may not be the most endorsed character strength within Muslim populations.

1.3.3 Meaning, Resilience, and Growth through Struggle

Though struggle does not necessarily imply an experience of traumatic events, it is certainly a component of adversity. Frankl's (1955) seminal work on logotherapy proposes that human beings develop meaning from struggle through transcendental love, purposeful work, and courage in the face of difficult circumstances. Like the Islamic conceptualization of the soul, Frankl's model puts forth three components of the self: body, mind, and spirit, with the spirit being the inner core of each person. In this view, human beings are inherently motivated to find meaning in their lives. They have freedom to access a pathway to meaning, even in the most traumatizing conditions, by choosing their attitude toward uncontrollable circumstances and making moment-to-moment decisions in line with their inner core. While it does not negate the hardships of struggle, resilience can be cultivated by facing reality directly (as opposed to denying the need for coping with the situation), meaning making, and using whatever resources, internal and external, that may be available (Coutu, 2002). Research shows that a search for meaning in the aftermath of traumatic events not only builds resilience, it can sometimes lead to positive growth in aspects such as social relations, spirituality, and appreciation of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004).

Struggle can be both individual and collective. For example, in the United States, structural racism has been a collective struggle that African Americans have faced for centuries. Ogbu (1989) contends that a history of institutional barriers has created a deep distrust of Whites and the systems they control, which has forged a collective identity of African Americans and promoted a collective struggle against the structural forces that persist in their subjugation. Among Muslim groups, there have been numerous collective struggles throughout history, including ethnic, political, and territorial ones. Ethnic collective struggles of Muslim minorities are currently found in Myanmar, where the post-colonial militarization of the state along with a rise of political Buddhism and the concept of "national races" (*taingyintha*) has led to the political erasure of Rohingya minorities from Burmese history (Ansar, 2020). While in the Xinjiang Province of northwest China, Uyghur communities continue to be

subjected to government surveillance, detainment, and torture in “re-education camps” (Raza, 2019).

The Israeli-Palestinian apartheid (Falk & Tilley, 2017) is another example of ethnic and religious struggle. Using collective narratives, Srour, Mana, and Sagy (2020) examined the interpretations of sociopolitical and historical events in the region. Differences were found in perceptions of historical events, such as the Holocaust (many Jewish Israelis consider it the worst tragedy for all of humanity and use it as justification for the establishment of a Jewish state, while Palestinians consider it a Jewish tragedy that should not be used to justify the infliction of suffering onto Palestinian people). Additionally, there is the 1948 War (many Jewish Israelis mark it as a day of independence, while Palestinians view it as a catastrophe, or *nakba*), and the current struggles such as the war in Gaza, which many Israelis consider a necessity, and many Palestinians view as a reflection of the violence of the Israeli state. Srour et al. (2020) found additional differences between Muslim and Christian Palestinians, with Muslims believing that an independent state should be Islamic and Christians fearing that an independent Islamic state in Palestine will not afford them equal rights as a minority group. Another example of collective struggle is that of Muslim women around the world, who continue to face racialized and gendered struggles to reclaim their narrative amid conflicting stereotypes of oppression and sexualization from both Western feminists and Islamic patriarchies alike (Zine, 2006).

As collective struggles reflect larger societal ills, they can prompt collective action and social justice movements. In developing an integrative social identity model of collective action (SIMCA), Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (2008), note the importance of perceived injustice, efficacy (or the belief in the likelihood of affecting possible change), and identity as antecedents to collective action against inequalities, with politicized identities being particularly cohesive. Furthermore, if those in positions of advantage are able to identify with collective actors, there is a possibility that their allyship can create positive intergroup attitudes, prompt acknowledgment of inequalities, and perhaps even create opportunities for reparations to be considered (Louis, 2009). As such, both individual and collective struggles can pave the way for meaningful change within human beings and societies.

1.4 JIHAD in This Book

As *jihad* in non-Muslim sectors is one of the most vilified Islamic concepts, it seemed a particularly apt opportunity to reclaim the narrative of the term by organizing each section of this collection using the acronym JIHAD to showcase the positive struggles discussed herein. In this book, the acronym stands for *Journeys toward Justice, Intersectional Identities, Health and Healing, Acceptance and Allyship*, and *Disrupting Dogma*, with each section providing perspectives about the individual and collective struggles that Muslims face relative to that theme. Given the nature of the content, both esoteric and scientific ideas are presented.

Additionally, in line with the third wave of positive psychology (Lomas, Waters, Williams, Oades, & Kern, 2020), an interdisciplinary approach incorporating aspects of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, cultural, feminist, and media studies, and of course, psychology is used to address spirituality, struggle, and social justice.

1.4.1 *Journeys Toward Justice*

Justice is an essential part of Islam and a primary struggle within Muslim populations. The Qur'an states: "God commands justice, righteousness, and spending on ones' relatives, and prohibits licentiousness, wrongdoing, and injustice..." (16:90). Thus, Islam demands equality and social interdependence to achieve a peaceful society. Yet, Muslim communities and governments today are experiencing deep rifts between ideology and practice. "The Islamic legal system is both normatively comprehensive and, yet, flexible in adapting to different contexts and challenges, as *shariah* principles orient the legal system in changing times and radically different contexts" (Zoli, Bassiouni, & Khan, 2017, p. 40); yet, confusion reigns in part due to distorted views of Islam propagated by governments and religious leaders who lack intricate understanding about how to apply *shariah* in the context of specific issues. This is further complicated by the fact that extremist groups such as Boko Haram, Daesh/ISIS, and various factions of Al-Qaeda use (or misuse) Islamic principles to justify their actions. As such, it is not surprising that the Pew Research Center (2014) found a varied level of support among Muslims in African, South Asian, and Middle Eastern countries for actions, like suicide bombing, which are untenable in normative Islamic frameworks (Zoli et al., 2017). Muslim communities also struggle with women's rights (Hajjar, 2004), internalized Islamophobia (Suleiman, 2017), anti-immigrant sentiment and colorism (Mohamed, 2017), ethnic conflicts (Mazhar, Khan, & Goraya, 2012), displacement from their homes and families (Hasan, Mitschke, & Ravi, 2018), and a new wave of civil wars (Walter, 2017), including the Syrian conflict, which the United Nations has described as the "worst man-made disaster the world has seen since World War II" (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017, para. 3).

While an extended discussion of injustices within Muslim communities and globally is beyond the scope of this chapter, social justice is clearly an area of struggle for Muslims. The chapters in *Journeys toward Justice* address positive struggle in this regard from various standpoints. In "Socially Engaged Islam: Applying Social Psychological Principles to Social Justice, Faith-Based Activism and Extreme Altruism in Muslim Societies," Anisah Bagasra looks at Islamic approaches to altruism and the ways in which Muslims tie their religious identity to social justice activism through religiously motivated actions. In discussing "Research with Minoritized Muslim Communities," Nasreen Shah, Munir Shah, and I focus on research methods that allow for mindfulness and cultural humility in building relationships with Muslim communities, protecting the vulnerabilities of Muslim participants, and ensuring ethical data collection and dissemination of

information that respects cultural and religious norms of Muslim populations. In “Afghan Hazara Asylum Seekers in Athens: Positive Affirmation through Service and Protest,” Melissa Kerr Chiovena employs an ethnographic approach to explore evidence of post-traumatic growth among Afghan refugees in Greece. Finally, in “Muslim Media Psychology and its Effects on Society: The Role of Pakistani TV Serials in Promoting Women’s Rights,” Iqra Iqbal and I discuss feminism in Pakistan and the portrayal of female role models in selected Pakistani drama serials.

1.4.2 Intersectional Identities

Social identity refers to the ways in which people think about themselves in relation to the groups they inhabit. Proposed by Tajfel (1969), the theory states that group membership provides individuals with a sense of social belonging that divides people into “us” (in-groups) and “them” (out-groups). As the in-group generates positive descriptors of those who belong, individuals gain self-esteem and pride from their group membership, which is further enhanced by negative portrayals and discrimination of out-groups. An offshoot of social identity theory is social categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), which focuses on the cognitive processes involved in classifying oneself as a group member and considers the salience of the categories in which individuals place themselves in different situations. This perspective recognizes the fluidity of both social groups and perceptions of belonging (Huddy, 2001). Identity is further complicated by the relative status of group memberships in different contexts and the intersection at which an individual may stand based not only on self-categorization, but also on the social identities imposed by others. As the term “intersectionality” brings with it a focus on the multidimensional aspects of power and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989), it is important to consider the influence of social hierarchies such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, ability/disability, and social class on the spectrum of power and oppression that impact social identity. Furthermore, a slow, but growing emphasis on non-Eurocentric/American psychological models has prompted rich discussion on the navigation of identities within multicultural and international contexts (Ferguson, 2006), thus highlighting the importance of historical, sociopolitical, cultural, national, and religious factors as well.

In “The Struggle of Chosen Identity Amongst Uyghurs While Living Under the Chinese State,” K. Tung discusses the impact of China’s policies on the identity expression of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, along with common coping strategies, such as art, friendship, and storytelling that are used to respond to the surveillance and “re-education camps” imposed by the Chinese government in the region. In “Working towards a Positive Islamic Identity for Muslim American Women” Tasneem Mandviwala critically evaluates the concept of a Positive Islamic Identity (PII) in light of the intersectional identities of Muslim American women and proposes the development of different PIIs, rather than one universal construct, to accommodate the influence of factors such as gender, age, and culture on identity

development. Finally, in “Sexually Diverse Muslim Women Converts: Where Do They Stand?” Maryam Khan examines the experiences of three sexually diverse female converts who navigate their journeys to Islam through pluralistic approaches to the faith system that include personalized relationships with God, the Qur’an, and Islamic practices.

1.4.3 Health and Healing

Wellbeing is a primary area of study in positive psychology. Rooted in the humanistic tradition of eminent psychologists such as Carl Rogers (1961), who emphasized the fully functioning person, and Abraham Maslow (1943), whose hierarchy of needs focused attention on the importance of studying contributors to healthy human development, positive psychology was launched as a separate subdiscipline by Martin Seligman’s 1998 Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 1999). The first wave of positive psychology embarked upon research that decentered the discipline of psychology from its “preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5), while the second wave (PP 2.0) focused on swinging the pendulum towards a balanced approach, integrating both positive and negative influences as well as culturally-relevant constructs in the study of wellness (Wong, 2011). This new trajectory allowed researchers to be more inclusive of existential perspectives in psychology, opening avenues to greater discussion of indigenous approaches to health and healing.

While much of the PP 2.0 literature focuses on the contributions of Eastern religious and spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism and Taoism (Wong, 2013, 2019) less emphasis has been given to Islamic ways of healing (Saniotis, 2018). However, for Muslim researchers and practitioners, as well as those working with practicing Muslims, Islamic practices can be effective positive psychology interventions (Saeedi, Nasab, Zadeh, & Ebrahimi, 2015) and useful addendums to Western therapeutic programs (Al-Karam, 2018; Carter & Rashidi, 2004; Henry, 2015; Zakaria & Akhir, 2019). Henry (2015), for example, notes that Islamic prayer can provide spiritual energy similar to the way that “expanding yeast works in the flour or as the forces of life push the seed into germination” (p. 3). In fact, neurobiological data collected during studies of Islamic prayer show changes in brain waves indicating increased relaxation and cognitive processing (Doufesh, Faisal, Lim, & Ibrahim, 2012; Doufesh, Ibrahim, & Safari, 2016). This is not to suggest that Islamic approaches to healing should replace medical and pharmaceutical options for those struggling with mental illness. Certainly, the implementation of spiritual therapies by those without requisite knowledge and processes for accountability can be ineffective or even detrimental to clients (Martinez et al., 2007). At the same time, ignoring religion and spirituality (R/S) can also be a disservice to practicing Muslims for whom the integration of R/S could lead to positive outcomes. Koenig (2001) suggests that clinicians begin by taking a spiritual history through which they can

determine the importance of R/S in the lives of their clients. “A spiritual history should be taken in a way that . . . sends the message that religion and spirituality are an important area that may influence health for better or worse. Spiritual assessment need not be done at every visit, but rather on occasions when there is more time, such as during a new patient evaluation or on hospital admission. It should not replace a comprehensive and competent evaluation of medical problems” (Koenig, 2001, pp. 1190–1191). For practitioners working with Muslims, taking a spiritual history can determine if a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual approach may be worth considering.

In “Health and Wellbeing: Bridging Secular and Islamic Worldviews,” Syed Rizvi and I explore hedonic, eudemonic, and existential (or “chaironic”) wellbeing and look at the ways in which the five pillars of Islam can contribute to Muslim health and wellness. In “Incorporating Islamic Principles into Therapy with Muslim American Clients,” Nasreen Shah and Munir Shah explore the integration of Islamic principles and practices with Western therapeutic approaches, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to promote psychological healing of practicing Muslim Americans. Finally, in “Gratitude and Wellbeing: Cultivating Islamically-Integrated Pathways to Health and Wellness,” Ali Al-Seheel, Kate Bridges-Lyman, Rabia Dasti, and I look at the concept of *shukr*, or gratitude, from an Islamic perspective, and provide suggestions for increasing gratitude through the use of Islamic Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs).

1.4.4 Acceptance and Allyship

The need for affiliation, originally coined by Henry Murray (1938) and popularized by David McClelland (1961), notes the importance of social acceptance in human motivation. Belonging is also a basic tenet of Maslow’s theory (1968) and serves as both an antecedent to social connectedness and a protective factor against loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, social acceptance for those occupying marginalized categories can be an even greater struggle. While representation of minoritized groups in mainstream spaces is certainly valuable, “social acceptance encompasses the *psychological* inclusion of minorities as group members” (Chen & Hamilton, 2015, p. 2). Moving beyond a tolerance of “others” to acceptance and allyship requires a multifaceted approach that “spans and connects macro, meso, and micro processes and contexts, ranging from societal and organizational ideologies, values, policies, and practices, to leadership models and practices and group norms and climates, to interpersonal behavior and individual experiences of inclusion” (Ferdman, 2017, p. 239). The process is not an easy one; it is fraught with psychological discomfort regarding the boundaries of what each person or group considers acceptable and unacceptable behavior and presupposes a willingness to engage in self-reflection about aspects of difference that may not be immediately visible within the boundaries of one’s own experience. While the literature on privilege has often focused on race/ethnicity and gender, Black and Stone (2005) expanded the concept

to include sexual orientation, religious affiliation, differing levels of ability, socio-economics, and age. They also noted a difference between social privilege, where an individual receives benefits based on membership in a prescribed group or groups, and social preference, which entails receiving benefits from membership in a group that is viewed with fondness. For individuals who hold positions at the intersections of oppressed and oppressor, dissecting one's social roles and privileges can be particularly challenging.

Within Muslim communities and spaces, discourse on marginalization is often weighed against the fear of adding fodder to Islamophobic rhetoric. However, it is important for Muslims to reflect on the ways in which we may hold positions of authority or social preference as a result of belonging to a normative or privileged group based on categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ableness, and socioeconomics. According to the Qur'an, diversity in human beings is by divine design:

To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but [His plan is] to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute (5:48).

From among Allah's signs are the creation of heaven and the earth and the difference of your tongues and the variation of your colors (30:22).

O mankind! We created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other [not that ye may despise each other]. Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is fully informed (49:13).

Given the Islamic injunction that "God is the best of judges" (Qur'an, 7:87), it is incumbent upon Muslims to engage in dialogue about the boundaries of acceptance and marginalization and to serve as allies for minoritized individuals within Muslim spaces. In "Decolonizing Muslim Same-Sex Relations: Reframing Queerness as Gender Flexibility to Build Positive Relationships in Muslim Communities," Sarah Shah, Maryam Khan, and Sara Abdel-Latif draw on theories of boundary-making and Orientalism to investigate the social construction of gender performance in the acceptance of queer Muslims within historical and some contemporary Muslim societies. In "The Heart of Autism: Building A Positive Islamic Model of Cognitive Disability," Laila S. Dahan introduces the Heart Model, a positive Islamic Model of Cognitive Disability that expands upon the Islamic conceptualization of self to consider individuals with neuro-atypical development and provides suggestions on how Muslims can better integrate individuals with autism into their communities and spaces. The chapter also includes A Deeper Dive contribution by Imaani Din, a 17-year-old Muslim with autism who provides a glimpse into her world. Finally, in "Promoting Allyship Among South Asian and Arab Muslims with Black and Latino/a Muslims in American Islamic Centers," Meg Warren, Yvonne El Ashmawi, Neneh Kowai-Bell and I discuss colorism, Islamophobia, and allyship, and explore the ways that South Asian and Arab Muslims can support and advocate for Black and Latino/a Muslims in American mosques.

1.4.5 *Disrupting Dogma*

The “Golden Age of Islam” is generally believed to have begun in the eighth century CE with the rise of the Abbasid caliphate and ended in the thirteenth century CE when the Mongol armies conquered and disseminated Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid empire (Renima, Tiliouine, & Estes, 2016). This time period is often remembered by contemporary Muslims with a sense of wistfulness as a bygone era when Islamic societies flourished, leading the world in scientific and cultural advancements. This was possible in part because the unifying force of the Abbasid empire broke down tribal and national barriers, allowing cultural, religious, and philosophical diversity to thrive. Additionally, forward-thinking leaders, by investing in research and scholarship, provided a rich environment for intellectual growth (Bobrick, 2012; Renima et al., 2016). It is perhaps because of this history of greatness that the decline and decay of Muslim societies today is particularly painful. Instead of a wave of great scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers, Muslim majority regions of the world are better known today for a wave of civil wars (Walter, 2017).

While numerous internal and external factors contributed to the decline of Muslim scholarship and influence beginning in the thirteenth century, perhaps one of the greatest losses is the deterioration of interest in critical thinking and intellectual debate. For Muslims, the Qur’an provides foundational knowledge, but this must be interpreted to reflect the ever-changing needs of society. This process, known as *ijtihad*, relies upon the Qur’an and *sunnah*, along with reasoning and deduction to adapt to societal changes. “As it constitutes a bridge between eternally valid divine injunctions and time specific requirement of every age, it is the key to provide an Islamic interpretation of modern developments and circumstances” (Javed & Javed, 2012, p. 216). Although some scholars believe that the “gates of *ijtihad*” were closed sometime between the tenth and the thirteenth century, as the interpretation of Islamic revelations had been finalized and settled, others contend that the tradition was never truly abandoned (Hallaq, 1984; Javed & Javed, 2012). A revival of the concept appeared in the eighteenth century and continues today by those who seek a way to revitalize Muslim scholarship to meet the current challenges of Muslims around the world (Javed & Javed, 2012; Laluddin, 2015).

As a religion, Islam is not antithetical to science (Pasha-Zaidi, 2019). Unlike Western social sciences which developed in opposition to religion (Zaman, 2009), the great discoveries of the Islamic Golden Age occurred in step with the precepts of the Qur’anic emphasis on knowledge seeking. “The Qur’an depicted the relationship between nature and man, and this inspired the Muslim scholars to study natural phenomena, in order to understand God” (Faruqi, 2006, p. 392). In fact, Al-Faruqi (1989) attributes the “malaise of the *Ummah*” to the distancing of Islamic beliefs from scientific discourse, which both he and Al-Attas (1978, 1993) believe can be remedied by the Islamization of Knowledge or rather, the Islamization of *contemporary* knowledge. In Islam, fundamentals like *aqidah* (creed), *ibadah* (worship), and *akhlaq* (ethics and morality) are timeless, but the manifestation of these concepts vary by time and location. As such, Laluddin (2015) invokes the concept of

maslahah (public good) as a way to reopen the “gates of *ijtihad*” and allow greater flexibility in the development of *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence that benefits contemporary societies, in the hopes of disrupting the malaise of dogma that exists in many Muslim communities.

To begin this crucial step, both scientific and esoteric approaches to knowledge seeking and production are highlighted in this book. In “Spiritual Assessment: Building Positive Resources for the Distressed Souls,” Rabia Dasti, Aisha Sitwat, and Amna Anwaar discuss the process of developing the Multidimensional Measure of Islamic Spirituality (MMIS), a quantitative psychological measure that uses Islamic conceptualizations of spirituality to study the religious commitment of Muslims. In “Thoughts on the GCC National Research Context: Challenges to Developing a Local Psychology,” Louise Lambert, Saad Ibrahim Yaaqeib, Annie Crookes, Brettjet Cody, and Semma Saad critically analyze the higher education landscape of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries and consider areas of need in the development of a regional psychology. In “The Contribution of Psychoanalysis to a Positive Islamic Psychology,” Beyhan Bozkurt and I explore the possibilities of psychoanalysis as a tool for deconstructing subjectivity and apply psychoanalytical thinking to analyze the concept of *sabr* (patience). Finally, in “Sufism and Jungian Psychology: Ways of Knowing and Being,” Mansoor Abidi bridges theoretical Sufism and Jungian Psychology by drawing similarities between Ibn ‘Arabi’s idea of *tanzih* (the soul’s descent) and *tashbih* (the soul’s ascent) with Jung’s individuation process.

1.5 Conclusion

In accordance with the newer waves of positive psychology, this book is a compilation of chapters from varied perspectives in the social sciences and humanities that bridge positive and negative aspects of human existence with the goal of amplifying voices that are lesser heard in discourse related to Islam and Muslims. While I understand that some of the perspectives may be controversial, it is my sincere belief that Muslim scholarship can regain the rigor of its past, however uncomfortable it may be at the outset. I invite you to consider the viewpoints in this book as a collective *jihad al nafs*, a struggle for the soul of Muslim relevance in the ever-changing world we inhabit. Research and media abound with negative coverage and stereotypes of contemporary Muslim societies. It is not enough to fight back against these narratives with counterpoints and outrage; we must also be willing to consider the struggles within our own communities and actively seek justice for those who are marginalized. You may not agree with the viewpoints expressed in this book. My goal is not to create consensus, but rather to open a dialogue that has been stifled by both Muslim and non-Muslim forces and to create a space for self-reflection. If you are uncomfortable at times as you read these perspectives, then you are likely doing it correctly.

I will reiterate here that I am not an Islamic scholar. I am simply a practicing Muslim. In my work as a social scientist, researcher, and educator, I have met with varying levels of disagreement and even disdain about the value of scholarship that highlights a positive psychology of Islam and Muslims, given the troubled state of Muslim affairs around the world. In one instance, my efforts were called “apologist”. However, I continue to move forward in the hopes of adding counternarratives to the abundance of negative, deficit-oriented portrayals of Islam and Muslims, while also encouraging a willingness among Muslims to seek out diverse viewpoints, not for the sake of creating enmity or confusion, but to acknowledge that diversity is by divine design. By opening ourselves to begin listening to those whose experiences are different from our own, we may perhaps begin to see some positive growth within ourselves and our communities.

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Part I
Journeys Toward Justice

Chapter 2

Socially Engaged Islam: Applying Social Psychological Principles to Social Justice, Faith-Based Activism and Altruism in Muslim Communities

Anisah Bagasra

Abstract The present chapter explores the social psychological concepts of prosocial behavior through the lens of Islamic tradition, focusing on how Islam promotes altruism, social justice, and social activism. Islam is a religion that encourages communal engagement as another form of worship, situating it within the contemporary dynamics of socially engaged spirituality. The chapter introduces readers to the various ways in which contemporary Muslims are tying their religious identity to social justice activism through religiously motivated social actions. Examples of religiously motivated altruism are described and discussed within the context of socially engaged Islam. Collectively, the chapter demonstrates the role of socially engaged spirituality among Muslims in promoting in-group cohesiveness and positive intergroup relationships that benefits large and small social change initiatives.

2.1 Introduction

The term “socially engaged spirituality”, or “engaged spirituality”, refers to activities motivated by religious or spiritual beliefs that focus on facilitating social change. Rothberg (1993) notes that it refers to the development of “spiritual qualities within the context of full involvement in social, political, and communal life” (p. 105). Stanczak (2006) discusses engaged spirituality among followers of mainstream religions, outlining the various forms of social change and the many paths that lead individuals to socially engaged spirituality. Interviewing 76 individuals, Stanczak explored the role of spirituality as a resource which adherents of various religions draw upon to engage in social transformation. Though the term socially

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engaged spirituality initially described social action in the Buddhist tradition, it is now widely studied within the context of other mainstream and alternative religious and spiritual traditions. However, engaged spirituality among Muslims has not been comprehensively explored, as psychology has tended to instead focus on the religion's role in deviant or societally maladaptive behaviors (specifically religious motivators for terrorism within the context of Muslims). With the advent of positive psychology and an increasing interest in indigenous psychologies, it is important to examine aspects of religious and spiritual traditions that encourage prosociality and social justice.

Seligman and colleagues developed the field of positive psychology in the 1990s as a response to psychology's focus on human flaws and psychopathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology concepts, which have historic origins in early psychologists such as William James and Abraham Maslow, emphasize areas of the human condition such as happiness, optimism, and human virtues and strengths. Behaviors such as altruism and social activism demonstrate the group level outcomes of individual optimal experiences, thereby connecting positive psychology to social change (Biswas-Diener, 2011). The integration of positive psychology and psychology of religion through the study of virtues has also recently been proposed (Root Luna, Van Tongeren, & Witvliet, 2017), and additional efforts have been made to highlight ongoing research in the positive psychology of religion and spirituality (Joseph, Linley, & Maltby, 2006). Similarly, indigenous psychologies have long acknowledged the role of spirituality to guide human virtues towards solving social problems (Bhawuk, 2017). Empirical studies have shown spirituality as a predictor of volunteerism, altruism, and other forms of prosociality (Pandya, 2017). Clearly, the research fields of positive psychology, indigenous psychologies, and psychology of religion intersect, including the study of human virtues, forgiveness, altruistic acts, and finding meaning.

Religious and spiritual traditions commonly address the issue of human virtues, meaning, and prosocial behaviors. Many religious traditions emphasize and promote prosocial behaviors, especially volunteerism, as ways to achieve meaning and demonstrate virtues in daily life. Research has sought to better understand the role of religiosity on prosocial behavior. Some research has suggested that high levels of religiosity are correlated with more prosocial behavior (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschueren, & Dernelle, 2005), with religious ideology acting as a motivating factor (Einhoff, 2011). Other studies have sought to understand whether religiosity can serve as a predictor of prosocial behaviors, and who will be the recipient of altruistic acts (Blogowska, Lambert, & Saroglou, 2013; Krause & Hayward, 2014). Results of such studies have been mixed, with some finding support for the role of religiosity in charitable giving, volunteerism, and helping behaviors under certain conditions, while others show no such role (Hunsberger & Platonow, 2001; Krause & Hayward, 2014; Petrovic, Chapman, & Schofield, 2018; Sappington & Baker, 1995; Van Cappellen, Saroglou, & Toth-Gauthier, 2016). Importantly, these studies have mostly been conducted among practitioners of Christianity within Western contexts. Islam, like many religious traditions, encourages personal spiritual development while pursuing an active role

in society. However, Islam does not have the monastic or ascetic traditions typical of Christian or Buddhist monasticism or Hindu asceticism. To the contrary, Islam discourages seclusion with some exceptions such as the practice of *itikaf* (a period of retreat in a mosque) during the last ten days of Ramadan, or the 40-day retreat (*chilla*) in the Sufi tradition. Social engagement is the norm and Muslims are expected to pursue spiritual growth without eschewing their family and communal duties. Social justice is an underlying narrative in the life and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and is therefore an important and recurring theme throughout the history of the development of Islam. Radical social change is also seen as the bedrock of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, which manifested in rights for women and orphans, calls for racial equality, and the promotion of education. Socially Engaged Spirituality (SES) within Islam can be divided into four categories (1) religiously-motivated actions that are mandated within the fundamental laws and beliefs of the Islamic religion, (2) movements or activities that are initiated or supported by governments or political parties of majority Muslim communities and rooted within Islamic tradition, (3) social activism and social justice initiatives created by small groups or individuals, and (4) personal struggles to engage in social change that are motivated by religious and spiritual beliefs. Socially engaged spirituality for Muslims can encompass communal, interpersonal, and individual actions, and they may be state-sponsored or independent of governing bodies.

For contemporary Muslims, SES actions take a variety of forms including political activism, engagement in the promotion and creation of social welfare services, human rights initiatives, Islamic feminism, and other forms of civic engagement. The prevalence of SES within Muslim communities is often not dependent upon the trait religiosity of the society, but rather conditions that are favorable to spiritual development. This can include the absence of ongoing conflict and the absence of brutal suppression of ideas. Individuals and groups can develop under conditions of war, poverty, and suppression, but the number of individuals and groups engaged in religious or spiritually motivated social action tends to increase when conditions favor human growth and a movement towards actualizing potential.

2.2 Religious Edicts Supporting Socially Engaged Spirituality

The Islamic tradition specifically mandates some prosocial behaviors as well as encouraging the practice of others amongst its followers. These behaviors are outlined in the Qur'an, the *hadith* (recorded words of the Prophet Muhammad), and in the *sunnah* (the recorded actions of the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime). These three sources frequently serve as the foundation for Muslims to form values, motivate and shape behavior, and dictate social norms. As a result, religious directives are likely to impact everyday decisions and behaviors (Ahmed, 1999; Murata & Chittick, 1994; Rauf, 2004). Additionally, from the Islamic

Table 2.1 Religious edicts supporting socially engaged spirituality in Islam (Sumer, 2012)

Religious edict/ Practice	Origin	Example
<i>Zakah</i>	Qur'an	"And spends something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed on you" (Qur'an, 63:10)
<i>Sadaqah</i>	Qur'an, <i>Hadith</i>	"Those who spend their wealth by night and day, in secret and in public, shall have their reward with their Lord" (Qur'an, 2:274)
<i>Waqf</i>	<i>Hadith</i>	"When man dies, his deeds cease to continue except for three things: Continuous charity, beneficial knowledge, and pious son who supplicates Allah for him". (Muslim)
Non-monetary charitable acts	<i>Hadith</i> , <i>Sunnah</i>	"If a Muslim plants a tree, or sows a field and men and beasts and birds eat from it, all of it counts as charity from him" (Bukhari, Tirmidhi)
Volunteerism	<i>Hadith</i> , <i>Sunnah</i>	"He who endeavors (to relieve) the needy, the widows, and the poor, is as one who endeavors in the service of God." (Bukhari, Muslim)
Social Justice	Qur'an, <i>Hadith</i> , <i>Sunnah</i>	"Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor (Qur'an, 4:135).

perspective, all charitable acts are a form of religiously motivated social engagement. Behaviors such as cooperation, volunteerism, donation, and social activism are viewed as acts that benefit not only the persons being helped but also provide ongoing spiritual benefits to the person engaged in the behavior. Table 2.1 illustrates both the religiously-motivated behaviors and corresponding scriptural or prophetic directives that encourage the behaviors drawn from Sumer's (2012) text.

A small number of studies have sought to examine the impact of religiosity on prosocial behavior in Muslim populations. These studies have affirmed the role of religious salience and religious socialization in increasing prosocial behavior (Duhaine, 2015; Kanekar & Merchant, 2001). One comparative study found higher levels of religious philanthropic behavior among Muslims compared to Hindus in the Netherlands, while Hindus engaged in more secular philanthropic behavior (Carabain & Bekkers, 2012). These examples illustrate the potential impact of religiosity and religious commitment on prosocial behaviors among both Muslims living in Muslim-majority, collectivist societies, and Muslims living as minorities in predominately individualistic societies. Other studies have also indicated religion as a motivator for involvement in social, political, and environmental activism among Muslims (Gilliat-Ray & Bryant, 2011; McGinty, 2012). Finally, given the emphasis on justice and equality in Islamic theology, researchers have sought to compare aspects of religiosity with psychological models of moral reasoning (Ji, Ibrahim, & Kim, 2009). Taken together, these psychological studies attempt to empirically measure the role of religiosity in establishing normative forms of engaged spirituality within Muslim populations.

The most explicit form of engaged spirituality in Islam comes in the form of yearly almsgiving (*zakah*) and other voluntary forms of giving (*sadaqah*). *Zakah* is considered the third pillar of Islam, after (1) belief in one God (*shahadah*) and (2) offering the five daily prayers (*salah*). The practice of *zakah* is followed by the two remaining pillars: 4) fasting during the month of Ramadan (*sawm*), and 5) pilgrimage to Makkah (*Hajj*). Helping others through *zakah* is mandated in the Qur'an. *Zakah* translates directly as "purity" and is viewed as a way of purifying one's wealth by engaging in an act that benefits others. As Murata and Chittick (1994) note, "*zakah* has an obvious social relevance. Purification of an individual's possessions takes place through helping others. In order to pay it, one has to concern oneself with the situation of one's neighbors and discover who the needy are" (p. 16). In addition, the Qur'an prioritizes the individuals who should receive the benefit of a person's wealth: "Whatever wealth you spend, let it be for parents, relatives, orphans, the destitute, and the wayfarer (2:215). In some ways, the Qur'an's emphasis on helping parents and relatives before others agrees with evolutionary psychology theories of kin protection and kin selection (Stewart-Williams, 2007).

The collection and distribution of *zakah* may be formal or informal depending upon each country. For example, national governments in some Muslim majority countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, engage in more formal control of *zakah*, while countries like Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Bangladesh engage in private, voluntary *zakah* collection. As Singer (2013) notes, *zakah* is a commandment and not an independent voluntary act: "Therefore, payment of *zakah* is first and foremost a sign of belief in and obedience to God, and not an expression of beneficence toward other people" (p. 345). Since few countries mandate and track *zakah* payment, contemporary *zakah* is like any other charitable act in that the form and amount is private and can be determined by the individual. In Western countries, Muslims may choose to send their donations to other countries, donate to organizations within their country of residence, or use informal pathways through family members, tribal councils, and community elders. It is worth reflecting on the increasing personal risks for Muslims in post 9/11 America who donate *zakah* to overseas organizations (Strom, 2009). This means that continuing with such donations has shifted from being simply a religious norm to a behavior with an altruistic element. In all cases, *zakah* remains an important behavior as it re-affirms civic engagement as a vital part of a Muslim's life and religious identity.

Charity extends beyond monetary forms of giving and embraces a much broader range of social behaviors. *Sadaqah* is the Arabic term that refers to all voluntary forms of charity outside of the obligatory *zakah*. Participation in *sadaqah* is viewed by many followers of Islam as being of equal importance as *zakah*, even though it is not one of the five pillars. One *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad illustrates this:

To smile in the company of your brother is charity. To command to do good and prevent others from doing evil is charity. To guide a person away from a place where he can go astray is charity. Removing troublesome things like thorns and bones from the road, is charity. Pouring water from your jug into the jug of your brother is charity. Guiding a person with defective vision is charity for you (Bukhari, 1996).

Sadaqah is identified in the Islamic tradition as positive prosocial behaviors that any person can engage in. Common forms of *sadaqah* in Muslim societies today include monetary donations to charitable and aid organizations; volunteering for soup kitchens or donating towards their upkeep; blood donation; food drives; providing for educational scholarships and orphan sponsorships; sponsoring meals for poor families during the month of fasting (Ramadan); cooking and feeding a community the fast-breaking (*iftar*) meal during Ramadan; and donation of time or skills based upon the profession and abilities of the donating individual (Singer, 2006). In the United States, specific examples of charitable acts have included free clinics run by Muslim physicians (Wang, 2014); donating supplies to victims of natural disasters and distributing water to victims of the Flint, Michigan water crisis (Wang, 2016); raising funds and donating supplies to refugee families; Ramadan food drives for local food banks; and fundraising for international aid organizations such as Islamic Relief, Syrian Sunrise, MuslimAid, the World Food Program and other agencies. Increasingly, religious doctrine is cited by Muslims as a main motivator for engaging with their local communities, in spite of rising Islamophobia and hate crimes. In discussing the development of Muslim Community Based Health Organizations (MCBHOs), Laird and Cadge (2010) note that many of the organizations talk about their work as both an extension of *zakah* and fulfillment of a religious duty, and also in terms of personal development: “First, MCBHOs offered a vehicle for the expression and enactment of personal piety and self-fulfillment, in ways that link traditional Islamic charitable values with American voluntarism. Founders, staff, and volunteers at MCBHOs, in other words, spoke about how their work in the clinics enabled them to develop their identities and anchor themselves as Muslims in the United States. They emphasized making services available to all people according to Muslim teachings, not just as individual Muslims, but through Muslim-identified organizations. Many spoke of how important it is for them, as Muslims, to give back not just to their Muslim community but to all” (p. 233).

Interestingly, the recipients of these charitable donations and volunteerism are not limited to members of the Muslim faith, which contradicts the kinship norm often discussed in social psychological literature on altruism. For example, during Hurricane Harvey, 25 mosques in and around Houston, Texas (USA) opened their doors to act as shelters (Arain, 2017). Certain donations such as food packets during Ramadan do target members of the Muslim community, but many other initiatives tend to go beyond the boundaries of any kinship created by a shared faith. In Europe and North America in particular, charitable activities often extend to serving the local and regional communities regardless of faith background. Donations to national and global aid organizations provide a variety of community needs including food, clothing, shelter, educational needs, creating community wells, medical services, and vocational training in addition to delivering emergency aid.

A *waqf*, or public endowment, is another form of charity designed to provide for the maintenance of a person, building, structure, or organization. *Waqfs* are a form of *sadaqah* known as *sadaqah jariya* or ongoing charity, though *sadaqah jariya* also refers to many other acts. Common examples of *waqfs* include mosque complexes, shrines, or a property that is rented out and generates income to support a single

family member or an entire family. A *waqf* may be motivated by the desire to promote specific services, maintain certain structures, improve or preserve the individual's reputation, keep property and assets within the family, preserve wealth, and promote community interests (Singer, 2013).

Within Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, there are teachings that stress the need for social engagement alongside spiritual goals (Budhwani & McLean, 2019). Some Sufi orders have developed programs or policies that emphasize peace work, education and other forms of social activism. In South Asia, Sufi activity often takes place at shrines dedicated to various Sufi saints; thousands of pilgrims flock to these shrines, many of which are viewed as the source of blessings from the dead saint. Because of these beliefs the sites themselves have become vehicles for Sufi adherents to carry out social work. For example, most major shrines are equipped with a *langar* (soup kitchen) that feeds the needy. All shrines attract a large number of destitute people because they know that pilgrims seeking some favor of the saint will not refuse money or other goods to the surrounding beggars. At some shrines you can find a large number of the mentally disabled and mentally ill who receive food and shelter there. In this way, shrines serve as informal sources of social services in addition to their role as spiritual centers.

2.3 Contemporary Social and Political Activism

Muslim communities are increasingly engaging in intersectional forms of social justice activism, especially in the United States. Contemporary examples can be found in the actions of community faith leaders such as Imam Omar Suleiman, who has been active in both the Black Lives Matter Movement (specifically issuing calls for justice for victims of police brutality), and more recently calling for Muslim Americans to support immigrants and asylum seekers detained at the US border. Linda Sarsour, one of the co-founders of the Women's March, is a Palestinian American who focuses on civil right issues in the United States including police brutality, immigration issues, women's rights, and the treatment of prisoners. She is also involved in the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) movement targeting Israeli policies towards Palestinians. Imam Zaid Shakir is a faith leader active in promoting issues of climate change. The election of Rashida Talib and Ilhan Omar to the United States Congress in 2018 has increased the visibility of Muslim American leaders and both have been vocal in addressing a range of social justice and civil rights issues. Other community leaders are driven by a desire to improve relationships with other faith communities through interfaith work. Religiously motivated social action also takes the form of challenging threats to religious liberty (Uddin, 2019), such as the right to build houses of worship and Muslim cemeteries. These contemporary Muslim leaders in many ways follow in the footsteps of earlier spiritually motivated social activists including Muhammad Ali who asserted his religious beliefs in objecting to participation in the Vietnam War and used his celebrity to promote other philanthropic endeavors.

The Muslim Student Association (MSA), founded in 1963 in the United States, continues to be one of the major vehicles by which Muslim college students in America engage in political, social, and charitable action as well as work on maintaining and strengthening their spiritual beliefs. The MSA also uses its voice to educate non-Muslims about Islam and the Muslim community and to engage in education about the plights of Muslims in other countries (Lampman, 2001). Social action was not a significant part of the lives of most Muslim American college students prior to 9/11, but that single event forced many Muslim students to alter their approach based on the shifting attitudes of their fellow Americans. For those Muslims who were already in college during the attacks, the realization that they needed to reach out to their fellow students, professors and others in their community became a basis for teach-ins, lectures and other events. For those Muslim students who began college after 9/11, there was a realization that the way they projected Islam and themselves as Muslims, could change or create new perceptions and combat misconceptions. Social action now plays a larger role in the lives of Muslim American college students than in any prior time period. From community efforts like collecting canned goods for homeless shelters to protesting wars and violence, Muslim college students are making their voices heard and exercising their rights to free speech, a drive for justice and the desire to establish themselves as a distinct but integral part of American society.

Other large organizations that promote religiously motivated social activism include the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). Smaller organizations include Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE), Muslims for Progressive values, and Muslim Legal Fund of America. All of these organizations promote the idea of spiritual development and strengthening of one's Muslim identity through active engagement in social change.

Globally, the themes of Muslim activism may vary. For example, in Europe there are challenges surrounding women's right to wear the hijab or modest swimwear as well as concerns about intimate partner violence and female genital mutilation (FGM; Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017). The group *Mamans Toutes Egaes* (Mothers all Equal) protested the banning of mothers in headscarves from participating in the children's school trips (Chrisafis, 2013). The Gulen network is a loosely structured organization based on the philosophy of Fethullah Gulen, which focuses on establishing education institutions and the incorporation of Islamic tradition with modernity (Pew Research Center, 2010). There is also a lot of work regarding the rights of refugees and providing appropriate social services for refugees and asylum seekers (Borell & Gerdner, 2011). In Muslim-majority countries, activism includes women's rights, universal education, environmental activism, and most prominently fighting against political oppression and corruption (Hashem, 2006; Tschalaer, 2015). Much of the present-day activism is either independent of organizations or only loosely tied to formal organizations. One example of this are the women protestors in Sudan, such as Alaa Salah, who became a symbol of Sudan's revolution. In fact, approximately 70% of the protestors during the 2019 protests were women, who received support through organizations such as the Women of

Sudanese Civic and Political Groups and the No to Women's Oppression Initiative. Importantly, social media has allowed more individuals to organize and engage in activism without membership in formal organizations. There is also a focus on developing sustainable social welfare systems that are not dependent upon foreign funding (Weiss, 2002).

2.4 Concepts of Social Justice in Islam

Islam encourages its followers to be active in society while pursuing a religious and spiritual lifestyle. Islam, for its followers, is often described as a way of life in which codes of conduct are clearly outlined in scripture and prophetic tradition. These beliefs shape social activism in Muslim communities, their interaction with other communities engaged in social change, and how social action is interpreted in the individual lives of Muslims.

Islamic concepts of social justice are drawn from the Qur'an and the biographic tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, specifically his recorded words (*hadith*) and actions (*sunnah*). Oppression, persecution, and resistance were common themes of early Islamic history and the Arabic word for justice occurs 28 times in the Qur'an. Specifically, the Qur'an commands Muslims to be just in their dealings with others and to avoid oppression (Qur'an 57:25; 38:26). One *hadith* records the Prophet Muhammad as saying, "Whoever of you sees something wrong should change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of belief." To act out, speak out, or inwardly disavow any act of oppression, injustice or wrongdoing is thus incumbent upon every Muslim.

Syed Qutb (1906–1966) was a Muslim intellectual who wrote extensively on the topic of peace and social justice. Two less well-known books by Qutb are *Social Justice in Islam* and *Islam and Universal Peace*. These texts were written prior to his imprisonment, and subsequent radicalization, and after his stay in the United States. His work on social justice reflects post World War II concerns of many Islamic activists at the time to address the role of Islam in solving concrete social and socioeconomic problems in light of the rise of Communism and Marxism (Qutb, 2000). Qutb describes social justice within the Islamic context: "Justice in Islam is a human equality envisaging the adjustment of all values, of which the economic is but one. Economic equality is, to be precise, equality of opportunity, combined with the freedom to develop one's talents within the boundaries set by the higher purposes of life" (Qutb, 2000, p. 47). He emphasizes Islam's acknowledgment of the fundamental equality and freedom of all individuals, and the sinful nature of oppression within the Islamic worldview. In his writings on peace, Qutb (1993) outlines social action as an obligation for all Muslims, noting that playing a role in maintaining a just society is a necessity for all practitioners of Islam: "Islam encourages the individual to use his mind and body and does not substitute ritual for rules to govern behavior. It does not cater for the individual and neglect his role in society. It does not concern itself with his private life to the detriment of his political role nor ignore the relationship of

his state to other states” (Qutb, 1993, p. 3). Such thinking regarding the active role that individuals should play in establishing a just, equal, free and yet moral society founded on Islamic principles has served as the foundation for most modern Islamic social justice movements.

Many Islamic spiritual figures have discussed the relationship between justice and peace. Justice is often viewed as a prerequisite for peace, though other factors are also discussed in relation to peace and justice issues. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, a Sri Lankan Sufi who established a Sufi community in the United States, discusses in his book *Islam and World Peace* (1987) the qualities within Islam that must be present in order for peace to prevail:

When he [Umar Ibn al-Khattab] was given the key to the Holy City, he spoke about four essential things which must always exist in Islam: justice, truth, wisdom, and faith. As long as Islam retains these four and lives in unity, comforting with compassion and giving peace to other lives, there will be peace in Islam. But when this justice changes, peace will be lacking. The time is now approaching when we will find no peace in Islam or in the hearts of people. We must realize that if man wants peace and justice in the world and in his life, then he himself must conduct his life with good qualities (Muhaiyaddeen, 1987, p. 29).

Bawa Muhaiyaddeen uses the story of Omar, one of the Caliphs of Islam entering the city of Jerusalem, to emphasize the necessity of certain qualities that Muslims should possess in order to foster peace, such as justice and compassion. Most proponents of social justice in the Islamic tradition acknowledge that each individual must reflect in their own lives the qualities that they want to bring to others or the society at large.

2.5 Islamic Social Justice Movements

Islamic social justice movements can best be defined as any organization or group of individuals that focuses on specific issues such as justice, humanitarian concerns, social, political, or economic welfare and which is primarily motivated by Islamic principles. These principles may include, but are not limited to, Qur’anic emphasis on social justice, oppression, charity, reconciliation, and maintaining the welfare of widows, orphans, and the poor. One example of this is the following Qur’anic verse: “Let there be a community among you who call to the good, and enjoin the right, and forbid the wrong. They are the ones who have success” (3:104). This verse encourages practitioners to be proactive in promoting ideal conduct as a key component to establishing a successful and just society.

An Islamic social justice movement, therefore, contains several components, which are often reflected in the movement’s complex nature. Current movements contain core principles based on scripture and prophetic tradition, as well as ideas and activities formulated from modern definitions of a just society and Islam’s interaction with current global economic, political, and social conditions. More importantly in the context of this discussion, in which the focus is on how activists from different backgrounds can assist in the process of global conflict resolution, modern Islamic social justice movements have had to contend with the idea of

interacting with members of other religious groups, or even other Islamic sects, in order to achieve common goals. One of the earliest examples of such a movement, in which members of different faiths worked together to resolve massive conflict, can be seen in Mahatma Gandhi's relationship with Badshah Khan, a Muslim and ethnic Pashtun who waged a successful non-violent campaign against British rule in India (Easwaran, 1984). Gandhi and Khan, along with other individuals within India, established a movement based on social justice and liberation that transcended faith, without sacrificing their own or their followers' religious identities. The Gandhi-Khan relationship still serves as a model for modern liberation movements intent on using a non-violent social action approach to eliminate injustice and colonialism.

Islamic social justice movements tend to be both progressive and revivalist in nature. They aim to tackle problems in economic and social development, while also looking to revive Islamic society based on the idealized period of 13 years in which the Prophet lived in Medina. However, many of the Islamic groups and movements, whose chief concerns are social justice, humanitarianism and economic liberation, fit this description while also being labeled fundamentalist, Islamist, or revolutionary by Western societies. Despite negative perceptions of these groups, their foundations lie in religiously motivated social activism and therefore cannot be ignored. The majority of Islamic social justice movements do not employ violent means to achieve their goals, though some groups continue to demonstrate a devotion to armed struggle. Some of the groups referred to as Islamic revivalist movements promote non-violent forms of social change and include the *Jama'at-i-Islami* in Pakistan, the *Dakwah* movement in Malaysia (Hilman, 2012; Nagata, 1980), and the Muslim Brotherhood, which has branches in Egypt, the Middle East and Africa (Clark, 2004). The *Dakwah* movement arose in Malaysia in the 1970s and focuses on incorporating Islamic values into the government with a goal of social, economic, and spiritual development (Mohamad, 2017). Similarly, the constitution of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood states among its purposes: achieving social justice, providing social security to every citizen, contributing to popular service, and encouraging charity work.

Other groups that are often tied to Islamic liberation movements, many of which use violence as one of many strategies to achieve stated goals, still show a strong involvement in social and humanitarian activities for Muslims. These include such groups as Hamas, Hizbollah, liberation movements in Algeria and Egypt, (Wiktorowicz, 2004) Chechnya, Iraq, and Kashmir, and are based on the concepts of ending repression and enacting political and social change within their respective countries. The foundational principles of many of these organizations imply social justice and involve the employment of various means to achieve this end, often based on the degree of resistance and repression encountered from those in political power. Within Islam, the state is viewed as the main source of establishing social justice and maintaining social welfare for its citizens (Ismael & Ismael, 2008). Many of these social and political reform movements arose out of recognition of the failure of the state to uphold its role in maintaining social justice. Most of these social justice movements are viewed within the Western media context only through the lens of their support of violence, without any recognition of their roles in relation to

education, social welfare, and political activism. Thus, their contributions to the area of social justice are easily dismissed when suspected links to terrorism are suggested by media or opponents. This prevents a deeper understanding of the multifaceted roles these organizations play within the daily lives of ordinary citizens with whom they interact.

The majority of Islamic social justice movements emerged in response to colonialism, with many forming after World War II as a reaction to colonial and post-colonial changes in national lines (Hanretta, 2009). The changes in infrastructure that resulted are significant, as these have played a role in the development of conflicts in many areas. In Africa, the deterioration of infrastructure built by colonial rulers has created competition for resources that has often resulted in armed conflicts. In Palestine and Israel, as well as Pakistan, India and the Balkan region, the changes in national lines have resulted in conflicts that are ethnic or religious in nature. These changes combined with the effects of modernity, conflicting political ideologies, and globalization have resulted in the formation of most of the Islamic social justice movements of the last half-century. Many of these movements, such as *Jaamat-i-Islami* and the Muslim Brotherhood, emphasize the need for reforming modern Islamic nation-states and strengthening economic self-sufficiency, enacting fair treatment of the poor, heightening awareness of the impact of consumerism, and formulating a political system based on Islamic principles (De Cordier, 2010). Most of the modern Islamic social justice movements do not see as their primary goal the establishment of an Islamic state or the application of Islamic law. This is based partly on the acknowledgment that such concepts are beyond the capabilities of most modern Muslim nations, and the increasingly transnational nature of Islamic social justice movements.

There are several subgroups of social justice movements that are selective in the nature of their goals and target populations. One subgroup of movements focuses on Muslim women (Dunn, 2016). Their priority is to remove societal and economic barriers that impede progress for women, using Islamic concepts of the equal role of women both spiritually and materially in society (Ahmad & Rae, 2015). Such organizations have been effective in advocating for issues that overwhelmingly impact women in Muslim societies (Mumtaz, 2005). Another subgroup comes from the followers of Sufism. Sufi spiritual leaders have been active throughout Islamic history in promoting a peaceful and just society, and have been very outspoken since 9/11 in promoting non-violence within Islam, and engaging in interfaith dialogues with their spiritual counterparts (Josefsson, Nilsson, & Borell, 2017). Their devotion to the principles of social justice makes them key players and potential consultants when conducting mediation in a region where Sufi leaders are viewed as spiritually or politically authoritative figures (Hanretta, 2009).

Several successful examples exist of Islamic social justice movements playing a role in resolving ongoing conflict situations. One is the role of Islamic groups in the social justice movements for all South Africans as a result of apartheid. The history of these organizations and their relationship with Muslims outside of South Africa and with non-Muslim South Africans demonstrates the complexity of such movements and their goals. Important lessons can be learned from the way Muslims in

South Africa engaged in cooperation with non-Muslims over the common enemy of apartheid, without sacrificing their Islamic identity. Muslims saw in apartheid the type of oppression and prejudice that was experienced by the early Muslim converts in Mecca, and realized that their struggle for economic, social, and political equality was also the struggle of Black South Africans of any faith (Esack, 1988).

2.6 Altruism

Altruism is sometimes considered a distinct form of prosocial behavior that involves helping with either no benefit to the helper or in some cases causing a detriment to the helper (Batson, 2011; Dibou, 2012; Weiler, 2003). Altruistic behaviors are selfless acts that tend to puzzle social and evolutionary psychologists. Post (2002) outlines two qualifications of altruism: the act must involve the intention to help another person and there must be no expectation of reward or direct benefit for helping. Seglow (2004) adds that true altruistic behavior should also show an absence of concern for one's own safety and wellbeing, and willingness to help everyone regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. This contrasts with general prosocial behaviors where reciprocity or the intrinsic reward of helping tend to be motivating factors, and willingness to help kin and in-group members outweighs help offered to non-kin and out-group members. Cooperation and communication among group members appear to be key factors in motivating individuals to engage in behavior that is beneficial to a group over self-benefit (Batson et al., 1995). Upholding a moral principle is also explored as a potentially motivating factor. In religions like Islam, both collectivism and moral principles are highlighted as ideal characteristics that should be cultivated in human beings.

In Islam, like the other Abrahamic traditions, altruism is encouraged as a moral obligation. The Qur'anic verse that is often associated with altruism is chapter 3 verse 92: "You shall never come to piety unless you spend of things you love; and whatever you spend is known to God". The Qur'an emphasizes that giving and helping should involve sacrifice on the part of the giver. One *hadith* records Prophet Muhammad as saying, "He who endeavors (to relieve the needy, the desolate, and the poor, is as one who endeavors in the service of God, is as one who stands up to pray all night and does not relax and rest, and as one who fasts and breaks it not" (Bukhari, 1996). Serving others is viewed as an act equivalent to forms of worship. In another, more specific *hadith* the Prophet emphasizes altruistic behaviors: "What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of human beings, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the sufferings of the injured" (Bukhari, 1996). The Prophet encouraged social interactions that resulted in benefit to another: "A Muslim who meets with others and shares their burdens is better than one who lives a life of seclusion and contemplation" (Al-Hajjaj, 2000). In summary, helping others without expectation of reward and in a self-sacrificial manner is praised as desired behavior. Examples of altruistic behaviors are numerous from the life of Prophet Muhammad and his

companions, from giving away food to guests leaving nothing left to eat for themselves, to giving away clothing though they had only one garment, and taking in widows and orphans.

2.7 Extreme Altruism Among Muslims

Cases of spiritual and religiously motivated altruism have been documented by historians, sociologists, and psychologists for more than a century, with many involving Muslim altruists. These include: Badshah Khan, a supporter of Gandhi's non-violent movement against colonialism; Noor Inayat Khan, who opposed the Nazis and refused to give up the names of any of her fellow resistance members (Basu, 2007); Muhammad Yunus, the founder of the micro-credit system in Bangladesh (Yunus, 1999); Meena, founder of the Revolutionary Association of women of Afghanistan (RAWA); Malala Yousufzai, who won the Noble Prize in 2013 for her advocacy for global education rights for women and girls; and dozens of others whose altruism has taken various forms from humanitarian aid to social advocacy. In her biography of Meena, Chavis (2003) discusses the values of altruism that shaped her activism: "Islam teaches that even the weakest and most vulnerable person should be treated with charity and respect . . . The idea is that everyone has the duty to care for each other, especially in times of crisis, regardless of religion or ethnicity" (p. 29). Meena upheld these values in her own activism, sacrificing her life in efforts to improve the lives of Afghan women and oppressed minority groups in Afghanistan. Malala and hundreds of young people like her are following in the footsteps of altruists like Meena who seek social change and freedom from oppression for others, embodying the concept of self-sacrifice discussed in the Qur'an.

Abdul Sattar Edhi demonstrated extreme altruism as he dedicated more than half a century of his life to creating a humanitarian agency that operates across Pakistan and internationally. He created the first ambulance service in Pakistan, buried unclaimed bodies, ran homes for orphans and the disabled, and established medical dispensaries throughout the country. For decades he was the first on hand when a natural disaster occurred in Pakistan and neighboring countries. His Cradle Program, allowing people to drop off unwanted babies, and his nurse training programs for women earned him death threats and propaganda against his foundation for many years. Abdul Sattar Edhi dedicated his entire life to the concept of social welfare and identifies his commitment to helping others as spiritually motivated. He states in his autobiography:

The five basic tenets of Islam continue into the sixth for me. *Huquq-ul-Ibaad*, or humanitarianism. That it is not proclaimed as obligatory has deeper meaning; as right and wrong are left to human initiatives its importance would be lost if forced. Within this tenet lies the essence of all religions and the test of all mankind. A universal unity is evident from it. All religions move in the same direction and towards the same goal . . . humanitarianism. All Holy Books hold the same meaning. No religion declares humanitarianism as obligatory, yet all stress upon it as the only acceptable way of life. In fact, we are different only by rituals

formulated according to the terrain and temperament of people that prophets were sent to direct (Edhi & Durrani, 1996, p. 52).

The concept of humanitarianism as a core tenet in Islam re-emerges as an opposing force to radical Islam. Abdelkader (2018) discusses the response of Muslims to radical Islam by focusing on volunteerism, charitable giving, and altruism as humanitarian Islam. Echoing the words of Edhi, Abdelkader describes the development of humanitarian Islam as a counter-narrative to Islamophobic rhetoric and as a force for empowering Muslims. Like other researchers, he notes that for many Muslims social engagement strengthens their religious identity and perceived role in society. He cites the creation of the crowdfunding site, LaunchGood, as one example of the many ways that Muslim Americans use their collective power to respond in positive ways to tragic events. He also notes that engagement in altruistic acts by Muslims is increasing at a time when hostility towards Muslim minorities is also increasing.

Recently, the global fight against terrorism has provided many cases of extreme altruism, where Muslims are risking or sacrificing their own life to save the lives of others and actively working to counteract radicalism. In this way, extreme altruism is an equivalent response to the extremism of radical Islamist propaganda and violence. Muslim extreme altruists see no moderate response to the threats that radical Islam poses to their spiritual values. Malala Yousufzai is a well-known example of an extreme altruist who knowingly risked her life in Pakistan to champion women's rights to an education. After being shot by the Taliban, she referred to the role of her faith and belief that Islam is compatible with feminism in her continued activism supporting education for women and the rights of refugees (Hafiz, 2013). Less well-known contemporary figures who have risked their lives to help others include Tawakkal Karman of Yemen, Shirin Ebadi of Iran, Manal al-Sharif of Saudi Arabia, and Dr. Hawa Abdi of Somalia (Griswold, 2011). Muslims who have lost their lives engaging in acts of altruism include Adel Termos, who tackled a second suicide bomber in Beirut, Lebanon in 2015, preventing him from detonating in a crowded market (Shaheen, 2015); Aitzaz Hasan, a 9th grader in Pakistan who stopped a suicide bomber from entering his school in 2014 (Khan, 2015); and Mohammad Salman Hamdani, an off-duty Muslim police cadet and emergency medical technician in New York City who entered the twin towers to assist on 9/11 (Otterman, 2012).

A Deeper Dive: The Socially Engaged Islam of Imam Omar Suleiman

Anisah Bagasra

Imam Omar Suleiman has become a prime example of the ways that socially engaged Islam manifests in contemporary settings. Based in Texas, Omar Suleiman serves as a major spokesperson for intersectional faith-based

(continued)

activism within the Muslim American community. Two major social justice initiatives with which he is currently involved is the immigration crisis at the border and the Black Lives Matter Movement. He advocates for justice for victims of police brutality and stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement by participating in demonstrations, giving speeches, and speaking to the media. He has been particularly involved in seeking justice for Botham Jean and Atatiana Jefferson, victims of police shootings in the state of Texas. Suleiman was arrested at the US Capitol protesting on behalf of Dreamers in 2018 and has continued his advocacy for immigrants by raising money for separated families and involvement in interfaith prayers at the border. He frequently partners with other Muslim leaders and other faith leaders to coordinate these initiatives. He partnered with several other imams and a charitable organization in a campaign called Muslims for Migrants which raised \$100,000 to pay for the bail of detained migrants separated from their children. Wecker (2019) writes of Suleiman:

Suleiman's activism is theologically motivated and draws upon a faith tradition in which stories of migration are hardwired into the theology. Islamic Scriptures tell of Muslim migrants fleeing violence from Mecca to both Medina and to Abyssinia a Christian land. Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, who are also prophets in Islam, were migrants, and the Islamic calendar starts with the date of the migration from persecution. The Qur'an prescribes recognizing the sanctity of all sons of Adam—meaning all people and caring for both the wayfarer and the homeless.

With 1.3 million “likes” on his Facebook page, Imam Suleiman has a large social media presence. This allows him to draw the attention of the larger Muslim community to these and other social justice issues, such as the plight of the persecutions of Rohinyga and Uyghur Muslim minority populations. His work, especially in partnership with other faith leaders, has received criticism from within and outside of the Muslim community, and even death threats from ISIS. He has eloquently defended his political activism in a recent open letter through the website, MuslimMatters.org, which also illustrates the ways in which his social activism is spiritually motivated:

My work politically revolves around eliminating suffering, domestically and abroad. This shapes how I view militarism, poverty, policing, mass incarceration, environmental issues, healthcare, immigration, and torture. The Prophet said, “find me amongst the oppressed. Are you given aid and support by Allah except by how you treat your most vulnerable?” I believe that we as Muslims, especially those who claim orthodoxy, should assert ourselves in these areas. This doesn't mean that I think this is the only area in which Muslims should be active. Different people should work in different areas of good, and not undermine one another. Good efforts should be complementary to each other. My background suits this particular role (Suleiman, 2019).

2.8 Conclusion

Islamic views of prosocial behavior, social justice, and altruism shape the attitudes and behaviors of practitioners who acknowledge social engagement as a valid source of spiritual growth. Deeply embedded in the psychologies of average followers of Islam are prophetic narratives of injustice and oppression, Qur'anic injunctions encouraging helping behaviors, and the promise of salvation by contributing to the positive social welfare of others. Interviews with Muslims engaged in social change often reveal spiritual and religious experiences as a source of strength and motivation for their behaviors (Stanczak, 2006). In spite of increasing prejudice towards Muslims living in non-Muslim majority countries, there is a growing movement for Muslims to step outside of their comfort zones and proactively engage beyond their religious and ethnic communities, and to become more politically involved on the local and national levels in their countries of residence. Within Muslim-majority countries, the power of social media to aid in organizing and communicating, as demonstrated during the Arab Spring, has strengthened and sustained calls to action in those countries. Among Muslims, religion serves as a powerful motivator for a variety of human behaviors.

Further research needs to be conducted to understand the complex interplay between religion, culture, and other social factors as motivating forces in the socially engaged spirituality of Muslims. There is little substantive research on engaged spirituality among Muslims outside of the United States. Reporting on social activism and volunteerism in Muslim-majority countries is sparse and mostly focuses on feminist movements and political activism. The role of religion and spirituality in extreme altruism has yet to be explored in a substantive manner. Empirical evidence for religion or spiritual factors as the primary motivator for extreme altruism is lacking beyond a few individual case studies.

There is no doubt that many ordinary Muslims have chosen social engagement and social transformation as the alternative to social isolation and apathy in the face of growing hostility. As many Muslims become better educated about the history of Islam and the meaning of the Qur'an and prophetic tradition, there is an increasing notion of Islam as a progressive religion that has always been a vehicle for social change. Socially engaged Islam can be clearly observed on both the individual and group levels as a distinct path for spiritual and social transformation.

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Chapter 3

Research with Minoritized Muslim Communities



Nasreen Shah, Munir Shah, and Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Abstract Understanding the nuances of marginalized groups can enhance the quality of research and provide positive supports for the communities being studied. This chapter discusses ways in which research with American Muslim communities can best be undertaken. Emphasis is placed on considerations for research with Muslims as a disenfranchised group and how researchers can be culturally responsive and ethical when working with these communities. The concept of “mindful research” is discussed with respect to cultural humility for dissemination of research in ways that empower Muslim communities and forge responsible relationships. Emphasis is placed on discussion of appropriate use of data to directly serve the community from which it is gathered. Research principles in this chapter also add value to work with Muslim communities outside of the United States and other Western countries. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs are reviewed with a focus on methodologies most appropriate to building relationships, protecting participant’s vulnerability, and ensuring ethical collection and dissemination of information. We also highlight the challenges and cultural considerations specific to Muslim communities, such as being fearful or hesitant to participate in research, and what the researcher can do to abate participant anxiety.

3.1 Introduction

Research studies in psychology follow the scientific method, which guides our observation, hypothesis formation, measurement and experimentation, the processes by which we predict and explain human behavior. Employing the scientific method

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allows for other researchers to be able to replicate the studies and thereby verify the reliability and validity of the original findings. However, the scientific method by itself can reveal little useful knowledge unless it is embedded within appropriate research questions. Researchers ask different kinds of questions depending on the focus of each study: Are we looking to explore thoughts, behaviors, physiology, perception, expectations, group events, or other cognitive, affective or behavioral aspects of human experience? The questions we choose are then empirically investigated using measures of sensory experiences, sound, touch, taste, sight, and smell (Ray, 2009).

Research methods may involve quantitative or qualitative measures, or a combination of the two in a mixed method design. Quantitative research utilizes statistical tests to confirm hypotheses, theories, and relationships between variables, whereas qualitative research focuses on narratives, exploring ideas through the use of open-ended questions, typically with a smaller group of participants. While quantitative methods allow for standardized and replicable findings, qualitative research explores and interprets deeper themes through textual, verbal, and pictorial responses that can provide rich data for culturally responsive research. One of the highlights of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to gather information on the stories and experiences that may not be quantifiable through statistical measures (Ray, 2009). If a researcher wants to know the impact of a life event, such as migration among first generation Americans, rich and accurate data may be best obtained through a small focus group in which the researcher spends time recording the narrative of participants and identifying the emergent themes. Such data can be missed entirely through the use of solely quantitative measures. At the same time, there is also value in the statistical categorization of these same life events across larger groups of people, allowing for the identification of general trends which can impact public policies and best practices. Historically, psychology research was overwhelmingly quantitative, a result of the influence of behaviorism on the definition of psychology as a social science discipline (Danziger, 2006). On the other hand, a great deal of psychological concepts and theories were developed through qualitative case studies conducted by Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic followers (Wertz, 2014). Today, there is an increasing emphasis on a mixed methods approach. This may begin with identifying quantitative relationships between variables, hypotheses, and factors, which are then further explained through participant narratives. It may also begin with an exploration of larger themes from a qualitative standpoint, which are then followed by the development and use of quantitative measures or surveys that expand on the generalizability of those themes across larger groups of people (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

3.2 Traditional vs. Positive Psychology

The history of psychology largely focused on dysfunctional aspects of human life; thus, the goal of treatment or research was traditionally centered around understanding, eliminating or managing such dysfunctions. Martin Seligman, who is widely

considered a founding father of positive psychology, introduced a movement in the late 1990s that highlighted human strengths as opposed to human deficits (Seligman, 2004). Seligman posited that the discipline of psychology was being stifled through its obsession with dysfunction and that psychology should be equally interested in optimizing functioning through building happy and meaningful lives (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Kobau et al., 2011; Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Positive psychology does not dismiss mainstream psychology; rather, it acts as a complementary discipline, pairing our understanding of suffering with factors of resilience and wellness to gain a more comprehensive approach to understanding mental health.

Areas of study within positive psychology research include definitions and experiences of happiness or subjective wellbeing, (Jorm & Ryan, 2014; Seligman, 2006), optimism (Peterson & Steen, 2002), positive affect (Fredrickson, 2008), mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), human flourishing (Keyes, 2002), character strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), hope (Snyder, 1994), and positive thinking (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006; Scheier & Carver, 1993). Research within the field has applications across areas such as education, therapy, and organizational health. Although positive psychology has been equally criticized for emphasizing “all that’s good” where traditional psychology highlights “all that’s bad”, a move towards exploring both the positive and negative aspects of human experience within positive psychology has been taking place (Febrianingsih & Chaer, 2018). Dubbed positive psychology 2.0, this trajectory began in part as a result of non-Western cultural concepts of wellbeing, particularly the influence of Chinese worldviews that do not necessarily emphasize the attainment of happiness or hedonic wellbeing, but rather the pursuit of a meaningful life (Wong, 2011). Thus, the cultural traditions, methods of healing, and family and societal values of non-Western groups are important topics as they highlight the functionality and health of diverse communities, as well as the ways in which individuals flourish within different societies. Identifying the strengths of a community helps dispel stereotypes, promotes a positive identity of out-group persons, and can give voice to narratives that have been untold or largely ignored because they do not represent the common associations with a particular group (Blanchet-Cohen & Salazar, 2009). In order to engage in a strengths-based perspective, researchers must evaluate their own agenda and focus. Research topics, populations, and research questions can be formulated to either support a pre-existing notion or negate it by the a priori intentions and expectations of the researchers. Culturally responsive research should aim to present the topic and population in a way that does not further stereotypes or biases. This can be ensured by utilizing accurate measures that are locally developed or reflect local community norms, identifying strengths, and acknowledging systemic and historical factors that have played a role in contributing to problems within “othered” communities.

3.3 WEIRD Populations as the Continuing Norm

Psychology's depiction of social norms has been overwhelmingly shaped by Western, Educated, Institutionalized, Rich, Democratic (WEIRD) populations (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). When research normed on WEIRD populations is used as the standard of measurement, it can create a biased standard that "others" the experiences of non-WEIRD populations. A 2008 survey of major journals in the field of psychology found that 96% of research participants were from Western countries, even though Western countries account for only 12% of the world's population (Henrich et al., 2010). While a growing body of research points to the differences in cognition, motivation, and analytical reasoning, among other traits, between WEIRD and non-WEIRD populations, the knowledge produced by Western institutions continues to inform and influence research with other populations (Arnett, 2009). That is, research based upon WEIRD populations carries a greater impact in setting the norms for human behavior, values, lifestyle, and health of diverse populations. This is particularly problematic as generalizations of normative behavior, set according to Western ideals, have been used to shape policies and procedures for work, social programs, even wage structure, in non-WEIRD societies (Henrich et al., 2010).

Even more concerning is that historically, most research done within the field of psychology has been limited to not just WEIRD populations, but specifically participants in the United States. In his analysis of six top APA journals, Arnett (2009) found that over 73% of first authors were based out of American universities, with only 1% of authors being from Asia, and none from Latin America, Africa, or the Middle East. Thus, psychology research is generalizing the norms, behaviors, and values of Americans, who account for only about 5% of the world's population, to global proportions. When Western and/American norms are set as standards for the world, there can be large gaps in our understanding, as well as inappropriate assumptions of health and functioning on a global level (Arnett, 2009). While psychology presents itself as a human science, Arnett argues that it may be more accurately described as an American science in its current form and focus.

Even though Muslims represent 24% of the world's population, less is understood about the culture, psychology, and lifestyle of Muslims than either American or WEIRD populations that account for 5% and 12% respectively. Geographically, most Muslims are situated in Asian and Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) countries, where much less psychological research is conducted as a whole (Arnett, 2009; see also Chap. 16 in this book). Additionally, in utilizing Muslim participants, researchers often fail to capture the heterogeneity of the population, such as the sect to which a Muslim may ascribe, whether the participant was born Muslim or converted (within Islamic communities, these are often call reverts rather than converts) and the country of origin. The lack of detail in these and other characteristics of Muslim American participants can have a significant impact on the generalizability and context of findings (Amer & Bagasra, 2013), especially if these findings are then applied to Muslims as a global entity. Without gathering

appropriate classification of demographic information, it is difficult to discern the influence of confounding variables such as the ones listed above. Finally, much of the focus of studies conducted by WEIRD researchers appears to be on Islamophobia, or themes regarding 9/11 and terrorism, which serve the interests of WEIRD populations but does little to enhance our understanding of the mental health needs and culture of Muslims themselves (Amer & Bagasra, 2013).

Garner and Selod (2015) found that the publication of journal articles with the word “Islamophobia” in the title or somewhere in the article has increased substantially since 1980, with the greatest number of studies on the topic being published in 2011. Between 1980 and 1989, they found only one article with Islamophobia in the title and 50 articles with Islamophobia mentioned somewhere in the article. Compare this to the period of 2000–2009 where 296 articles were published with Islamophobia in the title and 5650 articles used the term somewhere in the article. Islamophobic rhetoric also increased with the US-led “War on Terror”, which positioned Islam as the enemy of democracy and made popular the notion of “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims”—a dichotomy that serves to place Muslims as one extreme or the other based on perceived allegiance to Western political interests. This essentially erases the social, religious, and political diversity of Muslim communities in WEIRD societies and around the world, creating two camps of people who are either “with us” or “against us”. Moreover, “bad Muslims” are not only those who commit acts of terror, but those who don’t agree with Western imperialistic policies premised on the notion of liberating oppressed people around the world. “Good Muslims” stand with the beneficent imperialism of non-Muslim majority governments, uphold secular values reflecting WEIRD cultural norms, and can offer personal testimonials of the oppressions they have experienced in Islam, while praising the freedoms available in the West. It is important to note that in the “War on Terror”, US President Bush acknowledged the existence of “good Muslims”; however, the default position was that all Muslims are “bad Muslims” until they can prove otherwise (Maira, 2009; Mamdani, 2005).

It is no surprise that politics has a huge impact on the types of research that is conducted and/or funded. As most research continues to be funded by Western agencies and conducted by researchers in WEIRD nations (Arnett, 2009), the experiences of Muslims in the social science literature are often that of a minority population. As a result, the deficits and areas of concern within Muslim communities as they function within largely non-Muslim majority contexts are highlighted, inadvertently reinforcing existing biases against Muslims. Even within Muslim majority regions, the standard trope of psychological studies is on negative experiences or finding ways of alleviating human suffering. By highlighting ways in which Muslims experience mental illness, prejudice, and stigma without providing an adequate number of counter-narratives of Muslim experiences of joy and wellbeing, psychological research can contribute to stereotypes of Muslims as dangerous “others”. Although not an exhaustive list by any means, some examples of research focusing on deficit-oriented coverage of Muslim populations are shown in Table 3.1.

While deficit-oriented research with Muslim populations is not limited to WEIRD regions (as evidenced by the examples shown in Table 3.1), positive psychology

Table 3.1 Examples of deficit-oriented research with Muslim populations

Study	Deficit orientation	Location(s) of study
Macey, M. (1999). Religion, male violence, and the control of women: Pakistani Muslim men in Bradford, UK. <i>Gender & Development</i> , 7(1), 48–55.	Gender-based violence and psychological control of women	United Kingdom
Fekete, L. (2004). Anti-Muslim racism and the European security state. <i>Race & Class</i> , 46(1), 3–29.	War on Terror, racism	Europe
Raza, A. (2006). Mask of honor—Causes behind honor killings in Pakistan. <i>Asian Journal of Women's Studies</i> , 12(2), 88–104.	Honor killings	Pakistan
Kahn, R. A. (2007). The headscarf as threat: A comparison of German and US legal discourses. <i>Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law</i> , 40, 417–444.	Fear of visible Muslims	Germany and the US
Najeeb Shafiq, M., & Sinno, A. H. (2010). Education, income, and support for suicide bombings: Evidence from six Muslim countries. <i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i> , 54(1), 146–178.	Suicide bombing	Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, and Turkey.
Brooks, R. A. (2011). Muslim “home-grown” terrorism in the United States: How serious is the threat? <i>International Security</i> , 36(2), 7–47.	Terrorism	US
Al-Solaim, L., & Loewenthal, K. M. (2011). Religion and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) among young Muslim women in Saudi Arabia. <i>Mental Health, Religion & Culture</i> , 14(2), 169–182.	Obsessive-compulsive disorder	Saudi Arabia
Haroun, Z., Bokhari, A., Marko-Holguin, M., Blomeke, K., Goenka, A., Fogel, J., & Van Voorhees, B. W. (2011). Attitudes toward depression among a sample of Muslim adolescents in the Midwestern United States. <i>International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health</i> , 23(3), 293–301.	Depression	US
Victoroff, J., Adelman, J. R., & Matthews, M. (2012). Psychological factors associated with support for suicide bombing in the Muslim diaspora. <i>Political Psychology</i> , 33(6), 791–809.	Suicide bombing	Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and US
Saghaye-Biria, H. (2012). American Muslims as radicals? A critical discourse analysis of the US congressional hearing on ‘The Extent of	Radicalization	US

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Study	Deficit orientation	Location(s) of study
Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and That Community's Response'. <i>Discourse & Society</i> , 23(5), 508–524.		
Modarres, M., Afrasiabi, S., Rahnama, P., & Montazeri, A. (2012). Prevalence and risk factors of childbirth-related post-traumatic stress symptoms. <i>BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth</i> , 12(88), 1–6.	Childbirth-related PTSD	Iran
Aroian, K. J. (2012). Discrimination against Muslim American adolescents. <i>The Journal of School Nursing</i> , 28(3), 206–213.	Discrimination	US
Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Hamit, S., Leon, J., Tobio, M., & Rivera, D. P. (2012). Subtle and overt forms of Islamophobia: Microaggressions toward Muslim Americans. <i>Journal of Muslim Mental Health</i> , 6, 16–37.	Microaggressions, Islamophobia	US
Lyons-Padilla, S., Gelfand, M. J., Mirahmadi, H., Farooq, M., & Van Egmond, M. (2015). Belonging nowhere: Marginalization & radicalization risk among Muslim immigrants. <i>Behavioral Science & Policy</i> , 1(2), 1–12.	Marginalization and Radicalization	US
Robinson, R. S. (2016). Hijab in the American workplace: Visibility and discrimination. <i>Culture and Religion</i> , 17(3), 332–351.	Hijab discrimination	US
Budhwani, H., & Hearld, K. R. (2017). Muslim women's experiences with stigma, abuse, and depression: results of a sample study conducted in the United States. <i>Journal of Women's Health</i> , 26(5), 435–441.	Stigma, abuse, depression	US
Hadi, A. (2017). Patriarchy and gender-based violence in Pakistan. <i>European Journal of Social Science Education and Research</i> , 4(4), 297–304.	Gender based violence, patriarchy	Pakistan
Wilkins-Laflamme, S. (2018). Islamophobia in Canada: Measuring the realities of negative attitudes toward Muslims and religious discrimination. <i>Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie</i> , 55(1), 86–110.	Islamophobia	Canada

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Study	Deficit orientation	Location(s) of study
Keegan, K., & Morris, W. L. (2018). Mass Murder in the News: How Religion Influences Perception of Terrorism. <i>Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research</i> , 23(5), 354–363. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uhd.edu/10.24839/2325-7342.JN23.5.354	Terrorism	US
Lowe, S. R., Tineo, P., & Young, M. N. (2019). Perceived discrimination and major depression and generalized anxiety symptoms: in Muslim American college students. <i>Journal of Religion and Health</i> , 58(4), 1136–1145.	Perceived discrimination, depression, anxiety	US
Boysen, G. A., Isaacs, R. A., Tretter, L., & Markowski, S. (2020). Evidence for blatant dehumanization of mental illness and its relation to stigma. <i>Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 160(3), 346–356. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uhd.edu/10.1080/00224545.2019.1671301	Dehumanization, mental illness, stigma	US and Canada
Beller, J., & Kröger, C. (2020). Religiosity and perceived religious discrimination as predictors of support for suicide attacks among Muslim Americans. <i>Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology</i> , Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000460 .	Religiosity, religious discrimination, and support for suicide attacks	US

research conducted with Muslims who live in Muslim majority, non-WEIRD countries, has the advantage of centering Islamic cultures and allowing researchers to focus on wellness as it is defined and exists within Muslim communities. Utilizing a sample of Muslim undergraduates in the United Arab Emirates, Aveyard (2014) focused on culturally congruent symbols and rituals (such as the *adhan*, or Muslim call to prayer) to measure the psychological construct of morality. Noting the affective salience of the stimuli (namely, listening to the *adhan*) to Muslims, the authors discussed cultural variations in the route of processing. That is, in some cultures, sensory stimuli such as hearing the *adhan* become paired in one's mind with a sense of virtue and good character, creating an affective link to the concept of morality. In contrast, other cultures may connect with a concept such as morality through a purely cognitive lens (Aveyard, 2014). In regions where Muslims are the minority, one would not hear the Islamic call to prayer announced in public spaces, thus the impact of such measures on Muslim lives cannot be accurately assessed in WEIRD contexts. Other studies conducted with Muslim majority populations describe Islamic influences on preventive health behaviors as well as appropriately pairing measures of religiosity with measures of wellbeing when assessing the

impact of religious identity on Muslim populations (Achour, Grine, Nor, & MohdYusoff, 2015).

Culturally responsive research should identify the strengths and values of a community, seeking to enhance wellbeing and effectiveness of the community through the research. There is an imperative need to better understand Muslim populations, as well as the utility and contributions of Islam to the field of psychology and mental health (Haque, Khan, Keshavarzi, & Rothman, 2016; Rothman & Coyle, 2018). It is important to remember there is no single “Islamic culture”; Muslim majority regions represent highly diverse cultures, sects, and histories. If such diversity is to be understood, the ways we ask questions must be as varied as the diversity we encounter. Given that WEIRD researchers represent the dominant narrative that continues to perpetuate biases of minoritized populations (Kline, Shamsudheen, & Broesch, 2018), alternative models are necessary to present the voices and data that is missed in deficit-based research. Table 3.2 provides examples of strengths-based studies of Muslim populations as a counterpoint to deficit-oriented research. In comparing strengths-based to deficit-based models, it is important to acknowledge that wellbeing is not the opposite of depression, but rather a unique way of understanding how individuals thrive. As positive psychology research utilizes the strengths of a population to understand constructs such as happiness, subjective wellbeing, and life satisfaction (Jorm & Ryan, 2014; Seligman, 2006), it is an approach that centers wellness—rather than the absence of distress or disease—as a key feature of health (WHO, 2018). Although a complete list of studies addressing Muslim populations and wellbeing is beyond the scope of this chapter, Table 3.2 highlights some of the studies conducted within the last 5 years in Muslim majority countries.

Looking at the studies highlighted in Table 3.2, we can see another thorny issue in conducting research with Muslim participants: namely the lack of culture-specific scales. Despite calls for more indigenous measures of psychological constructs (Abu Raiya et al., 2007; Lambert, Pasha-Zaidi, Passmore, & Al-Karam, 2015), the instruments used by researchers working with Muslim populations continue to substantiate the prominence of Western conceptualizations. Interestingly, even though the studies in Table 3.2 were conducted with Muslim populations living in Muslim majority regions, they largely utilized Western measures of wellbeing. Given that Islamic beliefs and practices have been empirically linked to Muslims’ wellbeing (Abu-Raiya, 2013; Tiliouine, Cummins, & Davern, 2009), the importance of including Islam as a factor cannot be ignored. Batchelor’s (2013) Islamic Index of Wellbeing (IIW) for Muslim Majority Countries is one such scale, but much more needs to be done to develop culturally responsive tools that can capture the experiences of Muslims in both Muslim majority and Muslim minority contexts (see Chap. 15 in this book). While researchers may use religiosity scales to include this aspect of Muslim experiences, it does not negate the need for more non-Western conceptualizations of happiness, wellbeing, life satisfaction, and other positive psychology constructs.

Table 3.2 Selected studies of wellbeing, happiness, and life satisfaction among Muslim populations

Study	Positive psychology scale(s) or construct (s)	Region of study
Maham, R., Bhatti, O. K., & Öztürk, A. O. (2020). Impact of Islamic spirituality and Islamic social responsibility on employee happiness with perceived organizational justice as a mediator. <i>Cogent Business & Management</i> , 7(1), 1788875.	Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002)	Malaysia
Rosli, N. A. M., Suhaimi, H., Saari, Z., Siwok, S. R., Latif, A. A., Masroom, M. N., ... & Othman, N. (2020). Happiness in Islamic Perspectives among Multi-Tasking Women in Malaysia. <i>UMRAN-International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies</i> , 6 (3–2), 125–137.	Qualitative analysis of interviews on happiness	Malaysia
Maham, R., & Bhatti, O. K. (2019). Impact of Taqwa (Islamic piety) on employee happiness: A study of Pakistan's banking sector. <i>Cogent Business & Management</i> , 6(1), 1–22.	Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002)	Pakistan
Alorani, O. I., & Alradaydeh, M. T. F. (2018). Spiritual well-being perceived social support, and life satisfaction among university students. <i>International Journal of Adolescence and Youth</i> , 23(3), 291–298.	Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)	Jordan
Munawar, K., & Tariq, O. (2018). Exploring relationship between spiritual intelligence, religiosity and life satisfaction among elderly Pakistani Muslims. <i>Journal of Religion and Health</i> , 57(3), 781–795.	Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS, Diener et al., 1985)	Pakistan
Demirci, İ., & Ekşi, H. (2018). Keep calm and be happy: A mixed method study from character strengths to well-being. <i>Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice</i> , 18(2).	Qualitative analysis of interview data conceptualizing peace and happiness; Quantitative items of peace and happiness developed from qualitative results	Turkey
Bhatti, M. I. (2017). Meaning in life and psychological well-being among flood victims in Pakistan: The moderating role of resilience. <i>Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology</i> , 16(2), 73–86.	Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Tennant et al., 2007); The Ego Resiliency Scale (Block & Kremen, 1996); Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006)	Pakistan
Robbins, M., Francis, L. J., & Tekke, M. (2017). Religious affect and personal happiness: A replication among Sunni students in Malaysia. <i>Journal of Muslim Mental Health</i> , 11(2), 3–15.	The Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle et al., 1989)	Malaysia

(continued)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Study	Positive psychology scale(s) or construct (s)	Region of study
Achour, M., Nor, M. R. M., Amel, B., Seman, H. M. B., & Mohd Yusoff, M. Y. Z. (2017). Religious commitment and its relation to happiness among Muslim students: The educational level as moderator. <i>Journal of Religion and Health, 56</i> (5), 1870–1889.	Subjective Item Scale (Achour et al., 2017)	Malaysia
Hamsyah, F., & Subandi. (2017). Dzikir and Happiness: A Mental Health Study on An Indonesian Muslim Sufi Group. <i>Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health, 19</i> (1), 80–94.	Adapted SWLS (Diener et al., 1985); Adapted PANAS (Watson, Tellegen, & Clark, 1988)	Indonesia
Al-Seheel, A. Y., & Noor, N. M. (2016). Effects of an Islamic-based gratitude strategy on Muslim students' level of happiness. <i>Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 19</i> (7), 686–703.	The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE, Diener et al., 2009); Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS, Diener et al., 1985)	Malaysia
Aghababaei, N., Sohrabi, F., Eskandari, H., Borjali, A., Farrokhi, N., & Chen, Z. J. (2016). Predicting subjective well-being by religious and scientific attitudes with hope, purpose in life, and death anxiety as mediators. <i>Personality and Individual Differences, 90</i> , 93–98.	Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999); SWLS (Diener et al., 1985); Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 2002); Purpose in Life Test (PLT; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964)	Iran
D'raven, L. L., & Pasha-Zaidi, N. (2015). Happiness in the United Arab Emirates: conceptualisations of happiness among Emirati and other Arab students. <i>International Journal of Happiness and Development, 2</i> (1), 1–21.	Qualitative analysis of written responses to conceptualizations of happiness	United Arab Emirates
Joshanloo, M. (2015). Conceptions of happiness and identity integration in Iran: A situated perspective. <i>Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology, 1</i> (1), 24–35.	Eudemonia Scale (Joshanloo, 2014)	Iran
Achour, M., Grine, F., Nor, M. R. M., & Mohd Yusoff, M. Y. Z. (2015). Measuring religiosity and its effects on personal well-being: a case study of Muslim female academicians in Malaysia. <i>Journal of Religion and Health, 54</i> (3), 984–997.	SWLS (Diener et al., 1985); Job satisfaction scale (Hackman & Oldham, 1975)	Malaysia
Khan, Z. H., Watson, P. J., Naqvi, A. Z., Jahan, K., & Chen, Z. J. (2015). Muslim experiential religiousness in Pakistan: Meaning in life, general well-being and gender differences. <i>Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 18</i> (6), 482–491.	General Well-Being Scale (Dalbert, 1999); Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006)	Pakistan

(continued)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Study	Positive psychology scale(s) or construct (s)	Region of study
Farhan, R., Dasti, R., & Khan, M. N. S. (2015). Moral intelligence and psychological well-being in healthcare students. <i>Journal of Education Research and Behavioral Sciences</i> , 4(5), 160–64.	Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-being (Ryff et al., 2007)	Pakistan
Eryilmaz, A. (2015). Investigation of the relations between religious activities and subjective well-being of high school students. <i>Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice</i> , 15(2), 433–444.	SWLS (Diener et al., 1985); Positive-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988); Adolescents' Subjective Well-being Increasing Strategies Scale (Eryilmaz, 2010)	Turkey
Joshanloo, M., & Daemi, F. (2015). Self-esteem mediates the relationship between spirituality and subjective well-being in Iran. <i>International Journal of Psychology</i> , 50(2), 115–120.	SWLS (Diener et al., 1985)	Iran

3.4 Culturally Responsive Research

Researchers working with minoritized populations sometimes publish findings that reinforce negative stereotypes, while providing little if any benefit to the actual population being studied (Scharff et al., 2010; Simonds & Christopher, 2013). A quick search for research related to African Americans, Hispanic populations, and Native Americans, presents numerous titles of deficit-based studies; categorizing these communities by poverty, crime, substance use, and poor academic outcomes. With respect to Native American communities, researchers have emphasized risk factors that reinforce social stigmas such as suicide rates, substance abuse, and domestic violence, often overlooking strengths or identifiable needs of the community. Reinforcement of negative trends within minoritized communities (i.e., Native Americans have higher rates of substance abuse, domestic violence, and rape) not only damages the relationship between the community and the researcher, it ends up further dehumanizing the minority population. In Native American communities, the term “helicopter researchers” (Boyer et al., 2011; Campbell, 2014) reflects the notion that researchers often encroach upon a community with the intent of fulfilling a research agenda, while paying little attention to the needs of the community. Helicopter researchers display a lack of sensitivity and often make little effort to use the data to benefit the community they have studied. Given the lack of nuanced information in the traditional psychology research literature about minoritized groups, focusing repeatedly on the dysfunctional (or perceived dysfunctional) aspects of such a community is not only irresponsible, but unjust.

Sensitivity is thus a requirement of research conducted with minoritized population groups. Dillard’s (2000) model presents a framework for culturally sensitive research, emphasizing the relationship of the researcher to the community, acknowledging power and systemic influences, and placing responsibility on the researcher

to accurately represent the community, both its strengths and challenges. Many researchers demonstrate their own voices as a primary source of information when representing study participants. Unfortunately, this approach centers the researcher, not the minoritized community, and essentially contributes to the silencing of disenfranchised voices. Culturally sensitive researchers, on the other hand, attempt to achieve resonance with, rather than power over, the population they are studying, and acknowledge the historical traumas that have impacted marginalized communities. When researchers from a WEIRD population conduct studies using participants from minoritized communities, the balance of power favors the researchers' worldview, which may not capture the nuances of minoritized experiences (Watson-Singleton, Black, & Spivey, 2019).

Muslims in the United States often face discrimination, especially in the post 9/11 era of Islamophobia. The increase in negative representation of Muslims in the media adds to the vulnerability and stressors within these communities (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Researchers would benefit from asking themselves why Muslims would want culturally and religiously ill-informed researchers representing them to the greater public. As it stands, Muslims are often wary of participating in research until they can be certain that the information collected will not be used to further inflame Islamophobic discourse (Abu Raiya, Pargament, Stein, & Mahoney, 2007; see also Chap. 15 in this book). It is worth reiterating here that researchers bear a responsibility to paint stigmatized populations, including Muslims, in ways that reflect their humanity to the greater society. Researchers are in the position to act as advocates for minoritized groups and must consider their role to do no harm to the populations with whom they interact (Tillman, 2002). Culturally responsive researchers take great care to protect the humanity and the rights of the communities they represent. If researchers limit their inquiries to biased topics, they stand the risk of defining groups of people in public opinion based on these biased inquiries. For example, Muslim Americans have become known in the research based on their relationship to 9/11, religious rituals condoning violence, and cultural practices viewed by the Western world as oppressive (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). How do these topics shape our understanding of Muslims in general? How much is missing? What potential harm could we be contributing by furthering these narratives?

Sensitivity to the needs of the population being studied and using research to improve the quality of life or address a key problem in the lives of the individuals being studied is present in a growing body of qualitative research (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Culturally sensitive research methods are advocacy-minded and therefore use approaches that preserve the voice of the individuals being studied, through interviews, naturalistic observation, and narratives. Thus, qualitative methodologies tend to be a good match for researchers interested in advocacy. The ability to present the stories of a population accurately from the population's perspective, the hardships and strengths as they occur around the topic of inquiry, reflects a tenet in the cultural humility model of using the power of the researcher to remove barriers for the minoritized population (Tillman, 2002). Researchers bear a responsibility to not reinforce social stigmas for a population, but to present research in a way that preserves the dignity and social standing of the minoritized population being

represented. How can researchers best partner with their participants to address the problems that are being observed? This question is important to the establishment of ethical research practices (Tillman, 2002). Furthermore, culturally responsive research must not only identify a problem or phenomenon within a community, but also provide connections to the outside world to discuss the problem or phenomenon in productive ways that do not replace the voice of the community with the voice of the researcher. All researchers should therefore aim to empower the community and address their need to have accurate and nuanced representation (Watson-Singleton et al., 2019).

Cultural humility as a model for research and clinical practice assumes the position of the researcher as a lifelong learner, a student rather than an expert, open to new knowledge and actively working to increase understanding of research and practice with diverse populations (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Yeager & Bauer-Wu, 2013). One way of conducting culturally sensitive research is through participatory methods that involve active collaboration between researchers and the community being studied, where participants can be involved in the process and assume responsibility for parts of the study. This approach to research differs from traditional methods and can be a key component in giving a voice to marginalized populations and lessening the power imbalance between academia and communities. Participatory research allows for communities that have been painted with stereotypes and misinformation to have an active voice in representing themselves. For Muslims, researchers outside of the community may inadvertently overgeneralize, or incorrectly interpret aspects of Muslim life and culture due to their own lack of knowledge. Participatory research can be an asset for informing the research and lessening misinformation and may be a starting point to better serve the needs of the Muslim community (Pasha-Zaidi, 2019).

A Deeper Dive: Culturally Responsive Questions to Engage with Minoritized Communities

Munir Shah and Nasreen Shah

Culturally responsive research is imperative when working with disenfranchised groups. What are some of the ways in which researchers can begin to utilize cultural sensitivity in designing and conducting studies, especially when those researchers are not a part of the community being studied? Cultural humility and authentic interest in the community's needs and perspectives can be gauged through the types of interactions researchers have with community leaders. As researchers, we may find ourselves in the unenviable position of not knowing where to start and what questions to ask to help us be responsive to the communities we are serving with our research. The key word here is service: How can we best serve the community? When

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engaging in dialogue with community leaders, researchers can use the following points of consideration to guide the conversation:

- What does this community need from me as a researcher and/or clinician?
- How can my work best be utilized to serve this community?
- What concerns do community members have about our research? How can we best address these concerns?
- What is it you need us to know about this community?
- How can I help?

3.5 Mindful Research and Cultural Humility

Before embarking on a study of minoritized groups, researchers must identify the subgroups that are of interest: what level of the system is the researcher aiming to target? If the aim is to gain information on Muslim youth, for example, it may be helpful to engage with school personnel, such as teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, as well as parents, to understand systemic influences relevant to the study (Ahmed & Amer, 2013). School personnel who work closely with the targeted population can be valuable collaborators in the research process. Secondly, when working with youth, securing interpreters for parents who might have a different first language is important. Researchers should also consider the setting in which the study will be conducted and whenever possible, go to the population with whom they would like to work as opposed to expecting participants to physically come to them. Meeting in safe spaces such as their mosque or school, or a neutral setting such as a community center, in addition to having interpreters, are factors that create a climate of comfort and trust. Requiring minoritized groups to go into predominantly White institutionalized settings can be intimidating and may add to a power imbalance between participants and the researchers.

Research conducted on minoritized populations should be done for the community and preferably from within the community. Researchers are encouraged to first build relationships with the community they seek to target, including collaboration with scholars and practitioners within that community or adjacent to it. For example, if non-Muslim researchers are interested in collecting data on the use of mental health services among Muslim women, they can start by engaging in discourse with leaders of Muslim women's programs at local Islamic centers. One way to build relationships if the researcher has no ties to the community, is to collaborate with a colleague who is part of this community, or who has already built a relationship with the community (Ahmed & Amer, 2013). Researchers may be able to increase involvement from Muslim participants if their work is promoted by a known and trusted figure such as an imam or council member. Taking the time to meet with members of the Muslim community, to hear their concerns and build relationships with them, also increases likelihood of participation as well as facilitating a culture of trust. Without establishing such relationships, researchers may face barriers in

accessing the population they wish to study. They are also less likely to obtain authentic data, especially if the participants are suspicious of the intent of their research. Being good stewards of the data facilitates ongoing relationship and engagement with the community and reflects the condition of trust and the mission of utilizing the data to first benefit the community being represented.

The tenets of cultural humility can empower communities by enhancing ethical research practices. It is important to carefully consider the ways researchers have misrepresented communities, often unintentionally, by neglecting culturally responsive methods of data collection and analysis. Investigators and consumers of research should pay particular attention to methodology, language, and pre-existing data as it shapes how current data is presented. By engaging in cultural humility, researchers may be better able to identify best practices and ways of ethically partnering with minoritized communities.

3.6 Resiliency Theory: Strengths-Based Research

Research is an important tool for identifying the deficits and needs of a community to support wellbeing and navigate barriers. Concerns within Muslim families, social structure within the mosque, and inter and intra-group relations represent key areas of focus. However, the cultural diversity within the community creates its own challenges. Three quarters of Muslim Americans are either first or second-generation immigrants spanning a range of continents from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East (Lipka, 2020). The imam and governing board make key decisions regarding services, education, and social support of members; and mosques function as a place of community for members of diverse cultural, racial, and generational backgrounds (Nguyen, 2017). However, mosques and Islamic centers in the United States face challenges in accommodating a diversity of values, needs, and practices. Culturally responsive researchers may find it challenging to investigate the concerns of marginalized groups in a manner that does not reinforce negative perceptions of the community. One way that researchers can address areas of concern without furthering bias is through monitoring their work for biased language and use appropriate terminology (American Psychological Association, 2019). This is not a simple endeavor and requires researchers to consider an alternative approach to developing and conducting research. Research traditionally begins with a “problem statement”; as such, it lends itself to a deficit view of the topic. However, research questions and study designs do not necessarily need to be deficit-oriented. Topics such as depression, trauma, and stress can instead be approached from a resiliency model. Resiliency Theory provides a conceptual framework for exploring traditionally negative psychological functioning through the opposite side of the coin: the positive contextual, individual, and social variables that can offset risk factors (Werner & Smith, 1992; Zimmerman et al., 2013). These are known as protective factors and may come in the form of assets (personal or individual strengths) or resources, such as parent and/or community supports. Even in studies designed to investigate primarily

Table 3.3 Examples of traditional and strengths-based research questions

Traditional research question/topic	Strengths-based research question/topic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the impact of Islamophobia on depression and anxiety? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What protective factors impact the influence of Islamophobia on depression and anxiety?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim women, the veil, and the role of women in Islam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim Women: narratives of intersectionality, values, and personal identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Islamic extremism? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the impact of labels such as “extremist” and “terrorist” on the wellbeing of Muslim communities?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the impact of Muslim identity on self-esteem and academic performance? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does religious identity contribute to self-esteem and academic performance?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways do traditional Muslim views of gender contribute to incidences of domestic violence in Muslim homes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What protective factors are viable for the reduction of domestic violence in Muslim communities?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors contribute to employment discrimination among visibly Muslim job applicants? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the employment of visible religious minorities enhance diversity in the workplace?

deficit-oriented topics, protective factors can be included as secondary research questions. In working with marginalized populations, in particular, it is important to include information on the assets and resources that may combat the deficits being discussed. Research is not apolitical and providing sources of strengths and resilience within marginalized communities can provide more equitable coverage of deficit-oriented topics (Table 3.3).

Social justice is an ethical tenet across multiple disciplines of mental health work (Munsey, 2011) and psychological research with minoritized groups requires that the same ethical principles be applied in constructing and disseminating knowledge. Muslim communities are expected to adhere to the social justice framework that comes from the Qur’an and *hadith*, which pair well with the APA code of ethics for social justice (Table 3.4). This common ground creates a space in which researchers can develop coherence toward responsible research practices.

3.7 Recommendations for Conducting Research with Muslim American Populations

Although research focusing on Muslims has increased since 9/11, there continues to be a gap in comparison to the coverage of WEIRD populations. In working with Muslim communities, researchers should bear in mind the hesitancy participants may feel in contributing to research studies (Ahmed & Amer, 2013). In particular, the impact of Islamophobia on psychological research creates a fear that results will be used to add fodder to existing stereotypes. As such, many Muslims, particularly those living in non-Muslim majority regions, tend to be suspicious of the reasons behind the research. Self-report research, which accounts for a large number of

Table 3.4 Aligning social justice in the Qur’an with the APA code of ethics

Selected quotes from Qur’an and <i>Hadith</i>	APA code of ethics
Indeed, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred; and forbids indecency, and manifest evil, and wrongful transgression. He admonished you that you may take heed. (Al Qur’an 16:91) The reward of goodness is nothing but goodness. (Al Qur’an 55:61)	Beneficence: do good
Whosoever killed a person ... it shall be as if he had killed all mankind” (5:32) The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Do not cause harm or return harm. Whoever harms others, Allah will harm him. Whoever is harsh with others, Allah will be harsh with him.” (<i>Hadith</i> of Abu Sa’id al-Khudri)	Maleficence: do no harm
Hadith: “Honesty descended from the Heavens and settled in the roots of the hearts of men (faithful believers), and then the Qur’an was revealed and the people read the Qur’an, (and learnt it from it) and also learnt from the sayings and traditions. Both the Qur’an and the traditions strengthened their honesty. (Sahih Al-Bukhari)	Fidelity
“Woe unto those who give short measure, those who, when they are to receive their due from people, demand that it be given in full but when they have to measure or weigh whatever they owe to others, give less than what is due. Do they not know that they are bound to be raised from the dead (and called to account) on an awesome Day, the Day when all men shall stand before the Sustainer of all the worlds?” (Qur’an 83:1–6)	Justice & Integrity

psychological studies, is subject to a number of biases, including social desirability bias (Laajaj et al., 2019). In other words, participants may provide information that makes them look good. Thus, conducting research focusing solely on deficit-oriented topics within Muslim communities can be difficult.

Building trust is an essential prerequisite to conducting research with marginalized populations. As noted earlier in this chapter, developing relationships with Muslim researchers, community organizations, and Islamic centers is a good way to begin (Ahmed & Amer, 2013; see Chap. 14 in this book for opportunities and challenges of American Islamic centers). Learning about the essential tenets of Islam and how they may influence Muslim worldviews requires researchers to delve more deeply into their own understanding of the population they are planning to study. Qualitative research utilizes data collection methods, such as interviews, narratives, and ethnographies that centers marginalized voices. Participatory research designs attempt to go further by including marginalized communities in many, if not all, aspects of the study design, data collection, and interpretation of findings. In disseminating information, researchers should provide historical context and cultural values as necessary background in articles and presentations.

Centering the American Muslim perspective within research studies can also be achieved by a broader call to include cultural context as a standard in any psychological research. Even within mainstream research, audiences will filter information from their point of view. Therefore, including a cultural and historical context for the

area of focus allows audiences to consider the specific (other) viewpoints needed to understand the problem, and may help reduce the biases and stereotypes arising from their own cultural experience. Although cultural context is generally included in journal articles that reflect lesser-studied, international, marginalized or non-White populations, it is in fact also important to include cultural context within articles that rely on participants from WEIRD backgrounds. This can alert consumers of research about the influence of majority norms on the results and discussion of constructs, rather than normalizing WEIRD experiences as the standard. By highlighting the importance of culture within mainstream research, we can begin to expand our understanding and acceptance of norms, behaviors and customs outside of the Western majority, enhancing application and value of the research.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the influence of cultural constructs on the development and acceptance of social norms that impact understanding of “othered” populations. We posit that the application of cultural humility can center the experiences of minoritized and non-Western populations in research, thus limiting “helicopter” practices that add to the existing social science literature while disregarding the needs and ramifications of findings to the communities being studied. Research is not apolitical and the ways in which researchers approach knowledge-seeking affects marginalized groups for better or worse (Dupont, 2008). In developing research designs and questions, researchers rely on existing publications to inform their own studies. This is one of the first steps in the scientific method. If literature reviews indicate overwhelmingly negative coverage of minoritized experiences without corresponding strengths-based approaches to offset that slant, researchers should consider reformulating their questions to consider positive psychology concepts such as resilience, post-traumatic growth, meaning in life, subjective wellbeing, hope, and mindfulness. As North American and WEIRD populations continue to be the main source of psychological information (Arnett, 2009), extant literature provides diverse options for understanding the experiences of the 5–12% represented in these regions. However, much less is understood about the psychology of individuals who reside in other parts of the world, which leaves more room for the proliferation of stereotypical information and less opportunity to counterbalance those narratives. As such, researchers must be mindful of the impact their studies have on the information that is available. Muslim populations, like other stigmatized groups, may be suspicious of researchers’ intent, and wary of adding to Islamophobic rhetoric (Abu Raiya et al., 2007). Not only can this lead to more difficulty in obtaining the participation of Muslims in research studies; it adds to the dilemma of how to best approach the realities of many Muslim regions that are ravaged by war and political instability. In addressing these issues, it is not enough to

describe the negative consequences; researchers must go further to elucidate the strengths and coping strategies that Muslim individuals need and rely upon to face social, political, and economic injustices. As researchers, we are in the position of creating knowledge that either stokes fears and biases or helps put them into perspective. With the right methods and research questions at our disposal, the way the world sees a minority population can be elevated in ways that do good rather than harm. The responsibility of that knowledge lies with us.

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Chapter 4

Afghan Refugees in Greece: Overcoming Traumatic Events and Post-Traumatic Growth



Melissa Kerr Chiovenda

Abstract Refugees in Athens, Greece struggle with negative reactions from local populations, harassment from far-right movements and institutions such as the police, and an asylum system that provides very few positive outcomes for applicants. Refugees find themselves in a position of heightened vulnerability, and those from historically oppressed groups, such as Shi'a Hazaras from Afghanistan, may experience additional challenges through the various stages of migration. Based on ethnographic research conducted in Greece and Afghanistan, this chapter considers the ways in which Afghan Hazara asylum seekers in Athens counter negative views about their character and intentions. Adrift in new surroundings waiting for extended time periods with no clear decision about their asylum status, some asylum seekers remake themselves, finding meaning and purpose through social relationships and prosocial activities intended to better the situation of the vulnerable groups to which they belong.

4.1 Introduction

Refugees face impossible odds to maintain a positive focus in their lives when their very existence is based on personal hardships and trauma. Not only must refugees perform the story of their trauma to be recognized as asylum-seekers (Giordano, 2008; Kmak, 2015), they must also create positive self-representations in order to be accepted into new communities (Suerbaum, 2018). From being regarded as destitute, pathetic victims in need of saving (Alshoubaki & Harris, 2018; Plambech, 2014; Ramsay, 2017) to being labeled economic, cultural, or security threats (Kirtsoglou & Tsimouris, 2018; Plambech, 2014; Scheibelhofer, 2017), all too often refugees occupy social categories that are associated with problems. This was highlighted in Europe during the “refugee crisis” in 2015 when more than one million refugees

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arrived on European soil (UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 2015), a substantial increase from about 250,000 the year before. Greece, the focus of this chapter, received 800,000 refugees by sea and 34,000 more by land. Of these, nearly 50% were Syrian, 20% were Afghan, and a little less than 10% were Iraqi (Pew Research Center, 2016). Prior to 2015, refugee migrations into Greece consisted of Albanians, who long occupied the Greek imaginary¹ as the archetypical refugee figure (Kalandides & Vaiou, 2012; Noussia & Lyons, 2009), as well as Afghans who were arriving in steady numbers due to ongoing conflict in their country, and some smaller numbers of people from the Middle East and Africa. However, in 2015, Syria became engulfed in war and refugee numbers increased substantially. Some Afghans migrated to Greece from Iran, where they had previously sought refuge; however, the situation in Iran was also deteriorating as Afghans were being pushed to take part in the Syrian war or lose their right to residency in the country.

4.1.1 Seeking Asylum in Greece

In order to get to Europe, most asylum seekers initially land in Greece or Italy, then attempt to seek refuge in a wealthier, usually northern, European neighbor. The journey consists of long treks by foot and truck, hiding out with smugglers, and in some cases, being caught in places such as Iran and Turkey, where refugees may be subjected to abuse by authorities (Glinski, 2020; Jafaari, 2020; Saber & Bezhan, 2020) before being dropped back at the last border they had crossed to ostensibly try again. The final voyage crossing the Mediterranean Sea is a particularly dangerous and harrowing experience (Fleming, 2015) as many refugees, particularly children, do not make it at all, and those who do survive are left with physical and psychological scars that receiving nations are unable to adequately address (Kousoulis, Ioakeim-Ioannidou, & Economopoulos, 2016; Shortall, Glazik, Sornum, & Pritchard, 2017). Moreover, until several years ago, the Athens police were responsible for judging asylum cases, forcing refugees to interact with them while enduring beatings, harassment, and abuse at their behest (Human Rights Watch, 2013). While some parts of Athens have a vibrant socialist and anarchist culture that supports refugees and calls for “no borders”, there is an equally strong (if not stronger) ethno-nationalist, far-right segment that wields power through violent means on the streets of the city (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Meanwhile, desperate young refugees arrive in Athens with no way to support themselves except sex work. Some resort to drugs as a coping mechanism, setting off a cycle of sex work and drug abuse that is very difficult to break (Drobnjakovic, 2018; Freccero, Biswas, Whiting, Alrabe, & Seelinger, 2017). Although the population of displaced and unaccompanied children in Greece is mainly comprised of young adolescent males, they are frequently left

¹By imaginary, I refer to the collective, culturally driven, set of representations and images that a specific group maintains about its surroundings.

out of policy discussions related to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, resulting in less guidance for response efforts to adequately address their needs (Freccero et al., 2017).

This chapter focuses on the experiences of three young male refugees in Athens who constructed positive subjectivities to counter the images of desperation and threat that were thrust onto them as asylum-seekers. These young men were for the most part early refugees in Europe, those who had arrived years before the 2015 crisis; yet, due to state policies, many still had no definitive answer to their own request for asylum (Kalandides & Vaiou, 2012). They were cast as needy, vulnerable, and sometimes, threatening to the ethno-nationalist Greek identity. However, in getting to know these young men, I encountered a different subjectivity, one that provided them with meaning and purpose as they cared for and advocated for other refugees who were experiencing similar traumas. In fact, the identity of many of these individuals was predicated upon the help they could give to newer arrivals. Although they were in precarious positions themselves, they became advocates for social justice, and for some, their entire life—how they spent their days and how they presented themselves to the world—came to be tied to the work they did to help refugees and others in need. This is not to say that their own precarity was in any way imagined. The sadness of years of separation from family and homeland, and, in some cases, their own mental health issues certainly posed serious risks to their wellbeing. However, the way they presented themselves to the world was not as refugees in need, nor would they accept being considered a threat to their host country. The active construction of a positive alternate narrative based on volunteerism and solidarity with other refugees reflects an intentional subjectivity that was created to counter the negative narratives of asylum seekers often held by receiving countries.

4.1.2 A Brief Note on Methods

This chapter is based on data from participant observation conducted in Greece. As a cultural anthropologist, I have a core group of about ten interlocutors with whom I spend time in Athens, and during any 2-3-month period of research, I am exposed to many others. Although I do undertake formal interviews, most of my research is based on informal interactions and time spent within the community, as is typical for ethnographically grounded anthropologists. My intention as a researcher is to better understand the subjective experiences, choices, and lives of those with whom I work, rather than to make claims of generalizability across any particular group. My closest interactions tend to be with refugees who came to Greece ten or more years ago, often as minors. Most do not have permanent political asylum, but instead have been granted temporary protective status to reside in the country. Despite the uncertainty of their own situation, these individuals have chosen to remain politically active. In this chapter, I explore some of the aspects of their lives that have contributed to personal growth, even as they continue to endure the trauma of statelessness.

In using a strengths-based perspective for this analysis, I do not seek to disregard or downplay their experiences of pain and struggle, nor do I want to leave the impression that the paths chosen by the young men discussed here are representative of all refugee experiences. However, as research and rhetoric regarding refugees often imparts negative characterizations such as helplessness, dependency or threat (Kisiara, 2015; Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016), with less emphasis on stories of human potential and resilience (Arnetz, Rofa, Arnetz, Ventimiglia, & Jamil, 2013), it is important to remember the strength, courage, and hope that is required to embark upon a journey known for its dangers and to continue to strive for a better life in the face of immeasurable obstacles.

4.2 Background on the Interlocutors

The refugees introduced in this chapter are members of the Hazara ethnicity, which is a vulnerable minority group in Afghanistan. As most Hazaras are Shi'a Muslims, they have suffered persecution not only at the hands of extremist Sunni groups such as the Taliban and Daesh (Islamic State—Khorasan Province); they have historically been oppressed by the Afghan state, most significantly during the late 1800s when the Hazara genocide led to the killing, displacement, and enslavement of 60% of their population (Mousavi, 2018). My own research discusses the collective and cultural trauma which has arisen due to this history (Chiovenda, 2016, 2019). Attempting to gain political leverage, the Hazara civil society activists in Afghanistan with whom I worked had used narratives of suffering to mobilize the Hazara population. Given that experience, I expected to find something similar in Greece. While certainly there was some evidence of the dissemination of information about Hazara suffering being used to leverage their chances of receiving political asylum in Greece, most Hazara refugees that I knew were committed to volunteer work that could benefit all refugees and vulnerable people. Some even publicly downplayed their Hazara identity to avoid alienating others. However, it is important to note that privately with me and to varying degrees openly, the three interlocutors in this chapter also sought to bring attention to the problems faced by Hazaras specifically.

All three of the young men discussed in this chapter experienced trauma during their journey to Greece and have sustained extended periods of time away from their families since childhood. Two left Afghanistan while they were still children, finding their way to Iran, and then to Greece. The third was part of the Afghan special forces, where he experienced discrimination and threats as a member of the Hazara minority, prompting him to escape from his unit and eventually make his way to Greece. As these young men continue to work with newly arrived refugees in Athens, it is important to bear in mind that the trauma of their own journeys is constantly replayed through the experiences of those they seek to help.

4.2.1 *Jawad*

Jawad left his family's village when he was about 12 years old, hidden in a truck as the Taliban encroached upon their region. He first traveled to Quetta, Pakistan, where for a while he worked as a baker's assistant. He then moved on to Iran, working in Tehran in a shop before doing construction work in Bandar Abbas, a port city. Jawad's father was also working in the region, but they did not find each other. After being threatened by the Iranian police with deportation back to Afghanistan, Jawad decided to head further west. He made it to Turkey where he found smugglers who he hoped would be able to get him to Greece. Although his first boat crossing failed, he arrived in Athens on his second attempt, an unaccompanied minor of about 15 years old. Other Afghans were also trickling in at that time, but as the Greek government suspected that the goal of applicants was to settle in a more northern European country, asylum requests were often tied up in bureaucracy to encourage their journey onward (see Cabot, 2014). While most asylum seekers did eventually continue to other parts of Europe, some did not have the funds to do so, and thus remained in Greece for 10 or 15 years, sometimes even longer. Many, like Jawad, were granted temporary protective status, which had to be renewed every few years. As a result, these individuals lived in a stateless limbo, not fully permitted to be in Greece, but having left Afghanistan at such a young age that going back seemed an impossibility. Jawad's situation was further complicated when he went to have his status renewed, but for some bureaucratic reason, it was instead revoked. Left with few options, he pretended to be a Japanese tourist in Greece, using a fake passport to try to get to a northern European country. Unfortunately, he was discovered at the airport and a criminal case was brought against him, leaving him with no way to obtain a job, rent an apartment, or pay his bills. He was essentially stripped of personhood, which added to the traumas he had already experienced. And yet, this was also a turning point for Jawad. Reading books by the spiritual guide Eckhart Tolle, Jawad found an existential sense of self through mysticism, insisting that his personhood was not dependent upon the Greek state.

4.2.2 *Ali*

Like Jawad, Ali left Afghanistan around the age of 12 due to the threat of Taliban rule. He made his way to Iran where he was later joined by most members of his family, but the decision was soon made to send him on to Europe. He arrived in Greece with the intention of migrating to a northern country, but after a fire in the warehouse where he was squatting claimed all of his savings, he no longer had the resources to continue his journey. At the age of fourteen, Ali was stranded in Greece. However, he was luckier than other refugees as he was taken in by a middle-class Greek family with leftist political leanings who introduced him to social justice groups advocating for a variety of causes. Upon completing high school, Ali decided

to devote his life to helping the refugees who had recently arrived in Athens. As a Hazara, he was also determined to bring attention specifically to the problems faced by his own ethnic group.

4.2.3 *Hamid*

Unlike Jawad and Ali, Hamid was not a minor when he entered Greece, and of the three young men discussed in this chapter, he is the only one who spent time in a refugee camp. Hamid's father had been an officer in Communist-era Afghanistan, so the military was a part of his upbringing. Raised in Pakistan, Hamid joined the army in Afghanistan because he was dedicated to the idea of an Afghan state. However, he was quickly disillusioned. As an ethnic Hazara, Hamid endured harassment and discrimination from other members of the special forces. After a fellow soldier attempted to shoot him from behind in the "fog of war", Hamid deserted his unit, walking through the wilderness to eventually be reunited with his family. As an army deserter, he could no longer safely remain in Afghanistan, so to avoid prosecution, the decision was made to send him to Europe. Although his desertion from the Afghan army forms the basis of his ongoing asylum case, legal problems resulting from his interactions with the Greek police threaten to jeopardize the possibility of political asylum. Hamid works as a translator for an organization that provides care and assistance to refugees. While he is dedicated to this work, he is also a heavy drinker and often frequents the bars and cafes which are common in Athens.

A Deeper Dive: Into Refugee Camps of Greece

Melissa Kerr Chiovenda

On my first research trip to Athens, refugee camps near the Greek capital looked exactly as one would expect them to appear. Refugees were housed in endless rows of white tents crammed with families. Those who were not given an official space camped alongside the fences, the luckier ones in donated recreational tents. Everything was dry and coated with a layer of dust. Entire camps became a field of mud when it rained, with tents providing no real protection against the cold in the winter, nor any cooling in the summer. Refugees were given their daily prepared rations in the morning, but as there was no refrigeration, some of the meals would spoil by evening. Few doctors were on duty, and activities such as school programs for children were minimal to non-existent.

The situation has changed somewhat over the last few years, with all the camps on the Greek mainland being converted to caravans or small mobile

(continued)

homes. Families and groupings of three to four single men now have their own climate-controlled living space with running water, a bathroom, and a cooking area. Additionally, the delivery of fully prepared meals has been replaced with payment cards that allow refugees to buy groceries and do their own cooking. The biggest problems reported within mainland camps are a continued lack of medical care, disputes that arise between refugees, particularly of different nationalities, that can lead to violence, and periodic attacks by far-right groups. While improvements have been made on the mainland, it must be noted that the camps on the Greek islands continue to exist as before. As access is restricted by the government, there is little to no monitoring of island camps by outside groups or journalists. Thus, while the mainland camps serve as models for media coverage, the conditions on island camps continue to remain deplorable.

4.3 Refugees and Trauma

The use of the medical term “trauma” to describe the psychological implications of exposure to adverse events, is recognized as imperfect. As the Greek term translates to “wound”, trauma originally implied a bodily injury, but within psychology, particularly within the psychodynamic approach to the study of the individual, trauma is considered to be a wound that is inflicted upon the mind, rather than the body. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV* (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), traumatizing events are those that involve experiencing, witnessing or being confronted with actual or threatened death, serious injury, or physical threats to oneself or others, to which the fifth edition of the DSM added actual or threatened sexual violence and indirect exposure to aversive conditions in the course of professional duties (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is important to note the difference between refugee trauma, which covers the spectrum of experiences specific to the realities of being a displaced person, and psychological trauma in general, which may be the result of various adverse conditions (Papadopoulos, 2007). Caruth (1995) suggests that it is not the traumatic event itself that causes psychological disturbance to an individual, but that it is the period of latency, during which the individual’s understanding of what has happened is mediated by inner and outside forces, that determines the extent of the trauma endured. Relatedly, Young (1995), in questioning the very construction of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suggests that psychological trauma is not necessarily limited to a single self-contained event, but instead may arise from a variety of ongoing situations. For the study of refugees, this is particularly significant as displaced persons experience a cumulative burden of pre-migration, migration, and post-migration traumas that can have deleterious effects on mental health outcomes.

Research conducted over the past several decades provides ample evidence that being a refugee has trauma-inducing repercussions (Kienzler, 2008) as the destruction of one's external world may also devastate one's internal reality (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Several studies indicate that severe exposure to mass violence along with experiences of torture, rape, imprisonment, as well as witnessing the abuse and/or killing of family members and being close to death are associated with a variety of mental health problems among refugees, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, and substance use (Farwell, 2004; Keller et al., 2006; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008; Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 2004; Nikendei et al., 2019; Silove, 2001). Other studies note the negative impact of traumatic refugee experiences on social functioning and life satisfaction (Marshall, Schell, Elliott, Berthold, & Chun, 2005; Vaage et al., 2010) along with heightened emotional reactivity (Kinzie et al., 1998; Spiller et al., 2019) and impairment of cognitive functions (Ainamani, Elbert, Olema, & Hecker, 2017). The impact of potentially traumatic experiences in childhood prior to migration can further complicate the psychological profile (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Jore, Oppedal, & Biele, 2020; Kaplan, Stolk, Valibhoy, Tucker, & Baker, 2016) while post-migration difficulties related to acculturation and resettlement as well as anti-refugee sentiments of host communities can result in a prolonged environment of uncertainty, deprivation, and social exclusion (Hynie, 2018; Khawaja et al., 2008). Aside from the loss of social and cultural support (Porter & Haslam, 2005), refugees may also experience a loss of the social roles they had previously occupied (Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, & Goldman, 2002) as their displacement results in barriers to participation in the life activities in which they once engaged (Khawaja et al., 2008). Importantly, several studies report the existence of a dose-response relationship between the number and intensity of exposures to trauma and the severity of psychological symptoms (Bogic et al., 2012; Keller et al., 2006; Neuner et al., 2004; Stelle et al., 2002). For example, Stelle et al. (2002) found that among Vietnamese refugees, experiencing more than three events that could be considered traumatic leads to increased anxiety, depression, substance use, and PTSD. Neuner et al. (2004) found similar evidence among Sudanese refugees living in the West Nile region.

4.4 Positive Transformation of Suffering

While much is known about the negative impact of traumas experienced by refugees, Papadopoulos (2007) warns that a primarily pathologizing narrative is incomplete and does not do justice to the resilience, strength, and perseverance of displaced individuals. Transforming adverse experiences into positive developments is not a new concept in the study of human experience. In fact, it has been the subject of discourse among notable psychologists such as Viktor Frankl (1959), who used his experiences in a World War II concentration camp to demonstrate the transformative power of suffering, and Carl Jung (1931, 1945, 1951) who highlighted the positive aspects of psychological symptoms to help individuals come closer to a balanced

psyche. For the past few decades, social science has increasingly taken up the question of positive transformation of suffering, or post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Part of this entails the exploration of coping strategies, the ways in which individuals who have experienced traumatizing events react to and deal with the adversities in their lives.

4.4.1 Coping with Trauma

In general, human beings cope with stressors through either active or passive strategies. Active coping, which entails facing the problem directly, has been shown to have positive outcomes on mental health (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009; Ni et al., 2010), while passive strategies such as disengagement are most often considered maladaptive (Neville, Oh, Spanierman, Heppner, & Clark, 2004; Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016). However, research with young refugees shows that avoidance activities like sleeping, praying and reading can help them cope with sadness (Brune et al., 2002). Although individuals deal with adverse conditions in different ways, several positive pathways to coping have been identified (Brune et al., 2002; Kashyap & Sharma, 2014; Khawaja et al., 2008; Pahud, Kirk, Gage, & Hornblow, 2009; Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007). Ai, Whittsett, and Tice (2007), for example, contend that having hope – both the ability to envision a pathway and the agency to embark on it – can help refugees cope with their circumstances, while Khawaja et al. (2008) note that both hope and cognitive reappraisal are useful coping strategies for refugees. An ability to cognitively reframe events can create pathways to meaning making. As traumatic experiences shatter our assumptions regarding the basic safety and benevolence of the world, cognitive dissonance between deeply held worldviews and external realities creates psychological distress; but by attributing suffering to destiny or to the will of God, individuals can retain their overarching view of the world as safe and good while acknowledging the severity of their own traumatic experiences (Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augoustinos, & Somasundaram, 2014). Additionally, those who perceive themselves as survivors show greater psychological gains and a sense purpose while preparing for future difficulties, (Basoglu et al., 1997; Goodman, 2004; Gorman, Brough, & Ramirez, 2003). Involvement in religious or cultural groups and participation in formal or informal networks can provide much needed support to aid in the resettlement process and create avenues of hope and opportunity. Indeed, several studies have linked social support to psychological wellbeing among refugees (Ahern et al., 2004; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). In some cases, a reliance on political beliefs in addition to or in lieu of religion/spirituality can also lead to positive outcomes (Punamaki-Gitai, 1990). This is particularly true of the interlocuters discussed in this chapter.

4.4.2 *Post-Traumatic Growth*

Not surprisingly, trauma research has focused heavily on negative outcomes. However, several researchers have also considered the possibility that severe life situations can act as catalysts for positive change. Terms to this effect include “positive psychological changes” (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991), “perceived benefits” (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1991; McMillen, Zuravin, & Rideout, 1995), “stress-related growth” (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), and “positive by-products” (McMillen, Howard, Nower, & Chung, 2001). Positive changes that act as coping mechanisms have been further described as “transformational coping” (Pargament, 1996) and “positive reinterpretation” (Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). As an overarching concept, however, the term most often appearing in recent literature is “post traumatic growth” (PTG), which Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) define as

the experience of individuals whose development, at least in some areas, has surpassed what was present before the struggle with crises occurred. The individual has not only survived, but has experienced changes that are viewed as important, and that go beyond what was the previous status quo. Post-traumatic growth is not simply a return to baseline, it is an experience of improvement that for some persons is deeply profound (p. 4).

Studies of PTG have focused on a wide-range of traumatic experiences, including loss of a loved one (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990; Edmonds & Hooker, 1992; Hogan, Morse, & Tasón, 1996), struggles with health problems, disease, and medical issues (Bower, Kemeny, Taylor, & Fahey, 1998; Collins, Taylor, & Skokan, 1990; Laerum, Johnsen, Smith, & Larsen, 1987), destruction of homes in fires (Thompson, 1985), sexual assault (Draucker, Murphy, & Artinian, 1992; Frazier 2000), combat experiences (Elder Jr & Clipp, 1989), hostage experiences (Cole, 1992), and of course refugee experiences (Berger & Weiss, 2003; Hussain & Bhushan, 2011; Rizkalla & Segal, 2018; Sleijpen, Haagen, Mooren, & Kleber, 2016).

Using the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) identified five major domains of post-traumatic growth: (1) a greater appreciation of life and changed priorities; (2) warmer, more intimate relations with others; (3) a greater sense of perceived strength; (4) a recognition of new possibilities for one’s life; and (5) spiritual development. These domains represent the paradoxical phenomenon of possible gains emerging from severe losses. Ai et al. (2007) suggest that PTSD and PTG may be two sides of the same coin, with individuals experiencing either or both depending upon mediating factors. It is important to note that PTG is not a direct result of trauma, but rather the growth that may emerge from struggling with adverse experiences. The trauma itself is not a desirable or positive experience, nor is it perceived as such. Positive changes are instead attributed to the activation of cognitive processes that attempt to make sense of the tragedies experienced, forcing individuals to mourn their losses through rumination (disturbing intrusive thoughts) and reevaluation of goals and assumptions (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). PTG does not imply an end to the pain and distress of traumatic events as individuals who attain some level of PTG often continue to struggle with the negative ramifications of their trauma. While longitudinal research indicates

significant variation in the type and timing of positive growth (Frazier, Conlon, & Glaser, 2001), the cognitive processing of trauma, according to this model, is aided by consistent and stable relationships. Opportunities for positive change may also appear at the societal level in dealing with larger groups of traumatized people, as communities and nations wrangle with the cognitive discomfort of the disparities that often exist between ideological values and actual behaviors and policies (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

4.5 Reimagining Subjectivities

The interlocuters discussed in this chapter share some important aspects of coping and positive growth that emerged from their individual experiences before, during, and after migration. While much of their coping is through active participation in prosocial behaviors as discussed in the following sections, they also engage in different passive coping strategies, including retreating from social activities when it becomes overwhelming (Ali), reading spiritual texts and pondering mystical approaches (Jawad), and consuming alcohol and recreational drugs (Hamid and Jawad). The young men employ similar approaches to social networks and advocacy work but have varying levels of personal growth. At the same time, their principle goal of remaking the image of themselves and other refugees in Greece provides counter-narratives to the negative discourse regarding displaced individuals and asylum seekers.

4.5.1 *Social Networks*

Of the three young men described in this chapter, Jawad has had the greatest degree of success in establishing strong social networks in Greece. He maintains warm relationships with people from a variety of backgrounds, from the Afghan refugee community to Greeks and foreigners of all types and has effectively leveraged these relationships when needed. While his social network provided him with the means to survive when he could no longer work legally or rent housing, his relationships are not in any way instrumental; Jawad genuinely finds pleasure and meaning in creating and maintaining deep relations with others. One example that stands out in my mind is the special relationship he has with a mother-daughter pair; the mother is frail and likely recovering from substance abuse. Jawad simply loves them, not in a romantic way, but as a brother or family member, and spends hours sitting with them. This relationship provides a level of familial intimacy that he would otherwise be lacking.

Ali has also formed deep relationships with some of the key people in life, but his social networks are not as extensive as Jawad's. He appears to be less extroverted than Jawad, and as such, struggles a bit while navigating social relationships. At the same time, he has a strong genuine relationship with his Greek family and a close circle of

friends that provide him with a small, intimate network of relations. He relies on his Greek family when he needs support, but he also tries to maintain ties with his biological family outside the country. Once, he even risked his status in Greece to visit his mother in Iran because he felt that he needed to preserve that link. While Ali's close relationships do place some demands on him, they also help him discover his potential and pursue his goals.

Hamid, on the other hand, has had more difficulty developing strong relationships in Greece. Although he has numerous friends within the Afghan refugee community, he has been unable to forge deep bonds with any of them. Being targeted for his ethnic minority status in the Afghan army—a position he had initially hoped would help him serve his country, may have created added barriers for Hamid to overcome, leaving him less trusting of others. He tries to reach out and maintain friendships, and individuals such as Jawad will never turn him away, but he also has difficulty regulating his emotions and often quarrels with others, including Ali. Hamid's closest relationships appear to be with Amnesty International volunteers with whom he works to bridge relations with the refugee community in Athens.

4.5.2 Advocacy and Refugee Support

Extant research shows that traumatic life experiences can promote prosocial behaviors, especially when survivors have been on the receiving end of altruistic gestures (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008). This is particularly relevant to the three interlocutors in this story, who devote much of their time and energy to other refugees, including vulnerable people and new arrivals in Greece. Jawad, for example, worked tirelessly to develop a community center for refugee children, a space for social gathering and education. Despite his own legal, financial, and political struggles, he was able to inspire others to join him on this quest. Working with a Greek partner and numerous others invested in the mission, Jawad served as the face of a project that he hopes will continue to support refugee communities in Athens, even after he moves on.

Ali has similar plans to provide care and assistance to refugees and to highlight the injustices faced by his ethnic group. Knowing that European asylum officials are generally unaware of the ways that Hazaras are persecuted in Afghanistan, Ali has started developing a database to keep a record of attacks on Hazaras which any organization or lawyer could use to create an asylum case. He holds roles as a translator and a cultural moderator for several aid programs in Athens, and on his days off, he volunteers on similar projects. He has spent time helping Muslims bury their loved ones according to Islamic regulations and established an ad-hoc school for refugee women. When he hears of inhumane conditions within camps outside of Athens, he forms his own fact-finding mission to document abuses and advocate for change. He also organizes outreach campaigns via video and social media to inform refugees of their rights in Europe. Ali understands that he is in a prime position to care for new arrivals because of his language abilities, social connections, and knowledge of the Greek asylum system. While his projects seem to start, stop, and

start again, he holds true to them and achieves some promising outcomes. At the same time, his devotion to so many projects and plans exhausts him and so, he alternates between high energy and solitude-seeking behaviors. Periodically, he closes out the cacophony of the refugee scene and goes to the house of his Greek family, or to the beach where he can find solace. However, it is only a matter of time before he is pushing forward once again. I have come to understand that Ali, who left his family as a child and arrived in Greece as a minor, sees something of himself in the refugee children he seeks to assist. He wants for them a better life than he was able to achieve for himself, and this is what he relentlessly works towards.

Hamid is affiliated with Amnesty International and serves as a liaison to promote communication between aid workers and refugees. When he is not frequenting a bar or cafe in Athens, Hamid can be found working at one of the refugee camps or with community organizations, often assisting those who present the greatest needs. I have personally witnessed his efforts to find housing for pregnant refugees who were turned away from camps that were filled to capacity. On several occasions, when I was at a camp doing my own research, I would encounter Hamid, seeking out the most vulnerable refugees to help. I ran into him once when an Afghan woman had been beaten by a member of the far-right group, Golden Dawn. Hamid not only made sure that she was connected with advocacy groups who could assist her, he stood by her, translating, witnessing, doing whatever was needed to make her plight just a little bit easier.

4.5.3 Remaking the Image of the Refugee

Despite the stated commitment of Western nations to offer protection to individuals seeking asylum in their country, refugees are generally viewed with suspicion and hostility by host communities. Western media outlets expound on this narrative by using images that depict refugees as untrustworthy, evil, unsophisticated, and opportunistic (Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, & Mihic, 2008). In Greece, the influx of asylum seekers from Muslim majority countries like Syria and Afghanistan, has further stoked the fear of Muslim “others” through rhetorical tropes and images associating Islam with violence and terrorism. Thus, Muslim refugees often serve as fodder for right-wing politicians who use the fear of Islam to gain power and to insert their nationalist agendas into government policies (Sakellariou, 2017). However, individuals like Jawad, Ali, and Hamid work tirelessly to counter such narrow dehumanizing images and narratives. Using their energy to bring the plight of Afghan Hazaras into social consciousness and offering hope to all refugees and vulnerable people through various humanitarian efforts, these young men stand at the front lines where their engagement with cultural and political groups and their prosocial activities can hopefully begin to chip away at age-old stereotypes of Muslims and refugees in Greece.

Through his efforts at advocacy and coalition building, Ali hopes to remake the way that right leaning Greeks view refugees. He spends much of his free time trying

to organize Hazara refugees, feeling that if they would just work together as a unified front, much could be accomplished; yet all too often he is disappointed when others have different priorities and are unable or unwilling to help him. While Hamid struggles with his mercurial temper, he too hopes that his efforts to help the most vulnerable communities in Athens will bring attention to the plight of his own ethnic community. However, for Hamid, remaking the image of Afghan refugees also requires him to reappraise his own journey so that he can come to terms with the betrayal that led to his desertion from the Afghan special forces. While of each of these young men continue to fight numerous obstacles to build an alternative narrative of refugees in the imaginations of Greek society, Jawad's work has probably had the greatest impact.

Aside from the development of the refugee children's community center, Jawad was featured in an anti-racism magazine that he works with in Athens. The magazine is dedicated to bridging gaps between different members of Greek society, bringing people together, and providing a safe space where individuals can express themselves. In the photo, Jawad is making a scary face, his eyes wide, wearing a sign that says "terrorist". The picture is an invitation to get to know him for who he really is. It was taken during a team building exercise in which people wore the labels that society often ascribes to them. Jawad seeks desperately to be seen as a person, rather than a faceless number in a crowd of asylum seekers. In my interactions with him, I noticed that he would often wear a shirt with the words "no identity" written upon it. That shirt symbolizes the same thing as his "terrorist" photo—his understanding that people do not see him for who he is, but for who they perceive him to be.

4.6 Conclusion

As an anthropologist who focuses on political identity issues, I spend quite a bit of time exploring social injustices that exacerbate the problems of oppressed and vulnerable populations. While I am cognizant of the joy that many of my interlocutors experience in their lives, I have always been wary of overly positive points of view where the burden of change is placed upon individuals, rather than the neoliberal systems that promote such severe inequalities. However, the successes of the refugees with whom I have worked deserve to be acknowledged and celebrated. My interlocutors have overcome numerous trauma-inducing experiences on often thorny paths, but in recrafting themselves subjectively, they not only assert control over how others view them, but also how they view themselves. The young Hazara men discussed in this chapter have rejected the categories of both "needy refugee" and "outside danger" to Greek society, while coping with multiple trauma-inducing events on their personal journeys of migration and resettlement. They focus on helping others, both individually and collectively to address the structural problems of refugees and other marginalized groups in Athens. This has led to new subjectivities and new ways of being. The growth they manifest after drawing from the traumatic experience of coming to Greece, is the positive energy and desire

to fight injustice and to engender a system that is more fair, so that others do not experience the same traumas that they have.

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Chapter 5

Muslim Media Psychology and Its Effects on Society: The Role of Pakistani TV Serials in Promoting Women's Rights



Iqra Iqbal and Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Abstract Positive media scholarship investigates the ways in which media can serve as a tool to uplift human attitudes and behaviors. The influence of positive psychology on media studies has flipped the script from looking solely at the negative aspects of media to identifying the ways in which media can be a source of inspiration, inducing emotionally positive states, creating a sense of meaning and purpose, and building on the human capacity for good. This chapter discusses the positive role that Pakistani media can play in women's empowerment. Pakistani television serials have historically provided strong female characters, using drama to inform Pakistani women of their legal rights and illustrating the ways in which women can flourish through their struggles. The groundwork for Islamic feminism was laid out during the time of the Prophet but was subsequently erased through centuries of patriarchal norms and customs which continue to impact contemporary Muslim societies around the world. The chapter highlights the ways in which popular female characters in selected Pakistani dramas impart Islamic strengths and virtues to encourage social justice and disrupt patriarchal behaviors and values within Pakistani society.

5.1 Introduction

Media, particularly mass media, has significant impact on people, who often unconsciously adopt and internalize perspectives, beliefs, and values shown graphically or textually (Handley & Runnion, 2011; Moorman, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2016). Despite the proliferation of social media and digital media options, television

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continues to be a strong contender in media consumption globally. The 2020 Media Comparisons Study shows that TV has the highest reach across all demographic sectors in the United States. In Pakistan, TV is the dominant media platform. According to a Gallup and Gilani Pakistan poll (2019), 72% of Pakistanis report spending up to two hours a day watching TV. Because television serves as both a supplier of news and a provider of entertainment, it promotes the transfer of cultural norms and values. According to Erzurum (2013), television is an essential tool for cultural transformation. It has the power to spread messages to all parts of society that have access to it. In fact, the media establishment in Pakistan impacts the views of Pakistanis on many issues of social justice (Naseer, Katib, & Ejaz, 2010). News coverage of crime and human rights infringements brings to light the extent of social issues prevalent in the country, while showcasing Pakistan's efforts on the international stage. Pakistani television dramas are particularly influential as they attract viewership from around the world, including in neighboring India. Given that Pakistani dramas have begun streaming on Netflix, the impact will no doubt continue across geographic borders.

Pakistan TV Corporation (PTV), the government-owned broadcast service, was established in 1964 and enjoyed a monopoly in Pakistan until 1990, when People's Television Network (PTN) came into being (Naveed, 2011). In the year 2000, Indus Vision, the first Pakistani private satellite channel, was launched. This was followed by ARY Digital in 2001, Aaj TV in 2004, and Hum TV in 2005. In 2006, PTV launched a channel geared towards audiences residing in Europe and the Americas. PTV not only opened the doors for television to enter the homes of Pakistanis, it served as a pioneer in the production of television dramas, which focused on bringing awareness of social issues through powerful writing, directing and acting. In a study of rural population viewing habits, Juni, Kareem, Alam, Haider, and Ashraf (2014) found that most participants preferred PTV dramas over other types of television programs. Through dramas, they gained knowledge of cultural norms, including fashion, jewelry and ways of communicating, such as "mixed gatherings" where men and women interact in non-gender-segregated spaces. Similarly, Madani and Qureshi's (2017) study of media and women in Karachi, a highly urbanized city in the Sindh province of Pakistan, found that media has a significant effect on women's behavior, including the practice of presented culture. They noted the importance of television in providing the images and content from which Pakistani women learn about behaviors, lifestyles and fashion. Given the emphasis on female viewership, Pakistani dramas hold a unique position in imparting cultural values and Islamic feminism. As such, it is important to consider the ways in which Pakistani serials have historically contributed to positive change and women's empowerment.

5.2 Positive Media Psychology

As an emerging discipline at the intersection of psychology and media studies, media psychology is centered on examining the interconnection between human behavior and media technologies in a progressively digital environment. Although media, particularly mass media, was initially affiliated with television, newspapers and magazines, where communication is unidirectional from the sender to the receiver, the emergence of the internet created a more interactive sphere as media technologies facilitated intermediated experiences that enabled the connection of people on a global level. Consequently, media technologies have rapidly integrated our everyday activities with innovative devices that are constantly coming into the marketplace, changing the way we interact with each other, play games, and communicate within and across social groups.

Early studies in the field of media psychology focused primarily on the negative effects of media on human behaviors, attitudes, and experiences. As noted by Giles (2003) in his book *Media Psychology*, early studies reflected the predominantly negative slant of psychology itself as a discipline. However, with the growing popularity of positive psychology, researchers have begun to look at the ways in which human beings find happiness, attain positive emotional states, flourish and thrive. Positive psychology relies on scientific understanding and successful intervention to help us in our individual and collective quests for a fulfilled life. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) initiated the discipline to emphasize scientific research on what makes life worth living, rather than concentrating on disorder, failures, and problems. Positive psychology has demonstrated that, even though happiness is subject to genetic impacts and—to a smaller extent—external conditions, it can be improved by purposive activities (Holder, 2012). For instance, an activity that has been observed to enhance happiness in young adolescents is participating in prosocial tasks that contain voluntary actions meant to help others, like performing acts of kindness (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, & Stockdale, 2013). Likewise, showing appreciation, or counting one's blessings, has also been determined to be a successful happiness-boosting technique in young teenagers. The explosion of interest in the study of happiness has precipitated research in the relationship between happiness and other variables of a good life. Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004) found an overlap between happiness and purpose in life, but also some crucial differences. Being a “giver” instead of a “taker”, for example, was associated with meaningfulness and not with happiness. In the book *Authentic Happiness*, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) also note the importance of meaningfulness, arguing that when people apply their exclusive talents and virtues for a purpose bigger than themselves, they can discover a deep sense of fulfilment.

While the first wave of positive psychology addressed a happy life, the more recent second wave (PP2.0) emphasizes meaning and purpose, focusing on the balance of positive and negative, and integrating the existential with the scientific to explore how the “dark side” contributes to a meaningful life (Wong, 2016). It is important to note that positive and negative traits are independent of each other.

Thus, removing a negative media effect does not automatically result in positive outcomes. For media psychology, the move towards a balanced and holistic understanding of human phenomena not only facilitates lines of inquiry on how media is linked to positive states, but how it can contribute to meaning and social justice. This is where the power of media can be most influential in creating positive change in individuals and societies.

5.3 Media and Gender

One major area of study is the impact that media can have on gender and the empowerment of women. Jasam (2001) notes the importance of media portrayals of men and women and how these affect perceptions of masculinity and femininity. By repeatedly associating each gender with specific types of behaviors, media contribute to gender role expectancies and gender imbalances (Franceschini, Galli, Chiesi, & Primi, 2014), leading to distorted role prospects (Hussain, 2019). Consider your own generalizations about men and women. How often is womanhood associated with the stereotypes portrayed on TV and in advertising? How often do we think about the status of women in organizations or the positions they have in the community; or portrayals of women in the imaginations of poets, performers, and prophets (Shrivastava, 1992)? The images shown on TV certainly impact our thought processes (Qaiser, 2019), often in unconscious ways.

In fact, unconscious processing of information is a well-studied phenomenon in media psychology, particularly as it relates to the influence of unconscious cognition on persuasion, advertising, and politics (Handley & Runnion, 2011; Moorman, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2016). Unconscious processing is known to have a priming effect on consumers of information, whereby stimuli such as images and texts influence the speed of retrieval of subsequent information. For example, the word “doctor” comes to mind faster after exposure to the word, “hospital” as compared to the word “fish”. Media outlets, especially in marketing, are well-versed with using the priming effect to influence our perceptions of messages. Indeed, research has shown that we are influenced by even incidental exposure to messages that we may not remember consciously (Afef & Jameleddine, 2015). As such, our views of gender are not solely developed through higher order critical thinking but are often the result of repeated exposure to stereotyped imagery.

Interestingly, television programs can reinforce patriarchal attitudes towards women even though such values may not correlate with the actual roles of women in contemporary societies (Matthes, Prieler, & Adam, 2016). In an analysis of Tamil TV serials, Keerthana (2015) found that women are often shown in the role of domestic support as a wife or mother. South Asian women are further depicted as submissive and overly engrossed in the affairs of friends and family. Men, on the other hand, are represented as employed, enthusiastic and combative. However, this does not reflect the actual experiences of Pakistani women who are legislators, businesswomen, artists, entrepreneurs, and lawyers. Gendered portrayals further

endorse the role expectations that are depicted on our screens (Prieler & Centeno, 2013), making the women who do not conform to such portrayals appear to be invisible or abnormal. Not only is the presentation of female characters primarily within the confines of home life an inaccurate and one-sided reflection of the realities of contemporary life in many South Asian communities, it exacerbates the shame, guilt and misunderstandings that women who work outside the home are attempting to conquer (Sandhu, 2016).

Along with emphasizing the traditional role of women as mothers, daughters, and caregivers, television and advertising also promulgate the imagery of an idealized standard of beauty. Of course, beauty on TV and advertising is the result of teams of professionals employed specifically to create these ideal images, which cannot be easily replicated at home. The resulting inability to attain the stereotyped depictions of beauty that are fashioned through professional hair, make-up, and lighting contribute to a loss of self-esteem and confidence (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg, & Alicke, 2013), promote psychological disorders related to weight loss and body control (Ohsiek & Williams, 2011), and make women more susceptible to abuse and discrimination (Michelle & Weaver, 2003). The sexualization of women on television is a tried and true way of improving viewership, but it also reduces the value of women as constructive members of society and encourages risky sexual behaviors which can have dangerous social outcomes (Wille et al., 2018).

Even though media outlets often promote harmful norms that benefit patriarchal assumptions of women, they can also provide messages that promote women's rights. According to Creedon (1994), the task of improving gender sensitivity and gender equality requires a revisioning of both male and female characteristics and a critical analysis of the traditional traits associated with each. Knoll, Eisend, and Steinhagen (2011) note that

historically, men dominated the media world, globally and nationally. Men develop and determine media policies, priorities and agendas which include how females are depicted and represented . . . The problem of controlling and promoting how females are depicted in the media is complex. This includes a change in the common representation of gender in the media, which reflects a particular way of thinking (pp. 870–871).

Fu, Danescu, and Lee (2016) explain that in its initial definition, the word "gender" was utilized in social, political and medical functions. It presented new dimensions of a person's background and brought to the foreground women's subjugation in various spheres of life. According to Attenborough (2014), gender roles describe the expected social and behavioral patterns followed by males and females in a societal context. Gender functions differ from one culture to another. These functions also change with the passage of time. Several socializing agents such as families, friends, educators, religious beliefs and media representations impact how a society characterizes masculine and feminine traits. Parents hold a primary role in imparting gender roles onto their children. Expectations regarding boys and girls are often passed down from one generation to the next. Even before a child is born, we make assumptions about their place in the world. Typically, young boys in Pakistan and other parts of the world are socialized as future breadwinners.

They are encouraged to participate in traditional male tasks, such as repairing and constructing things as well as money-making activities to prepare them to take on these roles in adulthood. Young Pakistani girls, on the other hand, are encouraged to be caretakers of the home, where skills such as cooking food and stitching clothing are emphasized. Ali et al. (2011) explain that traditional gender associations in Pakistan place women in a lower social category than men, so much so that the honour of men is identified by the activities of the women of their family. To assure their reputation, the mobility of women and girls is often constrained to avoid any allusions of disgrace to the family. Some of the major issues related to women's rights and violence against women include child marriage, honor killing, rape and sexual violence, forced prostitution, human trafficking, *vani/swara* (trading women to settle family disputes) and acid attacks (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019).

In some parts of Pakistan especially in urban centers, traditional notions of women's subservience are being challenged. We posit that the changing attitudes towards women's roles and expectations are due in part to the influence of Pakistani dramas that portray female characters who assert the strengths and virtues of Muslim women, thereby reimagining role models and emphasizing the rights that Muslim women were given through the revelations of Islam centuries ago. It would be inaccurate to state that Pakistani dramas always do this. Many dramas portray women and girls as weak and vulnerable (Khalid, 2017), subjected to pain and abuse at the hands of family members and societies. However, in some cases, the storyline changes as the episodes progress, showing how a character that was meek at the beginning evolves into a woman who has the confidence to fight back against patriarchal forces. Such depictions are highly relatable to the experiences of Pakistani women as they speak to the contemporary struggle between traditional patriarchal interpretations and women's rights in Islam. Increasingly as Pakistani authors work towards empowering their female characters (Khalid, 2017), women are being portrayed as strong and independent. This provides Pakistani women with role models (albeit fictional ones) who are shown to rise up and speak for themselves, and as such, delivers a script that can motivate women in the real world to demand their rights and safety (Bhattacharya, 2014).

A Deeper Dive: “Good” and “Bad” Women in Pakistani Culture

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi and Iqra Iqbal

Tarar and Pulla (2014) argue, “despite social ethnic and linguistic difference, Pakistani ladies have to bear strikingly similar patterns of the agriculture-based tribular, feudal, class system and kinship network” (p. 56). Although the women who reside in metropolitan regions have better access to education, more job prospects and comparatively higher living standards, they are nonetheless like all Pakistani women classified as “good” or “bad”, “perfect” or

(continued)

“imperfect” according to specific traits that they appear to embody. A “good woman” may or may not have higher education. She is defined by character traits that make her a good companion: generous, peaceful, patient, sympathetic, trustworthy, compromising, understanding and hospitable. She takes on the responsibility for household tasks, marries whoever her family deems appropriate for her, and is prepared to take care of her husband, children, and in-laws after the wedding. She compromises, hides her true feelings, and sacrifices her personal desires and rights. She is also supposed to ask permission of her elders before making any decisions about her own life. Furthermore, after marriage, a “good wife” must accept her in-laws as her own family and tolerate any unfairness or abuse that comes her way. At the other end of the spectrum is the “bad” or “imperfect” Pakistani woman. She is self-centered, boisterous, open-minded, liberal, modern, impatient, unreliable, uncooperative, and outspoken. She is assumed to concentrate more on her own goals, profession and self-grooming. It is important to note that characterizations of good, bad, perfect, and imperfect women are not exclusive to Pakistani culture. They appear in some form in all patriarchal societies (Tarar & Pulla, 2014) and lay the groundwork for the socialization of girls. In collectivist societies such as Pakistan, their actions reflect not only on themselves, but have a positive or negative impact on the honor of the entire family.

5.4 Islamic Feminism, Strengths, and Virtues

The term Islamic feminism is used by some female Muslim scholars who are devoted to their religious beliefs and who are working towards the creation of gender-sensitive religious knowledge. The struggles of White American middle-class women set the stage for the first wave of feminism and sparked a wider movement for gender equality across the world. However, feminism is not a single struggle. Western feminism is often criticized for being exclusionary and imperialistic (Gurel, 2009). The term “feminism” itself carries many negative connotations, such that it is not uncommon for people who believe in the basic stance of gender equality to avoid the label themselves. Part of the problem is that the waves of feminism emanating from Western individualistic perspectives often does not capture the struggles of women in other parts of the world or women who may not adhere to Western definitions of womanhood and liberation. As Western feminism in Europe was rooted in opposition to religious scripture, its emphasis on secularization does not necessarily fit with women who are looking for ways to incorporate their religious beliefs with feminist paradigms. In fact, Muslim women who are aligned with Islamic feminism vehemently reject the notion that Muslim women must be liberated from Islam or that they must adopt the Western model of an ideal woman. Instead, it focuses on empowering Muslim women from *within* Islam, arguing that much of the patriarchal norms are a result of human cultural systems of oppression, rather than

divine revelation in the Qur'an, which Muslims believe is the direct word of God. A basic tenet of Islamic feminism is that "Islam granted Muslim women rights that other religions have deprived them of, and this religion is fully capable of liberating women once it is correctly understood. The adjustment of women's condition can be achieved from within Islam. It is within this context that the theory of Islamic feminism comes as a response to radical Western feminism and its modernizing model, a context that renders Muslim women's demands entirely different from those of Western feminists" (Grami, 2013, p. 106).

Islamic feminists call for an un-reading of Islamic texts to reflect the spirit of the faith, rather than dogmatic adherence to traditional exegesis that is constrained by the historical proliferation of patriarchal cultures and systems (Wadud, 1992). Although there is disagreement among Islamic feminist scholars on whether the Qur'an alone should be used as the source of moral and legal guidance, or if the Qur'an and the *sunnah* (the practices of the Prophet Muhammad) together with international principles of human rights should form the basis of reform, Islamic feminism rejects the notion that men alone have an inherent right to interpret and guide religious knowledge. Along with gender-equitable readings of holy texts, Islamic feminists call for the reinstatement of the rights that were given to women in the early days of Islam—rights that were subsequently neglected and lost through centuries of patriarchal authority. Islamic feminism, thus, provides a way for contemporary Islamic discourse, which in many ways has been hijacked by extremists and political machinations, to move toward contemporary models of social justice. By giving voice to marginalized communities, it upholds gender equality as an inherently Islamic *jihad* or struggle to promote the strengths and virtues of all human beings, regardless of gender, social class, nationality, race or any other socially-constructed concept that may be used to oppress, subjugate, and diminish human rights.

Islamic virtues reflect human strengths which are compatible with both sexes. The VIA classification of strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), a list of 24 universal character strengths that was sourced from various religious, historical and literary references, substantiates the similarities between men and women, tapping into the ways that human beings are alike, regardless of biological sex or gender identity. In aligning the VIA classification system with Islamic strengths and virtues, Pasha-Zaidi and Odeh (2019) also maintain a gender inclusive model. As Qur'anic references to virtues such as honesty, love of learning, spirituality and kindness are not differentiated by gender, Islamic strengths and virtues cannot and should not be categorized as such. In fact, the Qur'an states, "And wish not for the things in which Allah has made some of you to excel others. For men there is reward for what they have earned, (and likewise) for women there is reward for what they have earned and ask Allah of His Bounty. Surely, Allah is Ever All-Knower of everything" (4:32).

Yet gender stereotyping often results in gendered processing of terms. This is not really a surprise, considering that men and women have historically been held to different moral and ethical standards. In eighteenth century Western philosophy, women were expected to show modesty, compassion, and sympathy, whereas men

were gifted with the capacity for rational thought (Raphals, 2000). In psychology, Sigmund Freud, the father of the psychoanalytic school of thought, suggested that women have a weaker sense of morality as he claimed that women are unable to form a mature superego (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). The historical prevalence of male scholarship in Islamic philosophy compounded by the neglect and erasure of female contributions have created similar notions within Islamic societies. Thus, the idea that men and women are equally capable of possessing any combination of Islamic strengths and virtues may itself be a radical supposition for some. Here again, Islamic feminism can pave the way for an egalitarian understanding of gender by affirming the spiritual equality of men and women that is rooted in the Qur'an: "The believers, men and women, are allies of one another. They enjoin the 'common good' and forbid the bad, they observe prayers and give charitable alms and obey God and his Prophet" (9:71). By highlighting the equivalence of responsibility and the need for cooperation that is enjoined upon both sexes, this verse supports the equal footing of both women and men in the faith tradition.

5.5 Feminism in Pakistan

Along with a focus on gender equality, feminism in Pakistan has involved a struggle for political, economic, and social reform. After Partition in 1947, women's activism was centered around social welfare issues such as refugee rehabilitation. This was considered respectable work as it fit with traditional religious notions of women's roles in society. In the 1960s, the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) emerged as the face of the woman's movement. APWA focused its efforts on social welfare and the education of girls and generally did not challenge the political establishment. The struggle for women's rights became politicized in the 1980s primarily as a result of the efforts of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) in urban locations and the *Sindhiani Tehreek* in rural Sindh province. These organizations rose up against the military dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq, which incorporated strict fundamentalist interpretations of Islam in government policies and enacted several laws that discriminated against women. The most contentious of these laws were the Hudood Ordinances which criminalized sex outside of marriage, including rape, and silenced the victims of sexual assault as they feared prosecution for their forced participation in non-marital sex. Participation in the women's movement at that time meant confrontations with a militarized authority, street protests, and demonstrations (Saigol, 2019). WAF initially used progressive interpretations of Islam to counter the political narrative, but in the 1990s moved to a secular approach which was more in line with the feminist ideas of urban, educated, upper-class, English-speaking Pakistani women. Although WAF was a comfortable space for radical feminists, it was unable to mobilize a feminism that appealed to women across social classes (Zia, 2009).

The elections of Benazir Bhutto as Prime Minister in 1988 and subsequently in 1993 provided a symbolic victory for women's empowerment. At the 1999 United

Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, she advocated for women's participation in education and employment, and called for an end to female infanticide and misogynistic interpretations of Islam. During her tenure as Prime Minister, women made some gains in legislation and were able to hold key government positions, but most of the anti-feminist laws of the Zia-ul-Haq era, including the Hudood Ordinances, remained in place. The military government of General Pervez Musharraf, which took over the civilian government run by Nawaz Sharif in 1999, took bold steps toward women's rights, including reserving seats for women on various political assemblies at the local and national levels (Arab Naz et al., 2013). Interestingly, the feminist critique of the Hudood Ordinances found an ally in the Council of Islamic Ideologies, which in 2006, recommended a rewriting of the laws based on Islamic concepts of punishment outlined in the Qur'an, *sunnah*, and *shariah*. Geo TV addressed the controversial ordinances head on by televising debates questioning the Islamic validity of the Hudood Ordinances. These debates laid the groundwork for the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006. Although the Act did not repeal the Hudood Ordinances completely, it reformulated many of its aspects. Rape, for example, would no longer be governed by any Islamic law (Lau, 2007).

Based on the history of the woman's movement in Pakistan, the integration of religion with feminist ideology is not easily reconciled. It is important to bear in mind that Islamic feminist movements that are spearheaded by Muslim women in non-Muslim majority contexts are in part a response to the "War on Terror" which promotes the narrative that all Muslims as terrorists and "backward savages" (Saigol, 2016, p. 34). Islamic feminist scholars working within this paradigm seek empowerment by countering Islamophobic rhetoric through a positive narrative that embraces Islamic symbols and practices. In Pakistan, however, there is a palpable rift between feminists who work within a religious framework and those who come from a secular perspective (Zia, 2009). As culture and religion are deeply interconnected and much of the religious discourse in Pakistan endorses patriarchal mindsets, it is difficult to navigate an indigenous form of feminism that can appeal to all Pakistani women.

5.6 Positive Female Role Models in Pakistani Dramas

Media in Pakistan has always played an important role in feminism and women's empowerment, with dramas providing social commentary through the portrayal of fictional characters. However, studies on the depiction of women in Pakistani dramas show a wide range of characterizations, from stereotypically "good" or "perfect" women to stereotypically "bad" or "imperfect" ones (Ashfaq & Shafiq, 2018). The following dramas were chosen for their portrayal of strong female role models, characters that embody positive traits and abide by ethical principles despite the struggles they experience.

5.6.1 *Dhoop Kinare (1987)*

Dhoop Kinare translates to “at the edge of the sunshine”. The drama aired on PTV in 1987. Written by Haseena Moin, directed by Sahira Kazmi, and starring Marina Khan and Rahat Kazmi in leading roles, this drama serial is the quintessential tribute to strong Pakistani women. The show follows the lives of a team of medical professionals working at a hospital in Karachi. The main character, Zoya, represents a common struggle affecting many contemporary Pakistani women: the struggle for self-determination in education and profession. The drama touches upon push-and-pull factors, such as parent involvement and economic concerns that often force women to steer away from their own pursuits. Hospital intern Zoya journeys to become Dr. Zoya, a mature and responsible woman who finally understands the important part she plays in society. Her determination to overcome the multiple challenges she faces during her career emphasizes her strength as she moves forward toward achieving her goals (Abbas, 2020). By utilizing the backdrop of a hospital setting, the drama guides viewers to imagine the professional status that a woman can attain through a medical education. Given the existing cultural norms that tie a family’s honor with the respectability of its women, *Dhoop Kinare* opened the minds of Pakistani society to consider the collective gains associated with women’s entry into the medical field. As such, Zoya’s character motivated many young Pakistani women to enter the medical profession, a choice that was met with pride among family members. The drama elevated the expectations of women and encouraged their participation in work outside the home. As one of the main concerns of Pakistani families is the intermingling of men and women in work environments, the interactions between the female lead and the male lead were handled with poise and grace. By depicting the male protagonist as an honorable and decent Pakistani man, the presentation of Zoya’s journey promoted medical education as a valid and safe option for Pakistani women, inspiring a new generation of Pakistani women to pursue higher education with the blessing of family members. As such, *Dhoop Kinare* serves as a classic example of Islamic feminism and female empowerment.

A Deeper Dive: Tribute to Haseena Moin

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Haseena Moin, the deeply respected and prolific Pakistani playwright and dramatist, passed away on February 26, 2021 in the early morning hours. Her contributions to Pakistani drama serials are unmatched, with her depictions of the multifaceted and nuanced lives of ordinary Pakistani women being applauded for sparking a “discreet feminist resistance” during the regime of Zia-ul-Haq (Masood, 2020). I am honored to have known Haseena Auntie during her life and to have experienced her support and encouragement. She

(continued)

epitomized the ideal of a strong Pakistani woman. Graduating from Karachi University in the 1960s with a Masters in History, she went on to pen powerful dramas such as *Shehzori*, *Dhoop Kinare* and *Tanhaiyan*. In 1987, she received the Presidential Pride of Performance award for her contributions to Pakistani arts and literature. Using beautiful language and intricate story-telling, Haseena Auntie pioneered women's rights in Pakistan through family-oriented drama serials that touched the hearts of Urdu-speaking audiences around the world. "In fact, a survey conducted by the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Karachi reported that *Tanhaiyan* was still the most popular serial among women in 1998, a decade after it first aired" (Masood, 2020, para. 2). Haseena Auntie was also an avid supporter of the arts and served as the Vice-President of the Arts Council of Pakistan until her death. It is with deep sadness that we say goodbye to a Pakistani icon, a remarkable artist and a beautiful soul whose work has made an indelible impact and whose death leaves an unmistakable void in the literary world.

5.6.2 *Nijaat* (1993)

Written by Asghar Nadeem Syed under the production and direction of Sahira Kazmi, *Nijaat* is an award-winning serial that aired on PTV in 1993. As an eminent activist producer and director in the media industry, Kazmi is well known for making television dramas on women's challenges in Pakistani society. *Nijaat*, which translates to "freedom" in English, delves into the intertwined lives of three Pakistani families in a village in Sindh province. The serial compares the experiences of women in both rural and urban settings, and addresses controversial topics such as family planning, child marriage, human trafficking, child labor, and exchange weddings, known as *watta- satta*, in which the pairing of two individuals from the same households, such as uncle-niece pairs and cousin-cousin pairs, are arranged (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019). The main theme that runs throughout the serial is the importance of birth control. This is illustrated through the characters, Huzoor and Sajida Baksh. Huzoor is obsessed with having many children, especially boys, and forces these desires to his wife, Sajida, who suffers numerous health problems as a result of the quick succession of pregnancies and miscarriages. The serial provides a role model for women in the character of Zareena, the nurse at the local clinic, who attempts to educate Huzoor on the dangers that repeated cycles of pregnancy pose to his wife. A study of the impact of *Nijaat* on men and women in a village outside Lahore (Aftab Associates, 1993) found that Zareena was considered a trustworthy source of information and thus, the medical advice the character imparted was generally accepted by viewers and helped educate them on the importance of family planning. Aside from her role as the purveyor of much needed medical information, Zareena was shown to persevere through adverse experiences, thus providing a source of inspiration to Pakistani women. Although Zareena provided a strong

exemplar of an educated Pakistani woman, the female participants in the study could relate more with Sajida, who embodied the traits of a stereotypical “good” woman, and whose story mirrored their own in many respects. Sensitive subject matter was covered in an honest and straightforward manner, which some found embarrassing to watch with other family members. However, the provocative nature of the serial enabled conversations and internal reflections about taboo topics, which was particularly impactful given the popularity of the drama.

5.6.3 *Marvi (1993)*

Marvi, which means “a brave girl” in English, aired on PTV during the leadership of the Benazir Bhutto. Written by the feminist playwright, Noor-ul-Huda Shah and directed by the media powerhouse, Sultana Siddiqui, the serial was adapted as a modern version of the Sindhi folktale, *Umar Marvi*. As the founder and president of Hum Network Limited, Siddiqui is the first woman in Asia to have started and owned her own TV channel and has won numerous awards including the Women of Vision award, the Gold Medal Award, and the Pride of Performance award from the Pakistani government. She is well known for her work addressing social challenges and female empowerment, and certainly, *Marvi* fits within that domain (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019). In the original folktale, a village girl named Marvi was kidnapped by a powerful king, Umer, who wanted to marry her because of her beauty. When Marvi defied his advances, preferring to live a simple life in her village rather than being queen of the land, she was imprisoned for several years. The courage of Marvi that is portrayed in the folktale made her a symbol of the love a person can hold for their homeland. In the 1993 drama adaptation, Marvi is a brave village girl who moves to the city to obtain higher education with the intent of returning to her village to improve the living conditions of her people. While Marvi works to build awareness of the significance of women rights and girls’ education, the men in her village who are against the education of girls create obstacles to her efforts. Although the character of Umer was changed from the folktale in that he is not the king of the land, his obsession with Marvi leads to additional tribal troubles that Marvi is forced to endure and through which the strengths of her character are illustrated.

5.6.4 *Zindagi Gulzar Hai (2012)*

Zindagi Gulzar Hai translates to “life is a garden”. Another award-winning drama directed by Sultana Siddique, the story revolves around the lives of Kashaf (played by Sanam Saeed) and Zaron (played by Fawad Khan), who come from very different backgrounds. Kashaf comes from a lower middle-class family and lives with her mother and sisters. The father abandoned them and remarried because Kashaf’s mother was unable to give birth to a son. However, the mother persists

in raising her daughters, despite her husband's lack of financial and emotional support, providing a counter narrative to the traditional South Asian stereotype that a woman cannot survive without the help of a man. Her determination and resilience provide a strong role model for older women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, clearly reminding viewers that daughters should not be considered a burden, but rather a blessing. As a result of her circumstances, Kashaf holds strong views about women's empowerment, which she is not afraid to voice. Constantly faced with a lack of support from her father, she transforms into an independent woman who can take care of herself and others. After earning a scholarship to a prestigious university, Kashaf meets Zaroon, a flirtatious and competitive college student from a rich family who is envious of Kashaf's ability to out-perform him academically. Zaroon is not the typical Pakistani hero (Qureshi, 2016). He displays chauvinistic attitudes towards his mother, which in many ways parallel the character of Kashaf's father. As a result, viewers are shown that gender expectancies and patriarchal attitudes are not restricted to lower socioeconomic classes. Throughout the drama, Zaroon's character presents many preconceived notions of gender that are slowly questioned and torn down through the experiences depicted on the screen, particularly in response to Kashaf's characterization as a strong young woman who is able to persevere and succeed in a male dominated society, despite the obstacles in her way. The trials and tribulations of the two main characters and the people around them provide a glance into the ways in which socioeconomics and gender expectations impact the trajectory of life for older and younger generations, highlighting the absurdity and entrapments of stereotypical thinking. *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* received nine awards at the 2nd Hum Awards, three awards at the 4th Pakistan Media Awards and two awards at the 13th Lux Style Awards. The overall performance of Sanam Saeed as Kashaf was applauded by critics. The drama was released on Netflix in 2015, thus expanding its reach to global audiences.

5.6.5 *Ehd-e-Wafa* (2019)

Ehd-e-Wafa, which translates to "promise of loyalty" is a more recent drama serial that aired on HumTV. Unlike many formulaic Pakistani dramas which focus on the relationship between in-laws, particular *saas-bahu* (mother-in-law and daughter-in-law) characterizations, *Ehd-e-Wafa* follows the intersecting lives of young men and women as they learn lessons about friendship, betrayal, family and career. Although at first glance it appears to be a male-oriented drama as it showcases the trials and tribulations of four male college students (Saad, Shahzain, Shariq and Shehryar, who call themselves the Special "S" Gang), Mustafa Afridi, the writer of the serial, emphasizes the important roles that both men and women play in Pakistani society. Thus, the drama provides numerous opportunities for viewers to see strong female characters, including Dua, one of the main protagonists; Ramsha, a news producer; and Ghazala, a nurse and Shariq's sister. Women's empowerment is not shown as a single or one-dimensional journey. Through the character of Dua, for example, the

series makes it clear that a woman's life is not only about matrimony. Marriage is one part of life but is not necessarily the only, nor the ultimate, goal for all women. Dua's character helps viewers realize that a woman's career can be as important as a man's career. Setting goals and following through on them is another life lesson for women. As in the previous dramas discussed, the women of *Ehd-e-Wafa* persist despite unfavorable situations; instead of giving up hope, they fight to overcome the difficulties that life throws at them. They exude confidence and are endowed with their own opinions. For viewers who are mothers, the serial emphasizes the importance of standing by your children and supporting their goals. Additionally, it shows that women who work outside the home can also be good parents (Mehwish, 2020). This is illustrated through the character of Saad's mother, a career-oriented working woman who guides and supports her son at every turn. *Ehd-e-Wafa* is a remarkable drama that encourages Islamic strengths and virtues within Pakistani culture by showcasing the fictional lives of women who overcome the odds, stay focused on their goals, and move forward in positive directions. The characters defy stereotypes as they embark on individual journeys that are vastly different from each other, yet immensely satisfying to watch.

5.7 Conclusion

Given the popularity of Pakistani dramas, fictional television serials are not just a form of entertainment in Pakistani homes; they have been and continue to be utilized for disseminating positive messages (Madani & Qureshi, 2017). The changing role of women and the importance of women's rights have been a recurring theme for many years. Portraying women through a variety of fictional roles allows drama serials to explore the multidimensional spaces that women occupy in Pakistani society. Unlike news programs, drama serials provide the opportunity to delve deeper into the conflicts and concerns that women deal with. Through developing storylines, we can see how a character changes and grows, and how the decisions she makes in response to adverse conditions impact the consequences of her life. Pakistani writers, producers, and directors have taken advantage of the opportunities that dramas provide to showcase social commentaries through provocative plots and enduring characters that are both culturally relatable and unapologetically human. As such, the concept of Pakistani womanhood is in the process of being rewritten to debunk both the upper-class, "Westernized" model as well as the lower-class "backward" version (Dutoya, 2018). Focusing on developing a future-oriented audience, dramas are finding a balance between the stereotypical extremes. By highlighting the diverse strengths and virtues that Muslim women possess, drama serials allow us to envision a more egalitarian society—a goal that was the cornerstone of Islam from the very beginning. They also show us the kinds of obstacles that Pakistani women face as a result of the intersection of their gender with factors such as age, socioeconomics, social class, and cultural tradition.

Media has a powerful influence on our personal values as well as the norms of the societies in which we live (Handley & Runnion, 2011; Moorman, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2016). Although the negative consequences of media consumption are often a prime topic in research, it is also important to consider the ways in which media can have a positive impact. The emergence of media psychology along with the growth of positive psychology encourages research into the ways in which media can promote happiness, meaningfulness, and social justice (Giles, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Pakistani media have historically made efforts in this regard and should continue to use their reach to highlight the plight of marginalized communities. But there is much more work to be done! The intent of empowerment is not for women to surpass men in societal gains, but rather for women to be given equitable opportunities so that both women and men can work together as constructive members of society (Ahmed & Wahab, 2017). Thus, media outlets must stay vigilant in encouraging women's empowerment in Pakistan. By highlighting positive images of Pakistani women and girls; by providing coverage of crimes against women; by showing the significance of girls' education; and by uncovering gender bias and inequalities within the industry itself, Pakistani media can promote positive change in private and public spheres. By designing content for the betterment of society, the media industry can use its power not just to inform or entertain, but to contribute to social justice, which is one of the most important characteristics of an ideal Islamic *ummah*.

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Part II
Intersectional Identities

Chapter 6

Redefining the Uyghur Identity While Living Under the Chinese State



K. H. Tung

Abstract In the assault on Uyghur identity and the project of homogenization of the ethnic makeup of the region, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has employed a myriad of tried-and-true policies and methods to impose linguistic imperialism and all forms of biopolitics to render the region ideal for purposes of state-building. As policies and international focus on the region have ramped up in the last two decades, reports grow on the affected Uyghur voices within and abroad. This chapter discusses the historical influences of China’s policies on Uyghur identity expression as well as common coping strategies that are used in response to the varying forms of surveillance, “re-education camps”, and modes of governmentality that the CCP enacts in the region. The importance of artistic expression, friendship, storytelling, and oblique references to religion are discussed as avenues for subtle forms of resistance and identity preservation.

6.1 Introduction

In 2017, early reports of entire families of Uyghurs going missing and confined to “re-education camps” made waves globally. International outrage came soon, with a United Nations committee ultimately calling on Beijing to end detentions without trial, and practice “impartial investigations into all allegations of racial, ethnic and ethno-religious profiling” (BBC News, 2018, para. 7). Several Muslim-majority states, whose political interests with China lay exposed to their responses, either enthusiastically supported or parroted the Chinese state’s official reply to the accusations (Leduc, 2019; Qiblawi, 2019). In response to varying call-outs over the years, a number of China’s officials have claimed such camps did not exist (BBC News, 2018; Cumming-Bruce, 2018), or that relevant policies in recent years were all done in the name of counter-terrorism (Charbonneau, 2020) and most recently,

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that such “training centers” were for the economic benefit of minorities (Buckley & Ramzy, 2018).

Xinjiang’s unrest has received increasing interest over the years by international media. The exposed camps of 2017 were only the latest, most undeniable set of measures implemented in the region after nearly three decades of escalating policing. After the 1990s erupted with an emergence of independent Central Asian countries from the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) feared similar ideas festering in their westernmost province whose mainstay population shared linguistic and cultural elements with the newly independent countries next door (BBC News, 2014). After a decade or more of various methods of attempting to create “stable” political control in the region, the events of September 11, 2001 provided the CCP a new means of labeling Uyghur unrest in the region as terrorism against the Chinese state. George W. Bush’s administration’s rallying cry for the “Global War on Terror” became timely rhetoric for China’s government to continue exacting increasingly restrictive technologies and policies to create one of the most technologically-advanced police states in the world within the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) (Dooley, 2019; Buckley & Mozur, 2019). Starting in 2010, China banned Facebook and Twitter when Uyghur students used the media tools to organize protests (Khan, 2020). Then in 2014, after years of ramping up police forces, security checkpoints, and all forms of security measures, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CCP, officially announced a launch of the “People’s War on Terror” in response to a bombing in Urumqi, the provincial capital (Kang, 2020). Today, thanks to the ties between state security and the counter-terrorism industry, Xinjiang is a province like no other, providing ripe breeding grounds for the development of increasingly tech-savvy, ever-present public security (Byler, 2019).

6.2 China’s Interest in Retaining Xinjiang as a Part of the Nation

Occupying nearly one-sixth of the geographic surface area of China’s territorial claims, the province of Xinjiang has a contested history with the Chinese state. As a part of the fringe borders of the country, the region is home to multiple ethnic minorities such as the Hui, Kyrgyz, Tibetans, Kazakhs, Mongols and including, most notably for the purpose of this chapter: the Uyghurs. As an ethnic group, the Uyghurs’ native language has more in common with their Turkish cousins. Today, Uyghurs are generalized as being Muslim in identity due to large-scale conversions in the region that occurred in multiple waves by the time of the Yuan Dynasty (1271 CE–1368 CE) resulting in the observation of Islamic dietary and cultural aspects of this identity (Smith, 2011).

Xinjiang is a hotbed of resources for China and thus plays a key role in the nation-state. To assist in the slow change from a periphery of the nation into a “stable”

contributor and proper participant to nation-building, the CCP established the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) in 1954. The XPCC, or *bingtuan* as it was locally known, was crucial in introducing large populations of Han, 91% of China's ethnic makeup (Gladney, 2009), into the region. At time of establishment, 96% of the XPCC workers were Han. Its assigned mandate was to "defend [...] the border and open [...] 'wasteland' for agriculture" (Cliff, 2012, p. 29). In the 1970s, the XPCC's unwieldy growth, coupled with the chaos of the Cultural Revolution led to its abolition. In 1981, Deng Xiaoping, who saw the *bingtuan* as an essential Han presence and source of stability for governance in Xinjiang, re-established the system, though it became intricately entangled with political leadership. Today, the XPCC is inseparably tied to the political structure of Xinjiang and is a major economic, agricultural powerhouse of the region. It owns multiple traded companies that add up to 17% of Xinjiang's GDP, according to 2013 numbers (Olesen, 2014). Retrospectively, this massive entity was one of the first consistent means of Han in-migration to Xinjiang and remains an embodiment of unequal gains amongst the majority and minority ethnic groups.

A Deeper Dive: Han Identity in China

K. H. Tung

The concept of Han as an ethnicity and its presumed and purported homogeneity is well-challenged by Dru Gladney (2000). Gladney notes that the Han "nationality" is a phenomenon linked to the nation-building of modern-day China, beginning with early twentieth century Chinese revolutionary leader, Sun Yat-sen, who posed the idea of a Han majority as a unified front against both internal (i.e. Hui, Mongols, Tibetans, Manchus) and external "foreigners". The rise of the Communist Party later led to an addition of 55 minorities, all promised equality and recognition in return for their political support. Gladney posits that Han unity was crucial because its cultural diversity had previously led to warring chaos, most recently of competing warlords of the 1910s–1920s when China teetered between the cusp of being a Republic and a dynasty. Politically, then, it made sense that to maintain internal peace, the CCP would heavily emphasize differences between the Han "majority" and its numerous ethnic minorities to reinforce the unity and monolithic state of the former. In determining the relative influence that Han citizens have in Xinjiang politics compared to in the "inland", Cliff (2012) separates the Han living in Xinjiang into three loosely defined groups: the Han elite, mainstream and the subaltern. The three main factors in this categorization are (1) socioeconomic links to state, (2) potential for mobility and (3) time of migration. In this analysis, the Han elite have formal/informal links to state connections. Some are highly mobile, which means that finding ways of keeping them in Xinjiang

(continued)

is important to attract and retain more Han migration to the region. They are thus the most influential in the Party's reading of Han satisfaction in regional stability.

In 1991, Xinjiang's local government initiated the Tarim Basin Project, building infrastructure connecting the region itself with inland China and was given central support in economic boosts through subsidized cotton farming and being subject to consecutive "Open up the West/Go West" initiatives in the 2000s to incentivize Han migration and economic growth (Bhattacharji, 2012). This set off a new waterfall of policies and changes that very quickly transformed the landscape of the local land. Eighty-four percent of China's top export—cotton—is produced in Xinjiang, and increasingly, many scholars and human rights groups argue that this is done at highly subsidized levels or through forced labor conditions (Kelly, 2020). Discovery of oil and coal in Xinjiang led to great investment into oil fields, with the region being mined intensively against environmental concerns for its rich mineral resources (Wong, 2014). Yet, despite this incredible economic growth, the narrative of a select Han elite gaining significantly more than the Uyghurs pervades the region (Mukherjee, 2010).

Since the 1990s, increasing levels of unrest in Xinjiang have been Beijing's greatest concern. China's leadership now believes and claims this unrest is terrorist in nature, tied to religious extremism and other similar elements. Though international analyses of the threat of Uyghur "terrorist" networks tend to conclude that such fears are largely unfounded and that riots or violence are not particularly structured and sophisticated, leaked official memos from Beijing show that the CCP still believe it to be a real threat to national security and the stability of the nation (Greitens, Lee, & Yazici, 2020). Regardless of the purpose and understanding behind increasing crackdowns, Beijing believes increased control of Xinjiang is imperative to secure its economic importance and "peaceful growth" in the forthcoming decade or more (Grietens et al. 2020), thus severely limiting the expression of Islamic culture and identity in the region.

6.3 Applying Identity Development Models to the Xinjiang Situation

As research on identity models for Uyghurs or other ethnic minorities in China is non-existent, developmental and cultural psychologists would do well to focus on legal limitations of Chinese ethnic minority definitions, the effect of standardization of ethnic identity as allowed by the state, and how these definitions and policies encounter issues with new generations that increasingly deviate from these state-defined identity categories. Historically, within the limits of the United States where the majority of identity models have emerged in psychological literature, the

experience of Native Americans is most akin to the Uyghur one in Xinjiang in terms of subjugation, mass indoctrination and displacement. As a group, Uyghurs are constantly presented with forceful state-led initiatives that aim to erase, re-invent and indoctrinate an identity that is acceptable to the state. However, models of Native American identities are limited due to both the diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds and perhaps the reality that the identity indoctrination against Native American identities has seen much of its more forceful, transparently biopolitical policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, models used in research today focus on Native Americans who are generationally removed from the most-similar forms of current Xinjiang-style biopolitics in their communities. Resultingly, models mapping identity experiences become complicated when determining who “qualifies” as Native-American (Martin, 2012). Using an in-depth interview of a Native American elder to illustrate the level of bicultural identification, Garrett (1996) posits four levels to Native American identity acculturation: (1) Traditional: individuals who speak/think and practice in their native language/customs, (2) Marginal: individuals who speak both their native language and English but may not completely accept their inherited culture/customs and also struggle to identify in full with “mainstream American” customs and values, (3) Bicultural: Individuals who know, accept and practice both native and mainstream forms of customs, and (4) Assimilated: individuals who embrace only mainstream culture over native forms. Of special interest to the Uyghur struggle, is Garrett’s (1996) highlighting of the marginal identity being most likely to battle identity crises in their struggle to balance their ascription to native inherited customs, language and culture and assuming those of the dominant/mainstream.

Previous researchers (Gladney, 2002) have pointed out the parallels between Xinjiang and Palestine, but there are increased comparative links made to the Black-American experience as well¹ (Byler, 2020). William Cross’ Black American Racial Identity Development Model (1991) model lists five stages: (1) Pre-Encounter, where an individual identifies with White culture/people and rejects Black culture/people, (2) Encounter, a watershed moment that evokes reconsideration of an individual’s identity, (3) Immersion-Emersion, where an individual may reject all things White and idealizes/identifies only with Black culture, (4) Internalization, where an individual works towards developing a strong, secure and positive Black identity, and (5) Commitment, where an individual can maintain their Black identity and resist forms of oppression. Importantly, however Smith (1991) notes that oppression is not the only element informative of identity—something that is inadvertently assumed within the Cross model. Smith presents eighteen propositions regarding ethnic identity development and mental health as developed from interactions between majority and minority groups. Of particular

¹In an odd turn of events, the state-run China Daily somewhat subconsciously conceded to its human rights abuse allegations when it published an op-ed to use the issues of systemic racism and the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in the United States as a way to retort against the US’ “hypocrisy” (China Daily, 2020).

interest to the Xinjiang case, are Propositions 14 and 15. Proposition 14 posits that individuals “experiencing salient conflicts in identification” often undergo four phases which involve becoming confronted with feelings of inferiority, rising feelings of anger/hate against the majority group, attempts to address these issues and bring about closure, and integrating these experiences with experiences of others (Smith, 1991). This is tied to Smith’s 15th proposition which notes that when individuals experience conflicts in their identities, they will mobilize defense mechanisms such as segregation (distancing from the majority group/aggressor) or marginality (movements against the majority group/aggressor) to address the discomfort. These propositions align with factors in the converged model on racial and ethnic identity—the Cross Ethnic-Racial Identity Scale-Adult (CERIS-A) assessment tool—which measures “seven ethnic-racial identity attitudes—assimilation, miseducation, self-hatred, anti-dominant, ethnocentricity, multiculturalist inclusive, and ethnic-racial salience” (Worrell, Mendoza-Denton, & Wang, 2017). The seventh factor, ethnic-racial salience, or the level by which racial-ethnic identity affects the choices or lifestyle of an individual on a daily basis, is a crucial element for identity formation in Xinjiang.

6.4 Ethnic Identity Formation in the Historical Context of Xinjiang

The name Xinjiang literally translates into “new frontier/border”, something the current political landowners believe the space to reflect in terms of its place in the country. As Benedict Anderson (1999) explains in his work *Imagined Communities*, nation-building narratives and claims to land often build on successive chronological timestamps to continuous ownership of land. In the case of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the modern-day Communist Party leadership frame this narrative under a lens of continuous “Chinese” authority in the region dating back to the Han Dynasty in 200 BCE. However, this narrative is well-contested (Gladney, 2004). Key Chinese dynasties such as (but not limited to) the Yuan (ruled by self-identifying Mongols) and the Qing Dynasties (self-identifying Manchus) were led by non-Han ethnic groups (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020), which undercuts the argument of a historically continuous Han-as-Chinese or Chinese-as-Han control. Uyghur separatists typically point out the lack of successive Han control of the region and ultimately the establishment of two separate East Turkestan Republics for a few short-lived years prior to consolidation under the People’s Republic of China (then under Kuomintang rule) as counter-evidence to the PRC narrative.

6.4.1 1950s to 1980s: Standardizing State-Sanctioned Markers of Ethnic Identity

Xinjiang as it is understood today as a province of the PRC began its life as an autonomous zone under Beijing rule shortly after consolidation, though its official name was first proclaimed by the Qing Dynasty in 1884. During this time, anthropologists argue that the native populations did not view themselves in the way the Qing did, as belonging to Xinjiang as a greater region. Rather, there were very distinctive overarching differences and understandings of the greater community between the Turkic Muslims south of the Tianshan Mountain and the Buddhist Mongols of the northern stretch (Liu & Faure, 1996).

During the Republic of China period (1912–1949), Xinjiang was home to multiple separatist movements, ending with the last claim to independence in the Second East Turkestan Republic. This signals an understanding that the native populations of the region did not appear to identify with Chinese dynastic rule or the presented Chinese identity as it was understood at the time. In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) eventually took control over greater China after a long civil war against Kuomintang (KMT) rule, formally establishing the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in October of 1955. At this point, the region was fairly diverse with what is today labeled as Salar Hui Muslims, Hui Muslims, Dungars, and many other legally labeled minority groups living alongside the original Uyghur Muslims. In efforts to differentiate itself from the KMT, the CCP made distinctive efforts to show how they respected local Uyghur culture, religion, and language (Bovingdon, 2002).

During the Chinese nation-making project of the 1950s, a process was underway to standardize who, or what it meant to be Uyghur, concluding with representative garments and costumes, songs and performances codified into existence (Byler, 2018). Presented against the Han-majority standard, the Chinese system for coding ethnic minorities was borrowed largely from Stalin's definition that communities with shared history, common language, geographical living space, economic means and culture could be considered a separate ethnic group (Mackerras, 2003). As the accepted standard for Uyghur identity was legally instated into the Chinese state-building machine, these differences in identity became reified and strengthened over time as the population themselves became confronted with increasing numbers of Han moving into the region and repeatedly comparing/contrasting against their national compatriots in language, religion, dietary habits and more. In the early decades of PRC statehood, ethnic minority difference was almost celebrated in its standardized form. In many ways, Party leadership was keen to maintain good relations with the minority populations of the region, and such wording as "Han chauvinism" being "counterrevolutionary" was used by leadership to discourage Han civilians and leadership in the region to press their own beliefs and cultures over the native Uyghurs and thus incite discontent or unrest (Wu, 2015).

Similar to the rest of the nation, the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s—early 1970s saw much of Xinjiang's population conforming to communal work and

creating for the state. Religion, as a whole, was a major target of violence, dispossession and dismantling during this tumultuous time period. As Han in the region typically did not identify with religion, the Muslim-identifying Uyghurs, mosques, unofficial Islamic schools, traditional cultural practices and more became the target for much of this decade of violence (Mukherjee, 2010). In 1979, when Deng Xiaoping announced China's Great Opening and Reformation phase, there was an unprecedented level of religious and political freedom felt in the province. During this "Golden Era", cultural and religious forms of expression flourished once again. Islamic schools, mosques and spaces for religious learning were rebuilt or constructed in Southern Xinjiang (Castets, 2019). Protests against the Han colonizing effect, discrimination, and inequality were major themes throughout the decade. Even Qur'ans and religious texts were allowed to be printed and allowances were made for completing Hajj pilgrimages (Rodríguez-Merino, 2018).

6.4.2 1980s to 2000s: Ethnic Consciousness—How Uyghurs and Han Identify Themselves in Xinjiang

During the 1980s, the relative political and social freedom in Xinjiang led to much more porous border movements and interactions with bordering states and their populations. New connections with the greater Muslim communities that also shared cultural and linguistic ties helped strengthen the Uyghur ethnic identity to the global *ummah*, or Muslim community, through shared elements in the religion. It was also during this time that protective policies for minority languages were passed. In 1984, both Article 46 in the Nationality Law and the Law on Regional Autonomy granted the right to speak and write in one's native language in litigation, and also greater autonomy in the arts, literature, education and media (Dwyer, 2005). This impressive bit of legislation, however, could not make up for earlier decades of nation-building work that was built on the belief that minority languages were inadequate for the requirements of modernity (Dwyer, 2005). Much like majority groups and colonizers throughout history, the argument of tying science/modernity to the majority group became the underlying narrative that ultimately buckled against minority policy in the process of building a Han-majority nation-state.

At the start of the 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed and new Central Asian countries began to claim independence along the borderlines of Xinjiang, the fear of the same demands becoming full-fledged issues plagued Chinese leadership. Just shortly before, in 1989, Beijing's leadership experienced its own major cracks in difference when met with the infamous Tiananmen student protests in June. As leadership turned towards crackdown responses, Xinjiang became target to similar moves. Throughout the '90s, notable protests broke out in Hetian/Khotan and Yining/Ghulja, while the southern-based Islamic schools were shuttered, ultimately resulting in the CCP initiating "Strike Hard" campaigns—particularly harsh directives to crack down on what they perceived as terrorist incidents. This linking of

unrest with religious identity resulted in political leadership attacking symbols of Islam, restricting mosque construction, replacing mosque leadership with Party loyalists, and pushing harder for the inflow of Han population within the XPCC (Castets, 2019).

At the same time, cotton had become a booming industry. From a national perspective, Xinjiang's various resources made it an excellent funnel for economic needs in the rapidly industrializing Chinese East Coast. Unfortunately, rather than placing the riches of economic gain in the hands of the workers in Xinjiang, the large beneficiaries of this massive growth became the Han of the East or largely, the Han elites working at higher levels of command in Xinjiang (Mukherjee, 2010). Here, the great ethnic diversity and unity project of the Chinese state became glaringly problematic. The emphasized differences between Han and Uyghur lifestyles from language to culture, religion and housing, as well as the clear stratification in socioeconomic gains over the years made relations increasingly strained (Hasmath, 2016). Fieldwork done during the 1990s showed that there was a distinctive tendency amongst interviewed Uyghurs and Hans to consciously and willfully ascribe to their state-prescribed ethnicity labels (Bovingdon, 2002). The Han were particularly assimilated in their understanding of the local Uyghurs as their views did not appear to stray from official rhetoric, which contributed to deteriorating inter-ethnic relations.

The lack of integration of Han and Uyghur lifestyles despite a massive population influx of the former in a short period of time helped contribute to increasing ethno-religious consciousness. Hasmath (2016) summarizes this consciousness from the Uyghur standpoint through Dru Gladney and Joanne Smith-Finley's analyses: Islam and Uyghur identity were closely linked, where religious markers such as mosque prayer attendance became increasingly a cultural means of reinforcing community identity. Typically, the Uyghur ethno-religious consciousness was reinforced through three major routines: (1) repeating Han Chinese negative stereotypes, (2) experiencing the segregation of "symbolic, spatial and social boundaries" (Smith, 2002, p. 153) from the Han and (3) the consumption, creation and spreading of representation of the colonizer/colonized narrative through music (Hasmath, 2016). Through this discourse, the consciousness of difference made any likelihood of buying into the PRC narrative of being a part of greater China as a united entity much harder when state policy was perceived as closely linked to Han identity and distant from the Uyghur identity. Additionally, the Han in Xinjiang felt they were actively enacting the mandate of the country and deserved prioritized citizenship. The disenfranchised native Uyghur population became increasingly aware of the ethno-racial denigration of being seen as primitive, whilst failing to obtain significant promised economic gains. Celebrations of diversity in the country marked a clear preference for Han "modernity", adding to the pain of socioeconomic inequality among Uyghurs (Smith, 2006). Over the years, the situation was ripe for conflict and misunderstanding (Hasmath, 2016), with disgruntled Uyghurs noting that their newly migrated Han neighbors had ascended quickly up the socioeconomic ladder compared to their own stagnant trajectories (Rodríguez-Merino, 2018).

In 2000, the CCP initiated the start of the Xinjiang Class—which, like its Tibetan version next door—aimed to take Uyghur high school students and send them East to large urban cities to purportedly learn through the national curricula (Chen, 2010). Under these proposed classes, the aim was to sinicize² the future generations of Uyghurs and render them a more pliable population fully inculcated with nationalist education. The ultimate push to merge all Uyghur-language schools with Chinese schools by the end of 2008 marked the beginning of a serious push towards linguisticism (Tsung & Cruickshank, 2009). Much of Northern Xinjiang was already dominated by the Han, and much of the Uyghurs in this part of the region were largely secular and often partook in behaviors (i.e., drinking alcohol) typically considered prohibited for practicing Muslims (Dwyer, 2005). In a reflection of the state’s vested interest in reforming the ethnoreligious identity of Uyghurs, these boarding school recipients were given 80% quotas to be filled with the more religious Southern Xinjiang students (Tsung & Cruickshank, 2009).

6.4.3 Late 2000s: When Inequality Becomes Clear Along Ethnic Lines

It is useful here to use the settler-colonial mindset as Byler (2017) does, in understanding the Xinjiang story. Borrowing from Patrick Wolfe’s (2006) work, the framework shows patterns of political dispossession rooted in ethno-racial difference. In this setup, the settler nation aims to dispossess the existing groups living on the land of both territory and resources. However, in order to do so there must be a standard by which to determine what is sanctioned or allowed and what is not. One such standard was the enforcement of language use in the region. In what Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2010) label as “linguistic imperialism”,³ Xinjiang’s Uyghur language became collateral damage in the enforcing of Han hegemony in the region. While Uyghur-language schools were still functioning, the problem of Uyghur-language educated children being effectively locked out of participating in a Mandarin-functioning economy made “choosing” between Mandarin and Uyghur-language schools one that increasingly determined their personal economic future. In Xinjiang, the Mandarin-functioning economy also acted as “natural” barriers to entry, barring Uyghurs from employment in the Han-dominated companies due to

²Here, the term “sinicize” is used to describe processes enacted on non-Chinese, or as in this case, non-Han cultures or practices and re-educate, re-establish and reform them into Han-acceptable forms. This can take the form of enforcing the primary (or even, only) language use as Mandarin, enforcing customs and habits and ultimately, in the case of the PRC today: indoctrination of political beliefs including surrendering of religious affiliation to be subsumed under prioritized affiliation to the CCP.

³The authors describe linguistic imperialism as a parallel to capitalist imperialism: “A variant of linguisticism operating through structure and ideologies and entailing unequal treatment for groups identified by language” (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2010, pp. 81–82).

high requirements of Mandarin use, and institutionalizing administrative policies, such as the People's Convenience Card, which tie one's originating household to the right to work or live in a city (Byler, 2017). On the surface, simply obtaining one of these cards, and learning Mandarin (or making the choice to forgo a key marker of Uyghur identity) would make employment easier. In reality, however, the card is notoriously hard to obtain, frequently requiring connections and bribes that are often beyond the scope of the average rural Uyghur migrant (Byler, 2017). Finally, contributing to the overall environment pitting markers of Han and Uyghur identity against one another, was the reality that the minority language policies of 1984 that had called upon the majority Han to take up learning minority languages certainly bore little fruit in Xinjiang and instead may have contributed to stronger reactionary chauvinism among the Han (Dwyer, 2005).

Furthermore, ongoing hiring discrimination was clear. Though Zang (2011) found that income inequality was statistically insignificant amongst Han and Uyghur workers at State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), a 2006 study showed that 800 openings out of 840 civil service jobs were reserved for the Han Chinese (Mukherjee, 2010). This discriminatory trend was far more obvious in privately-owned companies. In-depth anecdotes with Byler's (2017) male rural Uyghur informants reflect this realization as one young Uyghur man discovered that he was the diversity hire and the vast majority of jobs available in his part of Xinjiang were reserved for the Han. A similar feeling of disparity of government policies on development became clear in interviews with a Uyghur agriculture official for a town near Turpan and a Han woman in the same town during the late 1990s. The former pointed out that state regulations to grow grain on a certain amount of farmland and rising water and fertilizer costs were bankrupting Uyghur farmers, while the Han woman described quick economic returns by farming high-value cash crops and paying a fine to evade the grain regulation (Bovingdon, 2002).

Cliff (2012) argues that the Han in Xinjiang, specifically the Han elite, have much more sway with Xinjiang government policy due to their key role as enactors of CCP policy in the region. Using a collective action framework that illustrates the underlying assumptions believed by groups when protesting against the government, Cliff (2012) shows how the Han population in Xinjiang believe themselves to be enacting roles as border supporters who contribute to the nation by helping to modernize a perceived primitive and "barren" land into economic prosperity. In Cliff's (2012) rendering, the Han in Xinjiang view themselves in "the partnership of stability" with the Chinese state. By playing the part of border supporters and accepting the Party as political leadership, the Han mainstream in Xinjiang expect themselves to be treated as prioritized citizens regardless of whatever official policy may say or do in terms of the Uyghurs or other groups. This mindset was visible during the 1990s as well, when prospering Han citizens echoed the belief that if not for the Hans arriving and developing the land, Xinjiang would "just be a desert". Many Uyghur individuals, however, struggle against this notion and would rather they have their "underdeveloped" lands for the return of their dignity and self-respect (Bovingdon, 2002). By the 2000s, this coupling of mindsets in the Xinjiang province led to a difference in response to unrest in the region. When the US declared its "Global War

on Terror”, China issued its own declaration of support to explain away government repression of protests and curbing of freedoms. Relying on the rhetoric of unruly, ungrateful Muslim Uyghurs using violence to gain independence, the CCP started implementing a series of security measures to “prevent” further violence. At the same time, growing dissatisfaction with perceived and real inequality between Han and Uyghur populations in Xinjiang became deafening grievances that were not dealt with effectively by local leadership or corporate policy.

6.5 The 2017 Reveal of Mass Concentration Camps: State “Re-Education” and Redefining Uyghur Identity

When Tibet’s party secretary Chen Quanguo was newly appointed to Xinjiang, China specialists took note. Known for his crackdown-style leadership and policies, Chen soon began rapidly expanding the security budget, investing in anti-riot gear and units, recruiting nearly 12 times the number of new police officers than in 2009. The extremely controversial “live-in” Han family program⁴ was also escalated, and the use of big data soon became key to monitor, track and ultimately catch any individual who had ticked a box on the security risk checklist (Castets, 2019). Some of these risks included elemental aspects of Muslimness, such as abstaining from alcohol, eating *halal* (food that is permissible such as meat slaughtered according to Islamic regulations), fasting for Ramadan, not eating pork, or growing a beard. Similarly, after years of increasing limits on Uyghur-language instruction, the CCP made moves to replace Uyghur-language education and fully implement Mandarin. In June 2017, Xinjiang’s Khotan/Hetian Education Department outlawed Uyghur language starting from preschool under the ironically named “bilingual education basic principle” (Sulaiman, 2017, para. 4). Rather than simply offering a carrot for following rules, the directive was laced with threats of punishment if Mandarin language implementation was not taken seriously.

Previously, disappearances or arrests of Uyghurs appeared to be targeted at those who had shown more active resistance to state-sanctioned rhetoric, whether that was through activism (Bhattacharji, 2008), or vocalized dissent through social media. By 2017 however, “disappearing” people had become a full-on tactic aimed at completely “re-educating” as much of the population as possible. Scholars deduce that there are likely three levels of camps, with the most common type being selectively chosen for the international media to observe regarding their “vocational”

⁴According to the Chinese CCP tabloid newspaper “Global Times”, the *jiedui renqin* or Civil Servant-Family Pair Up program has been implemented since October 2016 (though a more informal form of it has been in place since the 2010s) (Ji, 2018). This program pairs up Han civil servants with local Uyghur families as “homestays”, and is aimed at “unit(ing ethnicities) as a family”. The program is often seen as a form of extreme state surveillance by Xinjiang experts.

orientation. However, horror stories from escaped Kazakh nationals leaked details of torture, rape and inhumane treatment in other facilities (Rahim, 2019). The main objective of camps is to reform “problematic” identities into ones that fit the needs of state security. As the rhetoric of the camps is premised on the US “War on Terror”, security assessments focus on markers of ethnoreligious identity. For example, studying abroad, visiting certain countries, praying, going to the mosque, speaking of Islam, and wearing certain forms of dress are observable traits that can lead to detention (Conrad, Bayer, & Chan, 2020). Depending on the level of expression, this can result in physical punishment or months of state-run “reformation” education that pounds in the gratitude one must have towards the CCP and its benevolent assistance to the region. Both detainees and those who anxiously await news of their loved ones or fear detainment themselves suffer in varying ways from the insecurity of these policies. Successful “graduates” released from these vocational camps are almost genuinely believed to be reformed by state officials (BBC, 2018). Slowly, as groups of re-educated individuals are released back to civilian life, an important question emerges: How do they reevaluate their identity, its limits, and determine what and how to present their identity moving forward?

6.6 Local Response and Resilience: Retaining Uyghur Identity Through Subverted Means

Initially, Uyghur ethnic identity expression in response to state crackdown on ethnoreligious markers appeared to lean towards religious markers and the consumption of religious media and information, especially amongst Southern Xinjiang communities. When WeChat, a social app akin to Whatsapp, was first released in China, it became a powerful social media tool that soon became a channel for Uyghur communities to connect across the world and share and partake in religious media. Before the government realized this loophole in information-sharing and cracked down in 2014, Uyghurs were sharing an incredible amount of religious media that was consumed in private and allowed for the expression of ethnoreligious identity in the face of the restrictions and struggles of daily life. Some would use the then-unregulated channel to listen to popular Middle Eastern Qur’an reciters and share religious texts tied to social injustice. Uyghur-language sermons and *nasheed*⁵ would circulate, with popular shares tied to depictions of the oppression of Xinjiang as a punishment by God and insinuating a “return” to an orthodox form of Islam that would bring freedom to the region (Harris, 2017). However, with the connection severed, internet surveillance as well as curated patriotic, state-sanctioned media consumption became imposed (Byler, 2017), rendering resistance through chosen media consumption an impossibility.

⁵*Nasheed* is an a cappella-like poetry dedicated to praising God; often used by Muslims who prefer to avoid using instruments in musical expressions due to associations with “sinfulness”.

As the implementation of the camps in Xinjiang is a recent turn of events, little up-to-date research is available on traumas post-camp or in response to the overall situation of families and friends being “disappeared” for long periods of time with no word on release. In the face of the systematic project to erase and re-imagine the Uyghur ethnic identity, Uyghurs continue to live and struggle to face another day. For those who choose to reclaim and determine their own identity on their own terms, as much as possible against state notions, we can look to prior research for ways to practice forms of identity through other perceived-as-secular channels. While research studies and informal accounts by researchers confirm the overwhelming dread, trauma, and fear in the region, there are also aspects of strength that emerge through artistic expression, friendships and storytelling.

6.6.1 Creating and Listening to Ethnic Music as a Form of Resistance and Expression

Music is not only a form of entertainment; throughout history, it has been used as a means of resistance across global and political boundaries. Farzana (2011) notes that “disadvantage groups have tended to use informal means such as music, the arts, and artefacts to express themselves and avoid direct confrontation with their oppressors” (p. 216). Xinjiang’s cultural history is laced with musical forms of expressions that are intertwined with Islamic practices, particularly of the Sufi strain (Harris, 2017). Prior to the censorship of WeChat in 2014, *nasheed* that focused on topics such as martyrdom became increasingly popular to share amongst Uyghur groups (Harris, 2017). Though today some of Xinjiang’s own musical religious practices, such as *meshrep*,⁶ have been officially secularized in its submission and acceptance into the UNESCO intangible heritage category (Harris, 2020), it remains a deep part of local culture and history. Smith Finley (2007) notes that popular Uyghur music is often a method by which Uyghurs reinforce ethnoreligious consciousness; and in the case of Xinjiang, where ethnoreligious identity becomes increasingly policed, both creators and listeners of music can find some level of emotional resonance or even catharsis.

In China, music is frequently considered a skill that ethnic minorities are innately better at, exemplified by a belief that ethnic minorities are somehow genetically predisposed to singing and dancing. This stereotype is rooted in the Chinese

⁶*Meshrep* refers to a Uyghur practice where a community holds a gathering (typically involving and aimed at male constituents) that includes the playing of traditional music, performance and then involves an informal “court” which acts as a conduit of judgment of moral values of individuals in the community. These gatherings range in size significantly and cover topics of immorality such as polygamy, alcohol consumption or other forms of perceived immoral issues. These practices became the target of government interest when they began taking on more political undertones and were perceived as counter to state interest. In fact, Harris (2020) notes that the submission of *meshrep* as an “official” intangible heritage under UNESCO makes it even easier for the Chinese state to police for “healthy/unhealthy” forms of it.

nation-building project which matched each of the 55 ethnic minorities with a costume, song, or dance (Gladney, 1994). As a result of this stereotype however, music can be a powerful, covert way to convey, articulate and resist in the limited avenues left, providing Chinese ethnic minorities the ability to showcase the “ethnicness” of their identity in ways that are still acceptable to the state. The proliferation of music competitions in the country within the last few years has arguably become a space for ethnic minorities to convey a personal, political individual message if they so choose (Qian, 2017). Qian (2017) zeroes in on *Voice of China 2014* competitor Perhat Khaliq, a Uyghur singer-songwriter from Urumqi. Just looking at the list of songs Perhat chose, it feels almost distinctly political given the history of Xinjiang: *How Could You Leave Me Sad, Father and Mother* (sung in Uyghur and given Chinese subtitles), *Hometown, Who Am I Longing For, How Much Love Can Come Again*, and *Give Me One Reason* (Tracy Chapman’s song and sung in English). In the competition, Perhat explained his song choices as being tied to the early death of his older brother as well as his parents. In official statements he made no mention of political undertones, but also controversially explained the reason behind not singing his own work as being against competition rules—though Qian points out that the 2017 winner from Tibet was allowed to do so and won a round using an original song. Much of Perhat’s music is deeply rooted in guttural tones. Evoking broad themes of loneliness, pain, trauma and loss. Perhat was able to pervade general popularity, broaden his audience, and also use this platform to express in oblique messaging, his shared pain with Uyghur audiences. This can be seen in Perhat’s final performance on the show through performing an almost non-musical version of *Why is the Flower So Red*, a theme song to a Chinese film about a Uyghur soldier in the Chinese army. Here, Perhat interpreted melody in an especially sorrowful way, emphasizing this emotion as the lyrics describe the imagery of the blood of youth watering the growth of beautiful flowers. Regardless of Perhat’s own personal reasoning behind choosing this specific song on such a wide platform, and using this interpretation of its tune, the song created a deluge of commentary on Youtube by those who were able to connect with the song and the recent histories in Xinjiang (Qian, 2017).

Baranovitch (2007) shows how music can reflect also popular sentiment. In many colonizer-colonized/majority-minority hegemonic structures, an ongoing discourse of the rational/scientific advancement being linked to the majority culture and the opposite to the minority is a common theme that helps strengthen the narrative of the majority group’s mandate to lead and “liberate” the minority group (Witteborn, 2011). Conversely, however, minority groups can sometimes use this already-embedded rhetoric to repudiate against modern/scientific approaches that have wreaked havoc on nature. For example, Inner Mongolian scientists argue against Han-led development of natural fields in Inner Mongolia and push for a return to the ethnic minority’s deep-rooted environmental knowledge of the land and how to develop it to prevent further degradation (Baranovitch, 2016). Similar tactics are used in Uyghur music to enact resistance through subverted language focusing on environmental protections and concerns as the face. Popular Uyghur singer Askar frequently evokes visual imagery of swaths of desert land (in reference to Xinjiang’s Taklamakan Desert), pure snowfall and other natural states that have become sullied,

dirtied by pollution. Over-population and destruction of traditional architecture are also the targets of masked criticism in some of his songs. These analogies are understood by Uyghurs as euphemisms for the Han and Xinjiang. By singing in both Uyghur and Mandarin, the singer is able to produce a message with just enough oblique reference to pass censorship and plenty of shared understandings with the Uyghur audience he intends to reach (Baranovitch, 2007). Using veiled methods of creative expression through ethnic music, Uyghur artists can communicate their pain, trauma and frustration to a wider audience, while adhering to censorship regulations. In turn, Uyghur audiences are able to find meaning in the opaque representations of their trauma (Byler, 2017).

6.6.2 Finding Strength and Meaning in Storytelling and Friendship

Storytelling is a powerful tool for coping with trauma (Friskie, 2020; Pennebaker, 2000). By allowing trauma to be organized into coherent narratives, storytelling creates a space for processing and sharing emotions (Ingemark, 2013). Cathartic benefits may occur as despair, anger, and grief are released through the characters in a story (Heiney, 1995). In the case of Uyghur writer, Perhat Tursun, the motivation behind one of his novels of a Uyghur migrant male moving to the city was from experiencing the observation of five of his Uyghur classmates suffering from mental breakdowns (Byler, 2017). This novel provides a strong parallel to many who share similar experiences, and thus a comfort when realizing that such an experience is not singular. Furthermore, the ability to externalize the story from oneself can engender a sense of control in otherwise uncontrollable situations (Ingemark, 2013). Byler's analysis of male Uyghur rural migrants focuses on how they resist or cope with the overwhelming feelings of alienation by refusing to give up their native practices, noting the power of storytelling to be a way to reclaim dignity and impart an existential sense of security. Bovingdon's (2002) fieldwork in Xinjiang in the late 1990s points out the powerful words of a well-known Uyghur intellectual Abduqadir Jalalidin. Using an analogy of a "heaven built by others" being worse than a "hell of my own devising" (Bovingdon, 2002, p. 55), Jalalidin posits that dignity and self-respect are far more important to the Uyghur identity and overall well-being than the economic riches that come with Han superiority and self-righteousness. Stories, therefore, become agentic, creating bonds within subjugated communities.

By sharing stories of trauma with trusted friends, an individual can find validation and confirmation along with an increased sense of communal identity (Friskie, 2020). In his 2018 thesis, Byler presents an in-depth account of two Uyghur male friends who find meaning and purpose in life through a strong attachment to one another—denoting themselves as "life and liver" friends. When one feels suicidal, the other encourages him to keep living and builds him up in order to carry on through the anxiety and instability of the overall situation. Byler posits that coping

with the depression of hopelessness and fear may be mitigated somewhat by an intimate other who experiences similar pain alongside you. This is supported by existing literature on the positive effect of social support on psychological health and resilience of trauma-exposed populations (Sippel, Pietrzak, Charney, Mayes, & Southwick, 2015). Similar coping mechanisms can be observed through the development of strong friendship networks, such as those amongst Uyghur students subjected to the Xinjiang Class boarding schools. In part, the educational systems themselves are extremely segregated, failing to truly integrate these students into the larger fabric of the communities they are transplanted into. In response to the sudden displacement to a culturally, linguistically, economically vastly different space, Uyghur high school students cope by building strong friendships and using familiar ritualistic ways of expression to retain and strengthen their Uyghur identity (Chen & Postiglione, 2009; Grose, 2014).

6.6.3 Religion in as Oblique a Way as Possible

Finally, when most obvious markers of religion are targeted as detention-worthy and non-sanctioned ways to exist under the state, what ethnoreligious identity markers remain? Analysis of this is pointedly inadequate due to the recent policy of the camps making robust information and research on the region impossible (Farhi, 2020; Mozur, 2019; Tracy, 2020). Two of the three selected studies focus on Xinjiang Class students and graduates, who were now living in places outside of Xinjiang. In short, part of the ability to perform religious markers of identity is due to timing (prior to mass encampment), and the fact that they were not in fact, currently living in Xinjiang at the time of the study. The last, is focused on one researcher's recent work in the region. Darren Byler's formal field study was undertaken in 2014–2015, but he remained in touch with many informants as events transpired over the years. The in-depth anecdotes in his thesis are powerfully informative on how Xinjiang male migrants from the rural South react to the developments of religious crackdown.

Uyghur students who were sent to boarding schools in Han-majority provinces often felt distinctively dispossessed of language, culture and a sense of security. Even, as Chen and Postiglione (2009) noted, if the students themselves did not have any deeper, personal meaning or understanding of the reason behind wearing scarves or other presenting elements of identity, they would use these elements to sustain their sense of identity. Girls would often turn to wearing headscarves until school administrators realized their religious significance and later banned them (Grose, 2014). In the case of bans, female students who persisted in wearing headscarves would wear them in their sleep at night when no administrators would be around to limit the practice (Chen & Postiglione, 2009). Some female graduates of the Xinjiang Class expressed interest in learning Arabic and took extra pains to attend free Arabic lessons at another university, feeling it was important to be able to read the Qur'an in its original language (Grose, 2014). Male Uyghur students on the other

hand, appeared to implement prayers and handshakes. Part of the relative emphasis on prayer for males may be tied to the cultural practice of barring women from entering mosques in Xinjiang (Leibold & Grose, 2016). Of note, however, is that while some students turned towards orthodox practices of Islam (including daily prayers and a commitment to completing them regardless of time issues throughout the day), most others would find ways to explain away their lack of praying or fasting the month of Ramadan. These explanations either took the form of feeling guilty about not being as religious as one could be or believing that ritualistic aspects of religion such as prayer and fasting, did not fully determine a person's devotion. This mindset is similar to religious practices amongst Central Asian Muslims, who culturally and socially do not emphasize the performance of rituals such as prayers, fasting and instead focus more on spiritual connection and meaning (Grose, 2014). Interestingly, Grose found that making *duas* or a quick prayer/supplication (generally one of gratitude expressed towards God) at the end of a meal or snack was a practice that individuals performed when others were present, suggesting that the act of religious rituals is more rooted in building, sustaining and signaling a form of communal identity as opposed to one that subscribes to personal spirituality.

For the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, ritualistic forms of religion such as learning Arabic, praying in private or public, wearing headscarves and growing beards have all become explicitly anti-state symbols (Castets, 2019). As a result, the form that religion takes has become one that is used to channel and explain, as a greater narrative, the situation that is happening to an individual. In a way, using the narrative of Islam and the relation between events transpiring in the now to that of being within God's reason or a higher purpose, can be a way for individuals to grasp for control in what little stability they have in their lives. In Byler's PhD dissertation (Byler, 2018), he notes several references to how Islam is lived in a way to explain or give some form of meaning to those suffering at the hands of state repression and violence:

Alim told me, "If suicide was not forbidden in Islam many people would choose this as a way out." After praying in the mosque, he often saw men crying in each other's arms—the promise of future redemption matched by the brokenness they felt in their own lives (p. 10).

6.7 Looking Forward

In 2013–2014, prior to severe crackdowns on religious media consumption and proliferation through WeChat, it seemed that a large group of Uyghurs coped with ongoing repression through sharing religious texts that spoke out against injustice or insinuated a comeuppance against the oppressor (Harris, 2017). However, with the newly defined concepts of acceptable Uyghur identities, that is no longer overtly possible in the landscape of Xinjiang. Outside of the sanctioned secularized forms of ethnic dance and song, Uyghur identity in China is now one that cannot contain elements of perceived Islamic behavior, as seen from the checklist of crimes (Castets, 2019).

The Uyghurs of Xinjiang Province have been subject to decades of increasing levels of deterritorialization, dispossession, biopolitical violence and linguistic imperialism. In response to the varying levels of trauma, unease and attempts to reclaim individual autonomy and a sense of stability and peace, the affected individuals of the region have chosen to respond in a variety of ways to hold onto their markers of identity. Zang (2013) argues that the lived Uyghur identity is still one in flux. Indeed, identity, as a social construct evolves everywhere, but it is of particular interest when understanding how an individual undergoing trauma might view this flux and the need to hold onto their ethnic identity when central, previously established markers of identity such as language or religion are forcibly taken from them. In light of this, we see the response of Uyghur individuals in Xinjiang pushing on by finding value in strong, male, homosocial “life and liver” friendships (Byler, 2017); in the students who find comfort in hometown food, wearing clothing or articles of clothing signifying identity (Chen & Postiglione, 2011; Grose, 2014); in those who whisper to journalists and anthropologists under the guise of other purposes and names, persisting in finding a way to preserve religious knowledge and pass it down or practice secretly even if overt methods are persecuted; and those who resist by storytelling, singing or performing other creative art forms (Baranovitch, 2007; Bovington 2002; Byler, 2017; Qian, 2017). Though recent literature on the region and its individuals is increasingly restricted and surveilled, the Uyghurs of Xinjiang continue to find ways to reevaluate and determine new forms of identity expression, regardless of state interference.

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Chapter 7

Working Towards a Positive Islamic Identity for Muslim American Women



Tasneem Mandviwala

Abstract This chapter examines the applicability of Pasha-Zaidi and Odeh's (*Positive psychology in the Middle East/North Africa* (pp. 257–284), Springer, 2019) concept of a positive Islamic identity, or PII, to second-generation South Asian Muslim American women in their twenties. PII is a psychological model that allows for an inclusion of Islamic values as a part of an individual's identity, potentially ultimately leading to positive wellbeing and development. While PII can certainly be a useful psychological and developmental concept for particular populations of Muslims, as the stories in this chapter show, it may be too limited in its scope and nuance to effectively provide a framework for the Muslim Americans in question. Specifically, because Muslim American women must navigate issues of gender and age (among others) in at least two cultural contexts—Muslim and American—not acknowledging the varied cultural weight of certain Islamic values based on these factors silences crucial parts of these women's experiences. Consequently, rather than adhering to a universal model of PII, I propose different versions of PII be developed for Muslims embedded within different cultural contexts, simultaneously acknowledging the importance of individualized Muslim values but also the importance of non-Muslim cultural values to an individual's development and wellbeing.

7.1 Introduction

Discussing the social and political standing of Muslims in the West, particularly in the US, has become so popular in the contemporary post-9/11 and Trump era climate that it is arguably just shy of transitioning into a jaded topic. However, despite the plethora of both Muslim and non-Muslim researchers, writers, activists, and politicians who have opinions on the population's positioning as a politicized group, it is imperative that the next wave of literature examine the whole for its parts. For far too

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long, we have ignored the individuality of the people who comprise the group we label as Muslims, Muslim Americans, or second-generation Muslims, a shortcoming that only further feeds into the sensationalized view of the group as an exoticized other. This chapter proposes a dangerous new idea: taking Muslims' Muslimhood seriously as a part of their individual identity development. Rather than focus on all the ways Muslim Americans are good Americans, I examine how these Americans are or can be good Muslims. Using Pasha-Zaidi and Odeh's (2019) concept of "positive Islamic identity," or PII, the chapter tracks the stories of five second-generation Muslim American South Asian women in their twenties—developmentally, emerging adults (Arnett, 2000, 2007; Gomez, Miranda, & Polanco, 2011)—exploring if and how being Muslim and adhering to Islamic values can actually improve an individual's wellbeing.

At the same time, the chapter serves as a litmus test for the applicability of PII, as it was originally developed as an identity theory for the global population of Muslims. PII was coined as a concept in an effort to open up space for discussing a person's outlook and worldview from a specifically Muslim—and specifically positive—perspective. It aligns Islamic values with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) Values in Action (VIA) classification system, which characterizes positive human strengths across six virtue categories: Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. Additionally, PII takes into consideration existing developmental, cultural and religious models of identity development and applies these to a uniquely Muslim identity. It is noteworthy that not all aspects of Islamic identity development would lead to a *positive* Islamic identity (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019). Table 7.1 provides the theoretical trajectory of Islamic identity development:

The question of what it means to be a "good Muslim" varies widely, of course. While there are certain core beliefs that Muslims the world over agree on—mainly, accepting the Qur'an and the *hadith* as textual religious authorities that define *halal* (permitted) and *haram* (forbidden; Halstead, 2010; Hassan, Muhamad, Abdullah, & Adham, 2011; Waseem, 2013)—the interpretation of these texts has often led to differences in practice and norms. Perhaps one of the most notable is that of feminist Islamic theologies, an outlook that encourages the equality of women with men in order for them to be good Muslims (Cooke, 2002). Even further specific to the individuals this chapter discusses, South Asian Islamic culture has a unique political, economic, and social history that brings specific modes of religious interpretation. The study of South Asian Islam is a relatively new field of research that is only beginning to unravel the complex interactions of the faith on the region, and vice versa (Purohit & Tareen, 2020). Untangling the "Islam" from "South Asia" is likely impossible when examining cultural values, but what we can examine more easily is the social emphasis on certain values that might occur over others, potentially signaling an overlap of pre-existing values in South Asian and Islamic cultures.

Because of these different nuances in belief between Muslim populations, PII might be a more effective tool for certain Muslims than others, important factors being gender, age, and whether the individual lives in a Muslim-minority or Muslim-majority country. If PII is not universally cross-culturally relevant—because there

Table 7.1 Proposed model of Islamic identity development (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019)

Identity level	Description
Emergent identity	Religion is taught by parents and/or other authority figures. There is little discussion or reflection on the information provided by authority figures as these shape a child's worldview of what is right and wrong.
Accepted identity	Islamic values, as taught during childhood, are accepted. There is a reliance on authority figures and historical, generally patriarchal, interpretations of text. Islam and culture are integrally connected and questioning of norms may be discouraged.
Threatened identity	Accepted Identity is threatened by repeated exposure to opposing, dominant ideas. A retreat to religious authority figures, a strict, literal, and dogmatic approach, and increased attachment to historical anecdotes follows. In this stage, a constant feeling of being targeted by a hostile environment is present, resulting in an increased sense of isolation. Differentiation of "us" versus "others" is salient, and negative feelings toward "others" are encouraged.
Quest identity	Reflection on Islamic teachings is triggered by significant experiences or cognitive dissonance due to many factors, including disillusionment with traditionally religious figures who do not appear to live up to Islamic norms or lack of coherence between Islamic concepts of justice and the reality of injustices committed in the name of Islam or in Muslim communities. This stage represents an identity crisis, and the inability to resolve the conflicting ideas means that the individual remains in a state of constant uncertainty. Leaving Islam and/or Islamic communities may be seriously considered.
Consolidated identity	A coherent and inclusive identity develops as a result of critical analysis and personal reflection of historical, cultural, and sociopolitical factors involved in the ideology of Islam. People at this are cognizant of the ways in which Islam is used and misused in different contexts. This is the stage where activism may be seen as a way to improve the state of affairs within Muslim communities as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims around the world.

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are indeed different Muslim cultures across the world—what alternatives can cultural psychologists and humanists find?

7.2 Methodology

Between 2014 and 2017, I interviewed over 60 Muslim American women to allow their narratives a fuller space in academic discourse by asking them, yes, about politics and clothing, but also about friendship, school, dreams, careers, love, marriage, divorce, and (potential) motherhood. A qualitative mixed methods approach was employed to gather data consisting of semi-structured interviews paired with short questionnaires. The questionnaires were used as a supplement to the data gathered during the interviews, with the focus of the study being on the in-depth interviews. This approach allowed for an emphasis on the experiential aspect of the individual's life stage, leaving space for the organic exploration of topics that arose.

To recruit participants, I both contacted the Muslim Student Associations (MSA) on various college campuses in Chicago and Houston and used previously established personal and professional contacts in both cities. During the recruitment process, I simply recruited women who self-identify as second-generation Muslim American women; it was made clear that there was no requirement of outward religiosity involved (e.g., mosque attendance, hijab, prayer, etc.). However, I acknowledge that using the MSAs and previous contacts as inlets for recruitment may have limited the type of participant response I received. While I did speak with women of various cultural and racial backgrounds, the current chapter focuses specifically on the experiences of South Asians.

7.3 Aaliyah: Individual Autonomy Versus Parental Choice

Aaliyah¹ was one of the young women I interviewed. I spoke with her twice, once when she was an adolescent (18 years old) and then as an emerging adult (21 years old.) Her longitudinal participation in my research shed a particularly accurate light for her individual experience as a Muslim American woman. When I initially met her, she was a graduating high school senior, excited about her impending move from her hometown of Houston to New York City to pursue a design major at a well-known fine arts school. Poised, friendly, and direct with her answers, Aaliyah seemed to be the girl who had it all figured out. She had applied to and gotten into her top three schools—all of which were out of state. This is a rare experience for a second-generation Muslim girl, as most of the women I spoke with attended schools not only in-state, but in-city due to their parents' sociocultural expectations of single daughters remaining at (or close to) home. In fact, when I asked women how they chose their undergraduate institutions, many of them laughed and simply said, "I didn't choose; it was chosen for me." Aaliyah was aware of her opportunity, though, as she told me:

Aaliyah: I wanted to leave Texas 'cause I was fortunate enough for my parents to allow me to leave, 'cause I know a lot of my friends stayed in Houston especially. I was one of the only ones from my high school and even *masjid* to leave the city. So that was a big leap for me, and I really wanted to challenge myself and learn to live alone and be independent. So that was first, mainly, the reason I went. I applied to a lot of schools out of the state.

Even though the parental support and openness to personal choice is something Aaliyah acknowledged as a privilege, like most privileges, she was also careful not to abuse it:

Aaliyah: In the end, I did choose [the New York school], mainly because my parents are comfortable knowing that there was family and people we knew in the city, unlike Chicago. And yeah, in the end, I chose [it] without really knowing what [it] was. But I eventually

¹All names and certain details have been changed from the original to protect the confidentiality of the individuals.

understood that, wow, I did make the right choice, because it's a really good design school, and it's really challenging. And actually, after looking back at the 3 years so far, I've learned a lot.

Coming to a realization of the impact of her school choice was clearly a positive life experience, but initially Aaliyah still weighed her parents' comfort as part of the deciding factor. In fact, she bluntly told me, "[My parents] are really flexible with me, but I know my limits also".

This push and pull of voice and power within a daughter-parent relationship is not so different from what we might observe in mainstream American households. However, it is unique when it comes to Muslim American households—and this is where our discussion circles back to Islamic psychology and the potential for a positive Islamic identity. Choice, autonomy, and social power were issues that all adolescent and emerging adult women I spoke to were aware of. If they did not feel they had as much of it as they wanted, they touted marriage—either the actual experience of it or the future idea of it—as a “gateway to freedom” from parental restrictions in a socio-culturally acceptable form for daughters. This slice of their experience sheds a crucial light on a missing aspect of Pasha-Zaidi and Odeh's (2019) proposed model of a PII: gender.

7.4 Islamic Identity and Gender

Sociocultural gender dynamics must be considered when examining the potential for a PII in second-generation Muslim development for three major reasons. First, women are often seen as bearers and transmitters of culture from generation to generation, in both American and many immigrant cultures (Okin, 1999; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). In second-generation immigrant experiences, the pressure to maintain home culture on the one hand and assimilate and perpetuate the new host country's culture on the other is theoretically more pronounced for girls than for boys. Furthermore, girls are socialized to be more sensitive to others than boys are, priming the former to be more collective minded rather than more individuated (Chodorow, 2001). The weight of this type of socialization is doubled when placed in the context of collectivist cultures, as most Muslim cultures are (Greif, 1994; Platt, 2017).

Secondly, as noted, marriage arises as a major life event for second generation women that carries with it social, religious, and psychological ramifications. The question of when and if a woman is married creates major sociocultural changes for her relationships with her family, larger religious network, and sometimes with the religion itself. Like other Abrahamic faiths, Islam formally only permits sex within the bounds of marriage, and only permits marriage to be between a biological man and a biological woman. While the majority of the women I spoke with adhere to heteronormative views of gender and sexuality, the experiences of LGBTQ Muslim individuals introduce an added layer of complexity in the challenge of establishing a

PII. If a heteronormative cisgender woman is unmarried late into her twenties, she suffers socially raised eyebrows and perhaps admonishments to “get her life started.” An LGBTQ person—most often not having disclosed their sexuality for the sake of their social survival—not only suffers this same social judgment but also a suffocation of an inherent part of who they are due to not being recognized or seen in the cultural landscape at all. The Islamic social values of sex, virginity, and marriage hold a disproportionate amount of presence in young South Asian women’s experiences when compared to other social values and so must be weighted accordingly when constructing a healthy relationship with Islamic psychology. That is, women are often told through direct and indirect sociocultural messages that one of the most important ways for them to be “good” Muslims is to adhere to these gender and sexuality norms, and that if they do not, their upholding of other Islamic values is not worth much (Bacchus, 2017; Mehrotra, 2016).

Finally, the particularities of both the home cultures and host cultures in this case arguably contain more tensions for girls than for boys. To use two well-known cultural tropes, Islamic cultures are known to promote modesty and obedience in women while American culture prides itself on its liberated, unhindered women; this contrast is most obviously highlighted around the now almost *passé* image of hijab. As Carol Gilligan (1993) states, “women’s psychological development within patriarchal societies and male-voiced cultures is inherently traumatic” (p. 31), and both Islamic and American cultures still maintain deeply entrenched patriarchal schemas (Badran, 2009; Jaggard, 2008). This increased vulnerability of girls within macrosystems of patriarchy is a factor that must be considered throughout any proposal for positive psychological development.

7.5 Islamic Values and Gender

Even though Islamic values were implicitly important to all the women I spoke with, the responsibility of psychologists lies in being culturally aware of how certain social values mean different things to Muslim women and Muslim men when it comes to lived experiences. For example, the value of “citizenship” and “social responsibility” might denotatively mean the same for all Muslims, but connotatively, young Muslim women know they would be discouraged from attending political rallies in different cities overnight, campaigning for politicians that might require them to travel frequently, or even openly voice opinions on popular debates like abortion as it might affect their marital reputations within the immigrant community. The value of “discipline” can also be skewed through a gender lens within an immigrant framework, as for a man it might mean being committed to his job while for a woman, it could mean self-sacrifice—including her job. While this has been the trend in Muslim *and* mainstream American communities until now (Chodorow, 2001; Zaal et al., 2007), the recent increase of female Muslim American politicians like Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, among others, signals potential changes to this gendered political script. Although she is not Muslim, even the selection of Senator

Kamala Harris as Joe Biden's running mate in the 2020 US presidential election (and subsequent election as Vice President of the United States) can contribute to a change in the gendered South Asian sociocultural script due to her Indian heritage.

The question of *which* Islamic values were important to the women I spoke with varied greatly depending on the social support they received as teenagers and young adults from their families, Muslim circles, and, most importantly, parents. This positive social support is more critical for young women than young men in Muslim societies due to the uneven balance of cultural baggage women's experiences carry. In stories like Aaliyah's, there was actually less direct emotional, spiritual, and psychological engagement with values that the individual acknowledged as specifically "Islamic". Instead, there was a general acknowledgment of "being raised in the right way by [her] parents," and those parents trusting the young woman to behave in ways that would uphold those "right" values. While Islamic norms likely were the underlying structure for these values, in the meaning-making process of the individual, they were not highlighted or actively processed as such—mainly because there was no need to.

What would create such a need? The answer is both simple and complex: conflict. Tensions arising from the individual's microsystem rippling out all the way into the macrosystem begin to destabilize ideas of right, wrong, and truth.

7.6 Zahra: When Islamic Social Support Dissipates

Unlike Aaliyah, Zahra did not receive a lot of encouragement to pursue her individuality, career, or goals from her Muslim sociocultural systems. An unmarried woman in her late twenties and currently an advanced graduate student in psychology, Zahra had repeatedly been told that her views on women's rights and mental health would become problematic for her when it came to marriage. In fact, marriage was socially defined as her worth, and her professional interests were considered secondary, at best, or an interference, at worst. Although there is no formal age for marriage in Islam, a typical woman's life trajectory involves marriage in the first half of her twenties (Mandviwala, 2019). Zahra's lack of adherence to this expected trajectory led to negative feedback and lack of conversational response when discussing school- or work-related topics in Muslim social settings. Consequently, in her meaning-making process, her worth as a Muslim in general and a Muslim woman specifically came into question through the unsupportive messages she received about parts of her identity as an academic and aspiring professional. Not only did the South Asian Muslim environment not provide her with the necessary supports to create a healthy unified identity, but, in fact, it encouraged a self-antagonism of it:

Zahra: So, I see myself as an American. I was born here, I'm just as American as everybody else. I see myself as a Muslim. I grew up Muslim. I've grappled with a couple of things related to being Muslim, [but] I still feel like that's an important part of myself. I see myself as a South Asian woman. I mean, I don't really like being South Asian, but you know, I can't not be a South Asian woman; that's just a part of who I am, too. And I am a woman. And I

think it means something different in the American context, in the South Asian context, in the Muslim context. Yeah, I'm female, and that means something different for all of those different identities.

Because the South Asian and Muslim aspects of her identity are the ones that instigated the crisis of identity, Zahra has come to the point of simply accepting them as an inherently disliked part of herself that she cannot escape from. Interestingly, though Pasha-Zaidi and Odeh (2019) point out that Western media coverage and culture often portray Islamic character aspects as negative, and that Muslim youth need to be taught more positive integrations of Islamic values in reaction to this Western rejection in order to increase wellbeing, in Zahra's case, we see a betrayal of the individual's psyche from her Muslim community. The rejection from her minority community cuts deeper than rejection from her majority community—which also certainly happens—because the expectation is that her in-group (i.e., minority in a majority context) will support her more staunchly than out-group members.

Zahra: After I speak up [about my experience in class], I feel that—I'm usually emotionally just spent, and I have to take two or three days to come back into myself and ground myself . . . I'm being extremely raw and vulnerable with people, and I don't know what they're gonna do with that, first of all. I don't know if they're understanding me, versus pitying my experience and pitying the social identities I hold, which I find a lot of strength in, but I sometimes feel like when I share my story, people are like, "Wow, that sucks," or "That's what it means to be a minority woman." I just don't like being judged and so it feels risky because I've put all that out there and then they're probably not gonna follow up on me, getting to know *me* . . . And I know it's not gonna be reciprocated because you guys are the White people, and your lives are not as hard or something. This sounds like I'm othering them, but I don't get the same internal experience, I don't get the same introspection from them, and it's really not fair in my opinion.

From this description of Zahra's professional interactions in graduate school, we can tell that she is acutely aware of her position as a minority woman, and that she also knows this positionality comes with a shared internal experience with others like her (i.e., other Muslims, other South Asians, other women). However, when those that supposedly share this internal experience lack empathy for her and tell her she is *not* as similar to them as she thought, the psychological crisis obviously is more jarring. For Zahra, her threatened identity stage (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019) is collapsed into her quest identity stage because her identity is threatened to a greater degree by the Muslim community itself due to the weight it holds—or held—in Zahra's development.

While she had initially seen no frictions with pursuing her goals and being a Muslim woman, the negative sociocultural messages Zahra received from what were supposed to be her intimate support systems led to both social and inner psychological conflicts.

Zahra: I feel like I've reconciled some of the Muslim and American pieces of higher education and getting married later in life, or like doing good for your community—I feel like that's a *value* in the Muslim community that I've taken on and want to live by. And in my experience, or my perception of South Asian culture, those three things are harder to reconcile. Of not being married, of pursuing higher education, of doing something good for

the community—it's like, but why? It's a little too superficial for me. I feel like I always have to be looked at—I have to look a certain way, I have to act a certain way, I have to be feminine, whatever that means, and I'm just not into it.

Tasneem: Yeah, and you feel like the South Asian aspect is pretty easily separable from the Muslim aspect?

Zahra: I do, and I don't. I think some of the *values* do overlap, but in my head, I've separated them. I'm like, that's just a South Asian thing. And yeah, ideas about femininity and sexuality do exist in the dominant Muslim community the same way, but—I'm just going to hold on to the Muslim pieces that I like, that I aspire to, that fulfill my vision in life. It's easier for me to downplay some of the stuff that is similar between Muslim and South Asian because—it's just easier for me to hate on the South Asian piece than the Muslim piece because I have embraced some of the Muslim piece. I'd probably have some sort of existential crisis if I also started questioning the Muslim piece. (emphasis added)

Having the opportunity to connect with Zahra in the midst of her identity struggle was invaluable for me as a researcher, but also particularly meaningful for me as a fellow second-generation Muslim American South Asian woman. In her thoughts above, Zahra eloquently highlights the confusion caused by a crisis of Islamic identity and communicates poignantly why she may not question certain “values” as much as she might be inclined to. However, it is also notable that in the midst of this crisis she is beginning to focus on the value aspect of Islam, the core proposed tenet of PII.

Social events can be exited from, and religious holidays come and go, but the effect the interactions leave on the psyche hold deep repercussions for an individual's worldview and identity formation:

Zahra: I want to be an authentic human being, and I want to be genuine, and I want to be real with myself, and I want to be real with others. But I do feel like I censor myself a lot, and I censor myself based on the context that I'm in; I perform based on the context that I'm in. So, if I'm with South Asians, at a South Asian party, I have to talk about my schoolwork in a different way. Or I have to downplay some stuff with my family, who's like super religious because I just don't want to go there with them.

Ultimately, because she feels she has no choice but to self-censor in Muslim contexts, Zahra has lessened her participation in traditional *masjid*/mosque spaces:

Zahra: Yeah, I don't really attend the mosque. I'm not really active with the Muslim community where I'm at school right now. I go to Eid prayer once or twice a year with my family . . . I try to avoid [Muslim and South Asian gatherings.] I'm having a reaction right now, even thinking about these things gives me anxiety because—it's probably, my sister would probably tell me it's just me and that it's not really that bad. They make me nervous, getting ready for them makes me nervous, getting ready for seeing people makes me nervous. Like actually seeing people, people I haven't seen in a long time, that I don't really have a relationship with. Every once in a while, during Eid *namaz* (prayer) or after Eid *namaz*, I'll actually meet someone outside of Eid *namaz* who I actually have a relationship with, and that brings a lot of comfort and peace to me during post-Eid *namaz* mingling. But for the most part, both subjective experiences for me are very anxiety-inducing and nerve-racking because I feel like I'm gonna do something wrong or people already have some perception of me and my family that is not what they want, or I don't know. It's just not pleasant for me.

Zahra pinpoints one of the most crucial aspects that need to be addressed if an effective PII is to be established for second generation women in the US: social acceptance and participation, which are critical parts of individual and cultural identities (Shweder, 2002). This identity threat can partially be interpreted in terms of Berry's (1997) acculturation theory, which posits that not being able to maintain a connection with one's origin culture but also being rejected by one's host culture results in the psycho-cultural experience of marginalization. While arguably South Asian Islamic culture and American culture are both origin cultures for a second-generation individual, the absence of complete acceptance and support in either can indeed result in a similar marginalization. Because "achievement of a PII would reflect *both* private religious activities and public or social engagement" (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019, p. 271; emphasis added), the sociocultural community's implicit rejection of the identities of women like Zahra presents a critical problem that requires a solution if the Muslim American immigrant community is to move forward in an integrated fashion with multiple generations.

7.7 Parental and Community Support

Previous research suggests a positive correlation between involvement in the practices of a religion and wellbeing (Ellison & George, 1994; Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991; Koenig & Larson, 2001; Levin & Chatters, 1998; Levin, Markides, & Ray, 1996; Tix & Frazier, 1997), and the lived experiences of the women I spoke with corroborated this. If social participation in religion is a stronger determinant for wellbeing than private participation as the research suggests (VanderWeele, 2017), then it only logically flows that young women like Aaliyah who are made to feel comfortable and welcome by their social circles would end up participating in those circles more than women like Zahra, thereby raising the former's levels of wellbeing through a communally validated religious identity more than the latter's.

It is notable that even if there are members of the socioreligious community who view women like Aaliyah negatively—for example, for leaving her parents' home to attend college—one of the strongest determining factors to maintain participation in the religious community after adolescence is parental support, especially for women. Because the behaviors of South Asian Muslim immigrant daughters are particularly monitored (Khan, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Zaal et al., 2007), parental views become especially important in deciding the life trajectories of girls rather than boys. Furthermore, like many immigrant cultures in the US, Muslim immigrant family culture is communal in nature with a strong emphasis on respecting one's elders, especially one's parents. Accordingly, the messages a young Muslim woman receives from her parents are ultimately the deciding factor in how she views her relationship with her religion, her religious community, and herself. The more trust and less judgment parents show their daughters, the more their daughters accept

generic Islamic values as the “right” values since they cause no severe sociocultural conflict in their lives.

7.8 Farida: Effects of Harmonious Meaning-Making Within Parent-Daughter Relationships

Farida, a senior in college, was able to leave Houston for school like Aaliyah, though the former only strayed as far as San Antonio. Again, like Aaliyah, Farida weighed sociocultural concerns into her decision, opting for the program in Texas as opposed to New York because the local religious community center was closer to the campus in San Antonio versus in New York. Though she says her “parents would have totally let me go [to New York] if I had wanted to,” Farida also seems to exercise the knowledge of self-limits that Aaliyah mentions. Essentially, these young women look around to their peers and recognize that their parental relationship is not the norm within immigrant communities and so do not “push” or overstep their own relatively liberal parameters.

These parameters, however, align much more closely with mainstream American values than do the parameters that Zahra experiences. The negative overlap Zahra describes between South Asian and Muslim values can serve as a protective developmental factor for women like Farida and Aaliyah as it focuses on values that are present in both meaning-making systems—American and Islamic. Similar to Aaliyah, Farida also focuses on the idea of upbringing as a core element of shaping one’s values, though again, she does not pointedly claim these values as Islamic:

Farida: I guess it’s just the way [my parents] have grown up or something? You know, my dad has been in America for over 30 years now, and even my [paternal grandparents] have a fairly equal partnership. And even my [maternal grandparents] spent some time in England . . . and so that’s just the way they were raised. And so that’s how I am: I have a view that everyone is equal; no one should sit around telling someone what to do. I see it in other people’s houses, and it’s like, this is kind of depressing, you know?

Farida bluntly aligns her positive value system with Western values when she mentions the geography of her family members. Whether or not this alignment is factually accurate is irrelevant; the significance lies in her meaning-making and identity formation processes, and she sees little conflict between the values encouraged by her Muslim immigrant family and her mainstream American environment. Indeed, when she described what her parents had taught her about marriage, she said, “It’s supposed to be a partnership; there’s no being subordinate to your husband or wife.” Obviously, this emphasis on gender equality and potentially erasing gender roles is a much more American value than a South Asian/Muslim immigrant one. Contrast this view to the messages Zahra received regarding marriage and self-worth, and the importance of parental and familial support become blaringly clear.

7.9 Islamic Cultures and Gender Roles

For Aaliyah, too, a positive value overlap occurs due to her relationship with her parents. When I asked her to describe the latter to me, she replied succinctly, “Committed. Equal. And caring.” Though she did not directly label these traits as values, these positive social characteristics, while arguably not incompatible with Islamic values, are not necessarily being incorporated into the individual’s identity in a pointedly Islamic framework. In fact, when I pushed Farida to clarify whether she did view any conflict between her family’s egalitarian view on marriage and traditional Islamic marriage values, she said,

Farida: Yeah, it does have to do with religion. We have it in our minds that women are supposed to stay at home, cook, clean, kids—and *it’s true that there are roles that we have to fill*—but at the same time, my father has always been there. Like, “Let’s hang out, let’s go to Farida’s basketball game.” . . . Yeah, my dad was always there. I bonded with him through photography and our tech-savvy side. (emphasis added)

While parental support might be greatly beneficial in accelerating the development of a potential PII, it also leads to complications. Farida’s answer to my question, “How does your family navigate the idea of religion versus gender roles?” is unclear at best. She admits that religion—i.e., Islam—does dictate a value system of gender roles, but she never fully unravels the tension between her family’s stance and the religion’s. That is, there seems to be an acceptance of contradiction and a lack of further questioning due to the positive social support received from her parents. In a certain light, the avoidance of cognitive dissonance by simply not giving significance to the issue could be a positive psychological tool, but this is only available to Farida because other aspects of her social support system and sociocultural identity are solidified through parental reinforcement. Essentially, she has the luxury to ignore the dissonance because her individual identity does not suffer as a result of the contradicting messages; it actually thrives.

Whether or not this identity can be qualified as a positive Islamic one is clearly up for debate due to Farida’s own hesitance to call it such; I argue it is not a PII at all but a positive *convenience* identity, or a PCI. This is not developmentally detrimental, but, in fact, efficient. However, even if we argue for an organic and unconsciously developed PII in this context, we are still left with a cultural psychological question: If an individual is directly or indirectly made to feel unwelcome in the spaces where these activities occur, how does—or can—a positive religious identity develop?

7.10 Soraiyah: Conflicting Selves Created by Conflicting Values

Soraiyah is another young woman for whom the existing model of PII does not function effectively. Like Aaliyah and Farida, Soraiyah’s relationship with her parents is deeply important to her and shapes her daily life. However, instead of it

being a source of support and stability, it becomes a severe stressor and vulnerability due to an inherent part of her identity: her sexuality. Following the typical trajectory for South Asian Muslim American women (Mandviwala, 2019), Soraiyah married a Muslim man right out of college. At first, it seemed she was going to have a socioreligiously successful life, being a part of the religious community and eventually planning to raise a family. But then life took a turn:

Soraiyah: Actually, I loved him, a lot. And I was trying really, really hard. At that time, I had not been in a relationship with another woman. I kind of had a thing when I was 16, but not really. But I was committed to him. I thought that he was kind of like a gift from Allah. Like, this is how I'm gonna get to have a normal life, just like anybody else out there. And then I tried really hard, I read a lot of books about being a wife, you know, Islamically, and from non-Muslims. I did a lot, and I tried a lot. In the end, there was issues in respect to career, finance, and then there was drugs, and then there was some sexual related issues. So it just all got to a point . . . like a bursting point. And then it kind of fell apart from there.

Soraiyah identifies as lesbian, an identity she does not openly share with most from her religious community—and understandably so. She feels she will permanently have to hide this part of herself not only from the majority of her religious community, in which she is quite an active member, but also from her parents—family members she lives with and sees every day:

Tasneem: Have you told your parents [about your sexuality]? Or would you ever tell them?

Soraiyah: Hell no . . . Honestly, it would just be very hurtful for them to hear something like that. I know for a fact, because they voiced it, that they are disgusted by this realm of sexuality and everything having to do with same-sex marriage and things like that. They're so disgusted by all of that, and on top of that, they're also like upset that I'm not getting re-married and different things. So, I cannot throw that on them as well. So. I would never do that.

The contrast between the support women like Aaliyah and Farida feel from their parents and what Soraiyah feels is alarming and obvious. It is impossible to say whether Aaliyah's or Farida's identity formations would have been definitively different had either of them identified as non-heteronormative, but it is clear that parental support makes a difference when it comes to Muslim American women's mental health. While Aaliyah and Farida move forward confidently in life, able to take second generation, Muslim American, and gender obstacles in stride, Soraiyah feels stagnant and paralyzed, caught in a years-long depression fueled by what she perceives as her inability to live "normally" according to Islamic social mores (i.e., heterosexuality.) She has been to three therapists over 8 years and was taking antidepressants when I spoke with her. Exacerbating the parental tension over her not having yet re-married and her hidden sexuality was her mother's lack of respect for her privacy and as an individual:

Soraiyah: I've always had issues with my mom. Just feeling like she's not happy with me. She's not pleased with me. Why is she looking at me like that? Just like some kind of disappointment and stuff . . . She just kind of goes through my stuff in my room, even though I'm a freaking adult. So, she was like, "I saw your drawer with the bottled pills. Do you really take that much? You shouldn't take that much. You should be beyond these things." Blah blah blah. And other times she'll sit there and like, "I think that you're getting acne and stuff because of probably things you're taking." Or when I would not taste her food a certain

way, she would say that, “I think it’s probably whatever you’re taking, it’s probably changing your taste.” When I got, initially, I had gotten a lot sadder to the point where I couldn’t hide it from anyone anymore, so it’s like where I would just weep and I wouldn’t eat anything and stuff. And so my mom was like, “Are you taking the wrong drugs?” and stuff. She makes sure to make everything a lot worse than it needs to be.

In the midst of these complex parental relationships, Soraiyah also must navigate her own faith as an individual and what having a Muslim identity means to her. Like most LGBTQIA individuals within Abrahamic religious traditions, she is aware of the doctrines forbidding same-sex relationships. However, she also knows that being attracted to women is an inherent, unchangeable part of herself. Accordingly, I asked her how she imagined moving forward with these conflicting selves; here are her thoughts:

Soraiyah: Um, I’ve thought about every single scenario. And honestly, I cannot love someone that doesn’t love Allah and the Prophet (SAW²). That’s just too difficult for me, and therefore I would not be able to be with someone that’s not a Muslim. And then within the Muslim community, it’s, um, it has its own range of complications. Whoever I would be with, we would have to keep it a secret for the sake of our families. and for the sake of a lot of things. There’s a lot of things involved in that. So it’s just sad. And now on top of that, there’s issues of, well, Islamically, could you even be in a relationship. Because I’ve been in a relationship before, I’m kind of like, I don’t know if it’s such a bad thing. I don’t know if it’s the worst thing in the world if I’m just kind of happy because I feel loved by somebody and stuff. I understand having tests from Allah, but I don’t know how miserable he expects me to remain. It’s like a big thing I question a lot, and I’m always trying to understand it better, and get to the bottom of it.

Even more than Zahra, Soraiyah grapples directly with theological and religious questions, directly weighing Islamic values, morals, and meanings into her own identity formation. While she certainly embodies multiple Islamic values that are included in the model for PII such as self-control, social responsibility, and multiple others, in her own meaning-making process, she is not sure whether her identity is compatible with Islam at the very core. This creates a seemingly unresolvable clash within the self that would likely prevent the actualization of an effective PII.

In addition to her inner turmoil, Soraiyah feels the weight of her hidden identities even socially:

Soraiyah: There’s prejudice, like, regarding—you know, I don’t feel weird when I dress differently from non-Muslims. I feel weird when I dress differently from my Muslim peers. I’m more self-conscious about what I do, what my level of education is, how I look, what my family’s like, what sort of people I hang around, etc.—it’s like, when it comes to my Muslim peers, that’s when all the anxiety kind of hits usually.

Tasneem: Yeah, and what has conditioned you to have anxiety in that context?

Soraiyah: Um, just always knowing and feeling like I don’t fit in with my Muslim peers.

Tasneem: In what way?

Soraiyah: Um. I’ve just always been very different from all my friends, so it’s kind of like, I’m always like the odd ball. Like, a lot of people will be my friend and all that, but it’s like, I always feel like whoever is my best friend is always changing up. I’m notorious for

²SAW stands for Sallallahu alaihi wassallam or Peace Be Upon Him.

having drama in my life, and just, yeah, you know. It was always a struggle to be understood by—like as a 16-year-old by other 16-year-old girls.

This social distance potentially inhibits her ability to form and activate an effective PII, as social support is clearly one of the necessary buttresses for one. Ultimately, though, the inhibition of an effective PII, like any whole identity, comes from inner cognitive dissonance:

Soraiyah: Yeah, I mean, the only thing I would add is that the most frustrating thing is that, as far as Islamic concerns, um, it's pretty much a completely agreed-upon thing that you are not supposed to have a same-sex relationship. So the most frustrating thing is probably like I love Islam, and I know what I want in my life also. So those two things clash. I, I, you know, it's like, I don't want—*it's not like when I was with that person who I was with, that I loved Allah any less. In fact, if anything, I was just so grateful all the time that I had that person in my life. And I knew that He put her there. And it was a really good experience . . .* So that's like the most frustrating thing, is like, I don't understand that right now. maybe I'm not gonna understand it until, like, the next life or something, but that is the most frustrating thing. Just to feel like—I'll never sit there and choose between Allah and something else, it's just not what I do (emphasis added).

The lack of compatibility between her understanding of Islamic values and her human experience of joy, fulfillment, and gratitude to a higher being feels unresolvable to Soraiyah, creating an identity paralysis of sorts. While she identifies positively with Islam, she also identifies positively with homosexuality, a value that Islam does not appear to permit (Ilkcaracan, 2002). Accordingly, we are left wondering what a healthy, meaningful PII might look like for women like Soraiyah.

The lack of acceptance of Soraiyah's and Zahra's identities by their religious communities sets off a self-fulfilling cycle of isolation. The community risks permanently losing the contributions of a generation of women because of inflexible definitions and restrictive expectations. Zahra's high level of self-awareness is both an asset and an obstacle to achieving self-actualization as she realizes that she has a foot in each of her worlds, but that she cannot move these feet together to progress forward in a normative manner if an alternative Islamic identity framework is not allowed for. Similarly, Soraiyah's development is cemented in place by conflicting loves: for Allah and for women.

Currently, the model for PII does not adequately capture the experiences of 2G (second-generation) Muslim American. There is a moralizing that the sociocultural scene imbibes that makes it nearly impossible for 2G women to separate Islamic values from social values. This is especially clear considering just how much of a difference social support makes in helping—or preventing—women from forming what could be considered PIIs. While positive identities can be formed within Muslim immigrant communities, the communities must support traditional as well as non-traditional members equally if PII is to be a useful psychological model.

7.11 Developing a 2GW PII

Using some of the 2GW's (second-generation women's) experiences, voices, and actions described in this chapter, we may be able to sow a more effective version of a PII theory for Muslim American women. The first step would be to recognize worldviews of the individuals involved. Rather than assume all Muslims view the world in one way, an implication found in the original PII theory, we must consider the cultural contexts of Muslims worldwide. While Islam is certainly part of American Muslim women's worldviews, so is America, with its cultural values of individualism, independence, and self-determinism (Bowen, 1996). To most effectively create an Islamic psychological theory for this population, we need to allow the Islamic concept of the self (i.e., the immortal soul with a focus on the afterlife) to speak loudly and clearly to the American concept of the self (i.e., the mortal individual with a focus on the now). For the population in question, it will be impossible to have only an Islamic perspective or only a Western perspective of the self; we must propose a third new perspective in order to achieve maximum wellbeing. The challenge lies in harnessing the beneficial and applicable qualities of both definitions, especially when some aspects of each seem to work against the other. However, an important and effective first step is to listen to the voices of these women and notice what *they* end up valuing, whether Islamic or otherwise.

Interestingly, the more outward religiosity (social activities at *masjid*, hijab, Muslim friends) a woman engages in, the less direct the focus on Islamic values, particularly during emerging adulthood (Mandviwala, 2019). Inversely, the less outward religiosity a woman engages in (third-space attendees, wearing hijab less consistently or conventionally, close friendships with non-Muslims as well as Muslims), the greater the awareness of Islamic values. This happens due to the conflict 2GW face as a result of culture and gender-specific experiences. Even though the value of modesty, for example, is technically meant to be practiced by both Muslim men and women, it is the women who socioculturally hold the tension of this value due to the emphasis on their sartorial choices. The more pressure and the more messages that tell 2GW they are not existing in the "right" ways—for example, not dressing modestly enough—the more they must reflect on what it means to be Muslim, whether they want to remain part of the community and/or faith, and if so, which values are worth it. While in terms of PII this outcome of sociocultural criticism may be considered a silver lining by encouraging reflection on Islamic values, it is not an encouraging, reliable, or sustainable approach. Rather than foster active community members who inadvertently see religion as performance and punish marginal community members who struggle with inclusion but fight even harder to maintain their grasp on abstract Islamic values, Muslim immigrant communities must uphold the Islamic values of tolerance, acceptance, and pursuing knowledge by embracing the spectrum of their members. While community support provides invaluable nourishment for a 2G individual by teaching her about her cultural inheritance and past, a 2G individual can also teach her community about its own cultural perpetuity and future.

Zahra describes how she is “active in Muslim circles, but they’re not related to the mosques, *per se*”. Her cultural Islamic identity is deeply important to her as a woman and individual. Accordingly, when her sociocultural systems communicate messages of inadequacy regarding her level of Muslimhood, she is forced into introspection on the meaning of being Muslim. Sociocultural rejection may therefore encourage a second-generation Muslim American woman to re-evaluate values that are deemed culturally correct and replace those with actively Islamic values that re-establish the validity of their Muslim identities to themselves and others. At the same time, there is an active reflection regarding which Islamic values to embrace, and those that align most closely with certain aspects of their American and woman identities—for example, justice, citizenship, social responsibility, diversity, and integrity—are chosen.

Women like Zahra often find their initial Islamic identities rejected not only by mainstream Western messages, a common occurrence after 9/11 in America (Peek, 2005), but also Muslim immigrant messages. These women move from briefly establishing a typical PII—essentially, a PCI—after encountering mainstream negativity to working under the threat of having their Islamic identity snatched away entirely by their minority communities. There is a crucial and painful moment of rebirth in which the individual turns to original Islamic sources, even as she realizes that she herself must become one of those sources. As a result, her PII incorporates Islamic values in ways that are organic, inclusive, and ambulatory. There is an open-endedness to this alternative PII—a second-generation woman’s, or 2GW, PII—because of the conscious awareness that is required to establish it in the first place.

Because the individual realizes that the typical and well-established communal religious identity does not serve her positively, she becomes permanently aware of the process-oriented aspect of minority religious identity in a majority context. A 2GW PII inherently includes an element of growth and a quest for authenticity as it speaks to the life experiences of the socially secondary: from girls and daughters to women and wives, from religious ostracization to racial prejudices. Even if the individual herself does not limit her place in the world based on narrow labels, she does inevitably learn the sociocultural rules. As these expectations become an unbearable Procrustean bed, women like Zahra have identity growth spurts that break the chains that try to confine them. Through laborious spiritual, psychological, and emotional reflection, individuals can transmute what their societies perceived as weak identities into ones of strength, incorporating Islamic and American values into a third new set of identity 2GW values.

At the same time, it is important to note that those women who may flourish using the entry-level PII/PCI due to social support systems and resiliencies they possess have positive identities that still do qualify as inherently 2GW. One of the most integral parts of the definition of a 2GW PII is the space for multiple experiences. Therefore, emphasizing the experiences of women like Zahra does not invalidate the experiences of women like Farida as legitimate 2GW PII trajectories. In fact, establishing a clearer, more inclusive 2GW PII could also help Farida and others like her articulate more clearly the contradictions they may find within their own experiences. However, the need for increased support—psychological, social, and

emotional—for 2GW like Zahra is clearly highlighted, as non-traditional experiences often become marginalized, villainized, or ignored altogether.

7.12 Alternative Spaces for Muslim Women and LGBTQIA Muslims

Pasha-Zaidi and Odeh (2019) have provided a few suggestions in the vein of Muslim community support and involvement. For example, the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework is suggested to provide young Muslims positive social experiences in Muslim environments and with other Muslims. Furthermore, personality and cultural differences are noted, as “not all Muslims are part of a collectivist culture. Some may not have access to a welcoming family or community”—such as Soraiyah—“whereas others may be introverted and less inclined to participate in other-oriented activities” (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019, p. 19). While self-reflection and individual prayer are suggested as ways to reinforce a PII, as we see from the American Muslim women’s stories in this chapter, most Islamic communities in America are not conducive to individualism (Greif, 1994; Mandviwala, 2019). Thus, while one may be an introvert or not have access to supportive loved ones, the immigrant community culture does not allow space for these types of individualities, especially when it comes to the heavily gendered social role of women. Islam in America is inherently collectivist because of the contemporary sociopolitical place it holds in the US landscape, lumping all Muslims into one supposedly homogenous group and shared identity (Beydoun, 2018; Cainkar, 2011). The repercussions of Islamophobia, microaggressions, and social and political prejudice reinforce collectivist cultures even further (Barrett, 2007; Cainkar, 2011; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Pew Forum, 2017). To survive as a minority, immigrant communities often become even more interconnected, interdependent, and sometimes conservative than they were in their home countries (Espiritu, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

In spite of this necessary interdependence, marginalized Muslim experiences are finding alternative third spaces in which to express themselves, ultimately giving a 2GW PII a chance to be embodied, enacted, and lived. In fact, the only way these alternative spaces are often “found” is by creating them themselves. Though there is variety in aim and consistency, the general underlying ethos of these spaces is to embrace and welcome women’s experiences rather than judge or exclude them. The structure of these spaces can be as informal as bi-weekly lunch meetings at friends’ houses to discuss spiritual experiences or as formalized as actual *masjid* spaces with a board of directors and *Jum’ua* [Friday] prayers. Third spaces center around women and/or non-heteronormative individuals, allowing an alternative to the collectivist Islamic identity usually found in larger immigrant centers (Mandviwala, 2019). *Masaajid* spaces like Masjid al Rabia, founded in Chicago, IL in 2017, offer marginalized Muslims an inclusive, inviting space free from judgment but rich with spirituality and culture. Al Rabia has established its own “Pillars of Inclusivity”

alluding to the religious pillars of Islam and promotes the following philosophy: “All Muslims deserve an environment in which we can practice our faith without fear of exclusion or violence. We don’t believe it is asking too much to be uncompromisingly ourselves—as women, as queer and trans people, as ‘minority Muslims’—and still have a faith community we can come home to” (Al-Rabia, n.d.). Initiatives like Masjid al Rabia continue to develop across the US, though due to their nascent stages, their development is currently difficult to document. Even so, it is significant that 2GW are creating these spaces as powerful alternatives to the established hierarchies of Islam in America.

A Deeper Dive: “Unmosqued” Muslim Mothers

Tasneem Mandviwala

Though sometimes used with hesitation, the general gist of the term “unmosqued” implies a lack of commitment to one particular *masjid* due to a dominance by first-generation Muslims and the relatively conservative norms they tend to espouse in that space. Becoming “unmosqued” liberates women from stressful psychological and sociocultural situations, but it also comes with its own tensions. Most 2GW *want* a sense of religious and cultural community, especially since it was something they grew up with and because it can likely serve as an ongoing buffer against the larger often Islamophobic American environment they are entrenched in (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019). Suddenly finding a vacuum in their lives where this community used to be can be difficult. One of the major rising existential questions for the 2GW Muslims I spoke with is how to raise children. While the women themselves might be able to navigate their new sense of being ungrounded and disconnected from a *masjid* community, the mothers who I spoke with were particularly concerned about how to pass on the Islamic cultural values they saw as positive to their children. These women recognized that despite the conflicts they may have felt with their first-generation immigrant-dominated spaces, they did gain a sense of identity and history from them. How to pass on this sense of belonging to the next generation is a major question these women are being pushed to devise an answer for—one they are just beginning to find. By balancing self-constructed third spaces that ritualize connection with like-minded women and mothers with a limited but significant exposure to the *masaaqid* their first-generation parents are still connected with, 2GW are creating the script for a revised version of an Islamic community in America.

7.13 Conclusion

PII can be a helpful model for the analysis of psychological wellbeing for some Muslims. In its current theorization, it likely will prove most compatible in cultural contexts where political, social, and gender roles align with traditionally Islamic values. In cultural contexts where the values of the macrosystem generally align with the values found in the individual's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)—countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, or Indonesia where Islamic values are the dominant cultural values—approaching individual wellbeing through a PII model will likely be fruitful. This is not a surprising conclusion as it essentially invites a culturally and psychologically relevant model for wellbeing in much the same way Western models have been devised for Western individuals. However, in cultural contexts where the macrosystem does not align smoothly with the microsystem—and, in fact, where the microsystem itself embodies contradictions—a more individual-sensitive model for wellbeing needs to be composed. This does not mean a PII is not possible for Muslim women in America or other places in the West; it means simply that, like many aspects of religion, the values being discussed are flexible and fluid depending on gender, age, and geopolitical and sociocultural location. Not only do terms such as “modesty,” “citizenship,” and “social responsibility” need to be recognized for their slippery denotations and connotations, but they also need to provide more context-specific meanings that hold significance for the individuals enacting them. A more useful model for Muslim American women would be one that speaks not only to the overlaps in Islamic and Western values, but also one that recognizes the contradictions between them and acknowledges that to create a coherent sense of self, it is sometimes necessary to pick and choose values from different cultural scripts to create a sense of an ordered whole.

Though the cultural influence of Islam may continue to be psychologically present, sub-models of an alternate organic model of PII for Muslim American women would also be needed to account for individual life trajectories and identities. The alternate model therefore may be imagined more as a map with multiple destinations and routes growing out from a central nucleus rather than a list or a chart of pithy ideas. Depending on which Islamic and/or American value is embraced, the individual might be led to follow a different path and therefore arrive at a different destination. However, all these destinations remain within the same country—Muslim American womanhood—and all originate from the same place—immigrant Muslim culture. There are possibilities to U-turn back to this original urban nucleus, to settle in a neighboring suburb, or to establish a new city altogether. Ultimately, a 2GW PII must be created in unison with the actual lived velocities of Muslim American women.

This nucleus proposal can be useful in examining the wellbeing and experiences of a variety of Muslim American women, not just South Asian. While here I focused on second-generation South Asians, we might apply the same mapping model to other multicultural individuals, including Muslim American women converts. How the “point of origin” is defined will differ for each particular group—perhaps even

each individual within a given group—and likely will result in PIIs that vary from the South Asian model. Certain elements (e.g., experiencing Islamophobia) might remain the same depending on whether the woman appears outwardly a member of the mainstream or not: imagine the simple difference of a White convert who wears the hijab versus a White convert who does not wear the hijab. Since treatment of the host/mainstream culture also contributes to a sense of self/identity, a PII map could shift drastically for the same individual depending on her clothing. However, by personalizing the map using the particular cultural values and norms with which each individual is familiar and aligning Islamic values with different cultural groups, we may indeed create a very useful PII—or PIIs—for Muslim American women.

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Chapter 8

Sexually Diverse Muslim Women Converts: Where Do They Stand?



Maryam Khan

Abstract This chapter discusses the standpoint perspectives of three convert sexually diverse Muslim women in Canada and the US. The chapter examines their journey to Islam and the current Muslim practices in their communities of belonging. The ways in which the women create a positive understanding of their faith is discussed through the development of personalized relationships with the Creator, the Qur'an and Islamic practices, as well as the rejection of Arabization of Islamic discourse in favour of pluralistic approaches and practices of the faith tradition.

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the lived experiences of three convert sexually diverse (bisexual and queer) Muslim women is discussed through a critical feminist standpoint perspective. Of importance here is the power of lived experiences to center the lesser-known narratives of sexually diverse Muslim communities. These stories are part of a larger qualitative research study conducted with fourteen LGBTQ Muslim women in the Global North—namely, Canada and the United States (Khan & Mulé, 2021). The term Global North, of course, does not come without its ramifications as there are notable differences on political, economic, social, and cultural levels between Canada and the US. From a critical perspective, however, these nation-states are unified due to current, historical, cultural and political subjugation of people and identities perceived and/or associated with the Islamic tradition (El-Tayeb, 2012).

The terms sexually and gender diverse and lesbian, bisexual, and queer LGBTQ are used interchangeably to refer to non-normative gender and sexual identities and expressions in the Global North. These labels are used as an umbrella term, and as a political device to bring to attention the knowledges, alliances, rights-based movements, and global solidarity to unite individuals and communities fighting for gender

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and sexuality justice against multiple intersecting oppressions (Nicol et al., 2018). However, it is important to note that socially constitutive categories of reference (discourse and discursive constructions) can at times fail to represent and encapsulate the lived experiences, meanings and performances of individual identities and preferences in their respective communities (Haritaworn, 2015; Hall, 2005).

When discussing standpoint perspectives, it is worthy to explore the epistemology behind such perspectives (Khan, 2019). Within the feminist tradition, epistemologies are couched in, and not free from one's biases, ideologies and sociopolitical contexts which make it imperative to locate "who can be a knower"; "what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge" and "what kinds of things can be known" (Harding, 1987a, p. 3). Notably, "feminism is a political movement for social change" and its epistemologies were developed to address a need for woman centered knowledge that reflects the lives and experiences of women in public and private arenas (Harding, 1987b, p. 182). Feminist epistemologies were also developed to apply woman centered knowledge as a catalyst for social change and advocacy. The late 1960s and early 1970s in Canada and the US gave rise to the women's movement which challenged male dominated political, social, medical, cultural, and academic among other domains to include women's perspectives, issues and experiences (Brooks, 2007); and such attempts have taken the shape of feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and feminist postmodern (Harding, 1987b).

A feminist standpoint may look different in application contingent on the how, who, why, where and what assumptions exist in producing a certain type of knowledge about women (Hartsock, 1983, 1998; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Such differences in accounts exist since it is highly complex and at times problematic to create *generalized* knowledges about *women* in contemporary society. Many scholars who have written and debated on the topic of a feminist standpoint make their reluctance known in adopting a feminist standpoint based on its assumptions of commonalities between all women (Alcoff & Potter, 1992). For example, critical race feminist scholar, Razack (1998) argues that "we can no longer devise political strategies that start with something we might call women's experience" (p. 159). Alternatively, Razack (1998) suggests that *experience* and *woman* could be used as categories of analysis to examine the multifarious ways "patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism interlock to structure women differently and unequally" (p. 159). A feminist standpoint is used in this chapter to explicate and create awareness about how each sexually diverse Muslim women convert is situated and configured within many interlocking systems of marginalization and privilege based on race and whiteness, gender, diverse social herstories, contexts and realities (Collins, 2009); while recognizing concurrently that each woman's experiences and knowledges is transitional, unique, and used it as a platform to create situated knowledges (Brooks, 2007; Haraway, 1988, 1991; Harding, 1987b).

This is vital since historically, sexually and gender diverse Muslim women were not seen as knowledge holders and imagined as deviant and abnormal (Habib, 2007, 2009). Furthermore, historically, within normative Muslim communities, patriarchy and men have exercised considerable religious monopoly as authorities and experts,

particularly over the domains of morality, religion, sexuality, and bodies of sexually and gender diverse persons and Muslim women (Habib, 2009). In particular, Muslim women have been demoted “to positions of gendered subordination and public exile into domestic harems and political forms of purdah, while in the same breath, assuring us of our spiritual equality” (Zine, 2008, p. 111). A feminist standpoint will be useful in increasing the representation of multiple perspectives and situated knowledges that are different from normative discourses on sexually diverse convert Muslim women.

8.2 The Power of Narratives

Traditional research methods and approaches have tended to center objectivity, reason, and logic and have placed power and authority in the hands of predominantly white male researchers who are positioned as “experts” (Alcoff & Potter, 1992; Collins, 2009). This has resulted in historically marginalized groups and communities (i.e. women, Indigenous, racialized) discursively constructed in highly problematic ways (universal claims that are colonial, imperial and racist by individuals outside their communities (McClintock, 1995). Critical feminist standpoint research is “not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). By acknowledging and making known that values, beliefs, and life experiences *do* impact and construct research, and by situating these as arising out of the interaction between participant and researcher, more power of representation can be placed in the hands of the participants. This in turn can lead to the flourishing of non-dominant voices (i.e. sexually diverse Muslim women) and can start to decolonize qualitative research. As a devout queer Muslim woman, I was transparent about my positionality, belief systems and values about queerness as compatible with Muslimness. I discussed being invested in the lives, health and wellbeing of the larger queer Muslim community. The standpoint perspectives captured a mere snapshot of the women’s journeys, in interaction with this writer, surrounded by the sociopolitical and cultural contexts that governed our interactions and storytelling. It is important to note that the excerpts and the overall accounts of the women does not represent a coherent or static account. Below are the accounts of three sexually diverse Muslim women converts that challenge dominant understandings of Islam and Muslimness while integrating sexuality and religiosity in meaningful ways.

8.2.1 *Jenn’s Story*

Jenn identified as a bisexual (White) European American Muslim woman who grew up surrounded within the Christian tradition. Jenn is a highly educated individual.

She came to Islam in 2009 and was introduced to the tradition by being in relationship (engagement which led to marriage) with a Muslim man, whom she met overseas. During their engagement, Jenn was asked if she would be willing to convert to Islam. She was shocked by the request and told her fiancée that she will think about the conversion. Upon return to the United States, Jenn decided to learn more about Islam and Muslim life. Jenn's first exposure to Islam and Muslim life were with "conservative Muslims" overseas. Jenn's second exposure to Islam and Muslim life were a result of conducting personal research on approaches to Islam that were feminist, LGBTQ accepting and progressive. As Jenn explained:

The people that I knew very well there [overseas] were very conservative and so that was not appealing to me at all. My host mother there, for example, wears niqab with only her eyes showing. When she leaves the house, she wears gloves and socks . . . So I thought if I converted, I would be agreeing to that, which I would have never done. I just started reading as much as I could. I wanted to see if there was a feminist approach to Islam and to see what the attitudes were to LGBT people. One of the first books I read was *Progressive Muslims* by Omid Safi. That showed me that there was room for a more progressive approach.

After learning about progressive approaches to Islam and finding a local chapter of the Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) group, Jenn started to feel more comfortable about "the possibility of converting" and started regularly attending the group. Jenn found that there were similarities and overlap between the MPV group and the Unitarian Universalist Church's values she already held due to past involvement with a Church. Jenn had positive experiences at the MPV group and remained active in the MPV community for about 4 years as an observant Muslim (prayer, fasting and so on). During this time Jenn and her husband ended their marriage. Following this, Jenn had very difficult few years, and her faith faltered in Islam. Irrespective of Jenn's tenuous Muslim status, the MPV community rallied around her and offered support. Jenn talked about the importance of practicing and experiencing Islam and living a Muslim life as part of a community. She remarked on how much she felt supported by the MPV group and felt a sense of community. After a few years, Jenn relocated to another state and attempted to start a progressive Muslim group in order to build and foster a sense of Muslim community. Practicing Islam within a community of like-minded Muslims was very important to Jenn since it helped her engagement with spirituality and develop a personalized relationship with the Creator. Jenn did not feel comfortable attending normative mosques, as these spaces tended to be "conservative" in their understanding and practice of Islam as it relates to heterosexuality, gender, racial and sectarian segregation.

I have felt more alienated from mainstream Islam as a woman because we are told to go to the back of the room or to another room. I know there is homophobia within mainstream Muslim communities, but I haven't felt it directed at me personally because very few people know that I'm bi . . . It has been a long time since I have been to a mainstream mosque. You go, sit, and listen [to the *khutba*/sermon] and then you leave. There's no discussion unless you already know people. I used to go and wouldn't talk to anyone. It did not feel like a community for me at all.

Over the years, Jenn has been trying to foster a sense of community with like-minded Muslims who are deeply concerned about social justice related to gender

parity, affirmative sexuality and challenging monolithic understandings of Islam through equitable critical discussions. At the time of the interview, Jenn was trying to start a progressive Muslim group where she lived and worked. During this time Jenn remarried to a non-Muslim man. She talked about not sharing her Muslim and bisexual identity with other Muslims, due to fear of judgment and remained discrete about this topic. Jenn feared that normative Muslims would be “conservative”, and would question her Islam, her authentic Muslim status based on her being a convert, married to a non-Muslim man in addition to her bisexuality. Jenn did not believe that Islam is inherently bi-phobic or homophobic. Jenn believed that there is not one type of Islam and discussed the importance of plurality which exists within the Islamic tradition.

With respect to Jenn’s current practice and affinity for Islam, Jenn stated that Sufi approaches to Islam appealed to her. Jenn asserted that from progressive and Sufi perspectives, “there are ways to talk about God and the divine without anthropomorphism”. Before accepting Islam, Jenn discussed her interest in Buddhism.

I see a lot of similarities between Buddhism and the Sufi approaches to Islam, but I’m not sure what is particularly about Islam that appeals to me right now. I actually enjoy being a part of the struggle. I like being a part of debates and trying to change the mainstream approach or what people think about Islam. I don’t know. There’s just something about my personality, I guess, that appeals to me as a feminist having those arguments . . . I don’t like it when Muslims are discriminated against . . . if it is just a chance to talk to someone and trying to convince them that what they have heard about Islam is not necessarily true and if you think that Islam is anti-LGBT that is not Islam itself. That is a particular interpretation of Islam.

Jenn remained cautious about painting some Muslims as “conservative” which constructed them as a “bad Muslim”, while constructing progressive and Sufi approaches as “good”. Jenn struggled with trying to live her Islam in a particular way, which was different than normative Islam. As mentioned above, Jenn did not like it when Muslims were discriminated against. Jenn wanted to demonstrate to the larger non-Muslim and Muslim community that there are different types of “Islams”, and that not every Muslim practices and lives Islam in a similar fashion. Jenn discussed the perplexities associated with being a Muslim in the US.

I know a lot of non-Muslims who also say really negative things about Islam. Then I am arguing that not all Muslims are like that. There are some of us that are progressive and I can hear it myself that I’m saying that “those other Muslims are bad” or “there is something wrong with their approach”; and “only progressive Muslims, we are the good ones”. Yeah, I am not sure how to do that better.

As a result of coming to Islam later on in life, and not being brought up in the mainstream Muslim family and community, Jenn was unfamiliar with and did not share a fondness for the prevalence of Arabic discourses in normative Muslim communities. For example, Jenn worshipped in English and did not use or identify with Arab centric Islamic parlance and Arabic in her practice of Islam in everyday life. Jenn felt that it was not necessary to learn Arabic and perform Muslimness that involved Arabic discourse, clothing, and so on.

8.2.2 *Chinara's Story*

Chinara identified as a queer Black Muslim woman who is in a same-sex marriage with children. Chinara was raised in the Christian tradition and is of African descent. She is highly educated and is employed in the healthcare field in the United States. She came to Islam at the age of 18 years and identified as a visible Muslim (dons a head scarf).

If we start with my journey to Islam, I knew I was queer before I even thought about Islam or that was even a thought in my mind. I knew since I was a kid . . . Certainly, I knew there was this prevailing view that religion in general has a negative view of being queer. So, I knew that coming into Islam. Islam itself was so overpowering. Also, the understanding of God that I never thought about. Even reading the Qur'an was so overwhelming. So, I was like I have to do it, become Muslim, that is. So, I did . . . It is very easy to convert to Islam. I just googled the *shahada* and just said it at home. I then googled how to pray and googled how to fast because Ramadan was coming up.

Upon conversion, Chinara wanted to learn about Islam from Muslims as she was very serious about adherence to traditions, practices, and prayers proper. Chinara discussed falling into a conservative Salafi tradition and community. She soon enrolled in religious classes and found these to be delivered from a conservative Salafi perspective; as most of the people she learned from received their education from Medina, Saudi Arabia. Soon afterwards, Chinara described her being a Muslim took the form of implementing “a Saudi version of Islam” and this particular orientation to Islam did not work well in her life as a Black queer Muslim woman. Chinara stated the following in relation to the disconnect between her lived experiences and the type of Islam she was practicing:

You cannot just try to bring the [Arab/Saudi] culture, understanding, and idiosyncrasies that come with a specific culture and understanding of the world to *your* culture. And not even try to look at Islam or understand *your* Islam and these texts from your practice of faith from your own personal experience. It is just so inorganic or so unauthentic to do that and ultimately unsustainable. It doesn't work because my experiences are so different. When I read the text [Qur'an] I see and understand different things. I have to apply things differently just because that's the reality of my life.

After some time Chinara felt comfortable in her Islam and she started to distance herself from conservative Salafi approaches. Chinara discussed that she no longer deployed liberal, conservative, orthodox among such labels to identify her practice of Islam. In the larger normative Muslim and LGBTQ community, Chinara was often asked about adopting a Muslim name. In response, Chinara asserted that by virtue of her being a Muslim woman, her birth name now becomes a Muslim name. Chinara also talked about not using Arabic discourse in interactions with fellow Muslims. She was highly critical of the Arab influences on how Islam is constructed and practiced. She worshipped in English and referred to her practice of Islam as “my Islam”; and refrained from applying any labels to define her Muslimness—identified as a Muslim only.

Chinara discussed experiencing homophobia within the normative Muslim community, and recalled various Friday prayer sermons, religious classes, and gatherings

which discussed the “evils of homosexuality”. Chinara mentioned that she experienced tremendous challenges, pain, and trauma related to her practice and understanding of Islam, which was different than the normative Muslim communities understanding of Islam and her sexuality. She recalled an incident where a male Muslim friend asked if she would abandon Islam due to all the backlash Chinara received as a result of being public about her sexuality. In response, Chinara stated that she did not become Muslim to gain approval of other Muslims. Chinara asserted that Islam called to her and she became Muslim because she read the Qur’an. She decided to not leave Islam because some Muslims may have issues with her sexuality.

Chinara’s current practices of Islam involved following the overarching principles of *shariah*, such as: “the preservation of life, dignity, intellect and love. These are the principles of neither doing harm nor returning harm. Uncertainty does not overrule doubt. These things are what inform my Islam”. Chinara wears a headscarf so she is identifiable as a Muslim everywhere. She talked about living her truth as a queer Muslim Black woman and actively fighting against static perspectives on Islam and being Muslim. Chinara felt that it is important for queer Muslims to be public about their sexuality if they can so that it can help build a community of LGBTQ Muslims. Chinara believed that practicing Islam and being Muslim in a community context is vital to survival and peace of mind as a Black queer Muslim woman.

8.2.3 Alexis’ Story

Alexis is a bisexual Muslim woman who is an interfaith ordained minister. She identifies as a White Canadian of European heritage who was raised Catholic, has children and is married to a man. She is an educated professional in the healthcare field and is involved in supporting individuals across various faith traditions through leadership, ceremonies and spiritual guidance. Alexis embraced Islam in 2014:

There was this point in 2013 for me where I was coming out of a really dark place . . . As a woman I have rarely felt entitled to anything. I never thought of it as being marginalized. Now that I look back at my experiences, I see that differently. I spent a lot of time self-loathing and thinking I was lesser. I did not feel good about myself. It was such a classic woman narrative in many ways.

Alexis described her journey to Islam as a “heart-based calling” and felt this calling many times in her life. When attending seminary school in Canada, she experienced a powerful yearning toward Islam. Alexis stated that “the call to Islam woke up in me many years ago but now it came to a head. I told myself that I am not going to run away this time. I am going to own and embrace this”. Over the years, Alexis quieted her “call to Islam” for many reasons. One main reason being the prevalence of Islamophobia and the negative attitudes associated with Islam and Muslims locally and across the border. This was important to Alexis since she visited

family in the US and did not want to create tensions within her immediate and extended family. Alexis discussed that when she “fell in love with Islam”, the 9/11 attacks transpired. She talked about battling in her heart the common discourses on Islam and Muslims who were constructed as terrorists and the rampant Islamophobia. The day after Alexis graduated from seminary school the 2016 Orlando PULSE shooting transpired. Alexis stated that her world was turned upside down due to all of these events involving Muslims in terrible ways. “It felt like my worlds had collided, like my interfaith path, my queer path, and my Muslim path. All of these intersections that I embraced about myself, which I ran from before and feared came to a head.”

While attending seminary school Alexis also got involved with a progressive LGBTQ Muslim mosque and group. It was in this affirming atmosphere, Alexis was able to bring and celebrate all parts of her life and identities (Muslim convert, motherhood, bisexuality, interfaith Minister and gender). With the support of the group and the progressive LGBTQ Muslim community, Alexis was able to feel more confident in her Islam and felt comfortable disagreeing with “traditional and Wahhabi Muslims” when discussing non-normative perspectives on Islam which are gender and sexuality affirming. Alexis talked about experiencing “pushback” from normative Muslim spaces and communities. She also talked about this “pushback” as “baggage” she inherited upon conversion to Islam. Alexis discussed that she was not new to patriarchy, homophobia and misogyny that accompany the institutionalization of a faith tradition, as she had experienced these within the normative Catholic tradition:

I was lucky to find a welcoming mosque and a Sufi order. I didn’t have to go through the route of, oh I love Islam, but I am facing all this conservative rejection and having to cover as a woman. I did not face all of that. I got to bypass all that baggage.

In her work as a spiritual leader to Muslims and non-Muslims, Alexis brings a Muslim perspective to bear on the varying practices she deploys. Alexis shared that she found overlaps between her understanding of Buddhism and the Sufi approach to Islam. For example, Alexis discussed the parallels between a Buddhist meditation practice of *vipassana*, which she observes, and the breath work involved in *dhikr* at the Sufi *durgah* (shrine). She shared that talking with the Creator helped immensely with negotiating mixing religious practices, which could be seen as problematic by some Muslims and perceived as un-Islamic. When in doubt about anything, Alexis relied on her inner guide and conversed with the Creator: “I asked Allah if it is okay for me to mix these things because they all speak to me. The answer I got was satisfactory and to keep doing what I was engaging with. So, I am”.

In her practice of Islam, Alexis discussed fostering a personalized relationship with the Creator, whom she described as her “beloved”. Alexis stated, “I get to decide and own relationship with God”. Alexis shared that no one else can dictate with the personal relationship and practice of Islam can look like for each person.

“That person does not have the intimate connections, and conversations that I have with God. You have yours, and I can’t pretend to know what it’s like. And you can’t pretend to know what it’s like for me. So whether or not I pray five times a day or if I do *dhikr*, or if I sit in contemplation with God or anything that the Qur’an talks about.”

As part of the progressive LGBTQ Muslim mosque and group, Alexis practiced Islam as part of community. Whereby fellow Muslims and non-Muslims gather to discuss their interpretations of relationships with the Qur'an, the Creator and practice of Islam. Alexis felt that it is of the utmost importance that Muslims irrespective of sexuality and gender develop a personalized relationship with the Creator, and the sacred texts.

8.3 Decolonizing Knowledge of Islam and Muslims

Much of the extant discourses about Islam, Muslims, regions and countries identified as such are heavily imbued in orientalism, colonialism and imperialist histories. According to Said (1978), Orientalism underscores the creation and circulation of expert knowledge to justify colonial and imperial expansion of the Orient (Middle East and Asia inclusive of customs, inhabitants, culture, religion), which is considered the opposite of the Occident (Christian West and Europe). Additionally the contemporary shifting geopolitical and local sociopolitical forces including modernity and not limited to the rise of populism (Trumpism) in both Canada and the US; the increase in religious fundamentalism; the rise of white supremacy and alt-right groups and ideologies; increasing Islamophobia; racialization of Muslims and those perceived as such; homonationalism; “civilizational clash” rhetoric and secularism all impact on the ways in which Islam and Muslims are constructed as villains (Jamal, 2013; Puar, 2007; Rahman, 2014a, 2014b). One common strategy used in local and international nation-state politics is to use Muslim women and in particular LGBTQ Muslim women to push Islamophobic, anti-immigrant and racist agendas in local and global debates (El-Tayeb, 2012; Grewal, 2005). An example is how Muslim women are constructed as passive subjects requiring salvation from their “oppressive” religion (Mahmood, 2005).

Following Said's (1978) work on Orientalism, Ahmed (2006) builds on the connection between Orientalism and the inherent Whiteness within Orientalist discourses on Muslims. The author argues that “colonialism makes the world ‘white,’ which is of course a world ‘ready’ for certain kinds of bodies” (p. 111). In this way, the world follows a White orientation, which has implications for racialized and non-racialized sexually and gender diverse Muslims. There are power dynamics involved in the construction of the Orient as other and “Orientalism, [...] would involve not just making imaginary distinctions between the West and the Orient, but would also shape how bodies cohere, by facing the same direction” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 120). Whiteness can be understood as a hegemonic force which privileges dominant identities, epistemologies and ontologies while marginalizing minority and Indigenous communities and ways of being as it is used as a benchmark to alienate Indigenous and racialized bodies. Whiteness alongside Orientalism work to construct Islam and Muslim communities as threats and as polar opposites (opposite of the sexually tolerant) to what the Global North values and represents (Ahmed, 2006; Grewal, 2005). In order for Orientalism and Whiteness to work, Islam and

Muslims *need to be* constructed as static entities that are not in favor of sexual diversity. Meaning that there can only be one type of Islam and one type of Muslim, and any deviations from such discourses result in the “good Muslim” and the “bad Muslim”.

This was apparent in the stories of Jenn, Chinara and Alexis, who expanded static notions of Islam and being Muslim, while also attempting to challenge the Arabization of Islamic discourse and practices. In doing so, they challenged the normative (static) approaches to Islam (Salafi and Wahhabi) which they found were not accepting of gender and sexual diversity. However, the positionality of traditional Islamic approaches in this regard cannot be taken solely as evidence of how sexually diverse Muslim women are being oppressed by Islam; rather, these are examples of resistance and resilience — working towards decolonizing Islam from Orientalist constructions. Even though the women experienced adversities associated with traditional Islamic standpoints, their investment and love for Islam did not shift. Such critiques are necessary to shift static understandings of Islam to the diversity of Muslim experiences and practices. By doing so, pluralistic understandings and practices can emerge.

The critiques offered by the women are not an indication of Islamophobia. It is for the purposes of trying to tackle internal issues within the normative Muslim community, which are silenced to keep out Orientalist (Islamophobic) discourses. It is important to note that the women interviewed were invested in the longevity, wellbeing of all Muslims, especially LGBTQ Muslims. These stories are different from Islamophobic discourses and utterances that do not have investment in fighting Islamophobia and challenging colonial understandings of Islam. All of the women were invested in the separation of Islam and the Qur’an from its cultural and colonial influences in order to create expansive understandings of sexuality and gender. They attributed Western negativity towards Islam to conservative approaches, especially Salafi and Wahhabi interpretations. The marginalization of sexuality and gender diversity was attributed to Salafi approaches to the tradition and the Arabization of Islam in the Global North. The women critiqued the Arabization of Islamic practice and discourse since these were often confused in the Global North to signify “true” Islam. An important factor, which cannot be overstated, is that most mainstream religions approach sexual and gender diversity from deviant, sinful and overall prejudiced perspectives (Wilcox, 2006). This was documented by Chinara and Alexis, whereby the women discussed the existence of homophobia, patriarchy, misogyny and so on in normative religious institutional practices (normative Christianity, Judaism, and so on) that have historically marginalized sexual and gender diversity (Taylor & Snowdon, 2014). Even though this is the case, misogyny and patriarchy within non-Islamic faith traditions are constructed as individual failings whereas in Islam’s case, the entire tradition is represented as problematic (Ahmed, 2011).

A Deeper Dive: Women Living Under Muslim Laws

Maryam Khan

Extant scholarship critiquing the Arabicization of Islam vis-à-vis Wahhabi and Salafi conservative approaches argues that globally Islamic pluralism has suffered greatly when some nation-states have curtailed personalized and community-based perspectives on Islam in favor of state-sanctioned Wahhabi Salafism (Heck, 2009; Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009a). An important consideration to note is the Saudi state's promotion of Wahhabi Salafism especially in Asian and African Muslim majority societies (Jamal, 2013, 2015). Muslim feminists such as Jamal (2013, 2015) and the network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), are suspicious of Salafi-centered discourse on gender and sexuality, as the state support for Salafi-centric groups has usually meant a diminution of women and gender-related freedoms in many Muslim majority states such as Pakistan. Based on the women's experiences recorded by WLUML, societies where Sufi traditions dominate are generally more accepting of diversity in not only gender performance but also diversity of faith and practice within Islam (Jamal, 2013, 2015).

WLUML is a geopolitical "network that provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam" (n.d., para 1). This network contests the notion of Islam as a monolith and seeks to engage in Islamic pluralism that represents the diversity of Muslim women's experiences differentiated by varying geopolitical contexts and identity facets (race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, gender, reproductive aspects and religion to name a few). WLUML also engages in social justice through collective action-based research projects, report writing, advocacy and lobbying. Under the "Resources" tab of WLUML's website (<http://www.wluml.org/>) there are many excellent resources on women, sexuality, gender and Muslim laws.

8.4 Building a Positive Personal Relationship with the Creator and Sacred Texts

The converts expanded upon static and monolithic understandings of the faith tradition through the development of personalized relationships with the Creator and the sacred texts. This is really important as the Creator and the Qur'an were not seen as inherently causing the women's oppression; nor were they considered biphobic and homophobic. The three women were aware of their sexuality and would not enter into a faith tradition with the deep knowing that it inherently abhors sexual and gender diversity. By having a personalized relationship with the Creator, the three women drew on their inner guide as well as practicing their "Islams" within

a community framework. The women also fostered the belief that the Creator does not make mistakes and had created them without any errors. A common discourse which is rampant in normative society is the assumption that a sexually and gender diverse identity is antithetical to a Muslim identity or Islam. The converts challenged this discourse in many different ways. The women believed that the Qur'an and Islam actually supports sexual and gender diversity, as this is one of the principles guiding progressive approaches to Islam (Kugle, 2010). For example, the women referenced the following Qur'anic verses to demonstrate acceptance of sexual and gender diversity¹:

O mankind, what has deceived you concerning your Lord, the Generous, Who created you, proportioned you, and balanced you? In whatever form He willed has He assembled you (82, 6–8).

Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby fruits of varying colors? And in the mountains are tracts, white and red of varying shades and [some] extremely black. And among people and moving creatures and grazing livestock are various colors similarly. Only those fear Allah from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving (35: 27–28).

Jenn and Alexis discussed undertaking a Sufi approach to Islam, since it was inclusive of sexual and gender diversity as based on their lived experiences. As mentioned elsewhere in the chapter, Sufism has tended to be more accepting and tolerant of gender parity and sexual diversity (Safi, 2003) than Wahhabi and Salafist approaches (Jamal, 2013). It has been documented in the extant scholarship that White converts tend to gravitate toward Sufism in the Global North than the Salafist approaches, since the former is aligned with secularism, and the latter with radical and traditionalist Islam (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009b). Salafi approaches to Islam are constructed as traditional, heteronormative and thus not LGBTQ friendly (Al-Sayyad, 2010), even though there exists diversity, (irrespective of what approach is utilized) in how each Muslim observes their faith tradition (Safi, 2003). At times, Sufism is classified as “mysticism” and seen as separate from Islam; or is taken up in new age spiritual practices (where religious elements are removed altogether or minimized); and a safer “Islam” separate from conservative Islam (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009b) Further, there exist many Sufi spiritual groups that offer no connection to Islam (Klinkhammer, 2009; Schönbeck, 2009). Sufism is palatable to Europeans, and Westerners since “Sufi communities often appear to stand out as an alternative to more ethnically defined congregations and especially to younger people an alternative arena” (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009b, p. 8). Even though Islamic sects are deeply influenced by Sufism, some approaches to Islam are considered more ethnic, less trusting, and not accessible to individuals in Canada and the US. Further research is warranted to examine the lived experiences of diverse queer, trans, bisexual and lesbian convert women based on race, ethnicity, among other markers of “difference” and shifts in Islamic practices over time.

¹These verses and more have been discussed in detail in Hendricks (2010), Jahangir and Abdullatif (2016), and Kugle (2010).

8.5 Building Communities of Sexually and Gender Diverse Muslims

LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks in Canada and the US have gained ascendancy in the last few decades. These support groups help create spaces where sexually and gender diverse Muslims can build community and belonging around ethno-racial, spiritual, and religious realms among other important areas. One of the aims of such spaces is to affirm a sexually and gender diverse Muslim ethos which can support Muslims with coming to terms with their identity and reconciling issues between faith and sexuality. This has been evident in the extant scholarship on identity navigation for sexually and gender diverse Muslims where support groups like Imaan (UK, US), Safra Project (UK), Salaam and the Unity Mosque (Canada, US) have been used to recruit participants for research (Kugle, 2014; Siraj, 2009, 2011).

In Canada, Salaam is a national Muslim LGBTQ non-profit support group with chapters across the provinces. Notably, the term *salaam* is commonly translated as “peace” and is also considered a characteristic of the Creator. The support group directs its programming to anyone who identifies as Muslim and engages in community building with an emphasis on social justice. Some examples of the programming offered at Salaam are delivering information on topics relevant to Muslims (i.e. anti-racism and anti-Black racism workshops), drop-in therapeutic groups, and social and cultural events (i.e. Eid and Ramadan celebrations). One of the core principles propelling the programming is the reconciliation and affirmation of LGBTQ and Muslim identities from affirmative and pluralistic Islamic perspectives.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the standpoint perspectives of three sexually diverse Muslim women who converted to Islam. Their stories provide insights into how Muslim converts are practicing their “Islams” within the larger progressive Muslim communities which are sexuality and gender affirmative. The convert stories promote pluralistic understandings of Islam and argue against orientalist constructions of the faith tradition. Additionally, the converts rejected the Arabicization of Islamic discourse, which is prevalent in normative Muslim communities.

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Part III
Health and Healing

Chapter 9

Health and Wellbeing: Bridging Secular and Islamic Worldviews



Syed Rizvi and Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Abstract Wellbeing has been operationalized in a variety of ways, most of which fit within either a hedonic and/or eudemonic framework. The hedonic worldview equates wellbeing with subjective happiness, pleasure and momentary experiences of positive over negative affect, whereas a eudemonic worldview understands psychological wellbeing as capturing aspects of self-actualization, living well, and reaching one's potential by developing inner capacities that serve to make an individual more fully functioning. "Chaironic" happiness, a relatively recent addition to the discussion, takes a different approach by considering the influence of spiritual and transcendental elements in wellbeing. For practicing Muslims, the goal of life is not the attainment of complete happiness, but rather a complete submission and orientation towards God. In this chapter, we discuss these conceptualizations as well as the ways in which Muslim health and wellbeing may be attained through the Five Pillars of Islam.

9.1 Introduction

In the late 1970s, George Engel introduced the biopsychosocial model of health, which incorporated psychological and social factors in the diagnosis and treatment of illness. While the traditional biomedical model focuses primarily on the biological influences of symptomology at an individual level, this systems-level approach integrates variables such as cognitive beliefs, social relationships, and cultural influences on the development of illness, as well as the ways in which wellbeing can be attained. Focusing solely on dysfunction without consideration of wellbeing

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factors provides an incomplete picture as biological, psychological, and social processes operate together to contribute to health outcomes (Suls & Rothman, 2004). Although the biomedical model continues to be utilized in the practice of medicine (Alonso, 2004), steps towards an integrated model of health have been taken in basic and applied research, giving rise to new interdisciplinary fields, such as health psychology and psychoneuroimmunology (Havelka, Despot Lučanin, & Lučanin, 2009). More recently, researchers have posited that a biopsychosocial-spiritual paradigm is needed for a more holistic understanding of health and wellbeing (Katerndahl, 2008; Saad, De Medeiros, & Mosini, 2017). This aligns with indigenous approaches to psychology that advocate for the inclusion of multiple ways of exploring human experiences (de Gouveia & Ebersöhn, 2019), particularly within non-Western cultures and populations. In working with marginalized communities such as indigenous tribes and nations who have been historically oppressed through various systems of colonization, the implicit assumptions of Western psychology continue to create knowledge that privileges Eurocentric and North American ideals as universal, while regarding other beliefs as deficient or abnormal. As indigenous psychologies are more likely to include ritual, ceremonial, and spiritual facets, they align with other subdisciplines such as transpersonal psychology and existential psychology that focus on attaining higher consciousness, facilitating inner peace, and finding meaning and purpose through spiritual endeavors (Wong, Ivtzan, & Lomas, 2016).

9.2 Psychological Approaches to Wellbeing

Wellbeing has been operationalized in a variety of ways, with the majority of psychologists categorizing it under the umbrella of hedonic and/or eudemonic wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The hedonic worldview equates wellbeing with subjective happiness, pleasure and momentary experiences of positive over negative affect (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), whereas the eudemonic approach looks at broader orientations to behavior such as sense of purpose, positive relations with others and personal growth (Huta, 2016). Hedonistic philosophers argue that humans are innately driven towards maximizing pleasure over displeasure, with higher and lower forms distinguishable based upon quality of pleasure. For example, amongst certain Greek philosophers of the Epicurean school; a pleasure-seeking activity that is also noble supersedes a pleasure-seeking activity that is not noble (Crisp, 2006). Eudemonia was pioneered by Aristotle who understood flourishing and happiness as behaviors and activities that reflect virtue, excellence, and the fullest development of one's potential (Tiberius & Hall, 2010). A eudemonic approach considers points of convergence between traits such as self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery and autonomy (Ryff, 2014). While a hedonic approach contextualizes happiness as a subjective state that human beings seek to possess, eudemonists define happiness as the active pursuit of the virtues and ideals that are worth pursuing

(Huta & Waterman, 2014); happiness is therefore a byproduct, rather than a goal in itself (Ryan & Martela, 2016).

Although hedonism (operationalized as subjective wellbeing or SWB in research wherein an individual would be experiencing high SWB if they reported satisfaction in life and greater experiences of pleasure and positivity, over displeasure and negative affectivity; Diener & Lucas, 2000) and eudemonia are often contrasted with one another, this dichotomous view does not allow for the convergence of the two, such as a case in which someone may “feel positive emotions towards a life in which they are functioning well” (Keyes & Annas, 2009, p. 198). In fact, a systematic review by van de Weijer et al. (2018) of 29 peer-reviewed studies on SWB and eudemonic wellbeing (EWB) found a large overlap between the two constructs. While the attainment of pleasure may not necessarily dictate a virtuous life, facets of eudemonic wellbeing such as altruism, autonomy, relatedness and personal growth positively predict SWB indexes such as positive affect and life satisfaction (Batson & Powell, 2003; Emmons & Diener, 1986; Ryan & Deci, 2000). King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gaiso (2006) found that priming positive emotions leads to an enhanced sense of purpose. At the same time, individuals who report higher levels of SWB also tend to report more meaning in life and higher sensitivity to life goals (Hicks & King, 2007; Kashdan, Biswar-Diener, & King, 2008). Schueller and Seligman (2010) found stronger positive affect in individuals who pursued meaningful activities compared to those who pursued pleasure. Given this bidirectionality, many researchers have pushed for a single factor solution that collapses hedonia and eudemonia into one construct. Kashdan et al. (2008) propose that the dichotomy between eudemonia and hedonia has less to do with actual science than it has to do with philosophy, suggesting that both are parts of the same profile which synergistically and concomitantly influence diverse outcome variables such as affect, meaning in life, meaningful social relationships, and engagement. More recently, however, using exploratory structural equation modeling (ESCM), Joshanloo (2016) found that hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing are correlated but separate distinct factors.

As the debate about the empirical underpinnings of the constructs continues among wellbeing researchers, another area of discussion has been the use of psychological instruments to measure wellbeing. Researchers have criticized the use of measures that focus primarily on SWB, as this implicitly suggests that individual evaluations of happiness such as material wealth, comparison standards, and temperament represent benchmarks for a “good life” (Joshanloo, 2014; Keyes & Annas, 2009). Nozick’s pleasure machine thought experiment (Nozick, 1974) provides insight into the superficiality of such a worldview: if pleasurable experiences are all that mattered, people would choose to live in a theoretical machine that provides them the maximum amount of pleasure rather than the real world, which consists of hardships, pain and obstacles. Since we cannot attain maximum pleasure or even positive affect in a continuous manner, this indicates that factors other than hedonia pleasure play a role in happiness (Kesebir, 2018). Additionally, by relegating adversity to the realm of dysfunction, the first wave of positive psychology fell into the same cultural trappings of mainstream Western psychology. According to

this paradigm, an individual who is enjoying a peaceful and prosperous life may have a higher SWB score compared to someone who is struggling with adverse conditions such as poverty, homelessness or loss; however, the latter may show higher scores on other facets of wellbeing, such as resilience, hope, grit, and spiritual growth (Wong, 2017). Furthermore, Eastern and other indigenous philosophers and researchers have commented on lack of virtues such as communal harmony, inner peace, serenity, and other introspective ideals in Western conceptualizations of wellbeing (Joshanloo, 2014). In his reconceptualization of wellbeing, Wong (2011) suggests a “chaironic” happiness category that goes beyond hedonic and eudemonic perspectives and encompasses transcendent dimensions such as awe, gratitude, oneness with nature and connection with God. A product of the second wave of positive psychology (PP 2.0), this model emphasizes a number of key elements, including the coactivation of positive *and* negative emotions, understanding the role of suffering in forming meaning, recognition of collectivist ideals such as activism for the common good, broadening happiness to allow for ethical responsibility and morality, and adequate conceptualization of transcendent concepts such as purpose, devotion to something higher, self-knowledge, enlightenment, spiritual wellbeing, existential courage and harmony (Wong et al., 2016).

9.3 Religion/Spirituality and Wellbeing

Religiosity and spirituality are not homogenous or even interchangeable concepts (Hill et al., 2000; Hyman & Handal, 2006). Religion may contribute to something entirely unique once other variables have been accounted for, particularly in the context of adjustment to critical life events (Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005). Pargament (2002) states that religiosity is constantly shifting and evolving, possibly through a developmental sequence as noted by Fowler (1981) and further suggested by Pasha-Zaidi and Odeh (2019) in their theoretical framework of Islamic identity development. For example, an individual may shift from an extrinsic orientation towards religion (a “religious-but-not-spiritual” identification), towards an intrinsic orientation (a “religious-and-spiritual” identification). Additionally, research varies in whether spirituality exists as a component of religiosity or as a separate dimension (Pargament et al., 2005). Over the past few decades, spirituality has increasingly become regarded as distinct from religiosity (Hill et al., 2000), with the former encompassing an individualized approach to transcendence while the latter is characterized by institutionalized beliefs and practices (Weaver, Pargament, Flannelly, & Oppenheimer, 2006). This appears to be particularly common among health professionals and psychologists who define themselves as spiritual but not religious (Delaney, Miller, & Bisonó, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Although spirituality, defined as a connection to something greater than oneself, may not necessarily reflect the symbols or rituals of any particular organized religion, research into the relationship between spirituality and wellbeing often includes religious affiliations and ways of knowing, particularly as most Indigenous and

People of Color (IPOC) self-report higher rates of religiosity (Chang, Downey, Hirsch, & Lin, 2016). Shiah, Chang, Chiang, and Tam (2016) point out that the individualism in both hedonic and eudemonic conceptualizations of wellbeing fits better in a Western Christian context as compared to Buddhist or Taoist contexts which understand wellbeing along dimensions of societal harmony and collectivism. This can also be applied to Islamic value systems which emphasize both individual and collective traits (Lambert & Pasha-Zaidi, 2015, 2019). In looking at wellbeing from a Hindu perspective, Mishra (2012) notes that abstract and ethereal concepts such as aspects of the cosmos in relation to the human spirit do not fit with Western secular frameworks of wellbeing that promote an independent self, seeking further individuation.

Ironically, while theoretical considerations of R/S seem to align more easily with eudemonic or chaironic wellbeing, many research studies have instead focused on the positive relationship between religiosity and measures of hedonic wellbeing such as SWB, positive/negative affect, and life satisfaction (Graham & Crown, 2014; Lun & Bond, 2013; Pokimica, Addai, & Takyi, 2012; Steffen, 2012). However, as health is deeply influenced by social, cultural, and philosophical factors (Unantenne, Warren, Canaway, & Manderson, 2013), psychologists may miss aspects that are integral to a client's wellbeing if they rely solely on SWB self-report scales to determine wellness. Quality of life and personal relationships are often viewed through spiritual practice, but the integration of R/S in healthcare seems to be limited to pastoral or palliative care (Davidson et al., 2007). The reluctance of many practitioners to bring up R/S variables may be a disservice to those clients for whom such an approach could lead to positive outcomes. Religious coping strategies have been found across Western Christian and Muslim populations (Diener & Seligman, 2004) and demonstrate a buffering effect in the face of stressful conditions. Mattis et al. (2016) note that approximately 90% of African Americans report "turning to God for strength, support and guidance" and are more likely than Caucasian populations to rely on religious beliefs and utilize religious coping methods. Although studies have found mediators relating better health practices, enhanced social support, self-regulation strategies and belief structures to functional or extrinsic aspects of religion and spirituality (George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002), R/S is not solely defined by utilitarian or functional benefits; it also incorporates abstract concepts such as the pursuit of meaning and sacred experiences (Pargament, 2002).

While researchers have implied the importance of transcendence (Seligman, 2018), research and practice continues to emphasize physical dimensions related to wellbeing such as socioeconomic status. Even though indigenous, transpersonal and existential approaches emphasize spirituality in health and wellbeing (Wong et al., 2016), the dearth of psychological tools, measures, and training opportunities (Begum, 2012; Mueller, 2013) coupled with the avoidance of R/S topics in therapeutic relationships discourages the application of spiritual approaches in the practice of psychology (Post & Wade, 2009). Although the US is considered a highly religious country, in an analysis of 292 APA-accredited psychology training programs, Vogel, McMinn, Peterson, and Gathercoal (2013) found minimal and

unsystematic efforts in training for religious diversity. It is worth mentioning that race is often used as a proxy for diversity within educational sectors, particularly in Western migrant-receiving countries where minority religions are subsumed within minoritized racial categories (Joshi, 2016). Additionally, while many positive psychology interventions (PPIs) reflect R/S beliefs and teachings, programs developed by psychologists often present PPIs through secular language (Rye, Wade, Fleri, & Kidwell, 2013).

This is not surprising; psychologists are much less likely to engage in religious endeavors than the general public (Lukoff, Lu, & Turner, 1992; Rosmarin et al., 2013). While only about 1–5% of the general public considers itself agnostic or atheist, over 50% of psychologists describe themselves as such (Bergin & Jensen, 1990; Hyman & Handal, 2006). Although surveys of psychology professionals indicate an awareness of the benefits of R/S to mental health and its relevance as a potential interventional strategy, many psychologists prefer to steer clear of R/S considerations (Post & Wade, 2009; Saunders, Miller, & Bright, 2010). On average, only about 30% of clinicians discuss R/S with their clients, and less than 50% bring it up during the assessment process (Hathaway, Scott, & Garver, 2004), even though many religious clients prefer therapy that is consistent with their R/S worldviews (Bergin & Jensen, 1990; Rose, Westefeld, & Ansely, 2001). Psychologists often fear that broaching R/S topics can be interpreted by clients as judgmental and proselytizing (Gonsiorek, Richards, Pargament, & McMinn, 2009). Part of this reluctance is related to a lack of competence by practitioners in spiritual and religious matters, a worry that is also shared by their clients. Inappropriate use of religious interventions, even with clients who share the clinician's religious affiliation, can be ineffective or even psychologically detrimental (Martinez, Smith, & Barlow, 2007). Studies also note that psychologists may hold explicit or implicit biases against perceived client religiosity, at times assigning higher ratings of pathology to religious clients compared to secular ones who present identical symptomology (Gartner, Harmatz, Hohmann, Larson, & Gartner, 1990; O'Connor & Vandenberg, 2005). This disparity in clinical diagnoses has additional ramifications for clients who come from minority religious affiliations that are stigmatized or with which practitioners may be less familiar (Judd & Vandenberg, 2014), as the activation of harmful stereotypes can create more barriers to health and wellbeing.

A Deeper Dive: Promoting Wellbeing Through Mindfulness and Spirituality

Syed Rizvi and Gulden Esat

There is an unprecedented rise in mental illness at college campuses, which has been exacerbated by the uncertainty and wide reach of the COVID 19 pandemic (Lee, 2020). As of September 2020, COVID-19 has resulted in

(continued)

over 900,000 deaths globally, with the US accounting for over one-fifth of that number (Johns Hopkins, 2020). The Mindfulness, Well-Being & Spirituality Lab at the University of Houston utilizes spirituality as a way to enjoin compassion, present-moment awareness and self-reflection among university students. Mindfulness is an area of contemplative science that stems from Eastern, particularly Buddhist, psychological practices of introspection (Black, 2011), emphasizing attention that is purposeful, in the present moment and nonjudgmental (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). As with other psychological practices that emerged from various R/S traditions, once in the realm of Western social science, mindfulness was stripped of its spiritual qualities in the quest for secular empiricism independent of cultural, religious and esoteric beliefs (Black, 2011). The research wing of the Mindfulness Lab seeks to understand spirituality and mindfulness as supplementary techniques for enabling wellbeing and reducing negative symptomology. Interestingly, while conducting semi-randomized controlled trials of “Mindfulness” (active control condition) and “Mindfulness + Spirituality” (intervention condition) training with over 500 university students, consistent results were found indicating that mindfulness training is perceived to be spiritual, even though the content does not explicitly prompt spirituality. Participants received the training in the fall semester of 2018–2019. Self-reports of mental health symptoms and wellbeing data were collected at the beginning and end of the fall semester, and at the end of the following spring semester. Analysis of the three repeated measures found that total depression, anxiety and stress scores remained stable in the intervention condition but increased significantly in the control condition. The spiritual condition participants showed slightly better results in the reduction of symptoms; however, the difference between the two groups was not significant for this trial. As participants perceived a spiritual component in the mindfulness training, regardless of its explicit inclusion, it is possible that this perception acted as a confounding variable. Larger sample sizes may also be needed to detect smaller statistically significant differences between the groups.

For more information, visit www.mindfuluh.org

9.4 Islam and Wellbeing

A dual perspective is needed to bridge Islamic and Western psychology, where theoretical models supported by an Islamic worldview are integrated with Western science for broader utilization amongst non-mainstream communities. The term *islam* translates to “surrender” or “submission”, and abiding by the will of God is considered to be the route to peace and wellbeing (Gordon, 2002). Through submission to God, striving for personal goals such as commitment to prayer and charity and self-regulation, Muslims move from a lower self (*an-nafs al-ammarah*),

characterized by the lure of hedonistic pleasure and material possessions, to a self-accusing self (*an-nafs al-luwwamah*) where the conscience is awakened and one actively seeks nearness to God. The ideal is to reach a state of peace (*an-nafs al-mutam'innah*) through a complete commitment to faith (Al-Haqqani & Kabbani, 2002). Spiritual health is therefore a major component of wellbeing for religious individuals including Muslims. Mastering one's desires through struggle and self-discipline can bring Muslims closer to God, which is the aim of self-actualization within an Islamic paradigm. Although, various schools of thought in Islamic theology approach the concept of free will and predetermination (*qadr*) differently, a level of autonomy and agency is afforded to humanity to solve their own issues: "Indeed Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in it themselves" (Qur'an 13:11). Ultimately, however, this world is seen as a transient passage on a journey to an eternal Hereafter. Although pleasure itself is not shunned or seen as inherently bad in Islam, the attainment of pleasure aligns with Aristotle's view as a byproduct of being virtuous and engaging in good actions (Eryilmaz & Kula, 2020). Thus philosophically, Islam approaches the very concept of flourishing, happiness, and purpose from a transcendental approach that can only be attained by submission to God (*Marifat-Allah*) who is the manifestation of Truth (*Al-Haqq*), Justice (*Al-Adl*), Love (*Al-Wujood*), Mercy (*Al-Raheem*), Knowledge (*Al-Aleem*), Nourishment (*Al-Muqit*), and the Owner of All Worlds (*Malik Al Mulk*). The Qur'an encourages believers to see the influences of Allah in all facets of life: "Indeed in the creations of the heavens and the earth, and the alteration of the night and day, there are signs for those who contemplate" (Qur'an, 3:191). Here, *tafakkur* or contemplation opens avenues to wellbeing (Hassan, 2010). Thus, for a practicing Muslim, self-reflection, contemplation, prayer, remembrance, humility and gratitude are the keys to peace, joy and fulfillment in this world and beyond.

In attempting to establish wellbeing from an Islamic standpoint, Eryilmaz and Kula (2020) set forth three important criteria which facilitate happiness in adherents. First, a Muslim must believe in the central tenants of Islam; including *tawheed* (oneness of God), the Prophets, the Angels, the Hereafter, the Day of Judgment and scripture. These foundations of faith enable individuals to put their trust in Allah who places peace in the hearts of those who seek to remember Him (Qur'an 13:28). The second condition of happiness requires Muslims to follow the divine laws set forth by God; these include rituals (five daily prayers), ethics (how we behave when interacting with others), individual and social obligations (being active in the affairs of the global *ummah* or Muslim community) as well as placing full trust and confidence in the Creator. Third, Muslims must set an intention (*niyah*) of being happy for the sake of Allah. In terms of hedonic wellbeing, Islam promotes moderated pleasure rather than unlimited pleasure, which is ultimately tied to the transcendent aspect of faith (Eryilmaz & Kula, 2020). There are many ways to explore wellbeing within an Islamic framework and much work has already been done in this regard (Abde & Salih, 2015; Asadzandi, 2019; Joshanloo, 2016; Moeini, Sharifi, & Kajbaf, 2016). To add to the existing literature, we explore health wellbeing as a function of the Five Pillars of Islam (profession of faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca or Hajj).

9.4.1 *Wellbeing and Profession of Faith*

One way that psychologists can better understand a Muslim approach to wellbeing is to establish a baseline for religiosity. Several studies note the influence of faith on positive health outcomes, including lower scores of anxiety and depression (Laurencelle, Abell, & Schwartz, 2002), higher scores of balanced affect (Francis & Kaldor, 2002), and lower rates of substance abuse and alcoholism (Kendler, Gardner, & Prescott, 1997). As the testimony of faith is the first pillar of Islam: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Messenger”, in working with practicing Muslims, it is important to consider the ways in which faith (*iman*) may impact health and wellbeing. Primarily, it can help psychologists find out whether the need to embed a religious or spiritual framework is even relevant to their client, as some Muslims may not endorse either religion or spirituality as being prescient to their current mental health concerns. Owing to the fact that Muslims are not a monolithic group, incorporating aspects of religion or spirituality that are not reflective of their worldviews can lead to greater harm, leaving clients feeling that a certain religious viewpoint is being imposed upon them or that they are being judged for their beliefs (Martinez et al., 2007). On the other hand, for many Muslims especially those living in Muslim majority regions, culture and religion may be intricately linked (Roy, 2006), so any discussion of cultural influences on wellbeing may also have religious connotations. For practicing Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, the experience or perceptions of Islamophobia along with issues of acculturation and diasporic integration may have consequences for wellbeing that should not be ignored (Amer & Hovey, 2005; Kunst, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2013; Samari, Alcalá, & Sharif, 2018). As such, it is incumbent upon practitioners who work with Muslim clients to make an effort to learn about the ways in which professions of faith and religious affiliations may be affecting their clients’ wellbeing. Creating partnerships with local Islamic centers can be beneficial to both psychologists who may be uncomfortable addressing religious aspects of health as well as to imams who are often unprepared to deal with psychological issues (Ali & Milstein, 2012; see also Chap. 14 in this book).

9.4.2 *Wellbeing and Prayer*

As the second pillar of Islam, prayer, or *salah*, is a meditative activity that is performed in both private and communal spaces. *Salah* incorporates recitations of the Qur’an with different physical postures, including standing, bowing, sitting, and prostration. Muslims are enjoined to perform *salah* at specific intervals throughout each day: at dawn (*al-Fajr*), midday (*al-Dhuhr*), late afternoon (*al-Asr*), sunset (*al-Maghrib*) and late evening (*al-Isha*). Engaging in *salah* has several prerequisites such as ritual cleansing (ablution), facing the *Qibla* (in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca), and forming the intention to pray (*niyah*). Studies using a variety of

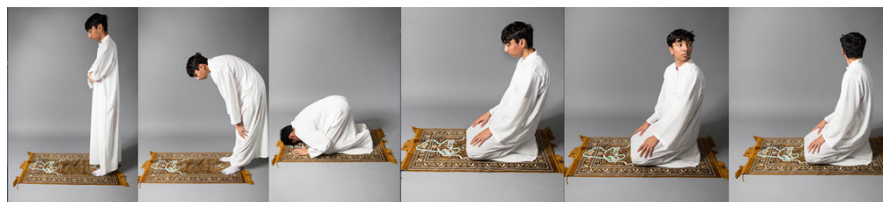


Fig. 5.1 Cycle of *salah* poses for various Islamic madhabs including Hanafi, Sha'fi & Hanbali schools



Fig. 5.2 Cycle of *salah* poses for various Islamic madhabs including Maliki & Jafari Shia schools. Maliki school prays with hands down but does not have a *kunoot* pose (hands open towards the sky after 2nd *rakah*)

neurophysiological data show an increase in parasympathetic activity of the nervous system during *salah*, indicating a state of relaxation (Doufesh, Faisal, Lim, & Ibrahim, 2012; Doufesh, Ibrahim, Ismail, & Wan Ahmad, 2014; Khanam, Rahman, & Ahmad, 2018) as well as increased gamma power in various cerebral regions that may reflect greater cognitive and attentional processing (Doufesh, Ibrahim, & Safari, 2016). Additional studies have noted the positive impact of *salah* on heart rate and blood pressure (Doufesh, Ibrahim, Ismail, & Ahmad, 2013) along with improvement in muscle tone, posture and balance (Putri & Nurviyandari, 2018; Reza, Urakami, & Mano, 2002) due to the physical movements required as shown in Figs. 5.1 and 5.2.

While *salah* is considered obligatory prayer, *dhikr* (meaning “remembrance of Allah”) is another meditative practice that involves repetition or chanting of God’s Divine Names and Attributes (*Al-Asma Al-Husna*). For centuries, Sufi Muslims who follow a mystical approach to Islam have created various techniques of *dhikr* (Saniotis, 2018). Utilizing prolonged, repetitive movements and intensive concentration, the performance of *dhikr* may elicit altered states of consciousness that reflect parasympathetic dominance, resulting in a heightened sense of calm and a reduction in stress hormones (Winkelman, 2002). Newberg et al. (2015) suggest that the changes in brain activity associated with Islamic prayer may reflect feelings of surrender and connectedness to God. Although scientific verification of indigenous Islamic practices is certainly useful for researchers and practitioners to support evidence-based work, for practicing Muslims, they add credence to the benefits already stated in the Qur’an (13:28): “Only in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest”.

9.4.3 Wellbeing and Charity

Zakah or compulsory charity is the third pillar of Islam, requiring Muslim individuals and businesses to pay 2.5% of their revenues and assets each year to those in need, including “the poor, the needy, the wayfarer, the heavily indebted, freedom of slaves, new converts to Islam, and the cause of Allah” (Nasir & Zainol, 2007, p. 262). Unlike conventional taxes, *zakah* is considered a form of purification that plays an important role in the moral and social wellbeing of Muslim societies (Sulaiman, 2003). Muda, Marzuki, and Shaharuddin (2006) note that altruism is the major motivator for *zakah*, with participants gaining satisfaction through the performance of the activity itself, rather than in anticipation of external rewards (see Chap. 2 in this book). Indeed, research consistently finds that kind emotions, helping behaviors and altruism are associated with wellbeing, health, life satisfaction and longevity (Post, 2005). Helping behaviors are also positively linked with higher levels of purpose, self-acceptance and positive relations (Ryff, 2014). Although self-interest is a natural driving force of much of human motivation (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009), Islamically it must be tied to the overall moral framework of justice (*adalaat*) and virtue. While *zakah* is obligatory, the guiding principles of Islam encourage additional acts of charity including *sadaqah* (acts that bring joy to others) and *udhiyyah* (the religious sacrifice of an animal such as a goat or cow, followed by distribution of meat among family, friends and the poor). From a systems perspective, embedding altruism can also take the form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which considers wealthy individuals and organizations as caretakers of society and defines success by higher levels of socially responsible business practices rather than solely through profit (Dusuki, 2008). Muslim businesses that participate in CSR set an example of the collective responsibility that Islam places upon its followers, as Muslims are expected to contribute to the wellbeing of both individuals and societies (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

9.4.4 Wellbeing and Fasting

Ramadan, or *sawm* (month of fasting) is a requirement of the Islamic faith, incumbent upon Muslims who are physically and mentally able. During Ramadan, Muslims are expected to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, sexual intercourse and other “acts of pleasure” from sunrise to sunset (Abu-Raiya, 2006). “Immature children, women at the time of menstruating, pregnancy and lactation, as well as sick people and travelers who stay in the local area for less than ten days, are exempt from fasting; but except for children, other individuals should pay the indebted fasting in other months” (Gilavand & Fatahial, 2018, p. 206). Ramadan is a time to engage in the mastery of one’s physical desires and to concentrate on one’s relationship with God. As Islam is a religion that values self-discipline, fasting is one of the compulsory activities like daily prayer that provides practice in self-regulation

and self-control. People with better self-control routinely report better positive affect, decreased anger, better family environment, stronger social relationships, and less health problems (Steffen, 2012).

Numerous studies have explored the physiological benefits associated with intermittent fasting, including weight loss (Rohin et al., 2013; Ziaee et al., 2006); reduced insulin resistance (Boden, Chen, Mozzoli, & Ryan, 1996), reduced blood glucose (Kul, Savaş, Öztürk, & Karadağ, 2014), prevention of diabetes (Brown, Mosley, & Aldred, 2013), cancer prevention and treatment, (Marinac et al., 2016; Rogozina, Nkhata, Nagle, Grande, & Cleary, 2013), protection against neurodegeneration (Arumugam et al., 2010), and extended lifespan (Mattson & Wan, 2005; Mercken, Carboneau, Krzysik-Walker, & de Cabo, 2012). At the same time, unhealthy eating habits and lack of physical exercise during Ramadan can result in surprising weight gain (Bakhotmah, 2011). Thus, maintaining proper diet, monitoring fluid intake during the non-fasting hours, and engaging in physical activity are important. Individuals who take oral medications at specific times during the day should check with their doctor before fasting (Rashed, 1992). While occurrences of irritability, headaches, and sleep deprivation are common during Ramadan (Leiper & Molla, 2003), studies have found that post-Ramadan scores of depression, stress, and anxiety are lower than pre-Ramadan scores (Erdem, 2018; Koushali et al., 2013). Although productivity tends to decline (Toda & Morimoto, 2004), with lower levels of activity and concentration during daylight hours (Afifi, 1997; Karaagaoglu & Yucecan, 2000), Ramadan fasting has been shown to have positive effects on SWB (Campante & Yanagizawa-Drott, 2015). Ugur (2018) found that Muslims who fasted fully during Ramadan showed the highest levels of happiness compared to those who missed fasts or those who were unable to complete their fasts. Additionally, Abadi, Farid, Bahari, and Chami (2012) found a positive association between fasting and spiritual intelligence. According to Raqib and Siadat (2009), spiritual intelligence, or the ability to apply spiritual skills to both the challenges of daily life as well as to loftier goals of humanity, is the basis of belief and meaningfulness. Thus, despite the challenges of fasting during Ramadan, such as sleepiness (Roky, Toufiq, Benaji, & Hakkou, 1999), lethargy (Afifi, 1997), irritability (Kadri et al., 2000), and headaches (Awada & Jumah, 1999), Muslims who are able to fast can attain physical, spiritual, and mental health during the Holy Month.

9.4.5 Wellbeing and the Hajj

Making the pilgrimage to Mecca is expected of all Muslims who are able to do so at least once in their lifetimes. Based on the Islamic lunar calendar, the Hajj occurs in the twelfth month, *Dhul-Hijjah*, between the eighth and thirteenth days of the month, and is performed by over two million Muslims each year. Interestingly, it is the only Islamic pillar that follows a pre-Islamic pattern as most of the Hajj rituals are modified versions of those that were performed by pre-Islamic Arabs (Jennah, 2005). Even though the focus is on individual worship, the practice of each

participant leads to a shared experience where ethnic, gender, national and sectarian identities are subsumed within a communal identity, reinforced through common dress and standard communal rites (Timothy & Iverson, 2006).

A Deeper Dive: Hajj Rituals

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

The Hajj is divided into several parts, the first of which is entering a state of ritual purification known as *ihram* where everyday clothing is replaced with simple loose dresses or abayas for women and white unstitched cloth sheets that men wrap around themselves. In the state of *ihram*, pilgrims must follow certain rules, such as refraining from anger and sexual activity. On the 8th day of *Dhul-Hijjah*, pilgrims circumambulate around the Kaaba seven times in a counter-clockwise direction (*tawaf*). The Holy Kaaba, a stone structure covered in black silk, lies at the heart of the Grand Mosque (*Masjid Al-Haram*). Believed to have been built by Abraham during Biblical times, the Kaaba symbolizes wholeness and connection to the Divine (Spiegelman, 2005). After *tawaf*, Muslims pray at the Station of Abraham and drink water from the Well of Zamzam (Timothy & Iverson, 2006). In Islamic tradition, Abraham was commanded by God to leave Hajar and their son, Ishmael, in the desert. When they ran out of provisions, Hajar went searching for water for her child, running between the hills of Safa and Marwa seven times until her efforts were rewarded by God, who granted the spring of *zamzan* to quench Ishmael's thirst. During the Hajj, Muslim pilgrims walk back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwa (*sa'i*) in remembrance of Hajar's patience and persistence. The pilgrims then set out on an 8 km journey from Mecca to the tent-city of Mina, where they spend the day in prayer and contemplation (Naar, 2017).

Day 2 of the Hajj, the Day of Arafat, is one of the most important days of the Islamic calendar. Pilgrims head out at dawn for a fourteen kilometer trek to Mount Arafat, where it is said that the Prophet Muhammad delivered his final sermon. Muslims spend the day in prayer, setting out after sunset on a nine kilometer journey to Muzdalifah where they spend the night under the stars. Many will also begin collecting pebbles for the next day's rites. On Day 3, the pilgrims return to Mina where they throw stones at three pillars (*jamaraat*) that symbolize Satan (Timothy & Iverson, 2006). According to Islamic tradition, Abraham was commanded by God to sacrifice Ishmael as proof of his faith, and it was at this point in Mina where Satan tried to dissuade him from

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following God's decree. Abraham responded by throwing stones at the devil, a tradition that is commemorated as part of the Hajj rituals. After casting stones, pilgrims who can afford it will sacrifice a cow, goat, sheep or camel. This completes the commemoration of Abraham's story when God replaced Ishmael with a ram that was sacrificed. The pilgrims also trim their hair (men may shave it completely) and replace their *ihram* with regular clothes. Many proceed to Mecca to perform additional sets of *tawaf* and *sa'i*, returning to Mina for the last few days of the pilgrimage where they throw more stones at the *jamaraat*. At the end of their time in Mina, the pilgrims return to Mecca to perform the final *tawaf* (Naar, 2017).

The Hajj is both physically challenging and spiritually uplifting, an experience of "lived religion" (Buitelaar, 2015; Caidi, 2019). Although the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) provides free medical care to pilgrims and takes stringent measures to limit the transmission of disease, crowded conditions, physical exhaustion, and the intense heat of the region particularly during summer months, along with an increase in elderly pilgrims, leads to a greater risk of communicable diseases such as respiratory infections, meningitis, and bloodborne diseases as well as non-communicable ailments such as heat stroke, dehydration, and possible trauma from stampedes or motor vehicle accidents (Memish, 2010). Pilgrims also report being anxious prior to arriving in KSA and concerned about the correct way to complete the rituals (Caidi, 2019). Women face additional challenges such as hygiene conditions, difficulty moving in the crowds, and the possibility of menstruation which would restrict their ability to engage in the Hajj rituals (Caidi, 2019; Gunlu & Okumus, 2010). Despite the plethora of concerns, Hajj pilgrims report a feeling of overwhelming awe upon seeing the Kaaba for the first time (Caidi, 2019; Vincent, 2019). Bakhtiari, Arani, Karamkhani, Khubestani, and Mohammadi (2017) note that the overall Hajj experience results in decreased anxiety, depression, and stress for pilgrims, along with a significant increase in meaning of life. Despite the dangers associated with crowding, belonging to a collective appears to create a sense of security. A survey of 1194 pilgrims during the Hajj found that pilgrims were not threatened by the crowd density if they identified closely with the masses (Alnabulsi & Drury, 2014). As a massive physical, emotional, and spiritual undertaking, the experience of Hajj not only inspires a greater sense of unity and acceptance within the Muslim *ummah* (Wolfe, 1997), it also results in more positive views of other religious groups and a greater orientation towards harmony and peace (Clingsmith, Khwaja, & Kremer, 2009).

A Deeper Dive: The Spiritual Path to Karbala

Syed Rizvi

Every year on the first month of the Islamic calendar (*Muhurram*), millions of Muslims gather in Karbala, Iraq for the ritual of Ashura. This pilgrimage is the largest religious gathering in the world with an estimated 22 million pilgrims¹ visiting the shrine of Imam Hussein, the Third Imam of Shi'a Muslims and grandson of the Prophet (Christia, Dekeyser, & Knox, 2016). Unfortunately, under the Iraqi Baath regime of Saddam Hussein (early 1970s–2003), the pilgrimage to Karbala was closely monitored and limited, reducing the numbers significantly during that time. Although that has changed, Shi'a sites and pilgrims continue to be attacked by Islamist organizations such as Daesh (ISIS) who contend that many Shi'a practices are heretical innovations not rooted in Islamic *sunnah* (*shirk* or *biddah*,). While Shi'a Muslims share the same basic tenants (*usul ad-din* or five roots of faith) as followers of Sunni Islam,² *imamat* or recognizing the divine leadership of the lineage of the Prophet is an additional component. Devotion to the Imams is therefore central to Shi'ism and is marked by visits to the shrines of various Imams and their offspring, such as the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, Iraq or the shrine of the 8th Imam Ali al-Ridha in Mashad, Iran.

The narrative of Karbala commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (*Sayyid al-Shuhada* or Prince of all Martyrs) along with the massacre of notable figures such as Hazrat Abbas (the brother of Imam Hussein), Ali Akbar and Ali Asghar (18-year-old and 6-month-old sons of Imam Hussein), Al-Hurr (general of the Umayyad caliphate who defected to fight alongside the Imam), and 72 other companions during the Islamic month of *Muhurram*. Shi'a rituals during the month consist of mournful gatherings (*majlis/mullayat*) which include greetings to the family of the Prophet (*salawat*), supplications (*du'a*) and calls for allegiance to and hastening of the Mahdi³ and lamentations

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¹The report also includes *Arba'een* which is commemorated 40 days after *Ashura*.

²The *usul ad-din* consist of belief in the unity and justice of God (*tawhid/adalah*), recognition of all prophets with Prophet Muhammad as the last and final prophet (*nubuwaah*), belief in the Day of Judgment (*qayamat*) and recognition of the Holy Qur'an as the sacred text which guides all Muslims.

³In Islamic beliefs, the Mahdi (meaning "Rightly Guided One") is the Messianic figure expected to rid the world of injustice and evil during the end of times. While messianism appears in Judeo-Christian beliefs, the Islamic principle of salvation does not regard human beings as sinners needing spiritual rebirth, nor does it consider salvation in nationalistic terms such as the kingdom of God in a promised land. Instead, Islamic salvation refers to the establishment of an ideal community based on the belief in One God and the revelations given to the Prophet Muhammad (Sachedina, 1981).

(*masaib/latmiyya*) in which adherents cry and self-flagellate (*matam/tatbir*). Shi'a Muslims also make religious vows in Karbala (*nidhr*), praying for the health of a loved one or asking for help with gaining employment, having children or finding a suitable spouse (Szanto, 2018). Visual imagery is prominent during *Muhurram* through the adornment of colors such as black to symbolize sorrow, red to display martyrdom, and green in honor of the Prophet. Flags depicting hands (*alam*) are also common, each finger representing the five most beloved Shi'a figures: Prophet Mohammad, his daughter Fatima, his cousin and son-in-law Ali and their sons, Hassan and Hussein.

Like the Hajj, Karbala rituals are dynamic physical and spiritual journeys which seek to instantiate love, sacrifice, devotion, patience, harmony and unity within the individual and across the Muslim community, so that adherents returning from pilgrimage(s) can apply these concepts to daily life (Alnabulsi et al., 2020). It is important to note, however, that while the Hajj is restricted to Muslim pilgrims, Karbala is open to all lovers of Imam Hussein and has attracted non-Muslim faith groups. The Hussein Brahmins, for example, are Hindu adherents who commemorate *Muhurram* because they believe that Rahib Dutt (one of the first Hussein Brahmins) and his seven sons were martyred alongside Imam Hussein at Karbala (Alvi, 2018).

9.5 Conclusion

Numerous studies have looked at the relationship between religion, spirituality, and wellbeing (Ebstyn King & Furrow, 2008; Tiliouine, Cummins, & Davern, 2009). The interconnection of these constructs reveals the diverse ways in which human beings conceptualize them and their impact on lived experiences. While Western secular approaches are most common in psychological research and practice, there is increasing interest in the spiritual and religious elements of wellbeing (Kapusinski & Masters, 2010). The second wave of positive psychology pushed forth the notion of harmony between positive and negative forces as well as the transcendental aspects of wellbeing (Wong, 2017). We posit that Islamic rituals and spiritual endeavors provide relevant paths to wellbeing for the Muslim *ummah*, which comprises over 24% of the world's population (Pew Research Center, 2015). For practicing Muslims, Islam is more than a religion; it is a way of life that impacts daily routines and influences lifestyle choices. The integration of Islam with the diverse cultures of its followers can promote different worldviews, particularly among Muslims living in Muslim majority and Muslim minority regions (Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, & Meyer, 2007). As a diverse community of over 1.8 billion followers, Muslims are not a monolithic nation. Understanding the place of R/S in the experiences and worldviews of Muslims is essential, as the influence of regional and sectarian norms on Islamic practices is not adequately explained by

Western stereotypes. While Western psychologists often shun the inclusion of R/S in their approach to wellbeing (Post & Wade, 2009; Saunders et al., 2010), this may inadvertently limit the efficacy of research, assessment and treatment, particularly with practicing Muslims. Additionally, a focus on individual happiness and life satisfaction may not provide the most useful information for working with Muslim clients as the majority of Muslims either live in or have cultural roots reflecting collectivist societies (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). Finally, as the experience or perceptions of Islamophobia impact Muslim health and wellbeing (Samari et al., 2018), ignoring R/S factors in Muslim lives may discount crucial information. Thus, research and practice involving Muslim populations requires a holistic approach that considers Islamic worldviews and cultural influences, along with Western psychological models, to better understand the unique contributions of these facets on the health and wellbeing of Muslims.

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Chapter 10

Gratitude and Wellbeing: Cultivating Islamically-Integrated Pathways to Health and Wellness



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Abstract Gratitude is an emotion and state of being that recognizes a positive outcome as the result of external factors, thereby prompting internal and external responses of appreciation. As a positive psychology intervention (PPI), gratitude not only encourages positive affect and savoring of positive life experiences, it is associated with a reduction in psychological distress, improved sleep, better relationships, more engagement at work, and fewer physical ailments. In Islam, *shukr* (gratitude) is a fundamental virtue which, along with *sabr* (patience), provides a formula for Muslim wellbeing. In this chapter, we review the positive psychology literature on gratitude and define the concept of *shukr* from an Islamic perspective. We also provide suggestions for increasing gratitude through Islamically-integrated PPIs and discuss how such interventions can provide useful tools for Muslim wellness.

10.1 Introduction

The field of positive psychology studies positive behaviors (e.g., the act of kindness), positive cognitions (e.g., gratitude), and positive emotions (e.g., joy, contentment, serenity, interest, vitality, and pride), which are all hallmarks of happiness

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(Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991). Gratitude, or a sense of appreciation, thankfulness, and wonder (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), has been difficult to categorize in the positive psychology literature, having been operationalized in a variety of ways including as “an emotion, an attitude, a moral virtue, a habit, a personality trait, or a coping response” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003, p. 377), as well as a character strength (Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003) and “a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation” (Sansone & Sansone, 2010, p. 18). Derived from the Latin *gratia* (meaning grace, graciousness, or gratefulness), gratitude is a response to recognizing the attainment of a positive outcome and attributing this gain to an external source (Weiner, 1985), which may be concrete or abstract (e.g., emotional or spiritual), but is generally directed to other human or nonhuman intentional agents (e.g., God; Solomon, 1977). According to McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, and Larson (2001),

gratitude has three specific moral functions: It functions as a moral barometer (an affective readout that is sensitive to a particular type of change in one’s social relationships, the provision of a benefit by another moral agent that enhances one’s wellbeing); as a moral motive (prompting grateful people to behave prosocially themselves); and when people express their grateful emotions in words or actions, as a moral reinforcer that increases the likelihood of future benevolent actions (Emmons & Shelton, 2002, p. 464).

In Islam, the Arabic term *shukr* (gratitude) is derived “from the trilateral root sh-k-r which means to thank, commend, praise, or eulogize someone for a service, benefit or act of devotion” (Khalil, 2015, p. 6). The root sh-k-r is used 75 times in the Qur’an in reference to both God and human beings (Khalil, 2015) and along with *iman* (faith), is a reminder to Muslims of the importance of gratitude to God, who is the provider of mental and physical health, wealth, consciousness, and everything else. In fact, the opposite of *shukr* in Arabic is *kafr*, or disbelief, which highlights the importance of gratitude as an expression of faith. While Muslims are obligated to remember the favors of God in their lives, they are also reminded that all circumstances are from God; therefore, *shukr* and *sabr* (which most closely translates to patience) are often invoked together. As such, *shukr* is an essential component of a worthwhile life, which in Islam, requires putting faith into action in order to achieve happiness in this world and the next (Joshano, 2013).

10.2 Positive Psychology Interventions and Wellbeing

In positive psychology, wellbeing is not merely the absence of psychological distress or disease, but the presence of psychological resources, such as positive affect, happiness, and life satisfaction (components of hedonic wellbeing; Diener, 1984) and meaning in life, purpose, and acceptance of self and others (components of eudemonic wellbeing; Ryan & Deci, 2001). This is consistent with Islamic perspectives on mental health (Joshano, 2013). One way of conceptualizing wellbeing is through the Sustainable Happiness Model (SHM; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005) which looks at happiness as the sum of three components: genetic

predisposition, life circumstances, and daily intentional activities. Changing daily activities has a greater impact on wellbeing than changing life's circumstances. This makes sense because as individuals become habituated to new circumstances, happiness levels are likely to return to baseline (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) are treatment practices that focus on cultivating positive feelings, behaviors, and thoughts (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). PPIs include a wide range of intentional activities that have been shown to improve wellbeing, such as performing acts of kindness, writing gratitude letters, socializing, savoring joyful events, and expressing optimism (Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011; Ruini, Belaise, Brombin, Caffo, & Fava, 2006). In a meta-analysis of studies conducted between 1997 and 2008, Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) found that PPIs not only enhance wellbeing among non-depressed participants, but also contribute to reduced depressive symptoms in clinical populations. PPIs have been used successfully in smoking cessation programs (Kahler, Spillane, Clerkin, Brown, & Parks, 2011), healthcare (Lambert D'raven, Moliver, & Thompson, 2015; Seligman, 2008), educational counseling (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkin, 2009) and other school-based programs to cultivate hope (Green, Anthony, & Rynsaardt, 2007; Marques, Lopez, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011), mindfulness (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Huppert & Johnson, 2010), resilience (Bernard & Walton, 2011), optimism (Brunwasser & Gillham, 2008) and character strengths (Madden, Green, & Grant, 2010; Seligman et al., 2009). Within organizations, a meta-analysis of PPIs found benefits in several work-related outcomes, including prosocial behaviors, forgiveness, and organizational trust (Donaldson, Lee, & Donaldson, 2019). PPIs targeting psychological capital (which consists of self-efficacy, optimism towards one's career and organization, hope, and resilience; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007) have improved employee work engagement, job performance, and organizational behaviors (Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010; Luthans et al., 2007), with character strength interventions being shown to benefit employee wellbeing, leadership, and executive coaching outcomes (MacKie, 2014; Quinlan, Swain, & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). PPIs that focus on improving wellbeing among employees have also resulted in lower absenteeism and rates of employee turnover as well as greater job satisfaction (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Layous, Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Pelled & Xin, 1999).

An outgrowth of SHM is the Positive Activity Model which posits that the conditions of the intervention, such as the dose and target of behaviors as well as the motivation and culture of the individual are critical to improving wellbeing. Those who come from collectivist cultures which are group-oriented may benefit from positive activities geared towards others (e.g. acts of kindness) rather than oneself (setting personal goals; Lambert D'raven & Pasha-Zaidi, 2014; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). As many Muslims belong to collectivist cultures, other-oriented PPIs are likely to provide better results (Lambert D'raven & Pasha-Zaidi, 2014). Additionally, inducing positive states requires effort and intentionality; thus, PPIs appear to work better for individuals who are motivated or who expect to receive a boost in happiness from engaging in such activities (Sin & Lyubomirsky,

2009). In an 8-month quasi-experimental study, Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) found that participants who invested greater effort into their intervention program reported more improvement in wellbeing than those who were less invested. Similar results were found by Sheldon and Houser-Marko (2001) in their study of first-year college students. Participants who strove to attain the goals they set for themselves in their first semester not only reported an improvement in wellbeing at the end of that semester, but also greater adjustment in their second semester, which predicted wellbeing in their final year of college, 3 years later (Sheldon, 2008).

10.3 Gratitude as a Positive Psychology Intervention

As one of the character strengths identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004) in their Values in Action (VIA) classification, gratitude has received quite a bit of attention in positive psychology, with both correlational studies and experiments finding positive relationships between gratitude and several measures of wellbeing. Researchers have noted that gratitude fosters constructive cognitive judgments of life satisfaction and overall wellbeing (Buss, 2000; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998), with the ability to express such emotions being important to achieving greater happiness (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Grateful thinking encourages the savoring of positive life experiences (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006) and can stimulate moral behavior and strengthen social bonds by promoting acts of kindness (McCullough et al., 2001). Among adolescents, gratitude has been shown to have a significant relationship with life satisfaction, optimism, and prosocial behavior (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009). Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) note that counting one's blessings may counteract hedonic mindsets by discouraging people from taking the positive aspects of their lives for granted. The ability to appreciate life circumstances may be particularly useful as an adaptive coping strategy in the face of difficult experiences (Fredrickson et al., 2003) as the practice of gratitude can reduce symptoms of psychological distress such as anxiety and depression (Vernon, Dillon, & Steiner, 2009; Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008) and may inhibit feelings of envy, bitterness, anger, or greed (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). Physiological studies have shown the positive impact of gratitude interventions on sleep quality (Digdon & Koble, 2011; Jackowska, Brown, Ronaldson, & Steptoe, 2016), reductions in blood pressure (Jackowska et al., 2016), lower levels of hemoglobin A1c (an important biomarker of health; Krause, Emmons, Ironson, & Hill, 2017) and decreased death anxiety (Lau & Cheng, 2011).

In a set of studies carried out by Emmons and McCullough (2003), gratitude groups exhibited heightened wellbeing across several of the outcome measures compared to control groups, suggesting that a conscious focus on gratitude events and blessings may have interpersonal and emotional benefits. Additionally, Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) found that gratitude exercises can increase happiness and decrease depressive symptoms over time. In a 4-week experimental study, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006) found that expressing

gratitude (e.g., writing about grateful things) produces an increase in positive affect. Similarly, Toepfer and Walker (2009) found that expressing feelings and thoughts of gratitude positively impacts happiness. In a 2-week experimental study of middle school students in the US, Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) found that participants in the gratitude condition (counting blessings) scored higher on optimism, life satisfaction, and lower on negative affect than participants in the hassles group (who wrote about things that irritated them) and in the no-treatment control groups. Importantly, the relationship between gratitude and positive affect was greatest 3 weeks after the end of the intervention. In another experimental study, Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller (2009) worked with teachers in a private school to implement a gratitude exercise that asked students in the experimental group to write and deliver a gratitude letter to someone of importance to them, while students in the control group were asked to journal about the things they had done and felt the day before. Students in the gratitude condition who were low in positive affect at the beginning of the 2-week intervention experienced greater gratitude than the control group immediately following the intervention and reported more positive affect 3 months later. These results suggest that a trait-based quality, such as gratitude (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004), can be improved through practice. Additional gratitude-based PPIs include appreciating the world and recognizing positive actions of others toward oneself (DeWall, Lambert, Pond Jr, Kashdan, & Fincham, 2012; McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010), keeping a gratitude journal (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) and posting online about the things for which one is grateful (Schueller & Parks, 2012; Seligman et al., 2005).

10.4 Cultural and Religious Considerations in Gratitude and Wellbeing

It is important to remember that gratitude, like other positive psychology constructs, may have different implications and manifestations based on cultural and religious background. In a study of gratitude and optimism, Boehm, Lyubomirsky, and Sheldon (2011) found that first-generation Asian Americans benefited more from expressing gratitude than practicing optimism, compared to their Anglo-American counterparts who showed a greater increase in life satisfaction across both conditions. Titova, Wagstaff, and Parks (2017) who studied gratitude and optimism among Anglo-Americans, Asian Americans, and Indians (living in India), found that Indians not only experienced more positive emotions when practicing gratitude, but also more sadness and guilt. This reflects Fredrickson's (2004) assertion that gratitude can have both positive and negative connotations across cultures. Given the value of interdependence in collectivist societies, gratitude is linked to aspects of obligation and reciprocity (Doi, 1973; Triandis, 1995). While positive feelings of gratitude may broaden reciprocation, aversive feelings such as indebtedness can possibly lead to narrower forms of reciprocity (like tit-for-tat; Cohen, 2006;

Fredrickson, 2004). The intensity and expression of gratitude may also vary. In a study of Latino/a and East Asian groups in the US, Corona et al. (2020) found that Latino/a Americans held gratitude in greater esteem and experienced it more intensely and more frequently than East Asian Americans, suggesting that Latino/a experiences and attitudes toward gratitude are closer to those of European Americans. This finding supports that of Appadurai (1985) who notes that

in Tamil culture, it is hard to express gratitude verbally for several reasons. One is that gratitude is most expressed through return gifts, and that notions of gratitude are inextricably tied up in obligation and reciprocity. In addition, Tamil culture is very status conscious. Because people of higher status have a responsibility to care for people of lower status, it becomes difficult to distinguish voluntary benevolent actions from socially prescribed benevolent actions. Does one feel gratitude for acts that are performed out of responsibility? (Cohen, 2006, p. 272).

This is similar to Aristotle's (ca. 350 B.C.E./1985) view which linked gratitude to social status, thereby supporting a hierarchy of benefactor (someone of higher social status who is not attentive to reciprocation) and recipient (someone of lower social status who feels indebted to return the favor; Cohen, 2006). Thus, gratitude may be viewed differently depending on the context being studied.

Religious worldviews also have ramifications for gratitude. In fact, gratitude is a fundamental virtue endorsed by almost all religions of the world (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Given that being grateful to God and significant others is an important element of religious experiences (McCullough et al., 2001), there is some evidence that religiosity is positively correlated with a grateful disposition and motivation to express appreciation (Tsang, Schulwitz, & Carlisle, 2012). In Judaism, gratitude may even be encouraged for indirect actions that have good results, regardless of the intention (Schimmel, 2004). Among Muslims, gratitude towards God has been shown to have a positive correlation with psychological wellbeing and subjective happiness, and a negative association with depression and anxiety (Aqababaii, Farahani, & Tabik, 2012). Other studies have found a positive correlation between gratitude and religious service attendance (Adler & Fagley, 2005), spiritual transcendence (Hlava, Elfers, & Offringa, 2014; McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004), and a strong belief in divine supremacy and control (Watkins et al., 2003). Religion can also provide justification for actions such as forgiveness and gratitude by fostering a sense of community that enables individuals to think beyond themselves (Baumeister, 1991). Krause and Ellison's study (2009) indicates that Christians who feel supported by members of their church also feel more grateful to God. Another study of American Christians (Krause & Hayward, 2015) found that those who attain a deeper level of meaning in their lives are more likely to be grateful to God. Interestingly, the same study noted that giving emotional support to family and friends encourages feelings of gratitude toward God, while emotional support to strangers appears to have the opposite effect.

Comparing the impact of religious versus dispositional gratitude on wellbeing has yielded mixed results, with some studies noting that dispositional gratitude has greater impact on wellbeing (Aghababaei, Błachnio, & Aminikhoo, 2018; Aghababaei & Tabik, 2013) and other studies finding that gratitude that is religiously

oriented or directed to God yields higher levels of positive emotions (Al-Seheel & Noor, 2016; Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Cohen, Galler, & Krumrei, 2011). As religious individuals tend to experience greater intensity of positive emotions than non-religious ones (Burris & Petrican, 2011; Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Emmons & Mishra, 2011), religious-based feelings may provide unique avenues for cultivating positive emotions. For instance, compared to interpersonal gratitude that is limited to situations when reciprocal benefits among people take place, gratitude towards God can occur for all the things that are attributed to God. The perception of being cared for or loved by God and feeling the presence of God, which accompanied by gratitude to God for one's blessings, can be cultivated any time an individual perceives these feelings. Such positive emotions may be of immense help in facing misfortune and adversity as the connection to something that is perceived as greater than oneself can mitigate negative consequences of such experiences and promote emotional wellbeing (Chukwu & Rauchfleisch, 2002; Gall, 2004; Gall, Miguez de Renart, & Boonstra, 2000). Furthermore, "when contemplating a positive circumstance that cannot be attributed to intentional human effort, such as a miraculous healing or the gift of life itself, spiritually inclined people may attribute these positive outcomes to a non-human agent (viz., God or a higher power) and thus experience more gratitude" (Emmons & Mishra, 2011, p. 254).

A Deeper Dive: Reframing Religious and Spiritual Struggles as Paths to Wellbeing

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Although religion has been shown to have positive effects on health and wellbeing, it is important to note that many people struggle with religion and spirituality (R/S), and open discussions are often inhibited by beliefs that R/S struggles are morally wrong (Exline, Kaplan, & Grubbs, 2012) or by fear of judgment and shaming from others (Exline & Grubbs, 2011). However, R/S struggles are not unusual (Pargament & Exline, 2020) and have been found across ethnicities, genders, socioeconomics, and religious affiliations (Abu-Raiya, Pargament, Krause, & Ironson, 2015) in response to a variety of reasons, including conflicts or tensions in the understanding of God and other sacred matters (Exline, 2013; Pargament, Murray-Swank, Magyar, & Ano, 2005), personality factors (neuroticism, for example, is linked to negative perceptions of God; Wilt, Grubbs, Exline, & Pargament, 2016), negative cognitive appraisals (i.e., an angry God versus a beneficent God), and unpleasant experiences in religious settings (Ellison & Lee, 2010; Krause, Chatters, Meltzer, & Morgan, 2000). Practicing Muslims who struggle with R/S report a fear of God's anger and punishment, despair of God's mercy, and a belief that their religious practices are insufficient for gaining entry to paradise in the

(continued)

Hereafter (Rüschhoff & Kaplick, 2018). Even atheists report experiencing religious and spiritual struggle, albeit at a lesser degree than their theistic peers (Sedlar et al., 2018). While R/S struggles are linked to psychological distress (Currier, Smith, & Kuhlman, 2017; McConnell, Pargament, Ellison, & Flannelly, 2006; Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011; Pomerleau, Pargament, Krause, Ironson, & Hill, 2019; Wortmann, Park, & Edmondson, 2011), they can also provide opportunities for personal and spiritual growth (Desai & Pargament, 2015; Wilt et al., 2016). Mediating and moderating factors such as social support (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004), identification with a religious community or spiritual tradition (Zarzycka & Zietek, 2019), dispositional gratitude (Szcześniak, Bielecka, Bajkowska, Czaprowska, & Madej, 2019), internal dialogue and upward prayer that focuses on adoration of the Divine (Puchalska-Wasył & Zarzycka, 2020) can impact wellbeing during times of R/S struggle.

One way to approach R/S struggles for Muslims is in relation to the 99 Names of Allah (*Al-Asma ai-Husna*, Allah's Most Beautiful Names), which are often invoked in philosophical discussions of God's essence (*dhat*) and attributes (*sifat*) to illustrate the ability of God to self-manifest in unlimited ways (Ibrahim-Lizzio & Soto González, 2017). Among the 99 Names of Allah, pairings of opposites are common. "For instance, the Quran describes God as the ascendant and the intimate (*az-zahir wal-batin*, 57:3). Likewise, God's names include the Exhaulter (*ar-rafi'a*) and the One who Abases (*al-khafid*), the One Who Bestows Honor (*al-mu 'aizz*), the Humiliator (*al-mudhill*), the Pardoner (*a/-'afou*), the Reckoner (*al-muntaqim*), the Bearer of Harm (*ad-darr*), the One Who Averts Harm (*al-mani*'), and so forth" (Ibrahim-Lizzio & Soto González, 2017, p. 100). When asked in therapy sessions to mark the Names of Allah that have the greatest personal relevance, practicing Muslims who struggle with R/S often list attributes that they associate with their parents or characteristics "that they love, oppose, fear, or wish for themselves" (Rüschhoff & Kaplick, 2018, p. 145). As parents represent one's initial understanding of God (Rüschhoff & Kaplick, 2018), it is not surprising that early parent-child relationships often mirror the image of God that is perceived in adulthood (Heine, 2007; Rizzuto, 1979). Thus, exploring R/S struggles, rather than ignoring, shaming or shunning such thoughts and feelings can open avenues toward healing. "Although it may seem odd to look to religion for variables that buffer the effects of religious problems, religion can be understood as double-edged in nature; it can be both a source of problems and a source of solutions" (Abu-Raiya, Pargament, & Krause, 2016, p. 1272). As Muslims are taught to be grateful for both positive and negative experiences in life, *shukr* may help reframe R/S struggles as pathways to wellness.

10.5 Islamic Approach to Gratitude

In Islam, *shukr*, or the expression of gratitude to the Creator and the creation, is considered half the faith (Al-Jawziyah, 2004). Muslims are reminded that God is the provider of all capabilities, including one's consciousness. According to the Qur'an, adversity and ease are not random events, but occur in relation to God's will, and the experience of weal and woe is intended to awaken people's innate nature or *fitrah*, which recognizes its Lord, and beckons human beings to turn to Him in pity and gratitude (Qutub, 1985). As explained in one *hadith* (Hanbal, 2012): "I am amazed by the believer. If he is granted goodness, then he praises Allah and is grateful. If he is afflicted with a calamity, then he praises Allah and is patient". At the same time *shukr* is not limited to the Creator but also reflects love, justice, care and fulfillment of obligations toward other human beings and nature (Kamla, Gallhofer, & Haslam, 2006). In fact, another *hadith* stresses that those who do not show gratitude to fellow humans, are in fact ungrateful to God (Abu Dawud, 2000). As servitude towards other creatures is inherently an expression of *shukr* to God, there is a clear distinction between people who practice *shukr* and those who are ungrateful (*kufir*), with three criteria for gratitude that establish a reciprocal relationship between the Creator and the creation: (1) acceptance that God is the only provider (2) contentment in whatever provisions God has bestowed, and (3) refraining from disobedience in spending those provisions (Ali, Ahmed, Bhatti, & Farooq, 2020). Several Islamic philosophers have also suggested ways of characterizing *shukr*. According to Al-Ghazali, *shukr* is manifested emotionally through the heart (*shukr bi'l qalb*), in words (*shukr bi'l lisan*), and through one's actions (*shukr bi'l bandan wa arka*), while Ibn 'Arabi defines three stages of *shukr*: "In the first level of *shukr* (the intellectual level) a Muslim understands and believes the true meaning of gratitude by recognizing the benefactor (the Creator); in the second level (the comprehension level) a Muslim not only understands but compliments his benefactor through his words and actions as a recompense to each blessing by Allah; in the third and final level (the manifestation level) a Muslim abides by every commandment from Allah and achieves a total conformity with *shariah* (the Islamic jurisprudence) as an acknowledgement of Allah's blessings" (Ali et al., 2020, pp. 1745–1746).

The Qur'an notes that many of God's bounties and provisions are conditional on divine will. For example, "...Allah will enrich you from His bounty if He wills" (3:37) and later in the same verse, "He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills" (3:129). However, the reward for gratitude is unconditional: "But Allah will swiftly reward those who (serve Him) with gratitude" (3:144) and unlimited: "If you are grateful, I will surely give you more and more" (14:7). Importantly, those who are grateful are only a select few: "But few of My servants are grateful!" (34:13) and thus very special. The grateful are known to God, even though they may not be recognized by other human beings: "And thus We have tried some of them through others that the disbelievers might say, 'Is it these whom Allah has favored among us?' Is not Allah most knowing of those who are grateful?" (6:53). Table 10.1

Table 10.1 Qur’anic entailments of *Shukr*

Selected verses from the Qur’an	Qur’anic entailments of <i>Shukr</i>
“It is he who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing, and he gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affection so that you may be grateful (to Allah)” (16:78)	Human beings have been created and bestowed with their senses and intellect to express gratitude to God.
“...and be grateful to Allah, if it is Him you worship” (2: 172)	True worshippers are those who are grateful. Allah is the only one worthy of worship.
“We showed him (i.e., man) the way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will)” (76: 3)	Gratitude is intimately related to faith. Being grateful or ungrateful to God, acknowledging and following or rejecting Allah’s guidance are divine tests in this life.
“And remember! your Lord caused to be declared (publicly): ‘If you are grateful, I will add more (favours) unto you; but if you show ingratitude, truly My punishment is terrible indeed’” (14:7)	Gratitude is a means to gain God’s blessings and to avoid His punishment.
“If you reject (Allah), truly Allah has no need of you; but He likes not ingratitude from His servants: if you are grateful, He is pleased with you...” (39: 7)	Gratitude is pleasing to God.
“Then remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me, and do not reject Me.” (2: 152)	Those who seek happiness in the Here and the Hereafter must be grateful to God. Gratitude is a means of remembering and not rejecting God.

provides additional examples of the Qur’anic entailments of *shukr*, which illustrate the reciprocal relationship between God and human beings.

While the Qur’an denounces over-immersion in this life, it also stresses that a believer should show gratitude to God’s favours by enjoying what is given in this life in preparation for an everlasting abode in the Hereafter: “. . .But seek the abode of the Hereafter in that which Allah hath given thee and neglect not thy portion of the world . . .” (Qur’an 28: 77). As such, Islam considers worldly pleasures to be essential drives for human beings that must be directed towards positive works (Qutub, 1985), thus promoting a balanced approach that recognizes the lure of worldly possessions while expecting behaviors that encourage spiritual growth. Al-Sha’rāwī (1991) states that this approach safeguards human wellbeing as it attaches greater worth to the gains of the Hereafter, which can make people less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of this life. Al-Rāzī (1981) contends that the Qur’an underscores the superiority of spirituality over materialism by emphasizing the long-lasting effects of spiritual gains over the perishability of material pleasures: “And [remember that] whatever you are given [now] is but for the [passing] enjoyment of life in this world—whereas that which is with God is far better and more enduring for those who have believed and upon their Lord rely” (Qur’an 42:36).

Glad tidings (*bushrā*), such as an everlasting pleasure in paradise, are for those who turn to God in repentance, worship, and gratitude, fasting for His cause,

Table 10.2 Human attributes and behaviors that can lead to enduring happiness in Islam

Human attributes and behaviors	Qur'anic chapter (<i>Surah</i>) and verse number(s)
Believing in the unseen, establishing prayer, and believing all of God's revelations and the Day of Judgment	<i>Al-Baqara</i> : 3–5
Calling others to goodness, enjoining good, and forbidding evil	<i>Al-i-Imran</i> : 104
Enduring in adversity, vying with one another in patience, staying steadfast and conscious of Allah	<i>Al-i-Imran</i> : 200
Observing one's duty to Allah, seeking to come closer unto Him, and striving in His cause by one's wealth and efforts	<i>Al-Ma'ida</i> : 35
Remembering God's bounties and being grateful to Him	<i>Al-A'raf</i> : 69 <i>Al-Jumu'a</i> : 10
Adhering to justice	<i>Yusuf</i> : 23
Bowing down and prostrating before God while worshiping Him, obeying Him and doing good deeds	<i>Al-Hajj</i> : 77
Turning away from all that is frivolous, being active in charity, mindful of chastity, and faithful to their trusts and pledges	<i>Al-Mu'minun</i> : 1–9
Surrendering to the judgments of God and His messenger	<i>An-Nur</i> : 51
Repenting	<i>Al-Qasas</i> : 67
Give their due to those near in kin and the needy (charity)	<i>Ar-Rum</i> : 38
Loving fellow believers, ridding oneself of the envy of what others have been given, giving preference to others over oneself even in times of need (as an act of altruism), and preserving oneself from greed	<i>Al-Hashr</i> : 9

enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, as well as observing the ordinances of God (Qur'an 9:111–112). Al-Rāzī (1981) argues that contentment with God's predetermination is essential for a believer's wellbeing, especially during times of misfortune as it shifts the focus from oneself and one's afflictions, which may change over time, to the mercy of God who is above all changes. This underlying mechanism may provide the necessary resilience to endure one's circumstances and may counteract common annulments to human happiness such as grief and worry that usually stem from dissatisfaction with one's fate. Some of the qualities and behaviors that can lead Muslims to enduring happiness in this life and the Hereafter are listed in Table 10.2.

A Deeper Dive: Divine Revelation as a Metaphor for the Human Spirit

Ali Al-Seheel

The Qur'an has described its revelation as a *rūḥ* or spirit that brings liveliness to one's heart through, guidance, enlightenment and knowledge (Al-Rāzī,

(continued)

1981). Al-Rāzī (1981) explained the underlying mechanism for this metaphor in the following way:

The body is dead, dense and gloomy, and when the soul is connected to it, it becomes alive, delicate and luminous, and then the impact of this light will appear on the five senses. Then the soul is also obscurant and ignorant, and when the mind is connected to it, it becomes bright and illuminated, as Allah mentioned in the following verse: “And God has brought you forth from your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing-but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds, so that you may be grateful” (Qur’an, An-Nahl: 78). Then the mind is not integral with enlightenment, pureness and brightness, unless it is complemented with the knowledge of God himself, His attributions and His acts as well as the knowledge of the soul and the body, and this world and the Hereafter (p. 224).

According to Al-Rāzī (1981), the soul in its basic form as an animating agent of the body (i.e., the practical force) is “obscurant and ignorant” until it is connected to the mind, which serves as a comprehension agent that with divine guidance can lead human free will toward submission to Allah, and thus to human happiness. Al-Rāzī (1981) further believed that the Holy Qur’an is described as a spirit because it is the genuine reviving agent that can eradicate ignorance and heedlessness, thus leading Muslims to happiness. He argued that the highest level of happiness is the one attained through human psychological perfections that can be achieved via two essential forces of the human self. The first is “theoretical force”, the readiness of the self to comprehend what is unseen and abstract. This force is perfected through acquiring knowledge, which in its noblest form is the knowledge of monotheism. The second force is “practical force”, or the self’s authority over itself and its surroundings. The perfection of this force is attained through righteous acts, and its noblest form is in the worship of God. According to this perspective, the purpose of God’s revelations is to nurture and revive these two chief forces within human beings: the theoretical force through the knowledge of monotheism (“Warn mankind that there is no deity but Me”; Qur’an 16:2) and the practical force through actions based on knowledge (“Keep your duty unto Me”; Qur’an 16:2), both of which ultimately lead to the highest level of happiness for which gratitude is incumbent (“... so that you may be grateful”; Qur’an 16:78).

10.5.1 *Shukr as an Islamic PPI*

Social scientists and mental health practitioners are becoming increasingly interested in psychospiritual approaches to healing and wellness (Pargament & Mahoney, 2009). Given the importance of gratitude in the lives of Muslims, *shukr* may have value as a positive psychology intervention. Although little research has been done on the efficacy of Islamically-integrated positive psychology interventions, two studies are notable for their use of gratitude as an Islamic PPI. Saeedi et al. (2015)

found that integrating positive psychotherapy with Islamic resources improved quality of life scores among female multiple sclerosis patients. Forty female members of the MS society in Kerman, Iran were recruited for this study, with half (20 women) receiving seven sessions of positive psychology training, covering topics such as setting goals, controlling negative thoughts, and attending to blessings and gratitude. The authors suggest that because religious beliefs can shield individuals from the stressors of life and severe crises (Pargament & Cummings, 2010), they can serve as important interventions for increasing quality of life. In another study, Al-Seheel and Noor (2016) found significant gains in happiness among Muslims through practicing 2 weeks of counting blessings followed by two days of composing a letter of gratitude. In the Islamic gratitude condition, participants were asked to associate their acts of gratitude with Allah, whereas in the secular-based group, participants were solely required to identify unappreciated aspects of their lives for which they are grateful, without any emphasis on gratitude association. Consistent with previous research, the results of the study suggest that Muslims' happiness can be elevated through expressive gratitude over time (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Seligman et al., 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006; Toepfer & Walker, 2009); particularly when the spiritual component of gratitude is emphasized (Rosmarin et al., 2011). Al-Seheel and Noor (2016) argue that Islamic-based gratitude may be more effective for Muslims because it is not limited to worldly rewards. Instead, it emphasizes that the Hereafter is the life that ultimately counts.

By acknowledging their spiritual essence, Muslims can observe gratitude in everything around them: "And in the earth are Signs for those who have certainty of faith, and also in your own selves. Will you not then see?" (Qur'an 51:21–22). Furthermore, using *shukr* as an Islamic PPI may be more effective for practicing Muslims because it fits better with the values and beliefs fostered in Islam (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004). By increasing awareness of and sensitivity towards blessed situations, Muslims can shift their attention to the manifestations of God's mercy and love in their lives. As such, pleasing God and developing a close relationship with the Creator might mediate the effect of gratitude interventions to help Muslims attain greater levels of wellbeing (Al-Seheel & Noor, 2016).

10.6 Ways of Cultivating *Shukr*

Positive psychology researchers have identified several ways to use gratitude to boost wellbeing, however, these are generally not connected to religious practices. As practicing Muslims may be better served by the integration of Islam into positive psychology, associating gratitude with Allah can be an easy add-on to evidence-based PPIs that appear in the extant literature. However, the benefits of gratitude can also be attained through indirect routes (Bono, Emmons, & McCullough, 2004). Fredrickson (2004) notes that "grateful individuals appear to creatively consider a wide range of prosocial actions as possible reflections of their gratitude" (p. 150). As

such, a variety of Islamic principles and practices may be helpful in cultivating a grateful mindset.

10.6.1 Personal and Interpersonal Gratitude Interventions

Personal or self-oriented gratitude interventions include counting one's blessings and making a list of and remembering the people and things in this life for which one is grateful. This can be done through gratitude journals, essays, social media posts, expressive art (drawing, painting, composing music, and others), even little post-it notes that can be placed in strategic locations like on a fridge or a bedroom mirror so that they can be found throughout the day. Gratitude can also be cultivated through mindfulness (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Santerre, 2002). In fact, just taking the time to have grateful thoughts can have psychological benefits (Watkins et al., 2003). While gratitude is often discussed in relation to positive life experiences, feelings of gratefulness may be even greater for individuals who have gone through difficult circumstances (Emmons, 2007). Thus, reflecting on life and death and one's own mortality can also increase gratitude (Frias, Watkins, Webber, & Froh, 2011).

Interpersonal gratitude interventions involve social interactions and may use a variety of media such as letters, texts, emails, and phone apps to reach out to others (Ghandeharioun, Azaria, Taylor, & Picard, 2016; Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010; Toepfer, Cichy, & Peters, 2012). Two of the most common interpersonal gratitude interventions are gratitude letters and visits, where people write and then deliver letters to someone who has helped them in their lives (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007). However, interventions that are primarily designed for other purposes can also provide routes to gratitude (Bono et al., 2004) that “*broaden* people's momentary thought-action repertoires and *build* their enduring personal resources” (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 147). Acts of kindness such as attending social events and celebrations that mark gratitude for an accomplishment or joyful moment, providing emotional support to family, friends, and community members, being available to those who are mourning the loss of a loved one, providing mentorship to others (Peterson & Stewart, 1996), and engaging in acts of altruism and charity (e.g. providing food, money or other forms of material support) can provide reasons for gratitude. One simple form of charity, which appears in the *hadith* (Al-Tirmidhī, 2007) is offering a smile to others: “And, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ‘Smiling in your brother's face is an act of charity’.”

While the extant positive psychology literature indicates that interpersonal forms of expression are the least liked gratitude interventions, they appear to be among the most effective (Huffman et al., 2014; Seligman et al., 2005). Researchers have speculated that interpersonal gratitude PPIs may be more difficult to do (Huffman et al., 2014), and may signal one's dependence on others, which can be emotionally taxing (Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh, 2009). However, for Muslims these concerns may be less of an issue as dependence and reliance on God are essential components of Islam.

10.6.2 Shukr Through Islamic Language and Prayer

“The sense of spirituality can be fostered and maintained by experiencing the transcendent in the everyday occurrences of life” (Pargament & Mahoney, 2002, p. 651). For practicing Muslims, gratitude is regularly invoked through Islamic language. For example, many Muslims use the phrase *Alhumdullilah* (Praise be to God) as an exclamation of joy (e.g., *Alhumdullilah*, I got an A on my exam!) as well as a reply to the question, “How are you?” (e.g., *Alhumdullilah*, I am well). Along with being a response to positive situations, *Alhumdullilah* is also used as a term of acceptance for difficulties and tribulations as a reminder that all situations are from God. “Islamic philosophy enroots *shukr* (gratitude) with feelings like total submission to Allah, feelings of indebtedness towards Allah, appreciation of whatever is bestowed by Him and to act faithfully in accordance with His commandments as recompense to Allah’s blessings” (Ali et al., 2020, p. 1750).

Daily prayer has also been shown to positively impact gratitude (Lambert et al., 2009). For practicing Muslims, the ritual prayer (*salah*) is a recurring appointment with God throughout the day. In order to perform *salah*, several conditions must be fulfilled: the time for prayer must have arrived, the direction of Mecca must be estimated, the space must be clean, and the believer’s clothing should be free from impurities. The believer’s body must also be in a state of ritual purity which is accomplished through a brief washing of the hands, nose, mouth, face, feet, and wiping over the ears and head (*wudu*). The way in which the ritual prayer is performed is outlined specifically: the words to say, the movements to enact, and the number of cycles (*rakahs*). “Indeed, the ritualistic repetitive nature of prayer could likely serve as a frequent reminder to express gratitude or to recall the things one feels grateful for” (Lambert et al., 2009, p. 146). Aside from daily ritual prayers, there is also a special Islamic prayer for gratitude. *Salat-ash-shukr* consists of two *rakahs* of the ritual prayer with the specific intention of gratitude to God. As a supplementary ritual prayer, the same prerequisites (purity, orientation towards Mecca, and clean space and clothing) are required.

10.6.3 Shukr Through Supplemental Forms of Worship

In addition to the basic tenets of Islamic practice (five times daily ritual prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadan, paying the *zakah* charity annually, and performing the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime), there are also additional acts of worship that can cultivate a grateful mindset. Just as the basic tenets represent a psycho-emotional commitment to God, the additional acts of worship are thought to reflect a deeper desire for closeness to God, as found in the following *hadith* (Al Bukhari, 1996):

... And the most beloved things with which My slave comes nearer to Me, is what I have enjoined upon him; and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *Nawāfil* (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him ...”

These supplementary acts of worship are framed in terms of intimacy between a believer and God: they are about coming *closer* to God with the result that God will *love* the believer, as reflected in the continuation of the *hadith*:

... so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me, I will give him, and if he asks My protection (Refuge), I will protect him; (i.e. give him My Refuge) and I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death, and I hate to disappoint him (Al Bukhari, 1996).

The relationship between God and the believer is such that the believer senses and experiences the world in a manner akin to God’s perception of Creation. Such intimacy is the ultimate purpose of faith and is the impetus behind all acts of worship, but even more so for supplementary acts of worship.

A Deeper Dive: The Islamic Prostration of Gratitude

Kate Bridges-Lyman

There are two types of supplementary worship related specifically with gratitude: *salat ash-shukr* and *sujūd ash-shukr*. The latter consists solely of prostration on the ground. It imitates the ritual prayer in its form: a person gently falls to place their forehead on the ground in a symbol of submission to God. While this is still a *stylized* worship, it does not have the same rigorous conditions that the ritual prayer has regarding ritual purity, cleanliness of space and clothing, timing, or orientation towards Mecca. It can be entirely spontaneous and may be conducted in public, in private, alone, or with people.

Mohamed Salah, an Egyptian soccer player who plays for Liverpool FC, is famously known to perform the *sujūd ash-shukr* on the field after scoring a goal or winning a match. This is a common sight among Muslim soccer players who see this not only as part of their belief, but also a representation of their Muslim identity and its intersection with professional sports. Several articles have remarked that Mohamed Salah’s openness about his faith through such a simple gesture has made Islamic prayer, and prostration in particular, more commonly understood among European and American soccer fans who may not follow soccer teams from Muslim majority countries where the *sujūd ash-shukr* is more commonplace. Additionally, Khabib Nurmagomedov, a Russian mixed martial artist, who is the first Muslim to win an Ultimate Fighting Championship also regularly performs the *sujūd ash-shukr* after he wins.

(continued)

The Prostration of Gratitude is an important case study that reveals the breadth of potential within Islamic worship for psychological and spiritual care. Depending on the needs of and therapeutic care plan for an individual, both structured and unstructured forms of giving thanks can be used for an embodied practice of gratitude. A Muslim client who struggles with ritual prayer, for example, would not need to undertake the ritual preparations in order to perform the prostration of gratitude: it is an easy opening to connect with God and is a reminder that ritual worship is not the only way to commune with the Creator.

10.6.4 *Shukr Through Appreciation and Service to Nature*

The Qur'an (3:190) reminds Muslims that "in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, are signs for people of understanding". Thus, in Islam, the entirety of creation is a complex compendium of signs that all point back to the greatness of God. *Tawheed* (or the unity of God) is a central concept in Islam that connects all of God's creatures and points to the importance of equilibrium, balance, and harmony with nature (Kamla et al., 2006). The Qur'an (55:5–9) states:

The sun and the moon are made punctual. The stars and the trees adore. And the sky he hath uplifted. And He hath set the measure. That ye exceed not the measure. But observe the measure strictly, nor fall short thereof.

As all of God's creations are believed to be engaged in acts of worship, the reciprocal relationship between human beings and God includes a respect and appreciation of the natural world and all the creatures therein (Kamla et al., 2006) as seen in the following verses:

Do you not observe that God sends down rain from the sky, so that in the morning the earth becomes green¹? (Qur'an 22: 63).

There is not an animal in the earth, nor a creature flying on two wings, but they are nations like you (Qur'an 6:38).

The restorative benefits of nature have been noted in numerous studies, particularly with reference to the positive impact of natural environments on stress reduction and focused attention (Joye & van den Berg, 2018). Additionally, exposure to nature can facilitate a healthier psychological mindset consisting of positive internal aspirations like personal growth, connectedness to others, intimacy, and generosity (Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2009). While being in nature is likely to provide the

¹Green is considered a blessed color by many Muslims as it represents the importance of nature in Islam and as such, is a prominent color in many flags of Muslim majority nations (Kamla et al., 2006). Greener spaces are also associated with higher levels of wellbeing and an increased sense of community (Whitburn et al., 2019).

most concentrated dose of benefit for health and healing (Mayer et al. 2009), the psychological benefits of nature can also be attained through immersion in virtual nature settings (Valtchanov, Barton, & Ellard, 2010), by viewing natural elements through a window (Kaplan, 2001), by listening to recorded sounds of nature (Diette, Lechtzin, Haponik, Devrotes, & Rubin, 2003), watching a video of a natural environment (Ulrich, Simons, & Miles, 2003), feeling the air through an open window (Largo-Wight, 2011), and by incorporating indoor plants at home and in offices, hospitals and other professional settings (Burchett, Torpy, & Tarran, 2008; Deng & Deng, 2018). “This intimacy with nature can generate a clearer sense of priorities, greater strength and resolve, and improved feelings of self-confidence and self-worth” (Kellert, 2002, p. 58). By reflecting on the wonders of nature, Muslims can practice gratitude through remembrance of God’s creations in the natural world. Additionally, creating healing gardens (Marcus & Barnes, 1999), planting a tree (Whitburn, Linklater, & Milfont, 2019) and taking care of the earth and animals (Granerud & Eriksson, 2014) are evidence-based practices that for Muslims, can also be ways of showing appreciation to God. Considering the integral relationship between gratitude and appreciation (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), attending to nature through reflection, savoring, and service can provide important pathways to gratitude and wellbeing.

10.7 Additional Considerations

While PPIs can be effective ways of promoting wellness in therapeutic settings, they are also used as self-help strategies with varying levels of success. When people are given the chance to try out a gratitude intervention on their own, their intentions may differ from their actual behaviors based on their beliefs about the utility of the intervention, their perceptions of the social norms surrounding the activities, and their own sense of self-control which determines the likelihood that the intervention behaviors will be maintained (Kaczmarek, Kashdan, Drażkowski, Bujacz, & Goodman, 2014). As only about 5.6% of individuals who have the opportunity to engage in positive psychology interventions are likely to do so of their own volition, it is important to consider ways of encouraging new behavioral strategies (Kaczmarek et al., 2015). For Muslims, intention (*niyah*) is an integral part of social and religious behaviors. As such, practicing Muslims who are interested in engaging in *shukr* (or any other Islamic act of worship) as a PPI may want to begin by stating their intention. According to the Qur’an (2:225): “Allah will not call you to account for thoughtlessness in your oaths, but for the intention in your hearts; and He is Oft-forgiving, Most Forbearing”. The importance of intention is further emphasized in the *hadiths* (Bukhari, 1996; Muslim, 2007): “Surely, all actions are but driven by intentions, and verily every man shall have but that which he intended”. As intentions reflect the amount of effort that an individual is likely to exert in performing certain actions (Ajzen, 1991), positive psychology researchers have argued that intention to complete intervention activities can account for the variable rates of

PPI efficacy (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Given that intention is associated with the blessings of Allah, the act of *niyah* may be able to cultivate greater buy-in and increased effort in implementing Islamic PPIs.

The efficacy of gratitude interventions can also depend on person-activity fit. Studies have shown individual differences toward gratitude expression as a result of gender and personality trait. Women, for example, are more likely to experience and express grateful feelings than men (Krause et al., 2017) perhaps because they “perceive gratitude expression as more socially acceptable and expect to derive more benefits from gratitude expression” (Enko, Behnke, Dziekan, Kosakowski, & Kaczmarek, 2020, p. 5). Personality traits such as narcissism and cynicism can also inhibit gratitude (Solom, Watkins, McCurrach, & Scheibe, 2017) with narcissistic individuals finding expressions of gratitude to be particularly unpleasant (Bono et al., 2004). Further, individuals who are low in trait gratitude and high in depressive symptoms are less likely to engage in expressions of gratitude as they may experience a conflict between social pressure to engage in gratitude practices and lower levels of self-efficacy in their ability to express thankfulness (Kaczmarek et al., 2014). In a study by Enko et al. (2020), depressed individuals with lower trait gratitude were less likely to initiate gratitude interventions due to physiological responses of threat that inhibited the motivation to engage in gratitude behaviors. As such, the use of gratitude as a PPI should not be considered a panacea for everyone. Forcing gratitude can result in less motivation and therefore less efficacy of interventions, particularly as a self-help tool (Kaczmarek et al., 2013).

10.8 Conclusion

Social scientists and health professionals are increasingly interested in the connection between body, mind, and spirit as well as the efficacy of psychospiritual interventions to improve health and wellbeing (Pargament & Cummings, 2010). For practicing Muslims, the integration of Islamic principles into evidence-based positive psychology interventions as well as participation in Islamic practices such as ritual prayer and prostration can be useful components of both therapeutic applications and self-help routines. As gratitude is considered an essential component of Islamic faith, engaging in acts that promote *shukr* can provide psychological benefits by redirecting the attention of believers towards God’s mercy and the greater recompense that awaits them in the Hereafter. The Qur’an states, “Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer—We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do” (16:97). While research into the efficacy of Islamic PPIs is in its infancy, findings suggest that attributing blessings to God and directing gratefulness toward the Creator contribute to the cultivation of greater level of happiness in Muslims compared to acts that do not acknowledge such spiritual aspects (Al-Seheel & Noor, 2016). As the pathways to wellbeing require intentionality and effort (Kaczmarek et al., 2013; Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof,

Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011), interventions that fit Muslim beliefs and values are more likely to be initiated and maintained. Thus, integrating gratitude interventions with Islamic practices may provide pathways to health and healing among Muslim populations.

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Chapter 11

Incorporating Islamic Principles into Therapy with Muslim American Clients



Nasreen Shah and Munir Shah

Abstract The chapter discusses the versatility of Islamic teachings, focusing on terminology, worldview, and mental health. Islamic principles are aligned with specific therapeutic tools (mindfulness, meditation, and visualization) and therapeutic approaches (DBT—Dialectical Behavior Therapy and ACT—Acceptance and Commitment Therapy). Incorporating ACT into therapy with Muslim American clients is highlighted as ACT conceptualizations of intention, values, acceptance, commitment, and integration of behavioral changes are particularly relevant to Islamic perspectives. The benefits of connecting Muslims to Islamic principles and practices as pathways to healing are discussed as well as areas of concern related to the inclusion of religion and spirituality in therapeutic relationships. A sample script of a hypothetical case study/therapy session is included to illustrate how Islamic tenets and practices can be incorporated into therapeutic work with Muslim American clients.

11.1 Introduction

Early Islamic scholars were actively engaged in the treatment of the mind and body. An Islamic focus on mental health can be traced back to the ninth century with notable figures such as Al-Kindi, who wrote books on cognitive approaches for depression; Al-Razi, who discussed “different types of melancholia, hypochondria, and effects of temperament on personality, lethargy, madness (*junun*), schizophrenia (*hadhayan*), insomnia, mental confusion (*iqtitlat*), and delirium” (Haque, 2018, p. 138); and Al-Balkhi, who proposed concepts such as the impact of cognitions, mental health diagnoses, and the importance of caring for the *nafs* (desires) and the mind (Haque, 2018). Using the Qur’an, *sunnah* (habitual practice), and *hadith* (recorded sayings and records of the Prophet Muhammad), Al-Balkhi wrote about

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cognitive-emotional connections, similar to modern day cognitive therapy. He also developed diagnostic criteria for understanding obsessive behaviors and anxiety, classifying types of mental intrusions, and the mind-body connection (Awaad & Ali, 2015). In addition to the contributions of early Islamic scholars and physicians, psychiatric hospitals were established in Baghdad as early as 705 CE and in Cairo around 800 CE, which emphasized compassionate care for patients, rather than simply housing individuals afflicted with psychological disorders. Emphasis on humane care included medicine and different types of therapy (Syed, 2002).

Despite early progress in mental health treatments in the Muslim world, Muslims today often choose to forgo formal mental health counseling due in part to the Western institutionalized format in which these services are portrayed (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). First-generation Muslim Americans and recent immigrants may rely on family, their mosque community, or religious leadership for support with mental health (Haque, 2004), while second-generation and other US-born Muslims may prefer to seek services with a provider who is familiar with their family and cultural system and willing to work within the framework of their religious values (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Hodge, 2002; Tropp, 2003).

A Deeper Dive: Subdisciplines of Psychology

Munir Shah

The lack of Western therapeutic integration into Muslim communities and countries where Muslims reside means that families, individuals, members of the helping professions, and even researchers are often unaware of the roles mental health professionals play in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health concerns (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). It is common to be asked about the differences between a psychiatrist, psychiatric-nurse-practitioner, psychologist, therapist, psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, social worker, and counselor. Confusion is partly due to the establishment of new norms within the discipline over the past 100 years, and consequently, new designations to differentiate between these norms. As the profession expands, we can expect the number of titles, and thereby the confusion among laypersons, to continue to increase. Most people do not have a clear understanding of the roles of mental health professionals, and this confusion can give Muslim clients and their families poor knowledge about where and with whom to seek help for mental health concerns (Tibebe & Tesfay, 2015). Difficulty knowing where to go and who to ask for support represents one of the many barriers Muslim clients face when accessing services (Graham, Bradshaw, & Trew, 2009).

While many people outside the field of psychology and psychiatry may use certain terminologies interchangeably, and certainly, there can be some

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overlap depending on the qualifications and specialties of each professional, there are notable differences in the duties and responsibilities of mental health practitioners. Psychiatrists are physicians who prescribe medication for mental health conditions. They have a medical degree (MD) and have completed a year of internship and a 3-year residency in diagnosing and treating mental disorders (Rehagen, 2015). As psychiatric postdoctoral programs stopped including training in psychotherapy in the 1980s (Shorter, 2008), it is common for many psychiatrists to refer a client to a qualified psychologist or therapist for counseling. In order to be considered a licensed psychologist in the United States, individuals must have completed a doctorate (either a PhD or a PsyD) in clinical or counseling psychology with a supervised internship (Rehagen, 2015). While psychologists conduct psychological testing and provide psychotherapy, they generally are not licensed to prescribe medication. As military psychologists have been prescribing medication since the US Department of Defense (DOD) initiated the Psychopharmacology Demonstration Project (PDP) in the 1990s (Dittman, 2003; Sammons, 2010), recent efforts in a limited number of US states have given psychologists prescription privileges (Keyes & Lopez, 2009). Psychiatric nurses usually work in hospitals and other inpatient facilities as well as correctional centers; they assist individuals diagnosed with mental disorders and their families to help them understand the diagnosis and treatment program. Many psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNPs) prescribe medications, conduct physical and psychological assessments, and provide emergency psychiatric care (American Association of Nurse Practitioners, 2019). Finally, therapists, counselors, social workers, and psychoanalysts are clinicians who provide therapy to individuals, families, and groups using a variety of therapeutic models that may converge at times.

11.2 What Brings Muslims to Therapy?

“Islamophobia appears to be getting worse . . . I feel it’s causing anxiety in myself . . . I am always deescalating when I want to just be” (Muslim American research participant; Shah, 2018, p. 64).

Muslim American clients may seek mental health services for several concerns, including anxiety, depression, relationships, career, and phase of life issues, which are found in the rest of the population as well. However, as a minoritized religious group, Muslims in the US are also subject to discrimination as a result of Islamophobia, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant sentiments (Read, 2008). A recent report by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU; Mogahed & Ikramullah, 2021) found that Muslim discrimination remains high, with 60–62% of respondents reporting experiences of religious discrimination in the year prior to completing the survey. Additionally, Muslims experience more interpersonal

discrimination than any other religious group in restaurants, interacting with peers at work or school, and institutional discrimination at airports, interacting with law enforcement, receiving healthcare, and when applying for employment. This reiterates findings of the Pew Research Center (Rosentiel, 2007) which noted that a majority of Muslim respondents report difficulty with job discrimination and harassment related to their faith. Bullying of Muslim children also increased from 42% in 2017 to 51% in 2020, with twice as many families of Muslim children in K-12 schools reporting incidents of bullying compared to the general American population (Mogahed & Ikramullah, 2021).

Legislation such as the PATRIOT Act and President Trump's "Muslim Ban" have made Muslims as a group the target of detention, home raids, interrogations, and deportation (Ahmed & Reddy, 2007; Albright & Hurd, 2020; Amri & Bemak, 2013), with the onslaught of negative media portrayals, particularly from right-wing media outlets, exacerbating existing prejudices (Amri & Bemak, 2013; Padela & Heisler, 2010). Given the increase in actual discrimination, perceptions of discrimination may be manifested as hypervigilance and heightened paranoia that can cause individuals to retreat from social interactions to avoid being victimized (Rippy & Newman, 2006). Additionally, underreporting of religious discrimination by Muslims may occur due to fear of backlash or intimidation as well as a desire to avoid "making a big deal out of something" (Shammas, 2017, p. 301) in cases that would be difficult to substantiate. As a result, many Muslims are experiencing anxiety, trauma, depression, and other psychological disorders at increasing rates, with feelings of alienation and isolation creating additional stressors to physical and mental health (Ahmed, Mohammed, & Williams, 2007; Amer & Bagasra, 2013).

It is important to note here that Islamophobia is not limited to Muslims but often affects multiple ethnic groups (Hedges, 2021; Shah, 2018), with anyone who is physically perceived to be Muslim at risk for discrimination, harassment, and violence. While Muslim women who wear the hijab are often singled out by attackers (Dana, Lajevardi, Oskooii, & Walker, 2019), practicing Sikhs have also felt the brunt of Islamophobia based on racist assumptions of the turban (Gohil & Sidhu, 2007; Jhutti-Johal & Singh, 2019). As such, Muslims are just one of the many diverse populations who are underserved in the area of mental health (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011; Ali et al., 2004; Nadal et al., 2012). In addition to Islamophobia and discrimination (Shah, 2018), common concerns leading Muslims to seek therapy include intersectionality of identity, navigating social stressors, refugee status, post 9/11 anxiety, drug abuse, and domestic violence (Amri & Bemak, 2013).

11.3 Western Therapies and Muslim Clients

Many Western therapy practices are centered on principles of individualism, shaped by Eurocentric cultures and values. For example, Bowenian and Minuchin's models, which reflect core approaches to family therapy, view individuation and autonomy as important factors in psychological health (Brown, 1999; Pardeck, 1989). In

Bowenian therapy, family relations are described by togetherness and individuality, where a differentiation of self is expected, and nuclear family systems are considered the norm (Bowen, 1978). Similarly, Minuchin's theory defines family structure as interpersonal and subsystem boundaries that appear on a continuum from enmeshed (or diffused) boundaries on one extreme and disengaged (or rigid) boundaries on the other. Although enmeshed boundaries may be valuable with young children, they fall into the dysfunctional category as children get older (Minuchin, 1974). While these models are useful in determining healthy family functioning in individualistic societies, they may not be accurate or even desirable categorizations of family systems within collectivist cultures in which interdependence and relational harmony are more relevant than individual wellbeing (Lambert D'raven, & Pasha-Zaidi, 2015).

Current trends in the field of Western psychology acknowledge the utility of Eastern practices (Perez-De-Albeniz & Holmes, 2000; Russell, 1986); however, few therapies are designed to be used with clients from non-Western cultures, and few practitioners are equipped to provide services to clients from collectivist cultures, clients with non-Christian religious based values, and clients who do not fit the White European majority for which these therapies were created (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011; Ali et al., 2004). As the needs of Muslim communities remain largely misunderstood and underserved in American therapeutic models (Shah, 2018), practitioners may lack the proper training to adequately address cultural and religious influences on Muslim mental health. Western practitioners are often at a loss when it comes to providing ethically sound, quality psychotherapy from an Islamic perspective, leaving them largely ineffective at working with Muslim clients (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011). Additionally, well-meaning advocates who inadvertently employ a savior mentality based on implicit or explicit biases may propagate negative stereotypes and further the "othering" of Islam and Muslims (Quraishi, 2011; Uddin & Arastu, 2016). By devaluing and/or pathologizing cultural values, practitioners who are unfamiliar with Muslim norms may create obstacles to rapport building, thus undermining the trust that is needed to maintain a therapeutic relationship.

11.4 The Three Waves of Therapy

When conceptualizing the history of psychological therapy, the field is commonly broken down into waves, or "dominant assumptions, methods, and goals" (Hayes, 2004, p. 640) that add to the therapeutic practices of the wave before it. The first commonly recognized wave of therapy was developed in the 1950s and entailed observation and modification of behaviors to increase mental health and help predict maladaptive behaviors (Skinner, 1953). We recognize this wave in experiments of classical and operant conditioning in which the behaviors (pressing levers) of rats and pigeons were reliably predicted and influenced. Current media and commercial

advertising are also based on first wave behavioral principles (Buckley, 1982; Carpintero, 2004).

However, as stimulus-response approaches could not fully address patterns of behavior without considering the role of cognition and emotion, a second wave of therapy emerged in the 1960s (Feliu-Soler et al., 2018). This wave built on behaviorism by linking distorted patterns of thinking to maladaptive behaviors, with the aim of restructuring these thoughts and behaviors into a more adaptive system of functioning (Brown, Gaudiano, & Miller, 2011). Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the most easily recognized of these. Through CBT, thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and core beliefs are restructured to reduce maladaptive psychological symptoms. While this wave became popular as a result of the success of randomized clinical trials (Butler, Chapman, Forman, & Beck, 2006), psychotherapy was structured to accommodate predominantly White, upper-class behavioral norms (Atkinson, Bui, & Mori, 2001; Whaley & Davis, 2007), and little focus was given to non-Western and minoritized populations, which contributed to the belief among Muslims even today that therapy is not inclusive of their worldview (Haque, 2004).

However, therapy needed to be inclusive of differing world views, a trait the third wave of therapy embraced in the early twenty-first century as therapeutic practices extended traditional CBT. Instead of focusing on changing dysfunctional beliefs to relieve specific psychological symptoms, third wave therapies emphasize the acceptance and modification of internal experiences of distress, avoidance, and control (Brown et al., 2011). By actively promoting mindfulness practices and compassion to observe and accept internal experiences, using language and dialectics to increase cognitive flexibility, teach distress tolerance, and move toward valued living (Brown et al., 2011; Gilbert, 2014), the third wave more readily incorporates non-Western interventions into therapy. The emphasis on broader contextual factors and experiential and indirect change differentiate third wave approaches such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993, 2014) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) from traditional CBT. Additionally, many third wave therapies acknowledge and draw from the values inherent in religious and philosophical practices of Buddhism, Stoicism, Taoism, and the Abrahamic faiths to teach compassion and mindfulness (Dimeff & Linehan, 2001; Gilbert, 2014; Hathaway & Tan, 2009; Karekla & Constantinou, 2010; Watts, 2011). As an exhaustive review of third wave therapies is beyond the scope of this chapter, we focus on a few therapeutic tools (mindfulness, meditation, and visualization) and therapy models (DBT and ACT) that work well with Islamic principles and practices.

11.5 Mindfulness, Meditation, and Visualization

Mindfulness, visualization, and meditation play a role in many therapeutic approaches (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Mindfulness meditation was first introduced into Western therapy by Kabat-Zinn (1990) who adapted Buddhist mind-training

techniques such as breath exercises, mindfulness of body sensations (body scans), and hatha yoga into an 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. Since then, mindfulness, or the cultivation of a non-judgmental awareness of present moment experiences, has been incorporated into numerous psychotherapeutic interventions with positive results for clients struggling with depression, anxiety, emotion regulation, rumination, and other forms of psychological distress (Chambers, Lo, & Allen, 2008; Hoffman, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; Huffziger & Kuehner, 2009). While mindfulness and meditation are often discussed together, they are not the same. Mindfulness focuses on paying attention to thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors and can be practiced at any time by being fully engaged in the present moment. Mindfulness can also be facilitated through grounding exercises, guided imagery, deep breathing, visualization, autogenic training,¹ and other techniques (Abrams, 2008; Luthé, 1963).

“The term ‘meditation’ refers to a broad variety of practices, ranging from techniques designed to promote relaxation to exercises performed with a more far-reaching goal such as a heightened sense of wellbeing” (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008, p. 163). While mindful meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) is one type, other forms of meditation include mantra meditation (repetition of a word, phrase, or syllable set to override intrusive inner speech; Lynch et al., 2018), movement meditation such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong (Fronsdal, 2002), and loving-kindness meditation, which involves repetition of positive affirmations and intentions toward oneself and others (Salzberg, 1995). Visualization may also be a part of meditative exercises. Visualization or guided imagery entails the creation of a cognitive representation of images using one’s senses and imagination (Achterberg, 1985; Donaldson, 2000; Knudstrup, Segrest, & Hurley, 2003). Visualization techniques have been empirically shown to improve optimism (Meevissen, Peters, & Alberts, 2011), mood (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006), self-efficacy (Callow & Hardy, 2001; Short et al., 2002), sports performance (Newmark, 2012), and immune responses to stress (Donaldson, 2000). Guided imagery is usually employed as part of a multimodal therapeutic program that may include relaxation techniques, meditation, and self-talk (Weinberg, 2008).

While Western models of therapy often refer to Buddhist traditions of meditation, philosophy, and poetry to enhance wellbeing (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Lutz et al., 2008; McMahan & Braun, 2017), visualization, meditation, and mindfulness are also basic approaches to Islamic spirituality and wellness. Islamic ritual prayer, or *salah*, engages principles similar to meditation. *Salah* incorporates Qur’anic recitations with different physical postures, such as standing, bowing (*ruku*), sitting (*tashahud*) and prostration (*sujud*). Muslims are enjoined to perform *salah* five times a day, with each *salah* being divided into repeated units of prayer (*rakahs*) that vary slightly

¹Autogenic training is a meditation accomplished through visualization and without the cultural elements inherent in traditional meditative practices (Luthé, 1963).

based on the *salah* being performed.² The first step is to make intention (*niyah*) to pray. While standing for prayer, Muslims are taught to visualize Allah in front of them, and to take account of the angels which join them. To facilitate visualization, Muslims pray in the direction of the Kaaba,³ ending each set of *rakahs* by acknowledging angels, others present in the congregation, and the one leading the prayer. Prayer rugs often contain a picture of the Kaaba to help Muslims center their intention. The acknowledgment of the self, others who are present, and intentions to a higher deity, connect the physical, relational, and spiritual aspects of each person.

Additional Islamic mindfulness practices include use of the words *In shaa Allah* (God willing) as part of daily vernacular when speaking of intentions, as well as utilizing the *tasbeeh* or prayer beads. Other Arabic terms like *Subhan Allah* (Glory to God) and *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to God), also acknowledge and express mindfulness of self, action, intention, and gratitude as one engages in daily affairs. Islam's practices of ritual prayer, Qur'anic imagery, *dhikr* (rhythmic devotions), *dua* (supplication, request, gratitude, prayer), *hadith* (traditions and saying of the Prophet Muhammad), as well as Islamic poetry, can be used to enhance behavioral therapies, specifically, mindfulness practices and cognitive frameworks found in ACT and DBT (Ahmed & Amer, 2013).

A Deeper Dive: Rumi's Poetry as a Therapeutic Device

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi and Nasreen Shah

As the source of inspiration for mindfulness has traditionally been Buddhist teachings that have been secularized for Western consumption, Islamic contributions have received little attention, despite similarities between Sufism and other mystic paths. Given the importance of culturally relevant frameworks in third wave therapies, it may be beneficial to incorporate broader transcultural approaches, especially with Muslim clients. While poetry has been used as a healing tool for centuries across cultures, within Western psychology, poetry therapy has been successfully implemented with a variety of clinical populations, including youth (Bowman & Halfacre, 1994; Mazza, Magaz, & Scaturro, 1987), individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (Smith, 2000) and schizophrenia (Shafi, 2010), older adults in nursing homes (Faraji & Fallahi Khoshknab, 2013), and individuals in palliative and

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²Salah consists of mandatory and additional voluntary units. The mandatory unit for the prayer at dawn (*al-Fajr*) is two *rakahs*; the midday prayer (*al-Dhuhr*) and later afternoon prayer (*al-Asr*) have four *rakahs* each, the sunset (*al-Maghrib*) prayer has three *rakahs* and the evening (*al-Isha*) prayer has four *rakahs*.

³The Kaaba (which means "cube" in Arabic) is the holiest site in Islam and rests within the Grand Mosque of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that the Kaaba was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael. While Muslims originally prayed towards Jerusalem, the direction of prayer, or *qibla*, was subsequently changed to the Kaaba (Hameed, 2018).

end-of-life care (Gilmour, Riccobono, & Haraldsdottir, 2020). As a therapeutic device, the poetry of the Jalal-ad-Din Rumi may be particularly relevant. Naficy (2016) notes the positive effects of Rumi’s poetry in her work with elderly Persian immigrants at a rehabilitation center in the US. Poetry therapy using Rumi’s poems was also effective in increasing hope among breast cancer patients in Iran (Daboui et al., 2020). Drawing on the Islamic tradition of releasing control, Rumi’s philosophy highlights the ways that attempts to control circumstances can limit our effectiveness in relating to the world as presented in Radically Open Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (RO-DBT; Lynch, 2018). Key concepts in Rumi’s teachings include “acceptance and acknowledgement of both positive and negative experiences; unlearning of old habits and looking at the world with new eyes; decentering, changing one’s focus from Self to Other; and attunement of body and mind through meditation, music and dance” (Mirdal, 2012, p. 1206). While Rumi’s poetry is integrally Islamic, his works have transcended time, space, and the boundaries of religion (Ciabattari, 2014), thus making his collection of spiritual poems a useful therapeutic tool for both Muslim and non-Muslim clients.

11.6 Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a third wave cognitive behavioral therapy, originally designed for chronically suicidal individuals and those with emotion dysregulation (Linehan, 1993), and has since been expanded to treat a variety of mental health concerns including substance abuse (Linehan et al., 1999), eating disorders (Safer, Telch, & Chen, 2009), and depression (Lynch, Morse, Mendelson, & Robins, 2003). “DBT combines the basic strategies of behavior therapy with eastern mindfulness practices, residing within an overarching dialectical worldview that emphasizes the synthesis of opposites” (Dimeff & Linehan, 2001, p. 10). The term dialectic refers to the inclusion of strategies that focus both on acceptance of self and validation of current capabilities as well as the process of change. The stages of DBT are explained in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1 Stages of DBT treatment (Adapted from Dimeff & Linehan, 2001)

Stages of treatment	Behavioral strategies and target behaviors
Stage 1	Use behavioral control strategies to decrease suicidal tendencies, therapy avoidance/interference behaviors (e.g. missing sessions) and quality of life interferences (e.g. depression, substance abuse, homelessness), and build behavioral change skills (e.g. affect regulation, distress tolerance, mindfulness)
Stage 2	Replace feelings of desperation with non-traumatic experiencing of emotions
Stage 3	Continue to reduce distress and challenges to living and improve ability to achieve a “normal” range of emotions including happiness and unhappiness
Stage 4	Resolve feelings of incompleteness, experience joy and possibly transcendence

While many Muslim clients may be unfamiliar with the process of therapy, DBT is conducive to Islamic practices. In DBT, distress tolerance skills instruct the client to utilize physical sensation, such as changing temperature, movement, deep breathing, and muscle relaxation. The mammalian dive reflex, for example, involves submerging the face in cold water or using ice packs to decrease physical arousal, lower blood pressure, and increase distress tolerance (Linehan, Bohus, & Lynch, 2007). Participants also change temperature in other ways through hot showers or sipping warm tea to decrease physical arousal. For Muslims, the ritual of ablution (*wudu*) which is used throughout the day to cleanse and mentally ready oneself for prayer is similar to the mammalian dive reflex. The use of water in *wudu* changes the temperature to the face, hands, and feet (Irmak, 2014), a practice so similar to distress tolerance skills taught in DBT that it would likely resonate with practicing Muslims. It is also common for Muslims to advise each other to perform *wudu* as a way of achieving a more tolerant, spiritual mindset (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). Changing body position is another DBT distress tolerance strategy that mirrors Islamic worldviews. A *hadith* about anger speaks to this parallel: “If a man is angry, advise him to sit. If he is still angry, have him lie down” (Abu Dawud, 2000). Changing one’s position from standing to sitting creates a shift in the brain’s perception of activation and threat (standing is more in line with fight or flight mode) to social safety (Lynch, 2016).

Inclusion of Islamic traditions and terms that support therapeutic skills can also provide buy-in from practicing Muslims and bridge the gap between Western therapy and Islam. For example, a psychologist might focus clients on connecting with their struggles by asking, “What might your struggles be teaching you? What might Allah⁴ want for you in this?” This question is parallel to the one a therapist might ask a client who is feeling upset or triggered: “What might this mean? What is it that I need to learn?” By encouraging self-inquiry, therapists can help Muslim clients identify their place of discomfort. Another aspect of Islam that resonates with cognitive reframing skills of DBT (Lynch, 2016) is the practice of viewing life as a series of tests, the purpose of which is to come closer to God by growing beyond worldly desires to achieve heaven in the afterlife (*akhirah*). Muslims gain hope through the belief that God is close to those who suffer and every struggle the believer faces in this world (*dunya*) will be rewarded. The *hadith* of Sahih Al-Bukhari (1996) notes that “nothing befalls the believer but that there is something good in it”. As such, Muslims are taught to cognitively reframe their thought process from one of despair and sorrow to resilience and hope. The clinician may also support clients’ Islamic identity by inquiring about the aspects of being Muslim that add value to their life, and utilizing psychoeducation based on the principles of Islamic culture that promote wellness such as family connection, encouraging

⁴There is no difference between the term “God” in English and “Allah” in Arabic. The use of one or the other would depend on the relationship between the client and the therapist. A Muslim therapist may feel more comfortable using Allah, rather than God; however, this may be awkward for Western non-Muslim therapists who are not familiar with the Arabic language.

Table 11.2 Hexaflex components and processes (Adapted from Luoma et al., 2007)

Hexaflex components	Description of processes
Self as context	Identifying the context of the experience and separating oneself from the events themselves to actively observe the context in which these events occur
Values	Personal principles that can be acted upon from moment to moment to create a framework for goal setting
Committed action	Engaging in behavior that is connected to values; changing behaviors to be more aligned with values
Present moment awareness	Connecting to the thoughts, emotions, and sensations that occur from moment to moment in order observe them, rather than fusing and acting upon them
Defusion	Examining the meaning of words and thoughts, creating space between oneself and negative thoughts instead of attempting to control or abolish them
Acceptance	Willingness to experience and make space for one's private experiences, including difficult thoughts and emotions

goodness, and forbidding things that are harmful. Finally, as the DBT skills manuals often include poetry examples from Jalal-ad-Din Rumi to establish principles of mindfulness, this therapeutic approach may be particularly useful in establishing rapport with Muslims (Linehan, 2014; Lynch, 2018).

11.7 Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an empirically supported intervention aimed at increasing psychological flexibility and teaching clients how to engage in values-based living (Luoma, Hayes, & Walser, 2007). ACT consists of six core processes, known as the hexaflex, which include (1) self-as-context, (2) defining valued directions, (3) present moment awareness, (4) cognitive defusion, (5) acceptance, and (6) committed action to foster the client's ability to be present and mindfully aware in the moment, and to engage in behaviors aligned with their values in order to create a meaningful life (see Table 11.2).

ACT is a language-oriented process, focusing attention to the words used to describe experiences and how this dialogue creates a pattern of emotions and cognitions (Luoma, Hayes, & Walser, 2007). *Tasbeeh* is a language orientated practice of furthering relationship with Allah and is compatible with ACT views on language use in therapy. Recitation, pronunciation, dialect, translation of meanings, are ways we use language in Islam to foster growth and observation of mental processes and emotions, guilt, joy, and shame as well as behaviors or values such as charity, kindness, family duty, empathy for others. These are traits found in ACT which are compatible with Islamic perspectives and may align with the worldview of

Muslim American clients. Furthermore, ACT is built upon relational frame theory, which emphasizes the role of language and how clients can become stuck struggling with their inner thoughts and experiences (Harris, 2019). ACT uses metaphors and experiential exercises to connect clients to present moment awareness of their private experiences and supports clients with re-contextualizing these experiences and learning to make space for difficult emotions, as opposed to struggling with them or avoiding them.

The aim of ACT is to engage clients in new behaviors that are aligned with their identified values. ACT facilitates this process by asking clients, “What are you willing to do?” Behavioral change begins with identifying the intention and declaring it before moving to a behavioral commitment from the client. The Islamic parallel to this is *niyah*, or intention, and is mentioned with importance in the Qur’an and *hadith* as being an integral part of a person’s deeds. The Qur’an (2:225) states, “Allah will not call you to account for thoughtlessness in your oaths, but for the intention in your hearts; and He is Oft-forgiving, Most Forbearing”. This is further supported by the *hadith* (Bukhari, 1996; Muslim, 2007), “Surely, all actions are but driven by intentions, and verily every man shall have but that which he intended”. Placing emphasis on intention highlights the Islamic philosophy that Allah has full control over the outcome of all things in *dunya* (the world), but that humans have limited free will, and are judged accordingly by what is in their hearts, known only to Allah, as well as the outcome of their actions. The concept of limited free will can be utilized to foster acceptance of current struggles and the meaning, reward, and promise, that Allah may have for the person enduring the struggle.

The Qur’an describes this world as having both good and bad circumstances, emphasizing that hardship is an accepted part of the human experience and leaving Muslims with a message of hope: “We never burden a soul beyond what it can bear, and with hardship we provide ease, verily with hardship there is ease” (Qur’an, 94:5–6). The emphasis in this verse is on the balance of hardship and ease as both may occur at the same time, thus encouraging Muslims to find the blessings within hardship by fostering a reliance and relationship with God. Additionally, the Islamic principle of *sabr* (patient perseverance) encourages Muslims to not lose hope and to keep actively working through their struggles. The Qur’an (2:153) states, “O you who believe! Seek help in patience and prayer. Truly! Allah is with the patient ones”. The importance of resilience and determination also appear in the *hadith*: “Amazing is the believer, for whatever Allah decrees for him, it is better for him! If he is tested with a bounty, he is grateful for it and this is better for him; and if he is afflicted with a hardship, he is patient with it, and this is better for him” (Muslim, 2007). Similarly, the philosophy of ACT (Harris, 2009), frames acceptance as an integral part of navigating suffering. Therapy creates space to observe and explore the labels we assign to difficult thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and belief systems. By accurately labeling experiences, we allow space for difficulties to exist alongside positive experiences. Clients learn to unhook from unhelpful thoughts by adding in language. For example, the thought “I am a failure” might be observed out loud, “I am noticing the mind come up with the thought that I am a failure”.

ACT shifts the focus from establishing rules for control narratives to creating a rich and meaningful life which occurs when behaviors are aligned with values (Harris, 2019). Values are not dependent upon a secular or religious viewpoint but occur within an individual's context. The value of compassion may look quite different from one person to the next, even among those who ascribe to the same system of faith. The therapeutic orientation of ACT does not seek to make diverse communities into monoliths. Instead, ACT recognizes the impact of individual contexts for each value a client holds. For example, two Muslim clients who identify the context of prayer as an important part of their identity may value different aspects of prayer. The value of learning may present through the behavior of fluent Arabic recitation for one client, while the other may value compassion toward self and others through *dua* (supplication). As such, individual contexts and values may have a myriad of meanings worth exploring in therapy. To begin this work, the therapist might incorporate value identification exercises into a session. Once values are identified and understood, a possible next step might be to explore the client's willingness to move behaviorally in the direction of those values. To the client who values compassion, a therapist might ask, "What would you be willing to do in order to engage prayer in a more compassionate way?" Included in values work is the acceptance of a full range of emotions, sensations, and experiences, including the hardships that accompany a rich and meaningful life.

The process of commitment to values in ACT entails identifying actionable goals that are consistent with the values specific to each individual and engaging in behaviors that move towards these values. The Qur'an (99:7–8) provides a similar message: "Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it". Muslims are therefore enjoined to take small steps in the direction of their values; recognizing that each step even of "an atom's weight" is rewarded by God (Meehan, 2019). The Qur'an also encourages moderation in fulfilling one's oaths and responsibilities. The clinician can therefore engage Islamic perspectives by discussing moderation and responsibility as tools to support commitment to authentic self. As the strategies and principles of ACT overlap with Islamic tenets in multiple ways, Table 11.3 provides a glimpse into more of these connections.

To better understand the ways in which Islamic principles can be incorporated into third wave psychological therapies, the following section contains a hypothetical scenario which is presented with a sample session script and dialogue analysis.

11.8 Sample Case of a Muslim American Woman in Therapy

Sara is a 27-year old straight, cis-gendered, Muslim American woman. She is seeking services for support with anxiety and negative thoughts. Sara is struggling with her self-esteem at work and has difficulty connecting with others.

Table 11.3 Connecting ACT with Islamic principles and practices

ACT principles	ACT strategies	Islamic principles and practices
Attention to language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using metaphors and experiential exercises, ACT strategies connect clients to present moment awareness by adding language to the content of thoughts to make space for difficult emotions and thoughts. • Critical thoughts and harsh judgments are noticed as words and labels of our experience rather than being taken as truths about who we are. • Emotional content is taught to be viewed as information about an experience rather than an extension of oneself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recitation, pronunciation, and use of metaphors in the Qur’an fosters observation of one’s own patterns of thoughts and use of language in labeling unworkable behaviors. • <i>Tasbeeh</i> and <i>dhikr</i>, involve repeating words of praising Allah, and function as an act of worship, as well as being used to connect with Allah and cope with difficult experiences such as anxiety and stress.
Behaviors aligned with values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment of behaviors and values may be facilitated by exploring client willingness to move in a valued direction. A clinician may ask a client “What are you willing to do?” • Changing an unworkable behavior begins with identifying one’s valued life direction and then making the intention to move toward the identified meaningful behavior in line with that valued direction. • Mindful awareness allows the client to let go of the struggle with difficult thoughts and emotions and instead focus on choosing behaviors aligned with values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Niyah</i> (intention) is a mandatory component of performing <i>salah</i> (prayer) and may be used as an example of ways a client behaviorally moves toward a value, in this case the value of a deeper relationship with the Creator.
Suffering as a human condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating suffering by actively and accurately labeling experiences allows clients to unhook from struggles and promote alternative behaviors in line with clients’ values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslims are reminded that human beings are made aware of only a small portion of the vastness of knowledge, while remaining ignorant of many facets of this world as well as the afterlife, and other parts of that universe that remain unseen. The unseen may be utilized by clinicians to promote possible alternatives to current understanding and allow clients to make space for the current struggle. • “Verily we made man to endure hardship and never place a burden greater than a soul can bear” (Qur’an, 2:286). Clinicians may explore ways a client can be more cognitively flexible toward their struggles. • “Therefore, be patient with your

(continued)

Table 11.3 (continued)

ACT principles	ACT strategies	Islamic principles and practices
		trials, know that Allah is aware of your struggle” (Qur’an, 2:153). Verses such as these are plentiful in the Qur’an and may be utilized by clinicians to promote making space for patience or another value the client holds alongside the hardship being experienced.
Acceptance instead of experiential avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindfulness exercises such as imagining thoughts as leaves floating on a stream promote noticing thoughts instead of reacting to them, creating space for hardship without needing to control the ways the hardship shows up. • Mindfulness creates space for evaluating the actions that can be changed and identifying the struggles associated with trying to control unworkable control agendas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We never burden a soul beyond what it can bear, and with hardship we provide ease, verily with hardship there is ease” (Qur’an, 94:5–6). Clinicians may pair passages such as this one to ACT metaphors such as the pushing paper metaphor to create space for positive experiences to exist alongside difficult experiences (Harris, 2019). • “A believer might think something to be good for him, and not see the harm in it, and find some things to be of hardship, while not knowing the good in it, and Allah has full knowledge of all things” (Qur’an, 2:216). Clinicians may point to passages such as this one to identify cognitively flexible alternatives to entrenched rules for how clients might avoid difficult experiences.

She describes feeling “like an outsider, or less than,” and states that her minority identity makes her feel insecure and “judged” by others. Sara also stated that she feels lonely and is hoping that therapy will help improve her relationships with others. Both Sara and the psychologist depicted in this hypothetical scenario are practicing Muslims and the use of Islamic language and terminology was mutually agreed upon during earlier sessions.

Psychologist: Let’s begin with *Bismillahi ar Rahman ar Raheem*⁵ as we start our relaxation exercise. I want you to notice your breath, the in breath . . . and outbreath . . . notice how Allah allows us to breath on our own, each minute, keeping us alive, keeping us well. *Alhamdulillah*. Exhale, relax and release . . . I want you to picture in your mind a place where you feel Allah’s presence, where you feel centered, calm, and at peace. Notice what is around you . . . the colors, the sights, the sounds of this place. This could be an actual place, or a place in your mind, somewhere from your past, or somewhere you are right now. Notice who is with you, and the sensations . . . thoughts, emotions, of being in

⁵In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

this place. Notice what it is like to observe yourself noticing these thoughts, emotions, and sensations.

Imagery is a key part of hypnosis and relaxation exercises and is used to teach clients how to create feelings of wellness and decrease physiological arousal of anxiety and tension. In this example, the Psychologist uses client response specificity (Teyber & Teyber, 2010), incorporating Islamic-based language and concepts of wellness to connect to the client's inner world. Including religious identity into treatment can enhance the exercise in session. Mindfulness allows for present moment awareness, with emphasis on developing the skill of noticing oneself and the thoughts, feelings, and sensations occurring in the body. It is common to begin a therapy session with a mindfulness exercise like the one cited above (Harris, 2019). The emphasis is on the individual experience and the exercises are tailored to the individual's life, culture, and religious experiences. The psychologist introduces values identification as illustrated by the following exchange:

Psychologist: If the most meaningful version of yourself was here in this room over the next hour, what would she tell us? What would be important for her to discuss?

Client: Umm . . . She would say that I don't want to feel lonely and like an outsider. I want to not be anxious anymore, like worried about what I say and do, and how others are judging me.

Psychologist: Ok so you know a bit about what you don't want . . . let's see if, together, we can identify how you do want to show up for yourself. So, I am hearing you want to connect with others . . . is that right?

The client's minority identity, in this case, being Muslim, can be integrated with any intervention. Integrating the client's identity as positive introduces alternatives to her struggle; that is, being Muslim is a strength, and is workable, as opposed to viewing identity as a barrier and source of the problem. This position is illustrated with the following dialogue:

Client: I don't know, sometimes I want things that I think Allah doesn't want for me, but I want to feel like myself-being American and not having to sacrifice other parts of my identity like my religion. I feel frustrated and resentful. Everyone tells me what I am supposed to do, and nothing seems to fit with who I am and what I want for myself. Other people do not have two conflicting identities. I want to be able to connect with both of my cultures, but I feel like I can't be both Muslim and American, I can't have those values because it doesn't work.

Psychologist: So here you are in this space of feeling both identities and also feeling that you can't effectively be either.

Client: Yes, what I choose somehow contradicts the other. If I choose values aligned with my culture, that is, western culture, it's like it makes me less of a Muslim. And If I am more religious that it's like I am less American. I feel disconnected from being American and then very disconnected from being Muslim.

Psychologist: What do you think Allah wants for you? (or) How does this fit with what you want for yourself?

Client: I want to feel better about myself and be able to have better relationships with others. The things that matter to me are integrity, love, and trustworthiness. I don't know how to find those things in others.

Psychologist: Let's explore these values: How does integrity show up in your life? What parts of your Islamic identity are connected to this value?

Client: Well Islamically I see this in written teachings of the *hadith* and the Qur'an that describe truthfulness and pursuing justice: being fair and honest with others. I also see this in my mother who taught me to bring my best self into everything I do: relationships, work, hobbies . . . She said that Allah loves when we do things with our whole heart. Showing up as your best self represents integrity to me.

Psychologist: Can you share an example of a time where you showed up with integrity for yourself?

Client: That's hard . . . I'm not very good at this . . .

Psychologist: Notice the thought, and I want you to say it out loud . . .

Client: I am noticing the thought that I am not good at this . . .

Psychologist: Where do you feel that thought in your body?

Client: My throat feels tight . . . I get worried, I think . . . I am afraid . . . fear!

Psychologist: Describe the shape of fear, the texture, the color . . .

Client: It's like a round ball is stuck in my throat . . . it feels dark in color, rounded and heavy . . . It's hard to breathe around it.

Psychologist: Connect with that fear for just a moment . . . be with it for just a moment . . . notice it.

Psychologist: I would like to try something that might seem a little strange but can help us work with fear. Would you be willing to try it with me? I want you to say the word "fear" fifteen times quickly.

Client: Fear, fear, fear . . .

Psychologist: Good, now let's sing the word fear to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* . . . I'll sing along with you.

Client (laughing): This is strange . . .

Psychologist: What is like to interact with fear in this way?

The Psychologist in this sample case utilizes present moment awareness, values identification, and defusion skills to work with thoughts and emotions accompanying Sara's value of integrity. As defusion creates distance between individuals and their thoughts (Harris, 2009), the Psychologist uses exercises such as singing or repeating a word to create space between Sara and her fear. This space allows Sara to move in a direction more aligned with the value of integrity in relationships, as opposed to acting from a place of fear. Psychologists who integrate compassion-focused work might notice the presence of shame and unworthiness when Sara states, "I am not good at this". Her struggle with judgment is internal. As long as Sara does not accept or value herself, she will continue to struggle with fusion to others' judgments and internalize negative evaluations as her own personal truth. Sara needs to build a positive perception and relationship with her identities (cultural, religious, gender, and others) and value herself in the present moment. This involves unhooking from feelings of shame in order to cultivate readiness for growth and meaningful behavioral changes related to values. To end the session, the Psychologist may choose to engage in mindfulness to practice the skill of noticing. Below is a sample of how a Psychologist might end a session with a mindfulness exercise while integrating Islamic language.

Psychologist: "*Alhamdulillah*, full exhale, relax and release. Allow Allah's presence to be with you in this moment. Allow yourself the full inhale, long breath, deep breath, slow breath, and relax and release . . . feeling the security of the space you are in. As we end our exercise, I invite you to take what you are experiencing in this moment with you as you go about your day. Keep Allah's presence with you, knowing that you can return to this space in your mind, anytime. May Allah be with you. Ameen."

The Psychologist ends this session by incorporating salutations of peace and Allah's presence. Inviting Sara to "return to this space" teaches the client to use her ability to engage in mindfulness practices at any time.

11.9 Final Thoughts

There are many choices available for mental health care, and Muslims can benefit from seeking support with modern therapeutic practices. The popular belief in many Muslim communities that therapy is incompatible with Islamic teachings can be reframed as much overlap exists between traditional therapies and Islamic practices. Muslim clients may elect to work with a trusted member of their community along with a mental health professional depending upon individual needs. A Muslim therapist who shares a similar background and is capable of supporting the client with navigating systems mutual to both client and therapist may also be preferable to many Muslim clients. Modern third wave therapies incorporate the tools of many cultural and religious worldviews and allow the contexts of each individual to remain a therapeutic strength. ACT proposes a shift from the western cultural paradigm of "my goal is to be happy, I should be happy" to creating a rich and meaningful life, which occurs when one chooses behaviors which align with the values one holds (Harris, 2019). Values are not dependent upon a secular or Islamic viewpoint, but occur within an individual's context and may readily be incorporated into therapy. Similarly, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) utilizes practices aligned with Islamic philosophies and can enhance client's ability to use skills that parallel teachings from the Qur'an and *hadith*.

Understanding basic Islamic concepts, terminology, and cultural norms can be helpful in building rapport and conducting effective therapy with Muslim clients. The ability to include Qur'anic scripture and process the meaning of the scripture as it relates to the client is an important component when working with practicing Muslim clients. Before embarking on any therapy program, it is important for practitioners to first find out the motivational, cultural, and religious worldviews that shape their clients' experiences. It would be inappropriate to assume that a Muslim client would be looking for an Islamic approach to therapy without understanding their connection (or lack thereof) to their religious identity. Muslim clients can benefit from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT; Ahmed & Amer, 2013) and should be encouraged to make connections between their values and the information they learn in treatment. Clients show improvement in mental health when they hold a positive view towards their minoritized identities (Haslam, Cruwys, Haslam, Dingle, & Chang, 2016; Pennay et al., 2018). An integral part of conducting psychotherapy with Muslim clients involves a strengths-based perspective of Islamic identity. By working within the client's worldview and inviting clients to process the strengths of being Muslim, therapists can reinforce principles and practices that are culturally relevant, Islamically aligned, and individually tailored.

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Part IV
Acceptance and Allyship

Chapter 12

Decolonizing Muslim Same-Sex Relations: Reframing Queerness as Gender Flexibility to Build Positive Relationships in Muslim Communities



Sarah Shah, Maryam Khan, and Sara Abdel-Latif

Abstract Historically, most Muslims understood sexuality as an aspect of fluid gender performance, not fixed sexual orientations. Decolonizing same-sex discourse can promote queer Muslim acceptance and also build positive relationships in normative Muslim communities. Drawing on theories of boundary-making and Orientalism, we investigate how sexual relations have been socially interpreted pre- and post-colonially and the consequent implications for non-heteronormative Muslims. When Muslim same-sex relations are socially constructed as expressions of gender performance, not sexual orientation, queer Muslims are within the boundaries of normative “Muslimness” in historical and some contemporary Muslim societies. However, when queerness is reconstructed in terms of sexual orientation, a product of Western colonial intervention, rather than gender performance, queer Muslims are excluded from normative Muslimness. We argue that this social reconstruction of same-sex relations as sexual orientation results in exclusionary boundaries and the ongoing neglect of queer Muslims in public discourse. We conclude that varying acceptance of queer Muslims in normative Muslim spaces, including both diasporic Muslim communities and Muslim-majority countries, may rest in whether same-sex relations are constructed as gender performance or sexual orientation—the former yielding inclusion of queer Muslims while the latter yields exclusion.

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12.1 Introduction

In many Western societies, deeper understandings of sexual diversity has translated into more rights for sexually diverse populations.¹ Many countries today guarantee some marriage and family rights for same-sex couples that were previously reserved for opposite-sex couples (Altman, 2001). However, this trend has not been globally consistent, as some societies reject the rights-based approach for many reasons including maintaining state sovereignty against Western imperialism and imposition (Massad, 2007; Mulé, Khan, & McKenzie, 2017). In many Muslim-majority countries today, queer Muslims are seen as outside the folds of Islam, yet this was not always the case.

Historically, much evidence exists to indicate that when Muslims in Muslim-majority contexts engaged in same-sex relations, their sexual behaviors were seen as acceptable performances of gender (Habib, 2007, 2009). Still today, Muslim-majority countries accommodate gender non-binary individuals with third and/or alternative gender identities (Nisar, 2018) as well as with government funded (and sometimes mandated) gender confirmation, formerly referred to as sex reassignment surgeries (Najmabadi, 2013). However, specifically queer Muslims are excluded from normative Muslimness as their queerness is reconstructed as sexual orientation rather than gender performance. We argue that this social reconstruction coalesces within Orientalist homonationalism, erasing the social existence of “queer Muslims” by placing queerness outside the boundary of Islam. Reconstructing same-sex relations in this way reifies Muslim and queer identities as mutually exclusive and explains discursive reactions to incidents like the tragedy that struck the gay safe haven and nightclub, Pulse, in Orlando, Florida (Mahomed, 2016).

On Sunday, June 12, 2016, during the overlapping months of Pride and Ramadan, Omar Mateen, a Muslim American and regular patron of Pulse, killed 49 individuals, most of whom were Black and or Latinx. This event forced queer Muslims into the public eye, highlighting commonly accepted Orientalist notions of Islam as inherently and violently homophobic (Mahomed, 2016). This event also made visible both the normative Muslim homophobia² as well as the civilizational clash rhetoric which positions Western superiority over Islam and Muslims. In turn, space was created to recognize the unique intersectional and marginal positionality of queer Muslims in the West. Conservative American politicians, especially, framed the attacks as part of a systemic “War on America” while they invoked

¹By Western and the West, we are referring to nation-states that are located in the northern hemisphere of the globe such as Canada, US and the UK that recognize, in varying forms, same-sex legislation which address legal freedoms, marriage rights and the right to hold assembly. We recognize that there are differences in how these nation-states take up same-sex rights (Altman, 2001; Grewal, 2005).

²Notably, normative Muslim homophobia cannot be seen as an isolated event and placed outside of the internationalization of queer rights, pinktesting, colonialism, and Western enlightenment and modernity. See Rahman’s (2018) work on *homocolonialism*, which triangulates these processes in constructing Islam as inherently homophobic and the West as tolerant and progressive.

homonationalism (see also Puar, 2007). Out of character with his party's exclusionary social politics, the Republican Representative Jeff Duncan of South Carolina expressed concern for women and the LGBTQ community while simultaneously marking "Radical Islam" as fundamentally unlike any other radical religious movement:

Radical Islam has long oppressed women, targeted Christians, and persecuted homosexuals. Yet, there are some in our government and in the media that claim that radical Islam is just as dangerous as "radical" Buddhism or "radical" Christianity. That simply is not supported by the facts and distracts us from combating Islamic extremism both domestically and abroad (Duncan, 2016).

The Muslim American community was quick to respond to the attack as well. Community leaders and civic Muslim organizations offered strong support and solidarity for the LGBTQ community. This is evident from such leaders calling for American Muslims to donate blood—some even instructing their congregants to break their Ramadan fasts before sunset in order to give blood (Blum, 2016). However, in an attempt to deflect guilt by religious association to Mateen, many Muslim Americans countered by arguing Mateen's engagement in same-sex relations and frequentation of Pulse negated his Muslim identity (Burke, 2016).

The negation of Mateen's Muslim identity based on his same-sex relationships thereby also rejects the Muslimness of anyone engaging in same-sex relations, a painfully bright boundary³ queer Muslims are confronted with today. This boundary speaks to a greater rhetorical debate in which same-sex relations are constructed as outside the boundary of Islam and Muslimness (Rahman, 2014). By demonstrating that same-sex relations, constructed as gender performance, were relatively common in precolonial Muslim societies and allowed the inclusion of same-sex relationships through blurred gender boundaries, we reveal how colonial shifts in construction from gender performance to sexual orientation have pushed same-sex relations outside of Muslimness. In order to decolonize sexual and gender diversity in diasporic Muslim communities, we then focus on the daily lived experiences of queer Muslims in North America, including how they negotiate identities, access support from family and friend networks, and engage in their respective communities of belonging.

12.1.1 A Note on Using the Term "Queer"

In this chapter, our use of "queer" is deployed as an umbrella term and as a political device to capture sexual and gender diversity, though we recognize limitations related to its use as an identity category. Our intention is not to essentialize, but to unify social justice struggles against oppression while challenging the status quo

³We draw on Alba's (2006) conceptual development of Barth's (1969) boundary making process. Alba refers to the process by which boundaries become more rigid and impassable as brightening.

(Ahmed, 2006). We opt to use the term same-sex relations to refer to sexual relations that are not strictly between opposite-sex individuals. We do not use the term “homosexuality”, because of its history as a pathologizing concept that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe (Dunne, 1990). Furthermore, homosexuality as a term “refers properly only to the distinctly modern (and Western) subculture of persons conscious of and defining themselves in terms of an exclusive sexual orientation” (Dunne, 1990, p. 57). Evidence from the discourse of same-sex relations in Arab medical literature and fiction, as well as historical descriptions by European colonists, demonstrates that the terms “‘homosexuality’ and ‘homosexuals’ in their ‘modern’ Western connotation of a conscious subculture of individuals whose self-identification proceeds largely from an exclusive sexual orientation have no historical parallel in the Middle East” (Dunne, 1990, p. 59). We maintain that gender and its expression is fluid at the individual level, and gender is also a social institution that structures interactions and creates hierarchies between social actors (see Bartkowski & Shah, 2014). By “gender performance”, we refer to the aspects of gender that are performed within society according to cultural, social and political understandings of hegemonic masculinities and emphasized femininities (Butler, 2007; Connell, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As such, we employ the concept of hegemonic masculinity when investigating the ways masculinity is simultaneously restricted yet epitomized in relation to other types of masculinities and femininities (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

12.2 Theoretical Framework: Boundaries and Orientalism

Boundaries are socially constructed to signify who does and—more importantly—does not belong. Boundaries are socio-historically situated, and can either brighten and sharpen, becoming more exclusive, or blur, becoming more inclusive. Although Alba (2006) developed this conceptualization to study race relations in immigrant-assimilation contexts, boundaries have been applied to analyses of gender and sexual relations as well (for review, see Lamont & Molnár, 2002). In the Western context, acceptance of sexual diversity has increased in public discourse and policies, assuring equal treatment and access for same-sex couples (Altman, 1993, 2001). Homonormativity, though widely critiqued by queer theorists for reifying classist and normative gender assumptions and acting as a tool of assimilation for ethno-religious minorities (Abraham, 2009), also functions as a way to make same-sex couples blur and cross boundaries in Western contexts. This provides public acceptance and validation for same-sex couples as having legitimate social and sexual relationships (Altman, 1993, 2001).

Homonormativity within nationalist boundary-making produces homonationalism (Puar, 2007), a form of Orientalism. Said (1978) cautioned against Orientalism, a particular type of Eurocentric normative understanding directed against “Oriental” peoples and cultures. These normative understandings are based on a distinction between the Occident and the Orient, framed as fundamentally

opposite and different. In scholarly and literary works, the colonized were oft-described as inferior and irrational, and essentialized as having monolithic and static attributes (Said, 1978). Contemporarily in the West, Muslims are still depicted in a similar vein in political, academic, and popular discourse (el-Aswad, 2013; Moosavi, 2015). This process of essentialization is typical when a dominant group simplistically characterizes a subordinate group. The dominant group reduces the complex characteristics of the subordinate group to controlling images (Collins, 1991), then posits these images as based on culture and biology rather than social construction (McClintock, 1995). This is notable, for example, in media coverage of acts of aggression as driven by monocausal religio-ethnic forces when perpetrators are racialized, but simultaneously invoke a plethora of systemic and institutional factors when the perpetrators are white (Korteweg, 2012; Razack, 1994).

Similarly, homonationalism creates a diametric “us/them” binary in Western political discourse regarding Islam and/or Muslim-majority countries. For example, Americans regard the United States as “progressive” and more “tolerant” of LGBTQ groups than the rest of the world—specifically Middle Eastern and Muslim-majority countries. Sexual autonomy and Islam are often bifurcated and framed as irreconcilable (el-Tayeb, 2012; Rahman, 2010; Verkaaik & Spronk, 2011). As such, America is constructed as the global protector of queer rights and its enemies as violators of such rights. Homonationalist discourse implies Western democratic states are superior because of tolerant social politics, regardless of how tolerant those social politics actually are in practice. An outcome of homonationalism is the erasure of intersectional subjectivities—of being “queer” and “Muslim” simultaneously, as the former is appropriated by, while the latter is disassociated from, American social politics.

Homonationalism does three things. First, while obfuscating the ongoing struggles members of LGBTQ communities continue to face in their respective societies, it erases the nuanced ways in which “other” societies accommodate and accept gender and sexual diversity. Second, even when considering the acceptance of sexual diversity as a process, homonationalism creates a narrative that all societies experience a similar upward trend of “progress” in the recognition of queer rights—in other words, it applies a universal approach to understanding gender and sexual relations as a political identity, rather than recognizing this approach as Eurocentric. As the analysis below reveals, not all societies mirror European trends in understanding and accepting diverse gender and sexual relations. Third, in a global social politic where powerful (Western) nations create global discourse, the “others” (in this case, Muslims and Muslim-majority spaces) internalize the Western imagination of homonationalism, redefining Muslimness as homophobic. Thus, the definition of the Muslim “other” is internalized and produces resistance to the seemingly Western invention of the advancement of sexual rights. The wave of nationalism that swept the Middle East in the twentieth century, as many colonized territories organized for statehood and resisted European colonizing powers (Cole & Kandiyoti, 2002), preceded an era of unprecedented social acceptance of queerness as queer activists organized for rights (Haritaworn, 2015). Because Western imagination created a self-ascribed “liberal” identity in both gender and sexual relations,

the “other” needed to be the opposite. Thus, Muslim antagonism to feminism and minority rights are constructed, but become actualized as Muslims and Muslim societies act in line with this assumption to combat Western cultural influences (Jamal, 2013).

What gets lost in homonationalist discourse is that Muslim patterns contrast with Western constructions of gender and sexuality. That is, Western societies reproduce gender binaries and police gender conformity more than sexual orientation, while Muslim societies police sexuality more than gender expression. Even when phenomena might seem homophobic at first, deeper analysis reveals that variant gender performance, not sexual orientation, is what Western discourse rejects. For example, Pascoe (2007) found that American (particularly White) teenage boys used the term “fag” not to police each other’s sexuality, but rather their gender performance, “fag” being a subordinate masculinity. However, as demonstrated below, this is flipped in modern Muslim-majority contexts, where gender is less policed and regulated, but sexuality is highly regulated. This is why same-sex relations defined as gender performance blurs boundaries, but same-sex relations defined as sexual orientation confronts sharp boundaries. Thus, homonormativity as a way to blur boundaries for queer Muslims would fail in modern Muslim-majority spaces, while gender flexibility may be a more fruitful mode of engagement. By promoting knowledge of premodern discourses on gender in Islamicate⁴ contexts, we can reframe same-sex relations through the language of gender rather than sexuality to promote positive relationships in Muslim communities that uphold the rights and dignity of queer Muslim individuals.

12.3 Constructions of Muslim Same-Sex Relations

In the analysis below, we draw on queer Muslim subjectivity as a target of inclusion and, later, exclusion from the normative Muslim-majority. We are mindful of the fluidity and plurality of Muslims and “Islams”, acknowledging static constructions of either reflect the colonial perspectives we wish to avoid (Khalafallah, 2006; Said, 1978). Reconnoitering meanings connected to Muslim and Islamic subjectivities varies on intersecting levels of individuality, community, and specific sociopolitical and historical contexts. Moreover, we argue against a *singular* or *correct* approach to Islam (Kugle, 2014). Thus, while we argue that Islam as a tradition is open to plurality, as reflected in the diversity of Muslim intersections (Esack, 1997, 2005), we avoid faith-based arguments and instead focus on the social construction of same-sex relations from one context to another. Therefore, we first explore contexts

⁴Hodgson (1974) coined the term “Islamicate” to describe the components of Muslim societies that extend beyond Islam as a religion and into the realm of living social and cultural beings, including the making of art, cuisine and social relationships. Islamicate societies include non-Muslim members and thus explore cultural products and practices that extend beyond the direct religious ordinances of Islam as a faith.

in which Muslim queerness is constructed as gender performance, and therefore acceptable, before turning to the construction of queerness as sexual orientation, and therefore deviant.

12.3.1 *Same-Sex Relations as Acceptable Gender Performance*

In historical Islamicate societies, when sexual relations were constructed as gender performance, Muslims who engaged in same-sex relations fit within a blurred boundary and were generally accepted (Habib, 2007, 2009). There is rich evidence in Islamic history of same-sex relations, a majority of which points to male pederasty as common practice, particularly in the Ottoman Empire, but existing before that as well. There are also indications that both male and female adult same-sex companionships were accepted, emerging from legal rulings (Ali, 2016). In poetry, arguably a less objective medium than legal rulings, there are historical examples of loving same-sex relationships that may or may not have been sexual, as in the case of the Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi and his beloved companion Shams al-Din al-Tabrizi.

Historical Islamicate societies also featured a plurality of gender expressions, as seen in the existence of the *mukhannathun*, or effeminate men (Rowson, 1991)—what we can conceptualize as a subordinate masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Though less documented, there are later historical accounts of “masculine women” as well. Effeminate men, though not performing gender according to hegemonic masculine ideals, could still be attracted to only women, married to wives, father children, and have no interest in same-sex relationships (Rowson, 1991). Thus, gender and sexual fluidity was a feature of Islamicate societies, and the construction of both as gender performance rather than sexual orientation allowed gender- and sexually-fluid individuals to blur the boundaries of Muslimness. However, men’s gender performance was still policed according to hegemonic masculine ideals. Unlike men, women were not expected to perform idealized masculinity, and their sexuality as gender performance was not policed as heavily. Therefore, Islamic jurisprudence did not issue mandates about female same-sex relations (Habib, 2009) until much later; namely, we argue, until after same-sex relations were reconstructed as sexual orientation.

Deeper Dive: Muslim Women’s Same-Sex Relations in History

Sarah Shah, Maryam Khan, and Sara Abdel-Latif

Due to the pervasiveness of sexism and heteropatriarchy, female same-sex relations in Islamicate societies are discussed mainly under male homoeroticism, and garners limited mentions in legal Islamic texts (Bucar & Shirazi, 2012).

(continued)

Scholars have argued that historically men's same-sex relations have been centralized as most of the literature is penned by men, whereby, "women surface in a limited variety of roles as wives, dominant mothers, and beguiling seductresses. Women remain on the margins of recorded premodern Islamic history, and so their experiences are often obscured" (Babayan, 2008, p. 240). For example, grinding for pleasure was "always thought to have involved surface grinding, for in the patriarchal imagination, penetration could only be attained with the male presence" (Habib, 2007, p. 18). Despite this lack of attention, there are some accounts of Muslim women engaging in same-sex relationships as well as marriage. Amer's (2008) work documents historical female same-sex marriage in Islamic regions, particularly evidence found in Arabic and French medieval texts. Specifically, Amer (2008) analyzed "texts that combine female cross-dressing with same-sex marriage, texts in which the cross-dressed woman ends up marrying another woman" (p. 76). There is also Babayan's (2008) examination of poetry written in the seventh century, by an Iranian widow to her former female lover. The poem expresses love and affection for a female companion and friend and "exposes a feminine space in Isfahani society that was established through a ritual of sisterhood or companionship (*Khawahar Khwandagi*), which made use of religious connotations and the language of mysticism to express female love and friendship" (p. 240).

Historical evidence indicates that when same-sex relations were constructed as versions of socially acceptable gender performance, Muslims engaging in same-sex relations blurred boundaries and were accepted into the Muslim mainstream. However, hegemonic masculinity still shaped gender accountability, particularly for men. Men were confronted with a hierarchy of masculinities, created by the enforcement of a patriarchal system and the fervent desire to enforce a monolithic "inviolable" masculinity (Hunt & Kugle, 2012, p. 256). Mernissi (1991) argues, based on historical evidence, that these gender biases developed in early Muslim communities as a result of the personal preferences of influential individuals, pre-Islamic tribal custom, and gendered beliefs imported from Greek culture. According to this hierarchy of masculinities, whether a *mukhannath* had sex exclusively with women or not, he did not meet the hegemonic masculine ideal, and was subject to rebuke and ostracism regardless of sexual preference. On the other hand, men who performed hegemonic masculinity and engaged in same-sex intercourse as the penetrating participant were still constructed as engaging in heteronormative practices and relations. It was the *'ubna*, the penetrated participants in anal sex, that were considered either diseased or, in some cases, sinful (Rowson, 1991), because being penetrated reduced the status of a man to that of a woman.

As a case in point, we offer an excerpt of Ar-Razi's (865–925) work on *The Hidden Illness*, or *'ubna* (see Rosenthal, 1978 for a full translation). First, Ar-Razi explains the cause of men desiring penetration (by other men):

If the sperm of the man is the one that transforms, the newborn child will be male, and if the sperm of the woman is the one that is prevalent, the newborn child will be female. . . . Mostly it happens that one of the two sperms undergoes transformations between these (extremes). Then, the newborn child, whether male or female, is not masculine in the extreme and not feminine in the extreme . . . [and] it is possible that in some cases it happens that a male child's masculinity or a female child's femininity is extremely weak. We therefore find masculine women, as we find feminine men. . . . If it happens by chance that the male newborn child is feminine . . . he is affected by something like the motion of tickling in the region of the rectum when the sperm is plentiful and sharp just as masculine persons have that in the pubic region when the sperm is plentiful and sharp (Rosenthal, 1978, pp. 53–56).

Though biologically inaccurate according to contemporary understandings of conception, the cause of *'ubna* is being described as natural, just as sex and gender binaries are complicated with the presence of naturally occurring masculine women and feminine men. What is remarkable here is the understanding of sex and gender as separate phenomena, centuries ahead of Western constructions of the same (see West & Zimmerman, 1987). Following this, Ar-Razi describes the treatment of the *'ubna*:

If the *'ubna* is prolonged, the person affected by it cannot be cured, in particular, if he is obviously feminine and effeminate (*ta'nith-takhnith*) and loves very much to be like a woman. . . . [If not prolonged] the best treatment consists of frequently massaging penis and testicles and drawing them downward. [Female] maids and [male] slaves with nice faces and much practice (*mufritat*) in this matter should be put in charge of the patient, in order to rub and massage that place and apply themselves to it and kiss it and fondle it. This should be done as much as possible (Rosenthal, 1978, pp. 56–57).

Here, the salient feature of an incurable *'ubna* is that “he is obviously feminine and effeminate (*ta'nith-takhnith*) and loves very much to be like a woman”. Note that the *'ubna*'s propensity to have same-sex relations is not under scrutiny, but his sexual position as an indication of gender performance is. He is not chastised for wanting sexual relations with men, but for wanting to be penetrated like a woman. In his recommended course for treating the *'ubna*, Ar-Razi recommends frequent stimulation by both female maids and male slaves. Thus, again, it is not same-sex contact that is being problematized here but a man's desire to be penetrated like a woman.

Thus, we emphasize that sexual relations as gender performance, not sexual orientation, defined the boundaries that confronted queer Muslims—particularly gender nonconforming men—in historical Islamic societies. It is not heterosexual male sexuality that is privileged in historical Islamic contexts, but rather masculine performance in sexual relations generally, including same-sex relations. We therefore argue that hegemonic masculinity is at the heart of the conflict between historical Islam and acceptance of, or boundaries around, same-sex relations. As discussed below, these blurred boundaries became clearer, excluding same-sex relations from the boundary of Islam, only when reconstructed as sexual orientation through the forced import of colonial European—particularly Victorian—Christian heteronormativity.

12.3.2 *From Gender Performance to Sexual Orientation*

A significant portion of scholarly work on Muslim gender and sexual relations focuses on the negotiated construction of same-sex relations in the political context of cultural interactions between Islam and the West. Thus, discussion of the political dimension of colonial discourses on Islam and same-sex relations requires an investigation of Orientalist normative assumptions as a fundamental element of this analysis. We argue that the contemporary performance of Muslim identity as contrasting to the secular West has largely abstracted the rights of queer individuals in a larger game of polemics, politics, and cultural supremacy, as queer rights attached to sexual orientation became associated with the West.

In historical Islamicate societies, same-sex intercourse was relatively common. However, concepts of sexual orientation as an *identity* were absent. As demonstrated in the previous section, same-sex relations were not discriminated against. Rather, gender accountability was the focal feature. However, with the influx of Victorian-era constructions of same-sex intercourse as deviant sexual orientation, alongside the subjugation of colonized peoples, European colonists vilified what they considered a sexually licentious and immorally permissive society. Take, for example, the scandalized reflections of a French doctor visiting Morocco in 1912:

To homosexuality in Morocco—as with syphilis moreover—attaches no dishonor. For the notables of Fez, it is just as good form to have a *mezlough* (a small, pre-pubescent boy) or a *hassas* (a youth having reached puberty) as a pretty mistress. When night falls on the Moroccan cities, the *zamils* (passive homosexuals) . . . walk through the streets and souks, ready to follow the *louats* (active homosexuals) of a certain rank into the [interiors] of their houses or to engage others in the gardens, empty spaces and dark corners which are never lacking in Morocco . . . [T]he Moorish cafes are always or almost always centers of male prostitution . . . The Moorish baths constitute more discreet dens of prostitution . . . Among the soldiers of the Cherifian troops, pederasty is so widespread that one is hard-pressed to fight against it (cited in Dunne, 1990, p. 62).

Same-sex relations, therefore, became “a central issue of polemical attacks against Islam” (AbuKhalil, 1997, pp. 96–97). Contemporary Western rhetoric against Islamicate societies as sexually repressive is a perpetuation of discourses of Western superiority even when Western values are now inverted (Puar, 2007). Thus, what was once, “those homosexual Muslims are backwards”, has now become, “those homophobic Muslims are backwards”. Framing this discourse as Western progress is a façade to enforce cultural superiority. As Zanghellini (2010, p. 273) notes:

It is not surprising that the collective unconscious of Muslims would be particularly preoccupied with reclaiming for itself the badge of heterosexual purity and integrity, and that such a preoccupation would have survived the West’s belated, and relatively sudden, waking up to the rights of sexual minorities and the attendant change in Western rhetoric about Islam.

The “reclaiming” of “the badge of heterosexual purity” was paired with a revisionist interpretation of historical Islamicate texts, as Muslims implemented, repurposed, and renegotiated constructions of same-sex relations as sexual orientation, resulting in sharper boundaries.

We draw on the works of Kugle (2010, 2014), Jamal (2001), and Zanghellini (2010), who explore historical rulings on homosexuality based on the Qur'an, critically engaging with how the rulings reflect shifting social constructions of same-sex relations as unacceptable. These scholars focus on rulings derived from the following Qur'anic verses describing the story of Lot (Lut), in which same-sex relations appear obliquely:

What, do you commit such indecency as never any being in all the world committed before you? See, you approach men lustfully instead of women; no, you are a people that do exceed (Qur'an 7:78–82).

Do you leave your wives that your Lord created for you? (Qur'an 26:160–176).

My daughters are cleaner for you, fear God and do not degrade me concerning my guests (Qur'an 11:79–84).

From the rulings, the scholars identified three general trends in queer studies of the Qur'an. The first trend argues that the Qur'an condemns violence and rape, and not same-sex intercourse. In other words, the people of Lut were guilty for "wanting something [moral] in an immoral way" (Jamal, 2001, pp. 66–67). The second trend argues that the Qur'an considers same-sex intercourse a sin on par with other sins of morality, like willful ignorance or anger. Lastly, the third trend includes scholars who argue that the Qur'an discusses same-sex relations in the context of inherent cultural assumptions about masculinity. Thus, rather than condemn same-sex relations, the Qur'an condemns men receiving anal sexual intercourse, or men forcibly emasculating other men via rape.

The scholars point out that Lut's people could not have been destroyed for the sin of same-sex intercourse alone, as social actors involved who did not engage in same-sex relations were destroyed alongside those that did (Jamal, 2001; Kugle, 2010). Thus, the sin of Lut's people was not same-sex intercourse in itself, but rather the denial of their prophet, disrespect of venerable guests, and their subsequent alienation from God (see also Morschauser, 2003; Toensing, 2005). Based on the scant material from the Qur'an that can be exploited for the exclusion of individuals who engage in same-sex relations, some scholars conclude that it is the *hadiths*, or narrations from Muhammad, that are the main sources of homophobia in Islamic societies (Kugle, 2010). However, the *hadiths* that prescribe punishment for same-sex intercourse are themselves considered unreliable; thus, the *hadith* tradition does not and cannot provide grounds for punishing same-sex relations. Despite this, contemporary normative Muslim clerics pooled together enough scant evidence from the recesses of the broad canonical tradition of *hadith* to condemn same-sex relations. As Kugle (2010) states, "What the Prophet 'could have said' easily morphed into something the Prophet 'must have said' (especially when the report confirmed popular prejudice of the time) and was later transformed into something 'the Prophet did in fact say'" (p. 87).

The reconstruction of same-sex relations as sexual orientation parallels the contemporary association of feminism and gay rights with the West (Najmabadi,

2013; Rahman, 2014). This association has resulted in further constructions of same-sex relations as “un-Islamic,” regardless of contrary evidence (Hunt & Kugle, 2012). This has had the disastrous effect of erasing queer Muslim history. That is, when dominant cultures polarize against various subcultures, they forcibly eliminate native understandings of congruent discourses by provoking oppressed groups to push back and redefine themselves in terms of opposition to the dominant culture (see also Espirtu, 2001). In this way, Western powers through imperialism disrupted “the long Islamic tradition of tolerating homosexuality” (AbuKhalil, 1997, p. 99), only later to then critique colonized people for integrating previously normative Western cultural biases against same-sex relations. As we discuss below, contemporary Muslims are currently struggling to engage with the West and display the usual range of human psychological reactions from abuse and oppression: some desperately try to earn the West’s approval while others angrily resist. These responses manifest in both abstract discourse and sociopolitical actions (Hunt & Kugle, 2012).

12.3.3 Same-Sexual Relations as Deviant Sexual Orientation

Focusing on contemporary queer Muslims in diasporic contexts, same-sex relations are increasingly constructed as (deviant) sexual orientation. Thus, even female same-sex relations are now confronted by sharp boundaries (Siraj, 2016), despite a lack of historical precedent for policing Muslim women’s same-sex relations (Ali, 2016). Below, we draw on research examining Islamophobia in LGBTQ spaces and homophobia in diasporic Muslim communities to explore queer Muslim narratives and their experiences at the intersections of religion, sexuality, and gender. As queer Muslims are confronted with Islamophobia in mainstream LGBTQ spaces, they are expected to perform homonormativity, with constructions of same-sex relations as sexual orientation. This reconstruction of same-sex relations as sexual orientation also pushes queer Muslims out of the boundary of Islam, which they experience as homophobia in Muslim communities. Normative Muslims and Muslim majority nation-states are amongst the many vociferous elements condemning queer identity-based rights in local and international arenas (Ibrahim, 2016). Queerness in its varying forms has been denounced by normative Muslim leaders as “‘cancers,’ ‘impurities,’ and ‘corruption,’ [that needs to be] ‘cleansed’” (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 955). Thus, queer Muslims find themselves hiding their sexual orientation in religious spaces, and their religious affiliation in the LGBTQ community—what Abraham (2009, p. 85) calls the “Muslim closet”.

Deeper Dive: Canadian Muslim Attitudes About Same-Sex Relations

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A common assumption about Muslims is that they are *uniformly* homophobic and reject same-sex relations as outside the folds of Islam. This assumption is not supported by empirical evidence. In reality, there exists a diverse array of opinions and modes of thinking about Muslims who engage in same-sex relations. We have a glimpse of the range of Canadian Muslim attitudes on same-sex relations through data from the Environics Institute, 2016 Survey of Muslims in Canada (SMC). Between November 2015 and January 2016, the SMC was conducted via telephone by mostly Muslim interviewers to 600 self-identified Muslim adults across Canada to find out about their experiences, attitudes, and sociodemographics. The sample was stratified in order to ensure representativeness of the Canadian Muslim population.

When asked “What do you like least about Canada?”, the SMC respondents indicated many different items, the most common of which is the cold weather. Only two respondents (or 0.33% of the sample) indicated they dislike Canada because of “same-sex marriage or homosexuality”. When asked specifically about their opinion on “homosexuality,” less than half (45%) of surveyed Canadian Muslims indicated they believe homosexuality should not be accepted by society. Although only one-third (33%) of surveyed Canadian Muslims expressed unconditional support (e.g., “Homosexuality should be accepted by society”), there was a sizable proportion of respondents who provided more nuanced responses than either accepting or rejecting homosexuality outright. About one-fifth (22%) of respondents selected the “other” or “don’t know/not applicable” categories. When prompted on their selection, many of these respondents indicated their response “depends” on the situation, that the matter was “personal, not a moral issue,” or that they did not have an opinion on the matter. In sum, the slight majority (55%) of surveyed Canadian Muslims did not express homophobic attitudes.

As may be expected, the attitude that homosexuality should be accepted by society differs by respondents’ social categories. Gender was not a salient factor, as women and men support the social acceptance of homosexuality in relatively equal proportions (34% and 32% respectively). Immigrant generation, however, was more salient: while less than one third (30%) of first-generation Canadian Muslims support the social acceptance of homosexuality, half (52%) of second generation and over three quarters (78%) of third generation surveyed Canadian Muslims express the same. As such, Canadian Muslim attitudes towards homosexuality are diverse, complex, and nuanced. Importantly, Canadian Muslims do not overwhelmingly reject homosexuality, and later generations of Canadian Muslims seem to be more accepting.

12.4 Thematic Reflections

In this section, we offer a series of thematic reflections taken mainly from three sources of analysis. The first source is the wider literature on Islamophobia in mainstream LGBTQ communities, trans- and homophobia in some Muslim communities, as well as extant studies and narratives on queer Muslims. The second source is the lived experiences of one of the authors (MK) as a racialized queer Muslim woman. The third source is reflections from countless informal conversations with fellow racialized queer Muslims in social, religious, and spiritual settings on the intersections of gender, race, privilege, religion, ethnicity, and spirituality.

12.4.1 *Islamophobic and Xenophobic “Othering” in Mainstream Queer Spaces*

The literature on queer Muslims demonstrates that racism, prejudice, Islamophobia and “othering” of Muslims are features of mainstream LGBTQ spaces (Haritaworn, 2010, 2015; Khan, 2016a, 2016b). In everyday life, queer Muslims are often confronted with false assumptions about living an intersectional identity, given the lack of information about queer Muslims specifically, as well as misinformation about Islam generally (Khan & Mulé, 2021). Queer Muslims are also confronted with expectations on how to perform queerness with, for example, being “out”. Although being “out” is a diverse performance that is constantly negotiated and many queer Muslims reject the set typology of “coming-out” models, they also experience mainstream ostracism for failing to conform (Kugle, 2014). According to homonormative expectations, “out” is performed by being out to everyone, a performance that is equated with self-love and acceptance. This construction of “coming out” corresponds to same-sex relations as sexual orientation and therefore identity, creating a binary of “good queers”, who wear their sexuality on their sleeve, and “bad queers”, who are closeted within certain contexts (Esack & Mahomed, 2011; Mahomed, 2016). When sexual relations are constructed as sexual orientation, boundaries are sharpened for individuals engaging in the same-sex relations regardless of their gender identity and performance. These sharper boundaries also erase the subjectivity of those at the intersections. For example, Eman Abdelhadi, an NYU doctoral student, stated after the Pulse tragedy, “Islam and queerness [are] being pitted against each other in a sort of battle and that just makes it impossible for me to exist as I am” (Zoll & Hajela, 2016; see also Chamseddine, 2016). Abdelhadi’s words were echoed by other queer Muslims (Graham, 2016; Habib, 2016), confronted by exclusionary, bright boundaries heightened in the aftermath of the Pulse shooting.

Queer Muslims are often imagined as an anomaly, viewed as sexually and culturally repressed (Habib, 2010), and in need of saving from oppressive culture and family. On countless occasions, queer Muslims are questioned about their

adherence to Islam in light of the many atrocities committed against queers, and if families and friends have tried to cause harm through honor killings. There is extensive misinformation about queer Muslims coupled with Islamophobia and xenophobia in general. Many queer Muslims are tasked with challenging false assumptions about living an intersectional identity. Mainstream queer spaces are not always welcoming and safety is important to health and wellbeing. By contrast, in Toronto, Canada, the Unity Mosque and Salaam Canada have offered invaluable support in terms of gender and sexuality affirming spaces where queer Muslim experiences are both acknowledged and valued. For queer Muslims, attending and participating in the Friday prayers can validate lived experiences, and be a place where critical discussions enrich relationships with God, community, Islam and the larger world. For example, there are ways to “queer” Islam and Muslimness that challenge conventional understandings of religion, sexuality, gender and race (Yip, 2005a, 2005b). These queer acts may include praying in a mixed congregation, women leading sermons and prayers, praying when menstruating, and other such practices that challenge normative approaches. Queering Islam creates expansive understandings of Muslimness by celebrating and acknowledging the diversity of the many approaches to Islam and being Muslim (cultural, practicing etc.). Another example is engagement with *ijtihad* and *tafsir* as strategies of resistance in queer and progressive expressions of Islam (Kugle, 2014). *Ijtihad*, is referred to as “critical reasoning” (Barlas, 2002, p.71) and is an ongoing life-long process. It means using the self, intellect, corporeal and lived experiences, emotions, and spirit to bear on matters related to faith and its practice (Khan, 2016b). *Ijtihad* can challenge conventional understandings of the institution of marriage through the following actions: performing same sex *nikah* at the mosque led by an interfaith imam; choosing a common-law partnership over marriage; remaining single; and polyamorous and open marriages.

12.4.2 LGBTQ Muslim Family Relations and Support

While queer Muslims experience pressure to conform to homonormativity in LGBTQ spaces, they also experience pressure to conform to heteronormativity from their families. Woven into the fabric of Western national identities, societal institutions and attitudes are deep-rooted multifaceted forms of trans- and homophobia (Ahmed, 2006). Ergo, families and individuals, irrespective of religion and ethnicity, are not immune to such influences. Queer individuals—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—negotiate and resist compulsory heteronormativity within families (Ahmed, 2006) and host societies (Abraham, 2009). This is evidenced by many queer Muslims who contend with intricate family relations and obligations, experience coercion toward heterosexual marriage, and sometimes capitulate to uphold the family image and accept heteronormative approaches to Islam (Al-Sayyad, 2010; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010, 2012; Yip, 2005a, 2005b).

An important aspect to keep in mind is that each family is different and not all Muslim families respond in similar ways to queerness. Kugle’s (2014) scholarship

asserts that there is a spectrum of acceptance and support for queer Muslims from their families of origin, and that the families are not inherently homophobic and transphobic. We are against a fictitious essentialized framing of Muslim families. Equally erroneous is the image that all secular families are LGBTQ positive. Rather, sexually- and gender-diverse Muslims “do not simply reject their parents’ expectations and their siblings’ pressure to conform. They challenge rather than reject their families. They also create new models of family and community as they grow in strength and confidence” (Kugle, 2014, p. 78). Some families respond with an outright disownment and abandonment of their LGBTQ children and family members with no attempts at coming to an agreement in the future (Hendricks, 2009). However, the majority of LGBTQ Muslims and their families end up having some form of co-existence; and their families demonstrate varying levels of acceptance. This takes many forms, such as maintaining contact and relationships with their LGBTQ children post-coming out; visiting, defending and supporting LGBTQ children with extended relatives and family members; providing varying levels of acceptance and openness to the partners and spouses of their children; and attending milestone life celebrations like weddings, adoptions, and child births of their LGBTQ family member (Compton, 2017; Hendricks, 2009; Jalees, 2013; Khan & Mulé, 2021).

In order to transcend dichotomous and essentialist thinking, a decolonizing perspective is warranted to understand why some families have an arduous time with queerness. The denial and censure of queer identities by some Muslim families can be understood as a rejection of Western and European imperialism and colonialism. Notably, contemporary queer identities and identity categories are imagined as active forms of neo-colonialism, Eurocentric and Western hegemonic influences (Gopinath, 2005; Massad, 2007), and a conforming to Whiteness and its culture (Al-Sayyad, 2010).

12.4.3 Against Uniformity: Implications

As Muslim same-sex relations were reconstructed from gender performance to sexual orientation, queer Muslims were pushed outside the boundary of Islam, and the association between the West and queer rights has continued to erase the Muslimness of queer Muslims (Ahmed, 2011). When overlapping categories are treated as mutually exclusive, like “Muslim” and “queer”, Orientalist and homonationalist frames reproduce false boundaries between and across categories. Such boundary-making results in queer Muslim invisibility: queer Muslims remain largely undiscussed and unrecognized by both the Muslim and LGBTQ communities (Abraham, 2009; El-Tayeb, 2011, 2012). Thus, when queer Muslims are forced into public discourse following events like the Pulse tragedy, historical acceptance of queer Muslims within Islam continues to be ignored.

Whenever same-sex weddings occur in Muslim-majority countries, they are hailed as the first of their kind, which is factually inaccurate and erases queer Muslim

history (Habib, 2007). Likewise, assumptions that diasporic Muslims have negotiated acceptance of same-sex relations as “indications of Muslims adapting their faith to the western context” (Rayside, 2011, p. 109) is an ahistorical conclusion based on Orientalist assumptions of Islam as antithetical to same-sex relations. Although queer Muslims in diasporic contexts continue to subvert homophobia and Islamophobia in their host societies (Abraham, 2009) while holding fast to Islam (Siraj, 2016), this approach⁵ has not garnered mainstream Muslim support (Yip, 2008). This approach remains largely unsupported because diasporic heterosexual Muslims are especially critical of homosexuality, which they construct as sexual orientation (Siraj, 2009). Sexual preference as a category of social identity is not native to historical Islamicate societies; thus, the idea of an “exclusive sexual orientation” is not a useful concept for these societies (Dunne, 1990, p. 57). Furthermore, there is no concept inherent to the historical Muslim cultural repertoire wherein the gender of one’s sexual partner informs one’s sexual identity. Nor is there a notion of homosexual identity in historical Islamicate societies—only of the sexually penetrated and the penetrator, regardless of gender. Applying contemporary notions of identity politics to historic Islamicate societies requires an ongoing critical analysis of sociopolitical contexts for each situation (Najmabadi, 2008, 2013).

We argue that in order to effectively address queer rights in Muslim spaces, recognizing and working with constructions of sexuality that have historically existed in Islamicate societies would simultaneously lend authority to and create space for activists, academics, and allies. Such efforts would blur the boundaries in an effort to expand them. This may be more effective than forcibly dismantling sexual boundaries through Eurocentric and/or Western approaches, especially as Western assumptions about gender and sexual relations cannot be universally applicable. The thrust of academic and activist work advancing queer Muslim interests, then, should depart from Western queer academia and activism, where homonormativity is utilized as a way to blur sexual boundaries and include sexual diversity. As an alternative strategy, same-sex relations promoted as gender diversity in Muslim-majority contexts could be used to blur boundaries, resulting in greater acceptance of queer Muslims.

Historically, when Muslims in Muslim-majority contexts engaged in same-sex relations, their sexual behaviors were seen as acceptable performance of gender (Habib, 2007, 2009). Still today, Muslim-majority countries accommodate gender non-binary individuals in diverse ways. For example, gender confirmation or sex reassignment surgery (SRS) is legal in Iran, as transsexuality is religiously and legally recognized (Najmabadi, 2013). The legalization of SRS in Iran following Khomeini’s confrontation with Maryam Khatoun Molkara is often framed as either a surprising outcome given the social conservatism of the Islamic Republic, or a logical outcome of social conservatism leading to “*mullahs* curing homos” (Bucar, 2013, p. 199). A missing component from such discussions is how transsexuality (as gender performance) is both permissible and state-funded in Iran, but

⁵For an excellent discussion see work by Kugle (2010) and Hendricks (2008, 2010).

homosexuality (as sexual orientation) is not. Even the latter is nuanced by gender, as men engaging in same-sex relations can face capital punishment, while women would face corporal punishment (Bagri, 2017). The disparities of punishment align with early Islamic commentary on same-sex relations: women's same-sex relations were not deviant since women were not tasked with performing masculinity, while for men, performing subordinate masculinity was deviant.

Similar to Iran's recognition of transsexuality, Pakistan's recognition of the legal status of the *Khawaja Sira* community, comprised of mainly gender nonconforming members, is fairly recent (Nisar, 2018). However, this community has existed for centuries, despite British colonial attempts to criminalize gender nonconformity as "a breach of public decency" (Preston, 1987, p. 384), a practice the British imposed in multiple colonized lands, Muslim or not, including Turtle Island/North America (Anderson, 2000; Ibrahim, 2016; Stevenson, 1999). Under British rule, gender nonconforming communities were criminalized and therefore subject to state scrutiny practices, such as registration (Reddy, 2005). Although British laws were repealed, the *Khawaja Sira* community today still experiences discrimination and ostracism from mainstream Pakistanis, with patriarchal stigma at the root of the issue (Nisar, 2018).

By highlighting the two cases of Iran and Pakistan, we demonstrate the importance of historical context in situating the ways in which hegemonic masculinity operates. While each country allows for blurred gender boundaries despite colonial contact (and in the case of Pakistan, forced British laws criminalizing gender deviance), neither country readily negotiates criminalization of same-sex relations as sexual orientation. In societies where sexual relations are constructed as gender performance, academics are tasked with carefully understanding indigenous, local constructions of same-sex relations, while activists may consider blurring boundaries via gender fluidity as a promising route for queer rights. Muslim antagonism towards same-sex relations is historically recent and can change, and hegemonic masculinity can be reconfigured to create more gender equitable relations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) for subordinate masculinities and femininities alike.

12.5 Conclusion

This chapter re-examined Muslim same-sex relations through precolonial Muslim discourses in order to reframe queerness as flexible gender performance and to build positive relationships within normative Muslim communities. Drawing on theories of boundary-making and Orientalism, we investigated how sexual relations have been socially interpreted pre- and post-colonially to explain why queer and trans Muslims are excluded by normative Muslimness today. We highlighted historical cases in Islamicate societies, where sexual relations were constructed as gender performance, and therefore Muslims who engaged in same-sex relations fit within a blurred boundary of Muslimness and were generally accepted. By demonstrating that same-sex relations, constructed as gender performance, were relatively common

in precolonial Muslim societies and allowed the inclusion of same-sex relationships through blurred gender boundaries, we reveal how colonial shifts in construction from gender performance to sexual orientation have pushed same-sex relations outside of Muslimness.

When queerness is reconstructed in terms of sexual orientation, a product of Western colonial intervention, rather than gender performance, queer Muslims are excluded from normative Muslimness. By drawing on contemporary queer Muslim experience, we demonstrated that when sexual relations are constructed as sexual orientation, boundaries exclude individuals engaging in same-sex relations regardless of their gender identity and performance. Today, Muslim-majority countries will accommodate gender nonconformity, for example, by acknowledging third/alternative gender identities and providing government-funded gender confirmation (sex reassignment) surgeries.

Lastly, we offered thematic reflections based on queer Muslim narratives and lived experiences and highlighted the intersections of gender, race, privilege, religion, ethnicity, spirituality, and ability in social, religious, and spiritual settings. In order to decolonize sexual and gender diversity in diasporic Muslim communities, we focused on the daily lived experiences of queer Muslims in North America, including how they negotiate identities, access support from family and friend networks, and engage with their intersectional identities in their respective communities of belonging. We conclude that varying acceptance of queer Muslims in normative Muslim spaces, including both diasporic Muslim communities and Muslim-majority countries, may rest in whether same-sex relations are constructed as gender performance or sexual orientation—the former yielding inclusion of queer Muslims while the latter yields exclusion.

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Chapter 13

The Heart of Autism: Building a Positive Islamic Model of Cognitive Disability



Laila S. Dahan

Abstract Autism is a developmental disorder that has been on the rise in recent years around the globe. When a child is diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), it is a difficult and painful time for parents and relatives. People often turn to their faith in order to help them understand and face the complications that arise from this diagnosis. However, stigma is very pronounced in many Muslim majority regions and communities, often leaving individuals with cognitive disabilities and their families isolated. Muslims can encounter both understanding and assistance within the faith, but also confusion amid cultural beliefs about *jinn* possession, black magic, and the evil eye. This chapter delves into Islamic beliefs regarding cognitive disabilities in accordance with a strengths-based view of disability. The Heart Model, a positive Islamic Model of Cognitive Disability that applies the Islamic conceptualization of self to individuals with neuro-atypical development, is introduced. Finally, suggestions for the integration of Islamic teachings with psychological approaches to brain-based conditions are presented.

13.1 Introduction

There are nearly 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide (Desilver & Masci, 2017), representing diverse nationalities, cultures, beliefs, and practices (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). The Qur'an acknowledges the inherent nature of this diversity through the verse "We created you from a single pair, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another" (49:13). It further supports the innate dignity of every human being (Aminu-Kano & Fitzgibbon, 2014) as evident in the verse "We have bestowed dignity on the progeny of Adam [...] and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of our creation" (17:70). Yet, despite the equality of this status across all humankind, individuals with disabilities

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have often been considered lesser than others. The Qur'an (80:1–3) tells the story of a blind man who asked the Prophet Muhammad to teach him about Islam; but instead of responding with kindness, the Prophet frowned and turned away, thus incurring the admonishment of God. Through this example, Muslims are reminded that all human beings are conferred dignity and must be respected as a part of God's creation (Blanks & Smith, 2009); having a disability does not negate the basic human right to a meaningful life. Instead, people with disabilities are a fundamental part of the social order (Rispler-Chaim, 2016) and are encouraged to participate in education, family, and social settings to the extent possible (Al-Aoufi, Al-Zyouod, & Shahminan, 2012).

While there is no broad or all-inclusive terminology for disability in the Arabic language (Bhatty, Moten, Tawakkul, & Amer, 2009), it is possible to ascertain some general Islamic perspectives using the Qur'an, *sunnah*, and *shariah* (Rispler-Chaim, 2016). The term “disadvantaged people” in the Qur'an (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012, p. 205) encompasses a wide variety of conditions and reflects a holistic approach to social justice and equality (Bazna & Hatab, 2005). While the principle of *qadar*, or the Islamic belief in a predetermined fate, supports the notion of disability as a condition ordained by God (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012; Hasnain, Shaikh, & Shanawani, 2008), the lack of any specific language for disability in Islamic texts proffers it a normal condition within the diversity of human life (Al Khateeb, Al Hadidi, & Al Khatib, 2014). Unfortunately, notwithstanding Islamic directives for acceptance and inclusion, many Muslims continue to believe that a productive future is not possible for individuals with disabilities (Bhatty et al., 2009). Cultural bias against people with impairments have been noted throughout history (Barnes, 1996), and despite Islam's clear stance that disability is a part of life and not a punishment or shameful condition, cultural practices often illustrate a different reality (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012).

13.2 Disability and Mental Illness

Physical and cognitive disabilities may be co-occurring, but this is not always the case. Cognitive disabilities—those affecting the processing of information contributing to impairments in social skills, daily life skills such as personal care and hygiene, conceptual skills like language and literacy, and practical skills such as using money or getting a job—include dementia, amnesia, and developmental disabilities. This chapter focuses primarily on autism, a developmental disability that appears on a spectrum known as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD refers to a group of complex developmental disorders of the brain characterized by difficulties in social interaction, impairments in communication, both verbal and non-verbal, and repetitive behaviors and interests (Al-Kandari et al., 2017). In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), the American Psychiatric Association (2013) incorporates four disorders within the category of ASD: autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (Al-Kandari et al., 2017).

There is vast diversity among those classified as autistic. Since it is a spectrum of conditions, some on the spectrum can be high functioning, while others may seem non-verbal or completely non-communicative. In fact, every individual with autism possesses distinctive strengths and challenges. Additionally, autism can comprise co-occurring conditions such as low IQ, delays in gross and fine motor skills, problems with attention, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Pitney, 2015).

While cognitive disabilities are often confused with psychological disorders or mental illness, they are not one and the same. Mental illness typically affects moods, thoughts or behaviors and can appear at any time in a person's life. Although psychological disorders may not directly impact cognitive abilities, people with a mental illness often have difficulty performing daily functions and interacting with others. Cognitive deficits such as declines in attention, learning and memory, executive functioning, and the speed of information processing have been found in patients diagnosed with psychological disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and OCD (Millan et al., 2012). Morad, Nasri, and Merrick (2001) assert that Islam, as a religion, distinguishes between a person with a cognitive disability and one with a psychiatric disorder/mental illness, but it is extremely difficult to find information about this distinction in the extant literature. The thesis of the argument is that individuals with cognitive disabilities are considered legally incompetent in the Qur'an and *hadiths* and are therefore not responsible for their speech or actions (Mughtar, 1995, cited in Morad et al., 2001); however, no other information or anecdotes are provided to support their claim of a separation between the two.

While little emphasis has been placed upon cognitive disability in Islamic approaches to psychology (Kashani-Sabet, 2010), mental health has been studied in some depth with several Muslim intellectuals criticizing its conceptualization within Islamic paradigms (Sahin, 2013). Certainly, there is no "uniquely Islamic theoretical framework for an Islamic psychology" (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1731). However, exploring psychological constructs through a faith-based lens allows for the inclusion of shared religious worldviews that impact the understanding of human nature (Rowatt, 2013). This may be particularly relevant for the relationship between Islam and psychology (Kaplick & Skinner, 2017). Even though the term "psychology" did not exist at the time, early Muslim scholars, notably Harith al Muhasibi (781–857 CE), Abu Bakar Al Razi (854–925 CE), Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980–1037 CE), and Abu Hamid Al Ghazali (1058–1111 CE), wrote extensively about the human mind (Haque, 2004). These classical scholars were influenced by Plato and Aristotle's philosophical consideration of morality (Iqbal, 2013), which interestingly reflects the Islamic philosophy of *tawhid*, or Oneness of God (Haque, 2004). Unlike many cultural beliefs that exist today, early Islamic societies did not generally consider mental illness a punishment from God. On the contrary, hallucinations, delusions, and other odd behaviors were rationalized as mystical experiences. In his book *Ketab Al-Uqala Al-Majanin*, Al Naysaburi (d. AD 1016), a Shi'a Ismaili scholar, considered human life a blend of health and disease, noting that all human beings exist on a spectrum between reason and folly

(Youssef, Youssef, & Dening, 1996). While the Medieval Europeans believed that demons caused mental illness, Muslim scholars of that time regarded mental disorders as physiologically based (Sabry & Vohra, 2013; Youssef et al., 1996). In fact, Islamic physicians advanced many of the psychological theories and approaches to mental health that are predominant in Western psychology today, including biopsychology and psychotherapy. However, very little of this scholarship is available in English. As such, early Muslim contributions to psychology are scarce and widely dispersed, and the inclusion of these perspectives in the history and teaching of Western psychological science is limited (Haque, 2004).

13.3 Brain-Based Conditions and Stigma

Islam is unambiguous in that all people are created by Allah and must be treated as worthy. Muslims are taught that Allah does not send down a sickness without some sort of remedy. As Creator and Provider, God is in control of all human states of being including illness and restoration (Bhatty et al., 2009). Accordingly, Arabic terminology that is used to describe an ailment does not have a stigma associated with it per se (Bhatty et al., 2009). For example, the term *marid*, which literally translates to “ill” or “an individual with an illness” does not imply anything disparaging, and individuals are encouraged to seek medical treatment when they are ill. However, the stigma associated with brain-based conditions such as mental health and cognitive disability often prevents many from finding the help they need (Dardas & Simmons, 2015). The World Health Organization (2001) defines stigma as “a mark of shame, disgrace, or disapproval that results in an individual being rejected, discriminated against, and excluded from participating in a number of different areas of society” (cited in Dardas & Simmons, 2015, p. 672). As individuals with ASD are physically like everyone else, one would imagine that there would be less stigma associated with it; unfortunately, invisible handicaps tend to lead to more shame and stigma than disabilities that are noticeable (Grinker, 2007; Manor-Binyamini & Shoshana, 2018). Furthermore, children with ASD often exhibit behaviors that may be considered odd or socially unacceptable (tantrums, twirling, hand-flapping, stimming, other repetitive behaviors, and even self-injurious behaviors), which present a unique challenge in shame-honor cultures where brain-based conditions are not generally discussed in an open manner (Hartevelt Kobrin, 2016). South Asian families, for example, report a reluctance to seek care for a child with autism due to the negative effect this may have on the marriage prospects of other family members (Bernier, Mao, & Yen, 2010) and may attempt to identify the child with a less stigmatized diagnosis (Olsen, 2016). Consequently, the stigma attached to ASD may be a combination of cultural norms, lack of understanding among family and parents, and misinformation given by physicians (Al-Kandari, 2006). It can also include a general lack of awareness and the belief that the child will somehow outgrow the diagnosis and improve with continued prayers. Not only does stigma preclude some families from obtaining assistance, but in the Arab

Muslim world today, support services are inadequate and for some families financially out of reach.

As those on the spectrum can benefit greatly from early interventions such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, sensory integration, and behavior modification techniques (Blauw-Hospers & Hadders-Algra, 2005), ignorance of cognitive disability and its associated stigma may contribute to poor outcomes as they move into adulthood. Furthermore, social stigma is often internalized by those on the receiving end (Corrigan, 2004), leading them to believe that they are an embarrassment to their families or even to themselves, which can exacerbate feelings of shame and guilt (Hussein, Taha, & Almanasef, 2011; Karimova, Sauers, & Dakka, 2015). While Islamic jurists offer a wide range of accommodations to allow individuals with disabilities to participate in community life, religious ceremonies, and business (Rispler-Chaim, 2016), some Muslims equate brain-based health conditions with a lack of faith or punishment by God (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Mullick, Khalifa, Nahar, & Walker, 2013; Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010), which is a departure from ancient Islamic societies where behaviors that were considered odd reflected a closeness to God (Youssef et al., 1996). Interestingly, Dardas and Simmons (2015) argue that brain-based conditions may avoid stigma among Arab communities if they are attributed to *jinn* possession, evil eye, or black magic.

13.3.1 Supernatural Attributions

The belief in *al-ghayb*, or the unseen, is a central Islamic tenet, along with the belief in one God (Allah), his prophets, and holy books. *Al-ghayb* includes angels, *jinn*, heaven, and hell (Khalifa, Hardie, Shahid, Imran, & Walker, 2011). However, the belief in spirit possession or attributing mental illness to supernatural causes pre-dates Islam (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012; Graham & White, 2015; Islam & Campbell, 2014) and is not exclusive to Islamic beliefs. Analogous notions may be found in Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and even among Evangelical Christians (Dein & Illaiee, 2013). In fact, the notion is quite widespread across cultures and has been well-documented (Dein & Illaiee, 2013). *Jinn* are described, both in the Qur'an and *hadith*, as a race of intelligent beings that are normally imperceptible to human senses (Dein, Alexander, & Napier, 2008; Dein & Illaiee, 2013). Created by God from "smokeless fire" (Qur'an, 15:26–27), *jinn* may be good or evil; they live and die, much like human beings, and may be believers or non-believers in God. *Jinn* are mentioned in 29 different verses of the Qur'an (Lim et al., 2014; Lim, Hoek, Ghane, Deen, & Blom, 2018) with Satan (or *Shaytan*) being described as an ungrateful *jinn* who rebelled against God (Islam & Campbell, 2014). *Jinn* are also prominent in Islamic folk beliefs (Lim et al., 2018). As Lambek (1993) maintains, the cultural literature on Islam reveals evil beings, including *jinn* spirits, being responsible for human misfortunes, including disorders of the mind, which are often treated by exorcism (Littlewood, 2004; Younis, 2000). In a thematic analysis of the Qur'an, however, scholars Islam and Campbell (2014) found no connection between *jinn*

possession and mental illness. While madness and possession are mentioned several times, the root of the word *jinn* in Arabic is used in the Qur'an to refer to the taunts that many prophets received from disbelievers, as well as to the spiritual madness of sinful acts. However, they also note that the precedence for *jinn*-possession may be partly explained by the structure of the Arabic language:

Arabic is a trilateral root language, meaning that most words with related meanings are constructed on a core sequence of three consonants. For example, the trilateral root of *jinn* is j-nn, and the word *majnun* (crazy) is derived from this root. In general, when a *mim* (m) is added to the beginning of a trilateral root it changes the root to a noun indicating a person or thing that is the doer of the action. For example, the root s-l-m means peace and the addition of a *mim* at the beginning of the word turns it into Muslim, or doer of peace (one who peacefully submits his/her will to God). So, the addition of the *mim* in front of the j-n-n root turns it into *majnun*—one who is a doer of *jinn*, or one possessed by a *jinn* (Islam & Campbell, 2014, p. 235).

In addition to the mention of *jinn* in the Qur'an, black magic (*sehr*) and the evil eye (*hasid*) are also referenced, although with much less emphasis (Alqahtani, 2012; Graham & White, 2015). Some Arab Muslims think that black magic is a supernatural power that can be used to harm another person, while the evil eye originates from envy and is a powerful look that can impose bad luck, harm, or grief (Graham & White, 2015, p. 45; see also Khalifa et al., 2011). Although studies indicate that the majority of Muslims today attribute brain-based conditions to biopsychosocial factors (Adewuya & Makanjuola, 2008; Sadik, Bradley, Al-Hasoon, & Jenkins, 2010; Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010), some Muslims, particularly those who are older, female, possess lower levels of education, and/or belong to marginalized groups (Dein et al., 2008; Khalif et al., 2011; Dein & Illaiee, 2013) continue to identify factors such as God's punishment, weak faith, and spirit possession as causes of mental illness and brain-based illnesses (Islam & Campbell, 2014; Khalifa & Hardie, 2005).

Although the etiology of cognitive disability has been less addressed within Muslim societies, it is generally considered a personal tragedy (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2007), possibly brought on by the same supernatural forces that are associated with mental illness (Bhatty et al., 2009). The evil eye is often blamed for the disability of a child, as it provides an acceptable rationale within religious communities (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012). Others attribute disability to the sins of parents (Bener & Ghuloum, 2011; Blanks & Smith, 2009; Gharaibeh, 2009), karma (Jegatheesan, Miller, & Fowler, 2010), or taboo behaviors committed during pregnancy (Riany, Cuskelly, & Meredith, 2016). It is important to note, however, that not all cultural or religious attributions are negative. In parenting a child with autism, some Muslims perceive that God has recognized their ability to nurture the special person sent to them. These parents often refuse to engage in negative conversations about their children, choosing instead to focus on their abilities and ways to normalize their participation in social and educational systems (Jegatheesan et al., 2010).

A Deeper Dive: Raising a Child with ASD

Laila S. Dahan

My interest in Islam and mental health is based upon my personal journey as a Muslim mother of a child with autism. My son is 22 years old. His autism is still with him and will never disappear, and his daily struggles will always be a part of his life. Although my son was born in the US, he spent the first eighteen years of his life in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where his father and I taught at a university. For an in-depth discussion of how my family, son, and I dealt with the diagnosis and the aftermath, see my article “One Boy’s Journey: Living with Autism in the UAE” (Nahad, 2015). It is written under a pseudonym.

My son also spent part of his childhood in Jordan. While my former in-laws are wonderful, caring people, it was clear that, like many Arab Muslim families, they lacked information about autism and its effects on children and their parents (Manor-Binyamini & Shoshana, 2018). As a mother, it is hard to watch your child behaving in ways that are not particularly “normal”, but perhaps more difficult to realize that those around you think you are imagining a problem. In Jordan, my son was perceived as spoiled when he had one of his meltdowns due to stress or over-stimulation. Several of the older women in Jordan would take my son aside and read Qur’an over him. This is based on the belief that intoning the Qur’an is a remedy for mental issues (see Abu-Ras & Abu-Bader, 2008). My son enjoyed these readings, and they often did calm him down. Of course, in any religious experience, the words of God and the recitation of prayer can be soothing (Syed, 2003), and the same can be said for children on the spectrum. Similarly, in the UAE, surrounded by academics from all over the world, my colleagues were often dismissive of my son’s diagnosis because he could greet them and shake hands. As he lacked any physical markers of a disability, many people downplayed my concern, which left me feeling dismayed and alone. Additionally, finding resources for my son was difficult. Several studies have pointed to the constant struggle that Arab Muslim mothers of a child with a disability face in their pursuit of information and support (see Bhatti et al., 2009; Manor-Binyamini & Shoshana, 2018). Although I was able to find help, it was mainly through word of mouth. At the time of the diagnosis in 2003, there were no web sites or sources that could guide confused and desperate parents in either country (see Nahad, 2015 for details). Each time we found a new doctor or psychologist, we were told quite frankly that we should return to the US where we would be able to find the required assistance.

Parenting a child with autism is exhausting and can be frightening when you don’t know where to go for help. As medical and educational professionals often spend a great deal of time attending to the deficiencies of the

(continued)

child (Jegatheesan et al., 2010), parents can sometimes lose sight of the strengths their child possesses. Due to the continually negative interactions I had with my son's school, I am embarrassed to say that at one point I too believed he would not be able graduate high school (Nahad, 2015). I allowed that belief to weigh on me for nearly 2 years, before I finally determined that my son had potential far beyond what was offered at his UK curriculum school. When he was almost 18 years old, I moved back to the US, leaving a teaching job I loved and a very comfortable life in the UAE, to find the support my son needed to succeed—and he did, in a public school in Los Angeles. Not only did they look at my son as someone who would definitely graduate high school, they pointed out and reminded me of all his good points, his kindness, willingness to assist, and desire for rules and regulations. It took him 2 years in a US high school to obtain all the credits he required to graduate, but he did it. He was proud of himself and we were overjoyed for him. He is now in university majoring in interdisciplinary studies combining courses in politics and filmmaking. He enjoys performing arts and has been in several plays. ASD is fascinating; despite my son's inability to make friendships or talk at length with people outside the family, he has no fear of standing on a stage and delivering a performance. It is easier for him to be told what to say and when, than to deal with the complex and confusing world of human interaction. The open-minded and accepting educational environment we found in the US made all the difference in his life. Had we remained in the Arab world, I fear that his chances to flourish would have been hampered. Research carried out in the UAE has revealed that teachers in general have a negative attitude towards people with disabilities (Alghazo & El Naggar Gaad, 2004), and children who act in ways that do not conform to the norm, can find themselves left out and separated from their peers (Gharaibeh, 2009). It is disheartening to know that Islam offers dignity, protection, and encouragement for individuals with disabilities, but Arab culture and traditions continue to impair that reality.

13.4 A Strengths-Based Approach to Disability

Over the past 30 years, disability has shifted in Western scientific thought from pathology to functioning, which considers human abilities across a range of life activities rather than focusing solely on limitations. This is exceedingly important as the term “cognitive disability” implies some sort of limited capacity or impairment (Wehmeyer et al., 2008). Dictionary definitions of disability describe it as a “something that hinders, incapacitates, or disqualifies” (Reddy, 2011, p. 288), while medical definitions attempt to qualify people based on diagnostic categories, thereby casting variations in human ability as deviant from the norm and pathologizing some as deficits (Reddy, 2011). In 2001, the International Classification of Functioning

(ICF) was released, providing a system of codes that describe the components of human functioning to enable better diagnosis and treatment of health-related conditions. Importantly, the ICF does not classify people; rather it focuses on describing the situation of each individual within a variety of health-related domains. The ICF has codes for body structures and functions, including the impairments of each, human activities along with limitations or disabilities, and the range of participation, including restrictions or handicaps. More recently, emphasis has shifted from the barriers to participation to focus on opportunities for increased engagement. This move has an immense impact on the ways in which disabilities are addressed and encourages people to appreciate the vast biological and social intricacies that reflect the experiences of individuals with special needs. Instead of focusing on deficits, this perspective encourages the identification of existing strengths and offers opportunities to develop new ones (Rawana, Franks, Brownlee, Rawana, & Neckoway, 2011), recognizing that people with disabilities possess skills that can be leveraged to promote their inclusion and participation in society (Niemiec, Shogren, & Wehmeyer, 2017). It begins with understanding the types and intensity of supports that are needed for optimal functioning. Wehmeyer et al. (2008) argue that human functioning is enhanced when there is a good fit between individuals and their environments. As Islamic perspectives reflect strengths-based characterizations, Muslim communities can facilitate that fit by emphasizing the positive qualities of individuals with disabilities through Islamic paradigms that describe and explain human nature.

A Deeper Dive: My Superpower

Ayden-Imaan Din (Age Seventeen)

One thing that makes me unique is that I have autism. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), autism is characterized by social, communication and behavioral challenges (CDC, n.d.). I first discovered I had autism when I was in middle school, and I thought I was doomed! But then after my mom told me the benefits of it, I realized that it's my superpower. It is not a disability, although that's how the CDC describes it. As someone who has autism, I would prefer to describe it as a different ability. Being different can be empowering. I like to see it as a gift.

As a result of my autism, I am super creative, and I love writing stories. When I was 8 years old, I got my first journal. I lived in Dubai at the time. At first, I didn't know how to use the journal. Only a few of my friends wrote in one and it was mainly diary entries. Soon that all changed. Late one evening, I made up a story based on a constellation I had read about in a book. Once my mom heard it, she told me that I should write it down. I decided to give it a try and I was astonished at how satisfying it felt! I came to the conclusion that I

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should do this more often. Since then, I have written many stories and kept many journals. I love all the different genres of writing. Writing helps me understand all the feelings I have.

Sometimes I feel out of place when I'm around other people. I appear odd to others because I don't see the world like they do. Sometimes I notice people staring at me which makes me feel awkward. When that happens, I retreat into my inner self. There, I can block out negativity and instead focus on calming thoughts. I don't mind being different. It makes me who I am, but it can be tiring. I feel like I have to frequently explain what's going on in my mind. It's not an easy task. Often, I feel like people don't have the patience to understand me. I can appear spacey at times, which makes people question my awareness of the world around me. But it's a useful tool because I need a break once in a while. I'm very social and open; I'm close to my friends and kind to others. But I can also be reserved and introverted. I keep to myself often because it's exhausting having to explain myself.

I'm very sensitive to noises and loud people; it's like scratching on a chalkboard. When the world gets chaotic, I get really nervous. I start to sweat and my heart beats faster than a jetliner. I feel overwhelmed and would like nothing more than to retreat to a quieter space. A strategy I use to find peace is fidgeting with my hands. I take my index finger and make small circles on my palms. Another way I calm myself down is by retreating to my dream world where only cute animals, butterflies, stars, and other happy thoughts exist. There I can recharge my batteries. In my own world, I find comfort and the space I need after trying to fit in all day.

Despite my struggles with my different abilities, I still try to raise awareness about autism. I was involved with an autism advocacy group as a freshman and sophomore in high school. We did public panels and gave presentations to the school administrators and parents. As part of that initiative, we were invited to speak at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's (ASHA) annual conference in Boston. I felt nervous speaking in front of so many people, but I gathered my courage because I wanted to share my experiences to raise understanding and help people who may be autistic and can't speak for themselves. I was the recipient of the 2017–2018 Stars of Special Education Award at Amherst Regional High School for my service.

Autism has its ups and downs. It's a spectrum which affects people differently. Some people are mild like I am, but other people might have more severe symptoms. We're all unique. It's important to stop judging people by their cover. Everyone is special in their own way.

13.5 A Positive Islamic Model of Cognitive Disability

The eighth to the thirteenth century is considered to be the “Golden Age of Islam”, a period of economic, cultural, philosophical, and scientific prosperity that later spread throughout Europe, influencing developments in medicine, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, and other sciences (Falagas, Zarkadoulia, & Samonis, 2006). Possibly the most influential scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic of the time was Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, whose model of the human self continues to influence Islamic approaches to psychology today. Interestingly, “autism” comes from the Greek word “autos” which means “self”; thus, an Islamic approach to understanding autism and other cognitive disabilities utilizing Al-Ghazali’s model is quite apropos.

Al-Ghazali proposed that the self or *al-nafs* is the cause of both human happiness and misery. The Qur’an mentions three states of *al-nafs*: *nafs al- ammarah* (12:53), the commanding self or the soul that inclines to evil; *nafs al-lawwama* (75:2), the accusatory or self-reproaching soul; and the *nafs al-mutmaina* (89:27), the peaceful self or the soul at rest (see Abu-Raiya, 2012). Islamic approaches to psychology often compare these states of self or soul to the psychoanalytical construction of id, ego, and superego. In Freud’s theory, the id is the part of personality that works on the pleasure principle, striving to gratify instinctual impulses; the superego is the container of morality that develops through the internalization of social norms; and the ego is the rational mitigator between the two (Ewen, 2014). While comparison of *al-nafs* to psychoanalytical structures provides a bridge between Western psychology and Islamic perspectives, it neglects the essential conflict between Freud’s rather negative view of human nature and the basic Islamic belief in the goodness of the self (Haque, Khan, Keshavarzi, & Rothman, 2016).

In his twelfth century book *Ihya Ilumidin* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), Al-Ghazali presented the aspects of the soul as *nafs*, *qalb*, *ruh*, and *aql*, which he utilized to describe the qualities, structures, and functions of the self (Rothman & Coyle, 2018). Al-Ghazali opined that the human soul is in a battle between the forces of evil and good. Haque (2004) explains these various forces of the soul as searching for perfection. At the center of the *nafs* is the heart, or *qalb*, which is the core of the system and is linked to all other components. The *qalb* processes the messages from the other structures of the *nafs*, thereby, determining the fate of *al-nafs* (Abu-Raiya, 2014). What is fascinating about the Islamic view of the self is the notion that

the spiritual center of the human being is the heart, and that the intellect and consciousness are located in this heart center rather than in the mind, as most psychological theories posit. Furthermore, the idea that this center of consciousness within the human being is inherently connected and can be consciously connected to a primordial, divine consciousness is absent from Western, secular theories of human nature (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1743).

As such, the heart is the most important part of a human being because it connects us with God (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). The *ruh* (spirit) lives in the unconscious and is the source of “revelation, creation, and inspiration” (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1743). Finally, the *aql* (intellect) functions as the part of the *nafs* that thinks, understands, and knows; its role is to recognize the essence of Allah (Haque, 2004).

Given this paradigm, it is evident that Muslim scholars incorporated a philosophical approach in the scientific study of the mind (Haque, 2004).

The Qur'an informs Muslims that it is possible to resist a tendency towards harmful and negative thoughts and bring about tranquility. Within Islam there is a holistic approach to health, linking the welfare of the mind (*aql*), body (*jism*), and spirit (*ruh*) (Islam & Campbell, 2014). Unfortunately, despite the great strides in mental health care in previous centuries, and the chapters (*surahs*) in the Qur'an indicating that disabilities are part of the human condition, the situation in much of the Muslim-majority world today is less encouraging. Currently, mental health services in the Middle East, African, and Asian regions are unquestionably insufficient, with shame and superstition continuing to prevent more positive approaches to understanding and supporting brain-based conditions. To counter these perspectives in Muslim communities, I propose an Islamic Model of Cognitive Disability based on Al-Ghazali's structure of the soul (shown below in Fig. 13.1).

The human soul in Islam is "innately pure and good [...] and is connected to Allah" (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1742). However, that connection can be lost or forgotten by virtue of everyday life as conflicts within the soul impact a person's psychological state (Rothman & Coyle, 2018). As the soul (*nafs*) of a person on the spectrum battles between the forces of good and evil, it encounters far more negative input than positive. To counter the negativity, greater strength must be applied against the *nafs al- ammarah*, that is inclined to evil, as it could lead the person away from Allah. In addition, not only does the *nafs* and the person on the spectrum have to fight against *nafs al- ammarah*, but also *nafs al-lawwama*, the self-blaming *nafs*. Many people on the spectrum see themselves as the problem, and this tendency to accuse the self is another negative aspect that can lead individuals with disabilities away from Allah. Using positive supports and language can enable the *nafs al-mutmaina* of the individual with ASD and other disabilities to approach the peaceful soul, wherein it can find serenity and tranquility as it moves closer to Allah.

13.6 Integrating Islam into ASD Therapy

Western counseling relies on the concept of individualism, while Muslim cultures generally highlight the importance of the collective or community. Many Muslims establish their identity through religion, culture, and family (Sabry & Vohra, 2013), with extended family being particularly important (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). Therefore, psychoanalytic approaches that focus on the individual are not widely accepted among Muslims. According to Islam, when Muslims have negative feelings, they are to be resisted with positive thoughts, or professional help, as these are considered ailments (Sabry & Vohra, 2013).

There is precedent for the use of religion in psychological counseling. Cornish and Wade (2010) discovered that most people find religion important in their lives. They suggest that religion be applied in counseling for religious individuals and groups, as recognizing faith can provide clients with confidence and optimism

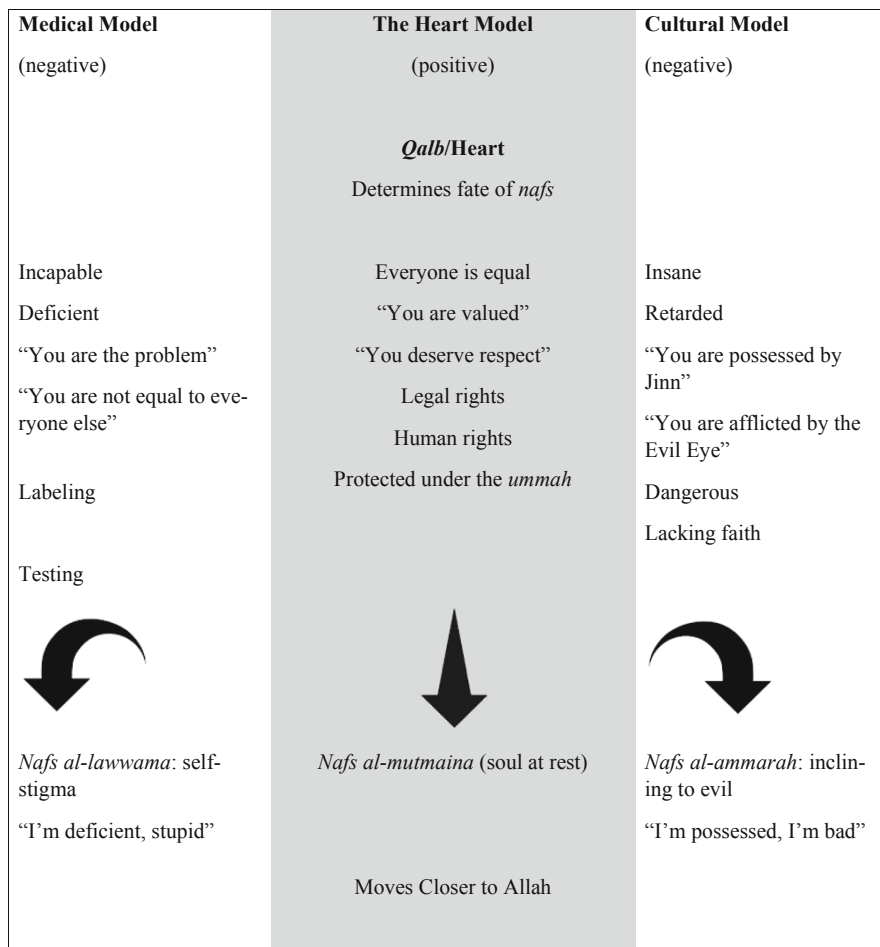


Fig. 13.1 The Heart Model: A positive Islamic Model of Cognitive Disability

(Bergin, 1991; Hofmann & Walach, 2011), while reducing stress (see Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Stanley et al., 2011; Yong, Kim, Park, Seo, & Swinton, 2011). Several studies have found that religion is often used as a coping strategy by parents of children with disabilities (Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999; Ekas, Whitman, & Shivers, 2009; Shaked, 2005; Skinner, Correa, Skinner, & Bailey, 2001). In a study conducted in Kuwait (Al-Kandari et al., 2017), Muslim mothers revealed how prayer helped them manage the stress of caring for their children with autism. Moreover, a qualitative study carried out in Indonesia found that parents depend on Islam to help them handle the difficulties of their child’s diagnosis, and often supplement biomedical approaches with alternative therapies such as acupuncture and herbal remedies to help their child cope with ASD symptoms (Hersinta, 2012). As such, cultural sensitivity training, leading to some basic familiarity with Islamic

perspectives, would be very useful for researchers and clinicians (Haque, 2004). Of course, mental health professionals working with Muslim clients should first ask about religious orientations before embarking on spiritually informed approaches. Used appropriately, positive religious coping mechanisms, such as praying and reading the Qur'an, can help individuals work through stress (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2010).

According to Keshavarzi and Haque (2013), the four aspects of *nafs*, *qalb*, *ruh*, and *aql* offer a structure for psychological interventions. They suggest that each aspect signify a tier of the soul that can be used as a focus for therapeutic interventions. For example, it is through the spirit (*ruh*) that healing or guidance can be received from Allah. Reminding Muslims of the divine nature of the *ruh* can inform therapy and treatment goals as "an Islamic perspective of psychology is inextricably linked to the process of cleansing the soul" (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p. 1735). Incorporating a positive Islamic model of disability in working with families of a child with ASD may also provide an outlet for understanding negative emotions such as fear, loss, stress, and the ubiquitous "why?". The *qalb*, as the center of human intellect in Islam, reveals the importance of faith in Allah and may be especially helpful to those facing painful and difficult times. Therefore, acknowledging the *qalb* and *ruh* in therapy may offer a vast amount of sustenance and relief to families with an ASD child.

Utilizing Islam to help Muslims understand the needs of a child with disabilities and how that child is accurately perceived in the Qur'an and *sunnah*, can also fight cultural stigmas and reiterate the importance of including and educating individuals with disabilities (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012). Local community leaders and imams are in a position to educate mental health professionals about the importance of religion (Dein & Illaiee, 2013; see also Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2010; Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010) and to advocate for programs that connect mental health practitioners with individuals and families that need those services. Muslims Understanding and Helping Special Education Needs (MUHSEN, n.d.) is a non-profit organization based in the US that is dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with special needs and their families. Services include educational programs, respite care resources, and matrimonial services for individuals with disabilities. The *masjid* certification program helps Islamic community centers become more inclusive and accommodating of special needs. In 2017, MUHSEN also began organizing opportunities for individuals with special needs and their families to perform Umrah, a pilgrimage to Mecca that is similar to the Hajj but can be performed at any time of the year. A similar endeavor was undertaken by the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah in 2019 through the *Sadiq Almutamir* (Friend of the Pilgrim) initiative in partnership with the *Sawt Al-Asm Association* in Jeddah (Arab News, 2019).

Although Islamic paradigms and practices can help Muslim families cope, can they also serve as useful interventions for those with ASD? As autism affects engagement with others, cognitive functioning and comprehension of abstract concepts, religious therapy for individuals with ASD may seem far-fetched. However, Fithri (2011) found that the inclusion of Islamic rituals as part of intensive educational efforts contributed to improvements in socialization, communication, and

emotional regulation among Muslim children with ASD attending an Islamic school. After listening to the Qur'an for half an hour each morning for 6 months, many of the students were able to focus better during the day. Research shows that listening to the Qur'an has psychological benefits for Muslims (Ghiasi & Keramat, 2018; Hashim, Shaban, & Zainuddin, 2017), but its ability to calm young people on the spectrum has real potential. In addition, Tumiran et al. (2013) contend that Qur'anic sound therapy may provide similar or even better outcomes than music therapy, as listening to Qur'anic recitation has been shown to elicit a higher percentage of alpha brain waves than listening to music. Alpha waves are associated with a relaxed state (Berk, 2008). Religious therapy can also include performing ritual cleansing (*wudu*) with help, participating in *salah* (ritual prayer), and learning to recite the Qur'an using appropriate pronunciation and inflection (Fithri, 2011).

13.6.1 Challenges of Incorporating Islamic Perspectives in Therapeutic Relationships

Although it is a good idea to ask about spiritual beliefs and practices when working with Muslim clients, we can be quite sure that the state of the soul will not show up in a Western therapeutic proposal (Rothman & Coyle, 2018). However, the importance of asking about clients' spiritual principles and observances sends a message to religious individuals that their beliefs and practices are deemed important and worthy of consideration in therapeutic relationships (Hodge, 2005). Despite differences in the specialties and roles of psychiatrists, counselors, psychologists, ABA therapists, and psychiatric nurses, many Muslims view all mental health professionals as a monolithic unit that discards religious values and lacks the empathy needed to build trust (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). This negative view of mental health professionals combined with misconceptions of brain-based conditions among many Muslim communities can make it challenging to find appropriate help and support. Moreover, as mental health and cognitive disability continue to be ascribed to supernatural forces by some, Muslims may look to traditional faith healers or imams for guidance and possible treatment. These healers rely on religious practices such as prayers, reading verses from the Qur'an, or asking the patient to drink and wash their body using water over which verses of the Qur'an are read, to help ease the symptoms. While religious treatments can offer hope to the families of individuals with cognitive disabilities, relying on folk healers in lieu of psychological or medical treatment may strengthen families' beliefs that brain-based conditions are a supernatural affliction (Graham & White, 2015). Additionally, if Muslims consider the Qur'an as a cure for brain-based conditions, they may neglect medical care altogether (Abu-Ras & Abu-Bader, 2008). In response to such inclinations in Muslim communities, Sheikh Azhar Nasser, a Vancouver-based lecturer, noted: "When someone breaks their leg, you don't tell them to just read Qur'an without seeing a doctor" (Khalaf, 2017). While traditional healers serve a purpose, they

definitely cannot cure mental illness (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012; Dardas & Simmons, 2015) or reverse cognitive disabilities.

13.7 Conclusion

Currently, the education system for individuals with ASD and other cognitive disabilities is underdeveloped in many Muslim majority regions (Al Khateeb et al., 2014). As a result, many families and individuals with disabilities have difficulty finding support structures to assist them (Bhatty et al., 2009). As a parent, who attempted to negotiate the system in the UAE, I can unequivocally state that there is a lot of work to be done in order to bring these systems up to a level that will assure assistance for parents and their children on the spectrum. According to Bhatty et al. (2009) some countries have written *fatwas* (formal rulings on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified Islamic legal scholar) to offer more help to those with disabilities. One of these *fatwas* advocates that sign-language interpreters must be available in all mosques, while another in Saudi Arabia urges parents to take their children with disabilities out in public, declaring that hiding them is unwarranted and wrong. Although such *fatwas* are certainly a step in the right direction, it is distressing to think that we require legal rulings to convince Muslim communities that we need to find ways to include individuals with disabilities in social and religious activities. At the same time, I do keep in mind that Western nations have also had to devise laws and regulations to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. In a similar vein, Muslim majority regions will undoubtedly continue to improve their systems as well. Providing training to imams to better understand disability, particularly cognitive disabilities like ASD that are not accompanied by physical markers and encouraging collaborations between religious organizations and mental health professionals are two steps that can be taken right now. Destigmatizing mental health services is essential to effectively diagnose and treat brain-based conditions. My hope is that we will continue to work towards acceptance of disability as a natural order divined by Allah, thus enabling our children with disabilities to become an integral part of our communities and social institutions. A strengths-based approach reflects Islamic perspectives of disability. Thus, reframing the dialogue surrounding ASD and other cognitive disabilities is imperative to help individuals with special needs emerge from the shadows to become a normal part of the Islamic *ummah*, which they so richly deserve.

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Chapter 14

Promoting Allyship Among South Asian and Arab Muslims Toward Black and Latino/a Muslims in American Islamic Centers



Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi, Meg A. Warren, Yvonne El Ashmawi, and Neneh Kowai-Bell

Abstract Increased social justice awareness in the United States and shifting demographics are giving birth to a more diverse and egalitarian generation. Improving relations across social categories has been a key topic in diversity, equity, and inclusion work, but less emphasis has been placed on cross-racial allyship within minority populations. While allyship in racial contexts is often perceived as a White versus non-White issue, this binary position erases the diversity that exists within communities of color. A dichotomous approach to allyship that positions White heterosexual males as the primary holders of privilege does not address the disparities that exist within and across minoritized communities. While Arabs and South Asians are minorities in the US on a macrolevel, they often hold privileged positions in Islamic centers and other Muslim spaces—even though Black Americans make up a larger percentage of the Muslim population. Additionally, there is an increasing number of Latino/a Muslims in the US, but they are often invisible in larger conversations about Islam in America as well as in discourse among Muslim Americans. In this chapter, we explore the concept of allyship and how South Asian and Arab Muslims can support and advocate for Black and Latino/a Muslims in American Islamic centers. We also discuss Islamophobia in the US as well as the

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anti-Blackness and racism that exists within Muslim communities and provide suggestions on how Islamic centers can serve as spaces of allyship and cross-racial dialogue.

14.1 Introduction

Allyship is becoming an increasingly important part of the dialogue on diversity, inclusion, and equity. An ally is a motivated and committed privileged group member who offers social support (e.g., fosters positive relationships) and stands with and stands up for marginalized groups and their members. According to Washington and Evans (1991), an ally is “a person who is a member of the ‘dominant’ or ‘majority’ group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population” (p. 195). Collins and Chlup (2014) define allies as “friends of and advocates for minority and/or disempowered social groups that experience oppression based on markers such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religious affiliation, disabilities, age, and so forth” (p. 482). From the perspective of the marginalized group (e.g., people of color), allies are described as providing affirmation (i.e., active social support) and performing informed action (i.e., constructive action born of disciplinary knowledge, debate, and deliberation) (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Thus, an ally displays strong commitment to supporting marginalized group members and is willing to dedicate considerable effort to learning to be effective.

In discussing allyship, heterosexual, cisgender, White males are typically in a position of privilege based on the intersection of their social categories. However, Patel (2011) contends that this limits the conversation to binary terms, particularly regarding racial categories where the perception of White versus non-White becomes the focus of attention, thereby disregarding the cultural diversity of non-White racial groups. Additionally, religious orientation is missing altogether in this characterization of allyship, which further erases the perspectives of stigmatized religious groups. Although there are multiple factors involved in supporting minoritized groups, there is a lack of information on cross-racial allyship, particularly within Muslim populations. Whereas Arab and South Asians are minorities in the United States, within Muslim communities, they are often the ones with greater privilege. This is particularly interesting because the number of Black Muslims in the US is greater than either of these groups, yet they have lesser power within Muslim spaces. Furthermore, there is a growing population of Latino/a Muslims, which often remains unrecognized altogether. As such, South Asian and Arab Muslims are in a position to provide support and advocacy for Black and Latino/a Muslims within Muslim organizations and spaces. As Muslims have collective experiences of Islamophobia, the importance of allyship across racial categories is particularly important within the *ummah* (community of believers) to better address the social, political, and psychological effects of anti-Muslim rhetoric and policy.

14.2 Diversity of Muslims in the United States

Although Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the US, it represents only about 1% of the American population. The dominant narrative often portrays American Muslims as being first generation immigrant Arabs, but in fact, the American Muslim population in the United States is comprised of a complex mix of racial and ethnic groups (Pew Research Center, 2011). Haddad and Lummis (1987) categorize Muslims in North America as two distinct groups: immigrant Muslims and US born Muslims. Among US-born Muslim Americans, 40% identify as Black, 18% as White, 10% as Latino/a, 10% as Asian, and 21% representing other or mixed races (Pew Research Center, 2011). Immigrant Muslims represent almost 80 different nationalities, with Pakistan accounting for the largest nation of origin (Foley, 2012). In addition to the plethora of ethnicities and national origins, there is great diversity in other aspects as well, including socioeconomics, home language, and sect (Haddad, 2011). Wingfield (2006) explains that Islam “has its legalists, rationalists, mystics, humanitarians, and ideologues, and many people of Muslim heritage are quite secular in outlook” (p. 261). While the number of mosques in the US nearly doubled between the years 2000 and 2011 (Bagby, 2012), most Muslim Americans are “un-mosqued”, meaning that they do not have a mosque that they attend regularly (Grewal, 2014). However, according to Jamal (2005), “mosque participants, as a concentrated group of observant Muslims, feel the pangs of stereotypes more sharply than non-mosqued Muslims because their basic religious identities visibly differentiate them from mainstream society” (p. 62).

In addition to varying levels of religiosity, there are also more than a dozen sects of Islam practiced in the United States today, including the most mainstream Sunni and Shi’a sects.¹ Among the Sunnis, there are two main groups that figure prominently in Muslim American life in addition to the Sunni Islam brought to the United States by the waves of Muslim immigrants: the Sufis and the Salafis.² The Sunni Sufis, not to be confused with other Sufi sects, study the traditional canons of Islam, encourage adherents to study with qualified Muslim theologians, and work hard at establishing an American Islam rooted in traditional texts interpreted for the modern US context. The Salafi group is an outgrowth of the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia which preaches a strict interpretation of Islamic doctrine and practice as well as the political view that Muslim leaders should not be challenged in public or private (Grewal, 2014).

¹Sunni and Shi’a schools of the thought are similar in most respects; the main difference is that the family of the Prophet Muhammad are treated as saints in the Shia view, but not in the Sunni view.

²While it may be useful for researchers to describe Muslim groups using sectarian labels, many Muslims would not self-identify in this way due to Qur’anic scripture which explicitly forbids division of Islam into sects: “Indeed, those who divide their religion and break up into sects, you have no part with them in the least: their affair is with God: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they used to do” (Qur’an 6:159).

Although not considered a part of true Islam according to mainstream Muslim groups, the Ahmadis have also contributed significantly to propagation of Islam in the US. The Ahmadiyya movement was founded in India during the late 1800s by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. As they are often labeled as heretics in Muslim majority countries, most Ahmadis worship in private spaces and do not disclose their affiliation for fear of persecution (Abdullatif, 2020). In the US, the Ahmadiyya community began with the arrival of Mufti Muhammad Sadiq. While the American Ahmadiyya community today consists of different ethnic backgrounds, early Ahmadis were comprised of mainly African American converts (Khan, 2018). The Ahmadiyya movement is also considered by some historians to have paved the way for other missionary movements such as the Nation of Islam, which was founded by Elijah Muhammad (Grewal, 2014). Like Ahmadis, the Nation is rejected as a true part of Islam by most Sunnis and Shi'as but is significant in the history of Black Muslim Americans.

Latino/a Muslims are comprised of both US-born Americans and immigrants from Latin American nations. As a group, Latino/a Muslims represent complex racial identities and may self-report as White, Black, Brown, and Native American, which makes it difficult to accurately gauge the number of Latino/a Muslims in the US (Morales, 2018). According to the report, *Latino Muslims in the US: Reversion, Politics, and Islamidad* (2017), most Latino/a Muslims trace their heritage to Mexico or Puerto Rico, and fewer from South and Central America. Additionally, many are first-generation Muslims in America. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), a large number of Latino/a Americans belong to the Catholic Church of America, but about one third leave the religion due to various reasons including questioning the Church, disagreeing with the "worship" of saints, sex abuse scandals, and marriage/spouse or family reasons. Many drift away from their parents' religion or experience a personal crisis and find support in other faith communities. Bagby (2012) notes that the number of Latino/a converts increased from 6% of all Muslim converts in the year 2000 to 12% of all Muslim converts in 2011.

According to Morales (2018), changes in the demographics of migration after the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 along with Latino/a inclusion in the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam prompted the first wave of Latino/a Muslims, with *La Alianza Islamica* (the Islamic Alliance) being the first Latino/a Muslim group in the US. Founded in the 1980s, the organization conceptualized an indigenous Latino/a Islam which they connected to the memory of Islamic Spain. As the organization was marginalized by other Muslim groups, it sought to develop independently of them, creating Islamic centers in New York that worked to spread the message of Islam (*dawah*), offer social services, and engage in political activism. Another wave of Latino/a Islam also emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the development of organizations such as PIEDAD (a Muslim women's group in Florida), the Latino American Dawah Organization (LADO) that disseminated information about Islam to Latino/a communities via the internet, and the Los Angeles Latino Muslim Association (LALMA), a Qur'anic studies group in California. While such groups were inspired by *La Alianza*, they worked within existing Muslim American systems, focusing primarily on knowledge production and study.

It is evident that the ethnic and racial composition of Muslim Americans is immensely diverse. While the journeys of the different sects and sub-groups in establishing and strengthening their presence in the US and the disparities in community size, socioeconomic status, social class, and immigration status, may contribute to different levels of acceptance and marginalization in Muslim communities, these factors also provide opportunities for allyship. Given the central role of mosques in building Muslim American communities, these institutions are well-positioned to provide leadership in this regard.

14.3 Characteristics of Islamic Centers in the US

The growth of Islam in the US has spurred the development of mosques (*masjids* or *masaajid* in Arabic), with data indicating the establishment of over 500 new Islamic centers³ between the years 2000 and 2011, a 45% increase in the estimated number of mosques across the United States (Foley, 2012). While any clean space can function as a mosque, Islamic centers in the United States provide more than just a place to pray; they serve as a nexus for Muslim communities where Islamic education and study are held and social gatherings such as weddings, holiday celebrations, youth activities, and funeral prayers take place. The location of Islamic centers in the US is sometimes fraught with difficulty due to building and zoning regulations as well as the reluctance of many American communities to accept a place of worship considered “foreign” or potentially “dangerous” in their neighborhoods. While the ideal Islamic center is one that is designed to suit the aesthetic, psychological, and practical needs of the community, most are storefront mosques established in rented spaces within commercial or residential buildings. Depending on the wealth of the Muslim community, some mosques that began as storefront types have transitioned to larger sites built with purposeful architectural features; however, many mosques continue to struggle financially (Lofti, 2001). While most Islamic centers have a weekend school for children, about 19% also have a full-time K-12 school that provides both secular and Islamic education (Bagby, 2012). Islamic centers are often divided by race, language, and social class (Omanson, 2013), and although Muslims may pray at any masjid, most mosques are generally affiliated with a specific sect. While only 3% of American Islamic centers cater to a single ethnic group, South Asians, Arabs, and Black Muslims comprise the largest number of mosque attendees (Bagby, 2012).

³In this chapter, we use the terms mosque and Islamic Center interchangeably. Some prefer the Arabic term, masjid, while others use Islamic community center or Muslim community center.

14.3.1 *Leadership in American Mosques*

Although Islamic centers are ideologically important institutions for Muslim Americans, mosque attendance has been declining over the past few years due in part to a severe shortage of imams, or Muslim faith leaders. A 2011 report by the Hartford Institute for Religion and Research found that only 44% of US mosques have a full-time imam, while 19% have no imam at all (Bagby, 2012; Ederer, 2020). An earlier study (Bagby, Perl, & Froehle, 2001) noted that in 40% of Islamic centers, an elected official serves as the leader of the mosque, with the imam being the spiritual guide. However, governance trends changed in 2011, with 54% of mosques having an imam who also serves as the institutional leader. Additionally, almost all Islamic centers have a Board of Directors/Trustees or *Majlis ash-Shura*, which often holds final decision-making power. This trend differs in African American mosques, however, where 65% of the final decisions are made by the imam. In general, larger mosques prefer shared governance models where the board is responsible for administrative functions and the imam is in charge of religious aspects (Bagby, 2012).

While the imam is expected to be a person with deep knowledge of the Qur'an and Islamic law (*shariah*), rituals and practices, this is not always the case, as 63% of US imams do not hold an undergraduate degree in Islamic studies (in the case of African American mosques, the number goes up to 78% of imams with no formal training in Islamic education; Bagby, 2012), and 40% of American imams have no college degree whatsoever (Morgan, 2010). In cases where an Islamic center lacks funding for an imam, an older male from the local community may take on that role (Foley, 2012). Among imams with a formal education in Islamic studies, most received their degree from Egypt or Saudi Arabia, with only 6% reporting US qualifications. Given the dearth of training for imams in the US, most mainstream Islamic centers have historically been led by immigrant (mainly Arab or South Asian) Muslims, (Bagby, 2012), which has resulted in dissatisfaction among younger, often US-born Muslim Americans who would rather have imams that reflect American culture (Ederer, 2020).

14.4 Islamophobia in the US

Beydoun (2017) defines American Islamophobia as, “the fear and animus of Muslims and Islam driven by popular and political representations, emboldened and endorsed by formative law and contemporary policy. . .rooted in established tropes and mischaracterizations of Muslims and Islam” that is built on a concept of orientalism which “positions Islam—as a faith, people, and imagined geographic sphere—as the civilizational foil of the West” (p. 1736). Thus, while it is tempting to do so, it is inaccurate to posit that Islamophobia in the US began on September 11, 2001. Unfortunately, there is a long history of Western “othering” of Islam and

Muslims. According to Zahedi (2011) American views of Muslims have been “influenced by the European colonial constructs of the colonized as less civilized people who had inferior religious and social lives compared to the Europeans: these constructs justified Europe’s civilizing mission” (p. 186). Selod (2015) explains that Islamophobia is deeply connected to “current imperialisms such as the ‘War on Terror’” (p. 80). Politically, colonizing forces “envision a seat of power in the West, and radiating out from it towards the East, a great embracing machine, sustaining the central authority, yet commanded by it” (Zahedi, 2011, p.44). The view that Muslim values are incompatible with Western values and that Muslim peoples need to be saved from their own faith through conversion to Christianity have been justifications for the colonizing of the past and the neo-colonial projects that have taken American soldiers into Muslim countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan (Selod & Embrick, 2013). The “War on Terror” has been discussed not in terms of conflict between nations, but rather as a war of ideas, with the enemy being those who embody the “wrong” kind of Islam rather than any particular nationality or ethnicity.

A Deeper Dive: Racialization of Muslims in the US

Yvonne El Ashmawi and Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Is Islamophobia a form of racism? Garner and Selod (2015) contend that it is. Given that race has historically been derived from both physical and cultural characteristics, and the process of racialization involves assigning characteristics viewed as “inherent to members of a group because of their physical or cultural traits” (p. 12), Muslims have been racialized in multiple ways. For example, Selod (2015) found that South Asian and Arab Muslims were being de-Americanized by encounters with non-Muslim Americans (often strangers in the street) who would question them about their nationality and loyalty to the United States. State-sponsored racialization of Muslims in post-9/11 America (Ali, 2014; Selod, 2015) included laws and policies such as the PATRIOT Act, which allowed secret searches and wiretaps without probable cause and the deportation of non-citizens associated with certain political organizations (Selod & Embrick, 2013), and the Special Registration Act, which required non-citizens from 24 Muslim majority countries to submit to fingerprinting and interrogations. In 2014, the Department of Justice reissued its call for racial profiling of Muslims by allowing the Department of Homeland Security to continue discriminating at airports and the US border and allowing the FBI to “map” minority communities to place informants; and in 2018, the Supreme Court upheld President Trump’s travel ban (dubbed “the Muslim Ban”) which primarily targeted individuals from Muslim majority countries (Yousuf & Calafell, 2018). The racialization of Muslims has further reified South Asians and Arabs into a singular category

(continued)

synonymous with “Muslimness” and in turn, excluded Black, Latino/a, White, and East Asian Muslims in discussions about Islamophobia and civil liberties (Hill, 2014). While religious symbols are not inherently racial, they may become proxies for race as evidenced by the salience of religious markers for White Muslim women who experience Islamophobia as a result of a visibly Muslim identity (Grewal, 2009).

14.4.1 Internalized Islamophobia

While Islamophobia generally positions Muslims as the receivers of fear and hatred, research shows that Muslim Americans may also harbor Islamophobic sentiments. According to the American Muslim Poll 2020 (ISPU, 2020), it is politics, not religion, that informs American Islamophobia. Using the Islamophobia Index that measures public endorsement of negative stereotypes of Muslim, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) found that White Muslims who experience discrimination are more likely to endorse anti-Muslim sentiments. While a majority of Muslims who are eligible to vote in US elections reported a preference for a Democratic presidential candidate in both 2016 (67%) and 2020 (51%), Muslim support for Trump—who expressed strong Islamophobic rhetoric—went up in 2020 partly due to the backing of White Republican Muslims who selected Trump as their presidential choice. Muslims who hold Islamophobic views were also less likely to support Black Lives Matter (BLM) and other coalition building efforts with minoritized groups. Additionally, 46% of White Muslims and 38% of Arab and South Asian Muslims reported being satisfied with the direction of the country, compared to only 28% of Black Muslims.

Apart from political leanings, internalized Islamophobia can also develop through other mechanisms. The religious discrimination and bullying that Muslim American children face not only by their peers, but also by teachers (ISPU, 2020) puts them in a very precarious position. Like internalized racism where Black children are socialized to perceive higher levels of “Blackness” as less desirable, Muslim American youth navigate their identities in part by their level of “Muslimness”. This can drive a desire to disassociate from the stigmatized identity (e.g., Muslim) by instead leaning into an aspect of identity that is of higher status (e.g., White, US citizen; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). This distancing can manifest into support for policies that hurt one’s own in-group and result in fractures within the in-group. Further, such distancing tendencies precipitate particularly during times when discrimination experienced from holding the stigmatized identity increases (Mendoza-Lepe, Warren, & Crano, 2021). Negative experiences at the mosque, particularly in the ways that many Islamic centers treat Muslim women, can also add to the discord between Muslim and American identities, reinforcing Islamophobic messages (Suleiman, 2017). However, given that Muslims in Western countries are repeatedly asked to speak out against extremism and apologize for the activities of terrorists (van Es,

2019) who represent a small number of Muslims around the world, the ability to critically assess the shortcomings of Muslim communities can be difficult.

14.5 Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion

Within the US, race is a primary force of division and oppression. Black Americans have been dealing with institutionalized and interpersonal racism since the arrival of slave ships from Africa in the sixteenth century. Some reports estimate that 10–20% of the enslaved Africans (between two and three million people) who were shipped to the Americas may also have been Muslim. While the US has historically created a dichotomous approach to Black-White relations, the status occupied by different racial and ethnic categories relative to Whiteness is also an important element to consider. As Asians are considered “model minorities” in the US, their racial status is closer to that of White Americans, creating a hierarchy that places Asians above other ethnic groups (Rastogi & Juvonen, 2019). This is not to imply that Asian Americans are free from racial discrimination. On the contrary, Asian American history speaks to a long and painful legacy of exclusion through immigration laws, forced migrations, internment camps and detentions (Okiihiro, 2014). Additionally, as Asian Americans are comprised of culturally distinct groups, experiences of discrimination vary by ethnicity, with South Asians⁴ only recently occupying a space within discourse dominated by East and Southeast Asians⁵ (Davé et al., 2000; Shankar & Srikanth, 1998). Like Arab Americans, discrimination towards South Asians is often linked to Islamophobia, which is particularly ironic as the majority of Arab Americans are actually Christian (Arab American Institute, 2020) and the religious affiliations of South Asian Americans vary considerably, including Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam (SAALT, n.d.; Pew Research Center, 2015). Within the American landscape, the experiences of Blacks and Latino/as are often lumped together on a lower ethnic rung compared to Whites and Asians, with Black and Latino/a Americans sharing common struggles of poverty, schooling, unemployment, and incarceration (Rastogi & Juvonen, 2019). In fact, anti-Blackness, or the dehumanization of Black bodies, is as much a problem within ethnic communities as it is between Black and White Americans, with African, Asian, Latino/a and Arab Americans increasingly acknowledging and fighting against colorism in their own communities (Abdulrahim, James, Yamout, & Baker, 2012; Banks, 2015; Hall, 2018; Jones, 2013; Mathews & Johnson, 2015).

⁴South Asian heritage reflects a host of cultures, including, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan, with the largest numbers of Muslims hailing from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

⁵East Asians are those from China, Japan, Taiwan, Macau, Mongolia, and Korea, while Southeast Asian heritage generally includes Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam and Singapore.

A Deeper Dive: A Globalized Preference for Lighter Skin Tones

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Around the world, there is an unmistakable preference for Whiteness or lighter skin color, exemplified by a global beauty industry which capitalizes and commodifies this phenomenon. Whether research on colorism intersects with anti-Blackness and racism depends on the context being studied, with race being inextricably linked to power in the United States and other Western countries. The origins of colorism in the West are usually traced to European colonization and the justification of the slave trade based on Biblical interpretations of dark-skinned Africans being cursed to slavery (e.g., the story of Noah's son, Ham, in the Book of Genesis) until Blackness became implicitly associated with lesser human worth (Jablonski, 2012). While the impact of European colonization has undoubtedly been immense, Arab slave trade promoted similar associations across many of the areas surrounding the Indian Ocean and Middle East. In Asian countries like China and Japan, colorism has been historically linked to classism. As the leisure class had less exposure to the sun, women with lighter skin tones were considered more beautiful, feminine, and pure (Hall, 2014). In the Indian subcontinent, there is some speculation that lighter skin was associated with higher caste as well as social class, and the colonization of Indian lands reinforced these notions (Jablonski, 2012). In the US, research shows that even today, lighter skin tones are often associated with better life outcomes across non-White groups (Abdulrahim et al., 2012; Bakken & Branden, 2013; Grewal, 2009; Montalvo & Codina, 2001). Given the increase in global migration and interracial unions that blur the distinctiveness of other racial markers, it is likely that skin color will continue to impact social stratification in much of the world (Dixon & Telles, 2017).

Apart from direct experiences of aggression and inequality, cross-racial interactions are also regularly laden with a multitude of subtle insults or microaggressions that are directed, often unconsciously, towards minoritized groups and their members (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007). While it is tempting to disregard these as unintentional faux pas, microaggressions are another form of oppression that reinforce existing imbalances of power and contribute to numerous mental health problems (Williams, 2020). As experiences of discrimination and hostility against Black Muslims are generally racially motivated, the confluence of being Black and being Muslim is often overlooked in the discourse (Mauleón, 2018), and given the small numbers of Latino/a Muslims in the US, the experience of Islamophobia may become conflated with matters of border security (Romero & Zarrugh, 2018). The intersection of stigmatized identities, therefore, not only results in a dual system of marginalization for Black and Latino/a Muslims in American

spaces but, given the privileged position of Arabs and South Asians in Muslim communities, also situates Blacks and Latino/as into minoritized categories within Muslim spaces.

14.6 Unpacking Privilege and Marginalization in Muslim Spaces

According to Johnson (2017), privileged groups are those that have historically benefited from institutional systems in which their group is viewed as dominant and whose group identity is positioned at the center. Although some individuals from socially disadvantaged groups may be able to accumulate privilege (e.g., a woman leader) it does not mean that other individuals from that group have the same opportunity. For example, tokenism might work against women attempting to gain power in an institution that already has a few women leaders (Dezso, Ross, & Uribe, 2016). Thus, the success of some socially disadvantaged group individuals in overcoming the effect of biases to some extent does not negate systems of privilege and marginalization. Further, individuals at the intersections of gender, race, sexual orientation and other categories may be uniquely privileged on account of certain categories and marginalized in others, making it more difficult to determine their level in the social hierarchy. In the US, while some ethnic groups of color may not face marginalization in the same way as others (e.g., Asian-Americans viewed as a “model minority”), positive stereotypes can also be problematic, albeit differently (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000). Additionally, non-White groups do not enjoy the privilege of being oblivious to their social identity as those considered the standard (i.e., White; Johnson, 2017).

While research in Islamic centers is limited, we can gauge some aspects of privilege by considering the voices that have been historically silenced or ignored within Muslim communities. There is a misconception among Muslims that Islam is “colorblind”; however, this is not an accurate stance (MuslimARC, 2015). In the Qur’an, human beings are recognized as diverse: “And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge” (30:22). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH⁶) reiterated this point in his last sermon: “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a White has no superiority over a Black nor does a Black have any superiority over a White except by piety and good action.” (Al-Bukhari, 1978). However, despite the unifying message of Islam, racial disparity among Muslim Americans exists. A report by MuslimARC (2015) found that Black and Latino/a Muslims face ethnic and racial discrimination within the Muslim

⁶PBUH stands for Peace Be Upon Him, an honorific that is attached to the names of the prophets in Islam.

American community, which consists largely of South Asian and Arab immigrants. Although there is strong support among Muslim Americans for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (ISPU, 2020), Black Muslims have voiced concerns about the performativity of such gestures as “merely playing to the popular theme of the moment” (Chouhoo & Abdullah, 2020, para. 3). While non-Black Muslim groups are often vocal about oppression in other countries (Chouhoo & Abdullah, 2020), there is less collective outrage towards oppression and violence targeting Black Americans, both Muslim and non-Muslim (Khan, 2015). This points to the need for stronger and authentic allyship.

The Muslim marriage market is another institution that is ripe with racism. As first generation South Asian and Arab immigrants may be less familiar with the American linguistic norms that “talk *around* race” (Grewal, 2009, p. 332), their conversations about race and skin color can be quite candid, with fair skin, particularly among women, being highly regarded. Among immigrant Muslim communities, Blacks are often considered less desirable, with Black women being least acceptable as potential mates for Muslim sons (Grewal, 2009; Swanson, 1996). Similarly, research into Latino/a Muslims shows that their acceptance in Muslim spaces is hampered by stereotypes of Latino/as as promiscuous as well as criticism of their knowledge of Islam and Arabic (Morales, 2018). As South Asian and Arab Muslims, who are minoritized within the American macrosystem, are essentially the *de facto* standard in mainstream American Islamic centers, they are in a position to advocate and support Muslims from minoritized ethnic groups. However, becoming an ally requires a conscious effort to recognize one’s privilege within a specific microsystem (i.e., mosques) and embark upon actions that will benefit those who are marginalized.

14.7 A Social Justice Approach to Allyship in Islamic Centers

To better understand allyship in Islamic centers, we look to the literature on social justice within organizations and institutions. As historically, patriarchal structures have shaped the nature and culture of institutions (e.g., Anderson & Tomaskovic-Devey, 1995), much of the scholarship stems from the assumption that privileged groups are unwilling to share power with those who are marginalized. Therefore, the onus for making the effort to bring social justice often falls on marginalized groups to fight for fair treatment, and on leaders to enforce institutional level policies to redistribute power. However, increased social justice awareness in the broader society and shifting demographics are giving birth to a more diverse and egalitarian generation (Donnelly et al., 2016). As Muslim youth are more likely to have open attitudes towards diversity and social justice, they may resist hierarchical structures using technological advances and social media to blur social boundaries and undercut power hierarchies (Ahmed, Patel, & Hashem, 2015). Assessment of what

predicts success in changing attitudes shows that those who are high in motivation are also more likely to change their attitudes and emotional responses (Kalinowski et al., 2013). Further, programs based on the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) that foster positive intergroup relationships by emphasizing social interaction under optimal conditions (e.g., shared goals, cooperative environment) are likely to improve affective-based outcomes such as prejudice reduction (Kalinowski et al., 2013).

14.7.1 The Pros and Cons of Diversity and Inclusion Programs

So, what kinds of diversity programs and practices foster positive relationships between members of different groups? In her examination of the boundary conditions of the Contact Hypothesis, Makas (1993) notes that while (facilitating) contact alone is insufficient, sustained positive quality contact has the capacity to overcome existing negative perceptions. On the flipside, however, if contact produces negative experiences, negative perceptions are reinforced. Therefore, offering opportunities for contact, without efforts dedicated to helping make the encounters *positive*, can backfire. Wasserman, Gallegos, and Ferdman (2008) define a culture of inclusion as one in which “people of all social identity groups [have] the opportunity to be present, to have their voices heard and appreciated, and to engage in core activities on behalf of the collective” (p. 176). While a reliance on fair distribution of resources and voice in decision-making may contribute to perceptions that these are sufficient in creating inclusion, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that such initiatives increase marginalized group members’ *feelings* of inclusion (Shore et al., 2011). There is also an assumption that the responsibility for inclusion lies with leaders, such as imams and Islamic center boards who ultimately make decisions about how resources are distributed, who participate in decision making, and whose voice is heard. Indeed, 71% of Islamic center leaders believe that their mosque is engaged in social justice work (Bagby, 2012). However, such assumptions neglect the role of fellow privileged group members, or allies in the congregation, who can help marginalized group members feel included. Importantly, emphasizing overt factors in the institutional structure and policies of Islamic centers overlooks Black and Latino/a experiences of being the target of implicit biases, microaggressions, and negative stereotypes within Muslim spaces.

Such shortcomings are evident across several studies of organizations that demonstrate that far from helping marginalized groups feel welcome and included, diversity and inclusion efforts often lead to active backlash from dominant groups. Programs that emphasize the awareness of differences have been found to lead to discomfort in relating with different others (Baba & Hebert, 2004), worsened attitudes, and backlash from dominant group members (Alderfer, Alderfer, Bell, & Jones, 1992; Hood, Muller, & Seitz, 2001; Sanchez & Medkik, 2004). Thus,

although institution-wide policies and practices in Islamic centers may be effective in creating opportunities for Latino/a and Black Muslims, they may come at an interpersonal cost. It is important to note that a lack of inclusion and the experience of microaggressions within mainstream Islamic centers rarely turn violent; instead, they result in divisions within the congregation that often lead to the development of separate Islamic centers for marginalized Muslim identities (MuslimARC, 2015). As such, creating multicultural mosques that follow the ethos of the Qur'an and *sunnah* (Islamic traditions) requires more than policy level changes within Islamic centers, but also cultural shifts that activate Islamic values and virtues such as humanity, justice, tolerance, and particularly, kindness, which have the capacity to foster authentic positive interpersonal experiences (Abdullah, 2014).

14.7.2 *Allyship as a Virtue*

To address the tension and often, the impasse between deontological (i.e., what one ought to do) and utilitarian (i.e., what is useful) perspectives, Dijk, Engen, and Pauwe (2012) recommend adopting a virtue ethics approach. According to this perspective, moral awareness and virtuousness are the starting point in cultivating social harmony (Jones, King, Nelson, Geller, & Bowes-Sperry, 2013). Such an approach can foster a culture of authentic, meaningful, and warm connections between members of privileged and marginalized groups (Pless & Maak, 2004). Specifically, a virtue ethics perspective suggests that inclusion should be valued as an end in itself; for instance, be considered a civic virtue that is centered on human dignity, deep respect, value for differences, affirmation of the diverse "other", and an ethic of care (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2013).

From an Islamic perspective, *akhlaq* or moral character, is the hidden element of the soul that causes one to engage in virtuous actions, and ethics or *ilm al-akhlaq* refers to the study of one's inner and outer character that promotes virtues and purifies the soul (Abdullah, 2014). Within positive psychology, much of the literature on virtues has referenced the work of Peterson and Seligman (2004), who identified a family of core virtues that have a positive influence on our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Six virtue categories (Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence) along with 24-character strengths were found to appear across historical, religious, and cultural boundaries. As strengths that were culture-specific were removed from the list (2006), Pasha-Zaidi and Odeh (2019) theorized a list of Islamic strengths based on the VIA virtue categories, changing the wording of some to better reflect Qur'anic injunctions and adding strengths such as tolerance, purity and cleanliness, and repentance to the list.

Recently, Warren (2019) explored the relationship between virtues and allyship among exceptional allies, finding that compassion, fairness, and spirituality fueled allies' psychological investment; humility, perspective-taking, and wisdom fueled intellectual investment; moral courage and responsibility boosted allyship action; integrity and prudence regulated the specific forms of allyship behavior; and

perseverance, passion and patience enabled long-term commitment to allyship. Actively leveraging virtues in the service of allyship offers South Asian and Arab Muslims a spiritual pathway for not only being better allies to Black and Latino/a congregants but also being better Muslims. Highlighting the importance of relationship-building and empathy, and consideration of allyship itself as an exercise of Islamic virtues may provide Islamic centers with a systematic approach to inclusion and diversity that exemplifies the practice of tolerance and diversity set forth by the Qur'an and *sunnah*.

14.8 Benefits and Barriers of Allyship

When stigmatized individuals call others out on discrimination and prejudice, results, if any, often come at an interpersonal cost to them (e.g., accusations of being hypersensitive and aggressive; Kaiser & Miller, 2001). At the same time, allies tend not to be subjected to such backlash when they voice concerns (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010) or call out the benefits they receive due to privilege or positive stereotypes (Diebels & Czopp, 2011). Thus, allies may be in a unique position to leverage their privilege as a tool to foster an inclusive environment while experiencing lower interpersonal cost and preserving civility and interpersonal harmony. Further, allyship does not only benefit the beneficiary, but has also been found to carry psychological and social benefits to the ally themselves (Warren, Bordoloi, & Warren, 2021).

However, there are several challenges that may prevent members of privileged groups from serving as allies. Geiger and Jordan (2014) hold that key privileged group members may lack awareness of the extent of their privilege, and when confronted with reality may experience shame, discomfort, and melancholy. Although these uncomfortable feelings have the capacity to spur some to become allies, others may withdraw instead. Further, those who subscribe to ideals of Islamic “color-blindness” may fail to see the extent to which privilege has played a role in their own acceptance within the Muslim community. In their review, Sabat, Martinez, and Wessel (2013) note additional reasons that may deter motivated individuals from making a difference. Those who intend to serve as allies may be discouraged by fears of negative reactions from other members of privileged groups, such as being viewed as overly political or radical (Goldstein & Davis, 2010; Washington & Evans, 1991). In addition, they may be reluctant to spark interpersonal conflict or confrontation on another’s behalf, particularly if it involves speaking truth to power (Ashburn-Nardo, Blanchar, Petersson, Morris, & Goodwin, 2014). Moreover, bystander research shows that the complex process of deciding whether to intervene involves weighing several factors such as severity of harm, the likelihood of reoccurrence, the presence of others, perceived intentions of the offender, and relationship with the offender (DuBow & Ashcraft, 2016; Ryan & Wessel, 2012). Similarly, they may lack knowledge of the most effective practical strategies to support marginalized individuals (Sabat et al., 2013), and therefore feel a lack of

self-efficacy and perhaps even concern that they might do more harm than good. Further, serving as an ally publicly may be challenging. The desire to do the right thing, the self-consciousness of an audience, and the salience of and desire to overcome one's in-group oppressive stereotypes may lead to a cognitive overload, suppressing the effectiveness of the help they give (van Leeuwen, Oostenbrink, & Twilt, 2014). All of these concerns are justified, and it is important that motivated individuals go beyond good intentions and actively develop themselves to become effective allies by gaining knowledge, developing a wide repertoire of helping strategies, and cultivating qualities that automatize ally behaviors.

14.9 Becoming a Better Ally to Black and Latino/a Muslims

The Qur'an states, "The believing men and believing women are allies (*auliya*) of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer (*salah*) and give charity (*zakah*) and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those, Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise." (9:71). The Arabic term *auliya* (singular *wali*) used here reflects most closely the meaning of allyship within Muslim communities as it suggests a willingness to bear responsibility for the welfare of others. Hill (2014) contends that "the Islamic concept of *wali* is more than an advocate. This relationship is a trust from Allah. . .the basis of our work in challenging racism within the Muslim community" (para. 8). From this perspective, allyship is an Islamic injunction that Muslims who hold any level of privilege must be willing to take on, despite the barriers they may face. Doing so, allows one to leverage their positive Islamic identity (PII; Pasha-Zaidi & Odeh, 2019) to serve as an ally to those marginalized within the community. Additionally, identifying with a wider Islamic identity, rather than one which is based on membership in an ethnic group, creates a common politicized identity for both advantaged and disadvantaged community members which can motivate collective actions in support of marginalized group members (Van Zomeren, Kutlaca, & Turner-Zwinkels, 2018). Based on the politicized solidarity model of social change (Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008), identification with a common politicized group may shift the self-categorization of advantaged group members to one that is more aligned with the interests of those who are disadvantaged (Radke, Kutlaca, Siem, Wright, & Becker, 2020), thus creating more impetus for allyship.

In order to be effective allies, Geiger and Jordan (2014) recommend privileged group members be empathetic and patient in establishing trust and developing a deep understanding of layers of injustice and oppression. As authentic conversations may surface a wide range of emotions and entrenched values that may necessitate strength and resilience to negotiate, they recommend various practices that can help individuals develop as allies. These include learning about privilege and seeking out critique, attributing marginalized group members' problems to socialization rather than individual attributes, and being mindful of when interpersonal interactions morph into inter-category (e.g., interracial, cross-gender) interactions. As such

they call for empathy and compassion, balancing individual and social identities, and educating each other on inclusive behaviors.

14.9.1 Recommendations

Taking on the role of an ally can be a delicate balance between stepping up and standing down. Given the intersectionality of Muslim American communities and mosque attendees, it may be particularly difficult for individuals to take on allyship roles without an institutional culture that strongly embraces the inclusion of non-majority perspectives. The response of authority figures, such as imams, to microaggressions and other forms of discrimination that may occur within Muslim spaces can signal to observers the values that are upheld. While it may seem more productive to respond with rational Islamic arguments against prejudice, leaders who use emotional expressions of indignation along with verbal confrontations are viewed as more sincere than those who rely solely on non-emotional approaches (Warren, Sekhon, Winkelman, & Waldrop, 2021). Yet, confrontation is not the only or even the best form of allyship. Responding to instances of racial discrimination by highlighting the cultural capital of Black and Latino/a Muslims in the community can provide a non-confrontational alternative that supports marginalized individuals and provides a counternarrative to biased viewpoints (Sekhon & Warren, 2020).

In order to become more cognizant of marginalized Muslims in the community, diversity in the composition of board members, committees, and community leaders is vital (ISPU, 2016). Creating activities that center Black and Latino/a culture and raise awareness of the issues that are of relevance to them in the community can contribute to an atmosphere of racial and ethnic respect. As the *khutbah* or sermon before Friday prayers is an essential component of any mosque programming, it is an opportunity to expose the congregation to scholars from a variety of backgrounds. This signals the legitimacy of non-Arab scholars in Islamic discourse. Other recommendations that focus on allyship initiatives from an institutional perspective include the following:

- Conduct an equity analysis of the mosque that looks at the demographics of attendees, investigates current institutional practices, and surveys local Muslims about their needs and their views of the current leadership, programs, and activities. Share the results of the analysis on the mosque website along with a plan of action to address the weaknesses identified. “A sense of inclusivity is engendered when community members feel that mosque leaders care about their opinions and listen to them” (ISPU, 2016, p. 2).
- Create a welcoming committee of diverse community members who can greet mosque attendees for Friday prayers and other activities, and who can facilitate conversations at social functions (ISPU, 2016). Having facilitators who can serve as translators may be particularly important for Muslims who do not share the language of the majority of mosque attendees. This also builds awareness among

majority group members to be more cognizant of individuals or families who may be sitting alone, thus creating an atmosphere of shared responsibility to ensure that no one is left out of small group conversations.

- For activities that include food, such as Ramadan iftars, menus should feature dishes from a variety of cultures as part of the mix.
- Organize a diversity, equity, and inclusion committee to develop outreach initiatives, review mosque programming, and create workshops on topics that highlight the contributions of Black and Latino/a Americans (both Muslim and non-Muslim; Hill, 2014).
- Organize a buddy program that helps Muslims pair up with trained volunteers who can provide socialization and support. This can be particularly helpful for new converts or individuals who have recently moved to the area (ISPU, 2016); however, it may also provide ways of re-engaging Muslims who are currently “unmosqued”.
- Develop educational programs that discuss the historical influence of African, Caribbean, and Spanish contributions to Muslim societies.
- Organize open-house events that encourage community members to bring family and friends, including non-Muslims.
- Organize Eid family sponsorships that pair families with Black and Latino/a Muslims, converts, and others who may not have the benefit of extended family and friends with whom to celebrate Eid.

Setting the stage for allyship should not put an undue burden on marginalized members of the community (Hill, 2014). Instead of placing additional responsibilities for educating ethnic majorities on those community members who may already be contributing to multiple antiracism projects, initial information can be obtained online and by reaching out to Islamic centers that cater specifically to African American and Latino/a congregations, even if these centers are not local.

While institutional efforts can begin the process of inclusion, it is equally important for South Asian and Arab Muslims to learn the interpersonal behaviors of allyship so they can continue the work of supporting Black and Latino/a communities in other Muslim spaces. Having authentic interactions entails a two-way exchange. If most of the personal information in a conversation has been garnered from the minoritized group member, the exchange is likely to be viewed as an interview or interrogation, rather than a dialogue. Reflecting on the reasons behind engaging in allyship are important in this regard (Hill, 2014). Sometimes advantaged group members make themselves the center of attention or make allyship behaviors conditional on personal or political gain (Droogendyk, Wright, Lubensky, & Louis, 2016). Misguided actions like these can further oppress marginalized voices. Instead of telling others about one’s own efforts as an ally, it is much more effective to amplify the voices, efforts and successes of marginalized group members (Daigle, 2018; Hill, 2014). As it can be difficult to recognize all the ways in which they are advantaged, good allies are active listeners who are open to critical evaluations and willing to change behaviors based on the feedback of less privileged group members (Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). While criticism can be difficult to hear, advantaged

group members who respond with fragility, outrage, repeated explanations about their behavior or assertions of their own lack of privilege can inflict more psychological harm on disadvantaged group members (Hill, 2014). Thus, allyship work in Muslim spaces entails accepting the mistakes that are made, checking one's own intentions, and continuing to strive toward equity and inclusion of all Muslims in the *ummah*.

14.10 Conclusion

As Muslims are minoritized within American mainstream spaces, the experiences of stigma and marginalization cut across ethnic and racial boundaries (Grewal, 2014). At the same time, some Muslims are able to find belonging, acceptance, and even power within American Islamic centers. However, Black and Latino/a Muslims face multiple categories of stigma in the US and often have less social support within mainstream Islamic centers that consist predominantly of South Asian and Arab Muslims (Chouhood & Abdullah, 2020; Hill, 2014). As allyship is a Qur'anic injunction (9:71), it is imperative to address the discrimination and microaggressions that occur in Muslim spaces. Becoming an ally requires continuous self-examination and rejection of racial biases that exist in South Asian and Arab communities (Khan, 2015). As Islamic centers hold an important role in the lives of Muslim Americans, these institutions can provide leadership and support to help advantaged groups become better advocates for marginalized members. While allyship can be an uncomfortable path, it is important to remember that the *ummah* is diverse by divine design and that Muslims are commanded by the Qur'an to be allies to one another. Learning to be an ally is therefore a crucial part of being Muslim.

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Part V
Disrupting Dogma

Chapter 15

Spiritual Assessment: Building Positive Resources for the Distressed Souls



Rabia Dasti, Aisha Sitwat, and Amna Anwaar

Abstract This chapter begins with a general overview of the relationship spirituality and psychology have shared over the course of the development of the field. The recognition of spirituality as a dynamic health promoting agent and rejection of anti-spirituality movements are highlighted. The importance of spiritual assessment in the realm of psychotherapy are discussed followed by debate on the difficulties encountered in the conceptualization of the spiritual construct. Both Western and non-Western models of spirituality are presented, and differences between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic spiritual worldview are emphasized. Acknowledging Islamic worldviews as representative of the spiritual aspirations of the Muslim population, the conceptualization of the Islamic spiritual construct is explained. The process through which a sensitive Multidimensional Measure of Islamic Spirituality (MMIS) was constructed, and the insights gained in the process as well as the challenges faced are described. Future recommendations for utilizing spiritual assessment in research and clinical work for the aspiring health practitioners are given while concluding the chapter.

15.1 Spirituality and Psychology: From Thesis, Antithesis to Synthesis

Spirituality has been a part of humankind in different forms since the beginning of time. From the life of an ordinary person to a larger community, spirituality as a human pursuit to connect to a higher form of reality has been significantly evident over the years. While it has been explored throughout human history as one of the three fundamental aspects of human beings (i.e., body, mind, spirit; Huitt, 2003),

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there is widespread disagreement as to its origin, functioning, or even importance (Huitt, 2000). The modern concept of spirituality has its roots in the Christian divinity where religion and spirituality (R/S) were viewed as works of the Holy Spirit (Schneiders, 2002). Later, the field of science deposed the church, which led to spirituality being declared unscientific, subjective, obscure, and irrational, and its use discouraged (Descartes, 1996). The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of disciplines of mental health, psychiatry and psychology, which aimed at addressing the mental health issues and alleviating resultant suffering (Sharma, Charak, & Sharma, 2009). It was at this point that spirituality and mental health became contenders as both followed different paths and theoretical frameworks to accomplish parallel goals. This rift resulted in a lack of understanding and mutual disparagement between the paradigms which led to the development of varied schools of thought.

Freud, the “father of psychoanalysis”, viewed R/S as a derived product of the human need to make helplessness and suffering tolerable. He proposed that religious beliefs are an adolescent stage from which human beings should be freed. Jung, a contemporary of Freud, proposed a different model wherein religious beliefs are considered derivatives of an archetypal system. In this view, the archetypes of God, Devil, Salvation and other primeval images are components of the collective unconscious that could be envisaged through intuition, which Jung believed to be a special human psychological function (Hall, Lindzey, & Campbell, 1998). However, with the rise of behaviorism in the 1950s, R/S components were again polarized as proponents viewed everything to be programmed, predetermined, observable and measurable (Powers, 2005), and for the next 50 years, behaviorism and cognitive psychology dominated therapeutic and diagnostic approaches (Fukuyama, Puig, Baggs, & Wolf, 2014). Later, the emergence of the humanistic paradigm put forth the concept of self-actualization proposed by Abraham Maslow, which shifted the focus from pathology to self-realization (Powers, 2005; Rogers, 1961). It was around the same time that the term “positive psychology” first appeared in the last chapter of Maslow’s book *Motivation and Personality* (1954). According to Maslow, psychology itself does not have an accurate understanding of human potential, and it tends not to raise the proverbial bar high enough with respect to maximum attainment. This paved the way for a fourth force in psychology, termed transpersonal psychology, which emerged in the late 1960s. Transpersonal or transcendental psychology focuses on broadening the positive aspects of mental processes through transcendence, the human need to unite with the greater whole and spiritual aspect of one’s personality (Rogers, 1961). Transpersonal psychologists (Grof, 1998; Tart, 1990; Wilber, 1995) view R/S phenomena as dimensions that connect the individuals with their transcendental reality, thereby emphasizing a change in self-consciousness toward the spiritual sphere.

Around the same era, after the emergence of the humanistic paradigm, spirituality also established its importance in the field of counseling and clinical psychology. In 1974, the Association for Religious Values in Counseling, which was later changed to the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling, was established in the United States (APA, 2013; Powers, 2005). In its fifth edition, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), which is used by

mental health practitioners as a guide to diagnose and classify disorders, introduced a category for R/S problems requiring clinical attention. It also addressed issues like loss of faith, problems with religious conversion, and questioning of spiritual values as worthy of clinical attention (APA, 2013). Moreover, a heterogeneous group of theorists who belonged to transpersonal and spiritual schools of thought, proposed a number of dynamic approaches to R/S. Though they differed in their views, they shared a unifying thread regarding R/S as a core characteristic of human potential (Sharma et al., 2009). In the last few decades, as psychologists and psychotherapists have begun approaching R/S through a positive lens, rapid developments have occurred in the empirical, experimental and psychometric study of R/S experiences and related phenomena like meditation and near-death experiences (Larsen & Rinkel, 2016).

15.2 The Western Perspective of Spirituality

The concept of spirituality is exceedingly multifaceted as it is highly subjective. The perception of spirituality ranges from elated, transcendental experiences to existential searches for purpose and meaning (Moberg, 2002). Speck (2005) illustrates this definitional dilemma when stating that “to harmonize these definitions would be a herculean task because they point to competing worldviews that are not always fully articulated in the literature, helping to explain why the definitions rely on abstractions” (p. 4). In fact, agreement on the exact definition of the terms spirituality and religion does not exist (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 1997). A content analysis of 31 definitions of religiosity and 40 definitions of spirituality revealed that there is no normative definition for either construct (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999).

The term “spirituality” originally emerged from the Latin term *spiritualis* which refers to breath or life, or in a more literal sense, one’s “sensitivity or attachment to religious values” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1993). Spirituality is generally manifested through involvement in religious rituals, or the practice of an organized set of religious rules and guidelines (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). Over the past few decades, Western intellectuals and researchers have put forth a myriad of definitions of spirituality. Meezenbroek et al. (2012) define spirituality as “one’s striving for an experience of connection with oneself, connectedness with others and nature and connectedness with the transcendent” (p. 338). Similarly, Koenig (2010) views spirituality as “distinguished from all other things such as humanism, values, morals, and mental health, by its connection to the sacred, the transcendent. Spirituality is intimately connected to the supernatural and religion, although it extends beyond religion” (pp. 116–117); whereas Powell (2007) poses that spirituality, intrinsically bound up with wholeness, is defined as a deep inner experience related to meaning and purpose in one’s life, or may be defined as a comprehensiveness that entails the feeling of belonging to others and a sense of peace. It also involves searching for answers about the infinite, and is particularly important in times of

stress, illness, loss, bereavement, and death. Pargament (2007) defines spirituality as the “sacred domain” which concerns “ideas of God, higher powers, divinity, and transcendent reality” (p. 32).

Another definition given by Gilbert, (2007) defines spirituality as

the essence of human beings as unique individuals, “what makes me, me and you, you”. So, it is the power, energy and hopefulness in a person. It is life at its best; growth and creativity, freedom and love. It is what is deepest in us, what gives us direction and motivation. It is what enables a person to survive bad times, to overcome difficulties, to become themselves (p. 23).

Nicholli (2004) thinks of spirituality as one’s connection to realities larger than oneself or larger than the material universe. It is an umbrella concept under which the specific category of religion is subsumed. The tendency to believe that there is more to existence than the material—that life has a spiritual element—is codified in various religions through beliefs and related historical events, or tenets that are usually documented in written form (scriptures). Religions formalize what the spiritual individual experiences. Religious expressions include cognitive elements (beliefs and theology) and behavioral elements, such as ritual and spiritual experiences (e.g. prayers and religious services).

Synthesizing the above definitions, spirituality can be referred to as a belief in an ultimate power which motivates a person to seek meaning, direction, purpose in life and a search for the sacred. It instills a sense of harmony, peace, feelings of belongingness, love, and makes a person able to survive and bear pain in times of loss, bereavement and distress. It is not necessarily associated with any specific religion and can also exist otherwise.

15.3 Spirituality and Mental Health

In the last 10 years, research conducted by different disciplines including gerontology, nursing, psychiatry, neuroscience and psychology have provided empirical evidence that highlights the importance of spirituality in alleviating mental and physical illnesses (Barker & Buchanan-Barker, 2005). Researchers have also shown that suffering caused by almost all kinds of mental and physical illnesses, if interpreted within a spiritual framework, can be transformed into hope (Sharma et al., 2009). Koenig (2012) suggests that spirituality helps depressive patients figure out purpose and meaning in their lives which further facilitates the vigor and hope required to face such difficulties. Clinical trials have shown that when an R/S component is incorporated in traditional cognitive behavior therapy, efficacy is improved for a number of psychological problems including anxiety, depression and emotional problems related to grief and bereavement. For practicing Muslims, when offering prayer and reading Qur’an were added to therapy, the efficacy of treatment improved significantly (Rosmarin, Pargament, Pirutinsky, & Mahoney, 2010). Research has further established a negative relationship between addictive

disorders and religiosity; for example, the 12-step program for alcoholism is based on a framework where spirituality facilitates compliance with the treatment process and promotes an openness to making positive changes (Abu-Raiya, 2013; Galanter, Dermatis, & Bunt, 2007). Additionally, certain methods of coping that have religious or spiritual roots such as reframing stressors, seeking spiritual support and connectedness with a supreme power, are significantly associated with overall psychological and physical wellbeing of individuals (Olson, Trevino, Geske, & Vanderpool, 2012; Phillips & Stein, 2007; Pieper, 2004). Religious coping methods not only enhance resilience in the aftermath of trauma; they also contribute to post-traumatic growth after natural or manmade disasters and help individuals deal with suffering resulting from life threatening illnesses such as cancer (Ai, Hall, Pargament, & Tice, 2013; Trevino, Archambault, & Schuster, 2012). Participation in religious activities, which is another practical manifestation of one's inclination towards R/S, and being surrounded by a supportive religious community have been associated with less catastrophic interpretations and psychological distress after facing traumatic events. Furthermore, feeling connected to a Supreme Power or a belief in God has also been found to be significantly associated with lower frequency of obsessions and compulsion, less social anxiety and paranoid ideation (Balbuena, Baetz, & Bowen, 2013; Kidwai, Mancha, Brown, & Eaton, 2014), and aids in efforts for suicide prevention or condemnation (Huguelet et al., 2007). Helping individuals to find meaning in life is another important facet served by spirituality. Existential crises faced by individuals suffering from a terminal illness, for example, can be served through a spiritual approach as transcendental experiences bring forth a connectedness with humankind, nature, or God, which helps alleviate as well as minimize despair and nurture a capacity to accept things in life that are beyond one's control (Pearce, Haynes, Rivera, & Koenig, 2018).

The efficacy of cognitive processing therapy has already been established for treating symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but follow-ups have shown that patients are often left with unresolved symptoms. However, results of Spiritually Integrated Cognitive Processing Therapy (SICPT) using patients' spiritual sources along with psychological treatment have shown reductions in PTSD symptoms among patients along with better follow-up results (Pearce et al. 2018). Although there is some debate against the integration of R/S in therapy as it may lead to misunderstandings between the practitioner and the patient, it has not deterred this movement (Arevalo, Prado, & Amaro, 2008; Boisvert & Harrell, 2013; Cotton, Zebracki, Rosenthal, Tsevat, Drotar, 2006; Mohr, Perroud, & Gillieron, 2011; Power & McKinney, 2013). As spirituality-based interventions have shown better outcomes compared with control groups who received regular therapy protocols, it is growing in practice around the globe (Koszycki, Bilodeau, Raab-Mayo, & Bradwejn, 2014). Over time, focus on spirituality has advanced to the extent that a more holistic concept of a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual model has emerged (King, 2000; McKee & Chappel, 1992) wherein etiological factors of a disorder are conceptualized in light of biological, psychological, social and spiritual factors (as cited in Josephson & Peteet, 2004). Conceding the role of spirituality, the APA Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct has made it mandatory for

all mental health practitioners to have sufficient knowledge of R/S to address clients' religious concerns effectively (American Psychological Association, 2002).

15.4 Spiritual Assessment

This increasing interest in spirituality over the years has led to the development of various measures of the concept. Richards and Bergin (1997) encouraged the evaluation of spirituality to gain a holistic diagnostic understanding which in turn, would allow the assessment of a client's spirituality to be more clearly linked to the establishment of prevention techniques and therapeutic interventions. Spiritual assessment is an organized and systematic approach that focuses on discovering the spiritual resources of the client and aims to conceptualize and treat problems using a holistic model instead of targeting segregated aspects (Brown, Johnson, & Parrish, 2007). Assessing religious or spiritual aspects can help to discover hidden coping sources of the individual which may further facilitate recovery (Josephson & Wiesner, 2004) and also leads the client to a better sense of self-awareness (Brown et al., 2007).

The most essential feature that defines psychology's investigation of religion is how R/S phenomena are measured. For this purpose, questionnaires, especially the self-report measures have particularly proven to be effective (Gorsuch, 1984 as cited in Rennick, 2005). There are many tools to measure the construct of spirituality including the Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975, 2001), the Spiritual Well-being Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982), the Spiritual Well-being Questionnaire (Moberg, 1984), the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (Hall & Edwards, 2002), the Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (Kass, Friedman, Lesermann, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991), the Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont, 1999), the Expression of Spirituality Inventory (MacDonal, 2000), the Spiritual Well-being Belief Questionnaire (Gomez & Fisher, 2003), the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002), the Spiritual Index of Well-Being (Frey, Daaleman, & Peyton, 2005), the Belief and Value Scale (Hatch, Burg, Naberhaus, & Hellmich, 1998), the Spiritual Involvement and Belief Scale (Hatch et al., 1998) and the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002).

These measures of spirituality are based on differing definitions and conceptualizations. Stanard, Sandhu, and Painter (2000) argued that most of these tools are based on Western theoretical models and hence they would only provide a limited perspective on spirituality, which is a complex and a broad construct. Additionally, expert opinions and references to various religious scholars have shown a lack of consensus on a definition of spirituality that makes it difficult to operationalize the term (Cohen & Koenig, 2003). In recognition of the complex nature of spirituality and the challenges in its operationalization, a multidimensional framework in defining the construct can be particularly helpful (Hill et al., 2000). As the majority of the constructs on spirituality have been explained by Western researchers (Koenig, Zaben, & Khalifa, 2012; Moberg, 2002), it is unclear if the findings generalize to other religious groups, such as Muslims. However, an increasing number of studies

carried out with predominantly Muslim population are emerging to provide insight into the Islamic context of spirituality and its assessment (Jafari, Loghmani, & Puchalski, 2014; Koenig et al., 2012).

15.5 Islamic Measures of Religion/Spirituality

With respect to assessment measures of Islamic spirituality, little research evidence is available. Most of the available assessment tools have either employed a Western conceptualization of religiosity or are translated or adapted versions of assessment measures of spirituality based on Western Judo-Christian perspectives that may be ineffective with Muslim populations. Available tools to measure Islamic spirituality have used items that measure a single dimension such as moral values or religious practices and have inadequate psychometric properties (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2010). In order to best identify individual differences in Islamic beliefs and how they correlate with mental health (Ghorbani, Watson, & Khan, 2007), it is crucial to develop scales that are operationalized on the dimensions of Islamic religious commitment. An effort to fill this gap in the available literature is discussed in the following section.

15.5.1 Islamic Conceptualization of Spirituality

In order to understand the construct of Islamic spirituality, we must first understand the conceptualization of human nature, which in Islam, stems from both spiritual and earthly realms. According to the Islamic view, human *fitrah* is the purity and sublimity of human nature made up of two constituents, the *ruh* (the transcendental-self) and the *nafs* (physical-self or phenomenal-self; Khalili, Murken, Reich, Shah, & Vahabzadeh, 2002). Mohamed (1995) acknowledges both biological and spiritual dimensions as intrinsically good, and defines *fitrah* as “an individual’s innate reality that also has a bearing on one’s beliefs, values and attitudes to life, worldview and the interaction with the surrounding environment [it] may be described as a God-given innate state to believe in God and to worship Him” (p. 2). It is therefore an inborn capacity of an individual affirming the *tawhid* of Allah (Oneness of Allah) and *din-ul-Islam*, (a code of life based on submission and obedience to Allah).

Humans are additionally endowed with various faculties that enable them to function as spiritual beings. The self or ego (*nafs*) is the lowest faculty that humans are endowed with and belongs to the Realm-of-Creation (*Aalam-e-Khalq*). A major part of this self is inclined towards lower pursuits and therefore the Holy Qur’an calls it *nafs-e-ammara*—the self which incites human beings toward worldly and baser pursuits. However, it is also equipped with a moral acumen. Human beings are blessed with the *ruh* (soul or spirit). This spiritual element belongs to the Realm of

the Divine directive force (*Aalam-e-Amr*). Originated by the Divine command, the *ruh* inherently possesses qualities of love and attachment for Allah. As a composite of baser and spiritual aspects, human beings experience an inner battle between good and evil. Spiritual development goes through three stages. *Nafs-e-ammarah* is inclined towards evil and if unchecked, leads to evil acts and damnation. *Nafs-e-lawama* is the stage at which a person becomes conscious of evil and tries to resist it. At this stage if a sin is committed, the person regrets and repents. The third stage is that of *nafs-e-mutma'inna*, in which a person achieves complete peace and satisfaction by following the Divine commandments (Ahmad, 2007).

Human beings also have a subtle faculty called *qalb* (heart) which has the power of direct perception of spiritual truths. The Holy Qur'an calls it the true-self or the dwelling place of the soul which is our existential, intellectual and universal center. Each individual has the power to exercise free will and to choose between right and wrong. When we focus our endeavors toward baser instincts, the faculties of the heart become obscure and our lower self dominates, but when we acknowledge and act according to divine design, the spiritual self dominates and the power of the heart become ablaze with divine love and gnosis of Allah (Ahmad, 2007). Therefore, a pre-requisite for the healthy psycho-spiritual functioning of an individual is through the regulation and transformation of the *nafs* into the spiritual qualities of the *ruh* (Khalili et al., 2002). The essence of religious experience in Islam is based on the realization of two realms of existence: the natural (earthly) and the transcendent, and it is the latter through which human beings must try to find the values to govern the flow of the former (Faruqi, 1973). Religion provides the basis to help us create this equilibrium and to optimize the functioning of body and soul (Razak, Mohamed, & Mutiu, 2013).

The Islamic perspective of spirituality is based on the divine sources of Qur'an and *sunnah*, wherein spirituality and religiosity are inseparable. One of the most relevant explanations in this regard comes forth from the *Hadith-e-Gabriel*, which asserts that Islam as *din* (or way of life) rests on three interrelated and mutually infused dimensions, which are recognized as *Islam, Iman and Ihsan* (Chittick, 1992). The aforementioned *hadith* sheds light on each one of these three dimensions at great length. Out of these three foci, *Islam* is acknowledged as the assertion of faith in terms of the five pillars of Islam, which include pronouncement of *shahada* (i.e. accepting Allah as the only God and the finality of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)), prayer (*salah*), fasting (*saum*), charity (*zakah*) and pilgrimage (*Hajj*). The second dimension, *Iman*, is emphasized as comprising of the foundation of Islam, which is defined as belief in Allah Almighty, the Prophets of Allah, Angels, the Divine Holy Books, Fate and the Hereafter. This is a step ahead from the first dimension (*Islam*) and has a more affective element associated with it, which is primarily reflected through actions, thoughts and emotions. The third aspect (*Ihsan*) is a more profound focus of *din* and embraces a deepening of emotive perspective. It emphasizes the worship of God through perceiving Allah's presence and knowing that Allah is watching over. These three foci are interfused and the more harmoniously these dimensions are imbued, the closer one gets to become a

perfect human personality (Chittick, 1992). The third aspect (*Ihsan*) represents the spirit of *shariah* which emphasizes that human beings must have a state of soul that conforms to their works and belief (Chittick, 1992). The current of spirituality flows through the knowledge of Allah, which in turn affects the beliefs (*aqaid*) and the behavior of the individual (Utz, 2011). As Islamic beliefs and practices as explained in the Holy Qur'an and *sunnah* provide guidance around the entire life of an individual (Rassool, 2019), being God-centric means to uphold and bring to life the precepts inspired and prescribed by Islam.

A Deeper Dive: The Alchemy of Happiness

Rabia Dasti

According to Al Ghazali (1909), happiness can be achieved with the help of acquiring and practicing the following four aspects: (1) knowledge or gnosis of Allah, (2) self-knowledge, (3) knowledge of this world and (4) knowledge of hereafter. Al Ghazali emphasizes that to acquire the gnosis of Allah there is a prerequisite to understand one's own self; this is also reflected in a famous *hadith*, "to know thyself is to know Allah". Knowledge of self can be achieved through reflecting on one's existence, the structure and function of one's being. This knowledge gives way to the possibility of knowing one's Creator. According to Chittick (1992), this knowledge can be achieved by dwelling on the attributes of Allah as presented in the Holy Qur'an. Imam Ghazali (2000) explains that the acquisition of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim and is the antidote to the maladies of the heart. It prohibits the commission of sins, except from slips in moments of weakness, which are not a sign of weak faith. Human beings are encouraged to seek knowledge by reflecting on the Qur'an, *sunnah* and the writings of the R/S scholars (Haddad, 1989). It is incumbent upon Muslims to discover the work for which they have been created (Qunawi, 1992). The state of one's religious and worldly affairs depends upon the soundness of one's reflection (Haddad, 1989). Thus, directing the power of reason to rectify one's state is the true use of such a precious faculty (Iskandari, 2005). Knowledge of Allah, according to Al Ghazali, is the true source of happiness and from this knowledge stems forth the love for Allah. This love in turn helps to structure one's thoughts, behaviors and emotions in line with the Divine commandments.

One of the ways through which the gnosis of Allah is realized is by following *ibadah* (righteous deeds) and *akhlaq Islamiyyah* (Islamic character); (Krauss et al., 2005). Islamic moral character is defined as the gatekeeper to spiritual purification (Mawlud, 2004). Fine moral character is the most excellent virtue in a person and by which one's inner nature is revealed. The knowledge of Allah also gives way to knowledge of the nature of this world

(continued)

and conviction in the existence of an afterlife. These help the believer reform the inner as well as outer being, leading to self-control and self-discipline. Once the inner self becomes purified through knowledge and reflection, it manifests itself through self-discipline. Therefore, sluggish behavior is a sign of lack of discipline and is reproached (Ghazali, 1909). According to Mawlud (2004), the pathway to disciplining oneself is to control desires and impulses relating to food. If this is achieved, other areas of self-discipline will follow. Regulation of sleep, control of one's tongue and management of time are also listed among some of the virtues of self-discipline.

Spirituality in Islam is defined as “the knowledge which leads to the perception of esoteric and exoteric states, the purification of souls and the purgation of mortals to help attain eternal salvation—Allah's nearness and pleasure. Its rudiment is the purification, the purgation and the reformation of the inner self while its ultimate purpose is the attainment of the eternal bliss” (Khan, 1996 p. 9). Islamic spirituality is an implicit construct and can be assessed crudely through its different manifestations. Belief is a prerequisite to be recognized as a Muslim. After pronouncement of the basic beliefs, the feeling of presence/sense of connectedness can be achieved through a quest to search the Divinity, righteous deeds, Islamic moral character, religious practices and self-discipline.

Islamic spirituality helps to reintegrate meaning in times of distress, suffering and pain. However, the more a person deviates from this path, the greater the chances of a withdrawal of Allah's protection against sin, distress and tribulation. Consequently, the faculties of the *qalb* become weak and the individual easily falls prey to various psychopathologies like depression and anxiety. Tribulations befall true believers as well, but they have a sound heart that acknowledges these as trials from Allah. Hence, believers find contentment and joy in His will and acknowledge it as a way of either expatriation of their sins or elevation of their status with Allah (Utz, 2011). The faculty of *qalb* can thus be considered the ruler of the self; if the *qalb* is rightly guided, the subordinates, the limbs will also carry their functions properly (Mawlud, 2004) and the beliefs will also be sound. This distinction between a diseased and a sound heart can therefore help us understand how distorted and deviant beliefs can result in emotional disturbance and distress (Utz, 2011). Underlying emotions of pathology involve guilt, sadness, anger, jealousy, and fear which are directly in opposition to optimism, happiness, life satisfaction, hope, meaning and purpose in life—the characteristics of *nafs-e-mutma'inna* (Ahmad, 2007).

15.6 Operationalizing the Dimensions of Spirituality for the Multidimensional Measure of Islamic Spirituality (MMIS)

In developing the Multidimensional Measure of Islamic Spirituality (MMIS), we operationalized a set of domains that represent different facets of Islamic spirituality. These domains are derived from a review of the Islamic literature (i.e., books on *tassawuuf*; Alvi, 1997; Ghazali, 1909, 1995, 2000; Haddad, 1989, 2001; Mawlud, 2004; Qunawi, 1992; Qushayri, 1990; Razaq, 1998). The general constructs derived from the texts were plugged into the search engine of the Holy Qur'an and *hadith* using keywords in the search panel of the website, <http://www.searchtruth.com/>. The search results were then verified with the help of authentic books, *Maarif-ul-Qur'an* (Shafi, 1988) and *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Al-Bukhari, 1978) to countercheck the validity of the initial search. Definitions of each domain with their behavioral components as referenced through the Qur'an and *sunnah* are provided in Table 15.1. To create an Islamic measure of spirituality, these dimensions were transformed into an item pool of 203 questions, which were then evaluated by mental health experts and R/S scholars. Scholars were selected based on the following criteria: (1) having a PhD in Islamic studies or comparative religions or working as a *mufti/aalim* (religious scholar) in a recognized religious university, with a minimum teaching experience of 10 years or (2) a practicing *Sufi* scholar associated with an organized mystic order for at least 10 years (for details, please see Dasti & Sitwat, 2014). Two women and eight men consented to participate in the review process.

15.7 Insights in the Process of Developing the MMIS

The following insights and challenges were encountered by the researchers from the time of the inception of the project to the different phases of its evaluation and data collection. These insights and challenges may provide important lessons to researchers planning to work in the area of Islamic spirituality.

15.7.1 *Insight 1: Differences in Islamic and Western Conceptualizations*

When it comes to discussing spirituality in the realm of psychology, there are primarily three prevalent perspectives. The first one emphasizes that religion and spirituality are two distinct and separate constructs with no common ground. Most Western conceptualizations follow this formula, where spirituality is generally considered to be subjective, beneficial, and life-enhancing experience while religion is mostly viewed as institutionalized, inflexible, narrow, rigid, and dogmatic (see

Table 15.1 Operational definitions of Islamic spirituality

Spiritual domains	Activities based on the Qur'an (Q) and <i>Hadiths</i> (H)
Search for divinity, meaning, and purpose in life	Activities that are undertaken to unravel the meaning of one's existence; to gain understanding regarding the Ultimate Provider and Sustainer of the universe. This includes seeking advice from those who know (Q; 39:18), taking guidance from Qur'an and <i>hadiths/sunnah</i> (Q; 4:82, 41:3, 38:29, 12:111, 3:7, 65:12, 7:52, 14:52, 38:29, 16:44, 39:27, 39:23, 3:31), and reflecting nature (Q; 3:190, 39:21, 6:105, 6:97, 10:24, 10:5, 14:25, 16:11, 9:11, 22:5, 6:98, 23:84, 30:22, 31:20, 35:11, 16:69, 37:155, 45:13, 51:49, 56:62, 30:8). It also includes feelings experienced in relation to the meaning and purpose of one's life
Ritualistic practices	Prayer (<i>salah</i>), alms-giving, charitable acts (Q; 3:17, 64:16, 3:17, 3:134, 4:103, 4:162, 5:55, 2:177, 3:191, 2:3, 3:134, 2:153, 2:238, 13:22, 23:2, 40:60, 62:9, 35:18, H; 48:846, 2:50, 93:625, 1:73, 24:491, 93:587, 2:11, 2:50, 24:524, 93:603, 52:73, 56a:73), fasting (Q; 2:185, 2:183, H; 2:50, 31:118, 31:197, 76:470), reciting the Holy Qur'an (Q; 33:34, H; 93:649, 120:73), practicing hijab (Q; 24:31, H; 60:282) and attending congregational prayers (Q; 22:41, H; 11:641)
Moral practices	Moral values and moral ills/ailments (Q; 5:93, H; 48:809, 76: 449, 56::73); Moral values include truthfulness (Q; 9:119, H; 73:116, 48:486, 67:442, 116:73) honesty (H; 92:381), keeping promises (H; 48:846), courage, self-respect, generosity (H; 63:219i, 1:5), steadfastness (Q; 2:153, H; 70:547), forgiving (Q; 3:134), patience and fairness (Q; 2:45, 3:17) Moral ailments/ills include lying (H; 2:32, 2:33, 83:73), bearing false witness (H; 7:73), hurling abuses (Q; 43:83, 58:73, 157:73), backbiting, suspicion and spying (Q; 49:12), making fun of others, spendthrift & miserly behavior (Q; 17:27, 17:29), showing off and pretense (H; 76:506), exaggerated praise (H; 86:73, 87:73), greed, jealousy (H; 90:73, 99:73), love for the material world, revenge and haughty attitude and pride/conceit (H; 39:59, 39:60, 97:73, 99:73)
Self-discipline	Organization in one's life and work, exerting self-control in daily activities like eating (Q; 2:168, 2:172), sleeping (Q; 78:9), talking and anger management (Q; 3:134, 3:17, H; 135:73, 137:73). Being persistent in following one's life goals and activities (H; 52:140) is also defined in terms of self-discipline
Responsibilities and obligations	Compassionate behavior towards one's parents (Q; 29:8, 46:15, H; 93:625, 1:73, 2:73, 3:73, 6:73, children (H; 24:73, 25:73, 26:73, 31:73), spouse, close relatives (H; 14:73, neighbors (H; 73:47, 43:73, 45:73, 46:73,

(continued)

Table 15.1 (continued)

Spiritual domains	Activities based on the Qur'an (Q) and <i>Hadiths</i> (H)
	48:73), guests (H; 73:47, 48:73) and the ordinary Muslims (Q; 4:36, H; 40:73)
Feeling of presence/ sense of connectedness with the Almighty Allah	An intimate, personal relationship with the Creator that contributes to life a sense of meaning, joy and happiness. It also includes feelings of fear for Allah's wrath and accountability (Q; 36:11, 7:56, 8:2, 22:35, 24:52, 33:39, 35:18, H; 2:19, 56:696), hope for being forgiven for one's sin (Q; 52:28, H; 28:73, 29:73, 111, 73), and a belief in Allah's compassion and love (Q; 2:165)

Hill et al., 2000; Koenig et al., 2001). The second view holds that religion and spirituality are loosely connected constructs with some commonalities and some distinctions (Hill et al., 2000), while the third outlook suggests that spirituality and religion are overlapping constructs, embedded in each other. The last view can be seen as a closer explanation of the Islamic conceptualization, which entails that spirituality is inclusive of religiosity; both have common footings and cannot exist meaningfully in isolation (Rassool, 2000). The other difference is in how spirituality is operationalized. In the West, where most of the work on spirituality has been carried out, there exists no agreed upon operational definition of the construct. Through a content analysis of both the constructs, Zinnbauer et al. (1999) found no single definition of religion and spirituality that qualifies as normative. On the other hand, an Islamic concept of spirituality is derived from the Qur'an and *sunnah*, the authentic books of renowned Sufis and Islamic tradition, and therefore can be crudely measured through its manifestations. Since these sources are considered authentic, any definition consistent with these can be termed as the normative or standard definition of Islamic spirituality. Moreover, any theorization when it comes to Islamic spirituality cannot draw meaning from any source of enquiry other than the ones discussed above (Dasti & Sitwat, 2014).

15.7.2 *Insight 2: Employing Sensitivity in Drafting Questions*

The sensitivity which should be practiced in drafting the questions regarding different aspects of Islamic spirituality came out as a unique and pertinent outcome of the developmental process of MMIS. As explained in Islamic literature and in most of the religiosity scales grounded in Islamic perspective, a separate domain of Belief (operationalized as belief in Allah, His Messengers/Prophets, Angels, Day of Judgment, Fate) was included during the operationalization stage of development of the MMIS. However, as such questions form the basis of Islamic faith, R/S scholars noted that applying a Likert type scale of measurement of Belief would subject respondents to expulsion from traditional circles of Islam because denouncing any

element of faith would require individuals to pronounce *shahada* (the pronouncement of Islamic faith) again in order to be accepted as a Muslim. The reason given for the Likert scale as not being a suitable measurement scale was because belief is seen as a dichotomous entity in Islamic faith; it is either present or absent and therefore cannot be measured as an in-between state. Therefore, according to the Islamic R/S scholars who provided feedback on the MMIS during its development, endorsing its absence would not only place a question mark on the faith of the participant but the researcher would also bear the burden of repudiating someone's faith. This was a new perspective, which Islamic faith-related researchers should be cautious about while developing or choosing appropriate assessment measures in their research.

Additionally, sensitivity in drafting the questions was further observed with reference to the domains of "Search for Divinity and Meaning & Purpose in Life" and "Feeling of Presence/Sense of Connectedness" with the R/S scholars emphasizing that such questions should be asked on an intensity scale ranging from "a very great extent" to "a very little extent" rather than a frequency scale ranging from "Always" to "Never". This was suggested with the reasoning that a participant committing to Islam as a religion, despite having weakened level of faith, will experience such states even if in lesser intensities rather than their complete absence. Similarly, another important feedback for drafting questions in relation to "Feeling of Presence/Sense of Connectedness" was that such questions should not be negatively worded with the rationale that they can induce doubts in the participants and may trigger negative states in them. For example, questions like "I feel Allah is annoyed with me" or "I feel distant from Allah" should be rephrased with a positive connotation, such as "I feel a close bond with Allah". The participants who endorse negative feelings would mark the other extreme of the rating scale affirming their distancing from God. In this way any negative influence in the minds of the participants can be reduced. This point was also emphasized in research conducted by Williamson and Ahmad (2007) who suggested that some of the questions framed in a faith-related research are considered offensive and derogatory by imams. Furthermore, in the same vein, a Islamic religious scale which includes subscales of negative religious coping can be detrimental. This was a unique and important finding during the development of the MMIS, which reflects the importance of collaborative work with R/S scholars in faith research. In this respect, a more cautious approach can be taken by including a social desirability scale alongside an Islamic spiritual measure to assess the influence of social desirability bias in participants' responses.

15.7.3 *Insight 3: Multidimensionality of the Spiritual Construct*

As Islam is considered a *din*, or way of life, it encompasses the various social, political, economic domains of life, wherein spirituality plays a part (Rassool, 2000). Therefore, from this perspective it was hypothesized that Islamic spirituality as a construct would be reflected in a number of different dimensions. While working through the operationalization stage, rather than emphasizing that people might favor one dimension of Islam over the other as a manifestation of being religious/spiritual (as suggested by Abu-Raiya, Pargament, Stein, & Mahoney, 2007), we considered whether an overall pattern of high scores across the domain should be taken as a reliable indicator of an index of spirituality. After initial item analysis, factor analysis was conducted on 101 items which supported the multidimensionality of the Islamic spiritual construct and placed the items into eight distinct meaningful factors. The factors derived were: Self-Discipline, Anger and Expansive Behavior, Self-Agrandizement, Tolerance-Intolerance, Meanness and Generosity, Quest and Search for Divinity, Feeling of Connectedness with Allah, and Islamic Practices (Dasti & Sitwat, 2014). The factors derived were in line with the initial conceptualization of the scale with minor changes. Previous literature supports the idea that R/S is a multidimensional construct and cannot be reduced to single indices which may compromise the complexity and breadth inherent in the construct (Abu-Raiya et al., 2007). However, contrary to the suggestions given by previous research, we contend that multidimensionality as a result of individuals endorsing various aspects of religion indicates the interconnectivity of domains, with a consistent pattern reflecting higher spirituality. Moreover, if individuals are not adhering to certain domains, all of which are considered central to Islamic spirituality, it would help them develop insight regarding the area(s) they can improve upon.

15.7.4 *Insight 4: Self-Evaluation*

The most encouraging insight developed during the process of data collection was that participants considered Islamic spirituality to be an important aspect shaping their lives. They found the measure more as a tool for self-reflection and self-evaluation rather than a measure of spirituality. This insight emphasized how intrinsically woven spirituality is in the lives of Muslims and how much meaning they think such an evaluation holds. The concept of self-evaluation or self-reflection is closely linked with the concept of *muhasaba*, a constant self-analysis to rectify one's behavior and thoughts in line with the precepts of Islam. As Islam is a way of life, there is a constant *jihad* (struggle) to engage in acts of self-development and self-growth, and for this, spirituality is a dominant force. This is termed *jihad an nafs* (struggle of the self) and *tazkiyat an nafs* (purification of the self; Rothman, 2018).

Islamic spirituality therefore signifies self-accountability as it provides the reasoning and motivation to strive in the direction of the ultimate goal of a believer, which in the case of Islam is to develop a feeling of connectedness with Allah, imbued with love and devotion towards the Creator. The objective of spiritual assessment is to provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of individuals and to acknowledge their spiritual resources. As participants endorsed the notion that the MMIS encouraged the use of spiritual resources, we were delighted that the assessment adequately achieves its intended objective and utility.

15.8 The Challenges Implicit in the Process of Developing MMIS

Along with insights, we uncovered several challenges in developing the MMIS. These challenges are discussed with the hope that we can continue to improve research processes through continued exploration and collaboration with social scientists, Islamic scholars, and Muslim communities around the world.

15.8.1 Challenge 1: Operationalizing the Islamic Spirituality

The first and foremost challenge in the development process was getting access to relevant literature and critically evaluating it. The most crucial aspect was to filter meaningful literature in light of the Qur'an and *sunnah* and make sense out of it. Researching the most relevant Judeo-Christian literature on spirituality served as the starting point and provided support for the inadequacy and inappropriateness of such measures with Muslim participants. As we moved towards evaluating existing questionnaires that reflected Islamic principles, we realized that most of these were either based on a single or a few indices, such as moral values or religious practices, while those that were adapted versions of existing tools were grounded in Judeo-Christian tradition and/or provided inadequate representations of complex domains.

15.8.2 Challenge 2: Distrust from Religious/Spiritual Scholars

One of the most challenging aspects of research in the R/S domain is the distrust and suspicion meted out by R/S scholars. Though historically psychology and spirituality have shared an antagonistic relationship, the post 9/11 scenario has made the relationship even more complicated, especially when it comes to Islam. Prejudice, stigma and Islamophobia have made Muslims more cautious, and focusing scientific

enquiry on a sensitive topic like spirituality of Muslims can be looked upon with suspicion by many. Some of the religious scholars who we approached for help with this project considered that it might be an attempt of Western funded NGOs with malicious designs to undermine Islamic society. They feared that such research aims at assessing the religious trends in an Islamic society and designs strategies to bring down the religious sentiments and practices through an organized conspiracy. We had to convince them by discussing at length the rationale and objectives of the study and only then did they reluctantly participate in the review process. There was also discouragement from some of the religious scholars on taking up such a sensitive topic for enquiry. Some of them suggested that religious topics should only be dealt by people trained in religious studies and somebody from a different field might not be able to do justice to it. Although the negative feedback did deter us at some points during the course of the study, there were also a number of religious scholars who applauded the work, and their continuous support was essential to keep this project moving forward.

The evaluation was also a tedious process. It took us almost a year to draft and redraft the questionnaire based on the continuous feedback and re-evaluation of the experts involved. Questions were rephrased time and again; some were deleted as they were objectionable in the light of religious knowledge. We had to reach out to some of the scholars at least three or four times until they approved the complete draft. However, only through such scrutiny was it possible that a refined, religiously agreed-upon list of questions could be devised. Therefore, to researchers who decide to step into the challenge of working on a sensitive issue of a religious nature, we suggest that it is imperative to get experts in the field early in the process. A collaborative effort that considers religious scholarship is unavoidable and any work without it would be misleading and defective in nature.

15.8.3 Challenge 3: Apathy Expressed by Mental Health Experts

While discussing the historical perspective of spirituality and psychology, an indifferent and sometimes even a hostile attitude of mental health experts was observed. Despite a paradigm shift in the approach of psychology towards R/S, there are still detractors in the discipline who may provide negative feedback that can deter new researchers from pursuing their endeavors. Feedback ranging from sentiments about the ambiguity of the construct to an indifference towards the significance of R/S with reference to psychology and those favoring Western conceptualizations can be encountered in the process. As many researchers and practitioners of psychology are trained in Western paradigms built on a secular tradition of science, they may be unable or disinclined to include a Muslim perspective in the field. This highlights the need for more dialogue and training in the field of psychology, especially among those who work with Muslim populations.

15.8.4 Challenge 4: Issues in the Field

We experienced many challenges in the process of data collection as well, one of the most important of which was the gender of the researcher. The first author collected data from various religious and mainstream educational universities of Lahore, Pakistan. However, being a woman, the researcher was not allowed to enter the premises of male sections of religious institutes. In such instances, the researcher gave detailed briefing to the teachers who administered the questionnaires. The researcher waited outside until the process was completed and on receiving the filled questionnaires, enquired about any difficulties experienced by the teachers in the administration process, the answer to which always was reassuring for the researcher. Furthermore, a feedback form was attached with the questionnaire, which reflected that the participants understood and acknowledged the questions as important and self-explanatory. However as suggested by Abu-Raiya et al. (2007) and consistent with our experiences, it is emphasized that gender sensitivity should be observed in faith-related research with Muslim populations. Both males and females should be recruited to facilitate the data collection process to minimize the inhibitions that Muslim can experience with the opposite sex.

Another interesting challenge was that some of the participants, generally those belonging to religious universities, found it difficult at times to acknowledge their shortcomings while responding to MMIS items. The reason pointed out on the feedback form was that verbalizing ones' shortcomings can lead to acknowledging them and acknowledgment of a weakness leads to its accountability, as one *hadith* points out. While creating some fear, feedback to the questionnaire indicated that participants responded to the questions honestly as they felt that misleading responses would akin to lying, which they considered a sin in itself. As the evaluation was a self-reflection process, any weaknesses confessed during the assessment process may be taken as a means of self-reformation rather than a precursor for Allah's reproach. Participants also noted difficulty in acknowledging a distant relationship with Allah. It is generally seen in faith-related research that participants find it difficult to profess the negative consequences of religion or negative relationship with the Creator (Abu-Raiya et al., 2007; Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2010). Therefore, admitting negative aspects of religion would mean projecting Islam in a negative light—something that participants may be reluctant to do. Here, the informed consent document can help alleviate such concerns by affirming that the aim of the research is not to target Islam, but to uncover the participant's practices and feelings, which can vary across individuals adhering to any faith.

15.9 Bridging the Gap Between the Past and the Future

The experience of developing the MMIS has taught us many lessons. It has also opened avenues for new directions in faith-related research both at theoretical, empirical levels as well as for clinical interventions. At the theoretical level, this work along with many similar accounts such as Keshavarzi and Haque (2013), Hamjah and Akhir (2014), and Abu-Raiya (2013) can guide health professionals toward a more useful conceptualization of R/S and its inherent sensitivities. After factor analysis, 75 items were retained in MMIS. While we acknowledge that the length of the assessment may create pause for researchers, assessing a complex and multidimensional construct such as spirituality requires the use of a sufficient number of items that can capture the depth and breadth of R/S. In constructing a measure of Islamic religiousness, Abu-Raiya et al. (2007) similarly contend that measuring complex multidimensional constructs with only a few items is too simplistic. Nonetheless, we are currently revising the questionnaire to make a shorter version to enhance its clinical utility. By acknowledging the multidimensionality of an Islamic spiritual construct, we can help determine which dimensions are most often linked with different psychological issues, while highlighting the importance of spirituality in health-related research. This conceptualization would also help clinicians understand the worldview of Muslim clients, which may be influenced by their religious/spiritual framework. It is encouraging to know that researchers have begun using the MMIS since it became available (Anum & Dasti, 2015; Farid & Dasti, 2019; Farrukh & Sitwat, 2012; Majeed & Sitwat, 2012; Rizwan & Sitwat, 2012), which lends credence to the continued interest in the relevance of a spiritual construct in psychology. The process of developing the MMIS was an insightful journey not only at a professional and academic level, but also helped us to practice self-enhancement through our own reflective process.

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Chapter 16

Thoughts on the GCC National Research Context: Challenges to Developing a Local Psychology

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Abstract In this chapter, we cover challenges pertaining specifically to psychology research within the GCC region and offer some insights and solutions. We analyze why, given a largely stable political landscape, economic prosperity and a government strategy for supporting science and academia, the GCC countries still lag in the development and growth of psychological science. We first offer an overview of the GCC nation's higher education landscape, and focus on three areas that hinder the development of research in psychology: Higher education institutions and their academic orientations; the intellectual environment in institutions, and the broader social landscape, including governments and research participants. We argue that this is a missed opportunity for Muslim psychology on a wider scale as much could be done within these countries to build a more informed understanding of Islamic and Muslim psychology in a native context.

16.1 Introduction

The state of science and research publications in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA), including the oil-rich Gulf nations, lags behind much of the world (Biglu, Chakhmachi, & Biglu, 2014; Bornmann, Leydesdorff, & Krampen, 2012;

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El Borai, Karlsson, Anouti, Klat, & Rizk, 2018; Rao, Donaldson, & Doiron, 2015; Ryan & Daly, 2019). In this chapter, we explore reasons for this underperformance and discuss problematic dynamics that make research difficult to conduct, issues which are not new and have been discussed extensively (El Borai et al., 2018; Lambert, Pasha-Zaidi, & Crookes, 2019; Ryan & Daly, 2019). Given their shared cultures, economies, and political systems, the nations of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Qatar constitute the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Abdulla, 1999; Foley, 2010). We limit ourselves to the GCC states, as they have a stable political context and economic prosperity which could easily facilitate and support effective research ecosystems. Yet, higher education and academic research within this region have been slow to develop. Given the economic conditions and governmental strategy for both science and social health and wellbeing, difficulties in maintaining research momentum in the social sciences is of interest. We first present a brief overview of the GCC's higher education landscape, and then focus on three areas that hinder the development of research in psychological fields: higher education institutions and their academic orientations; the prevailing intellectual environment in institutions, and the broader social landscape, including governments and research participants themselves, as contributors to these difficulties.

16.2 The GCC Academic Setting

The population demographic across the GCC nations is similar among country nationals but comprises varying numbers of expatriates, ranging from nearly 90% of the population in the UAE to 60% in Oman (Siddiqui, 2020). As such, the higher education landscape in most GCC countries is a mix of public/government institutions largely serving the local or GCC markets as well as private universities from all over the world serving the expatriate and international student market (see Table 16.1); although, there has been a recent move to allow some public institutions to accept fee-based paying international students through a rolling quota system. From elementary to higher education, the GCC states provide education services free of charge to national citizens. The *gratis* education system stems from the sociopolitical contract between the GCC nation governments and their citizens, which also includes free healthcare, housing, employment and other entitlements (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; UNDP, 2016; World Bank, 2019). This shapes the purpose of public higher education institutes in these states (Romani, 2009).

Among private universities, there is a mix of (1) institutions with international accreditation through independent organizations (i.e., Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Middle States Commission on Higher Education), (2) institutions managed and accredited locally but partnered with an international university for quality assurance (i.e., University of Wollongong Dubai, Algonquin College Kuwait), and (3) overseas university branch campuses (i.e., New York University Abu Dhabi, British University Bahrain). These branch partners may encompass only

Table 16.1 Psychology provision within GCC institutions

Nation	Psychology programs and universities
Bahrain	There are four public institutions, only one with a BA in psychology and MA in counselling, and no PhD programs. There are 19 private institutions, but none offering a psychology program
Kuwait	There are 11 universities; one public and one private institution have a psychology department (Kuwait University; American University Kuwait)
Oman	There are 18 colleges and universities, many linked to overseas universities for accreditation. There is one fully public university (Sultan Qaboos University) and only one offering a BA in counselling (A'Shariqiyah University)
Qatar	Overseas campuses serve international and national populations, including at least 12 from the UK, Canada, and USA. The majority of these are single specialist outposts in business, accountancy, engineering or health sciences; none seems to offer psychology programs. There are three national institutions, of which Qatar University has a BA in psychology. The Doha Institute for Graduate Studies has an active psychology department, including an MA and doctorate in clinical psychology
Saudi Arabia	Higher education in KSA has a longer history, larger population, and absence of international institutions and overseas campuses. The oldest institution is King Saud University (1957). Several universities offer psychology programs focusing on counselling and education fields. Masters' level programs are in clinical psychology. There do not seem to be any PhD programs in psychology
UAE	There are three public institutions (UAEU, Zayed University, and Higher Colleges of Technology), several semi-private local institutions including Abu Dhabi University, Khalifa University, Dubai University, American University of Sharjah, etc., and hundreds of private institutes, including New York University Abu Dhabi, Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, University of Wollongong Dubai among others. While much of the investment has focused on business, leadership, and engineering fields, in line with the government strategic interests, there are psychology programs in most of these institutions. Currently, there are no doctoral level programs in psychology

a single program or faculty (i.e., business, IT, or engineering) or function as a full, multi-faculty campus. Campuses are often income generators for the home institution through the recruitment of international student markets. Faculty in private and public institutions are recruited internationally as well as locally; however, there is a heavy emphasis on the nationalization of faculty and staff in the public sector (Randeree, 2012; Raven, 2011). While the merits of transnational education are a subject of ongoing concern in the literature (e.g., Adick, 2018; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017), we limit our observations to the GCC higher education context without differentiating between institutional models.

16.3 Challenges to Psychology Research in the GCC Nations

With the exception of Oman (1650), the GCC states are relatively young, obtaining their independence between 1927 and 1971. Still, all share the period of oil discovery (between 1938 and 1980) which launched these states' trajectory into modernity (Foley, 2010; Peterson, 2009). They have developed at a similar rate and share common cultural, economic, political and educational issues. With respect to the latter, there is a slow rate of accumulation and proliferation of academic research, which stands in sharp contrast to their progress in other areas like industry, infrastructure, political engagement and social welfare. With education in particular, they lag behind much of the world. PISA assessment scores for example, are below the world average and below what is expected for the qualifications young adults achieve in the region (World Economic Forum, 2017). The Human Capital Index (HCI) ranks nations on how well they develop and mobilize human capital potential; yet, the 2018 HCI shows that the region fails to capture its human capital potential, with numbers ranging from 66% in the UAE and 58% in Saudi Arabia, attributed in part, to lagging education (Lange, Wodon, & Carey, 2018; World Bank, 2018a, 2018b). We focus on some of these challenges as a means to explore the difficulties in conducting research in the field of psychology across the GCC states.

16.4 Orientations of Higher Education Institutes

Public institutes of higher education in the GCC states are tailored towards fulfilling the promises of higher education degrees proclaimed by their respective governments. Therefore, the public institutes' orientations lean towards teaching, as granting degrees to the national population is the priority, with knowledge dissemination taking precedence over knowledge creation (Ryan & Daly, 2019). Concerned voices in the literature regarding the sustainability of the GCC states' approach to public higher education have been published (Dakhli & El-Zohairy, 2013; Godwin, 2006; Romani, 2009; Vardhan, 2015). As public universities focus on student numbers and fulfilling their role as an educational arm of the state, selection for entry is lower than normal and consequently requires more effort from faculty as many students enter from public schools where higher level English academic reading and writing are not well developed.

In the private sector, there has been an influx of international branch campuses in the GCC region (Becker, 2015; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011); yet, this did not encourage research activities as expected, and knowledge production remains stagnant (Madichie, 2015). Ryan and Daly (2019) suggest that the private institutions' teaching focus stems from their profit-driven business models. As the proceeds from branch campus models support the strategic development of the institution's home campus, a teaching focus is intensified. The focus is further evidenced by the number

of course-based versus research-based master's programs. Course-based programs hold greater student numbers and the large number of Bachelor of Arts compared to Bachelor of Science programs, with the former focusing on theory and application and little on research methodologies and advanced statistics, is another indication of this.

As a result, professors find themselves teaching English, research methods, library database search strategies, note-taking, summarizing, writing and critical thinking even before reaching their content. Others assume these skills exist and pass on the problem to other professors with students ultimately never learning them, leaving lower ability students to fend for themselves and focus on higher ability students instead. Or, they downgrade the material and opt for multiple choice exams to meet the level of such students, devaluing the degree in the process. These students, a product of low-quality regional education systems who become difficult to teach as the lack in competencies is significant (Karoly, 2010; Khoury, 2017; Tuzlukova & Al-Busaidi, 2017), become a problem few are willing to address. Moreover, some public universities eliminated their foundations programs, where these very skills were taught, to remain competitive with the private sector (Al-Kinani, 2018; Salem & Swan, 2014). While public education reform is underway, changes have started from the early years and not yet reached university level students who have missed major learning milestones over time. These students struggle to become employed thereafter (Daleure, 2017; Forstenlechner, Madi, Selim, & Rutledge, 2012).

Imported academic programs add a layer of complexity to faculty members' workload. Most academic departments in GCC state public universities use academic programs modelled from or developed elsewhere (Baporikar & Shah, 2012; Kirk & Napier, 2009; Kosior, Barth, Gremm, Mainka, & Stock, 2015). Buying ready-made programs offers a concrete starting point from which departments can then employ and develop faculty and allows for institutions to benchmark their programs against international standards. Yet, the gap between local standards and international programs presents a challenge as these programs are developed with Western university entry standards in mind that stem from academic competencies students are expected to have upon graduating high school. This gap remains unaddressed by GCC nation public universities. To maintain international accreditations, local universities often overlook the gap and proceed as though national students are up to par. This situation weakens the capacity of faculty members to conduct research as more of their time and effort is funneled towards reconciling program materials with student needs.

A Deeper Dive: Is Working with Students any Better?

Brettjet Cody

It is common for students at the graduate and undergraduate levels to be involved in the research activities of faculty members. Increased responsibilities and higher order tasks are given to graduate students while undergraduates engage in data entry, coding, or finding journal articles. This allows students to engage with the academic process and support faculty research activity. Yet, for many, this process is more time consuming than output producing. Many students have little to no background knowledge of the research process or the basics of searching for journal articles. Research group meetings do not serve their purpose of discussing research, generating ideas, and executing projects, but to delegate tasks such as data entry, translation checks, and organizing survey packets, etc. When students are asked to write for a poster, manuscript, or paper presentation, most of the written work is plagiarized or poorly written, adding to the workload of faculty to recommence, or spend hours editing English grammar. While many students proffer to know how to write and avoid plagiarism, their methods entail simply changing random words using the synonym feature in Microsoft Word, or repeatedly running the text through a translator. While it would be helpful to have the assistance of students, for most faculty members already overwhelmed with high teaching loads, working with students involves the equivalent of teaching a research methods course, as well as English writing. Most decline involving students at all looking to advance their careers in a timely fashion; however, this means students continue to lack key skills.

Bearing the information above in mind, it is not surprising to see low numbers of academic publications. Osman and Afifi (2010) reviewed mental health related studies published in the region between the years of 1989 to 2008. They found a combined total of 192 studies, with most coming from the UAE. The authors of this chapter conducted a broader and more recent electronic search using the Summon library search engine that indexes popular databases like EBSCO, ScienceDirect and others. Studies tagged with “psychology”, “psychiatry” and “mental health” confined to peer-reviewed articles originating from the GCC countries between 2010 and 2019 were searched. Our findings revealed increased numbers; yet, a large number of these stemmed from non-psychological fields. For instance, Oman produces a relatively large number of literature listings overall. Still, a closer look at the top 50 results highlights that many of these do not relate to psychology, but to physical health and medicine, teaching related issues, and business. Psychology is often used as an add-on to more popular disciplines. It may be that in many GCC countries, researchers, even where they are active, may not be publishing to an international psychology audience but adding psychological theory to other disciplines to publish. Table 16.2 offers a snapshot of our findings with a “psychology”

Table 16.2 Overview of publications in the Gulf region between 2010 and 2019

Keywords	Country	Publications #s (2010–2019)	Journal themes (among top 50 results)
Psychology AND <country name>	Bahrain	928	Business management 4; Medical/health 15 Psychology/mental health 8 Teaching 6; Other 13 ^a
	Kuwait	2125	Business management 3; Medical/health 22 ^b Psychology/mental health 18 Teaching 5; Other 6
	Oman	2050	Business management 9; Medical/health 14 Psychology/mental health 16 Teaching 5; Other 5
	Qatar	1645	Business management 3; Medical/health 17; Psychology/mental health 18; Teaching 5; Other 7
	KSA	5001	Business management 1; Medical/health 19; Psychology/mental health 22; Teaching 3; Other 4
	UAE	1540	Business management 16; Medical/health 16; Psychology/mental health 10; Teaching 4; Other 3

% Saudi Arabia has a large number of non-English speaking academics who publish in Arabic language journals not indexed within the current database search

^aA number of results from Bahrain related to a discussion published in *The Lancet* regarding the legal issues of medical professionals in the country

^bLarge numbers of medical articles in Kuwait are published by the single journal “International Journal of the Kuwait University”

tag from the GCC countries as of June 2019 (using all standard databases; filter 2010–2019; filter for peer reviewed articles).

Table 16.2 shows that the UAE, a country with relative stability, economic prosperity and strategic investment in science and wellbeing, produced low publications in the past decade. In fact, the top listed publications are from the Human Resource Management and Management departments. In contrast, Lebanon, an Arab country with both private and public universities, shows similar overall psychology listings (3932), but half of the top 50 are published in mainstream psychology journals. This suggests there are factors beyond economic wealth and higher education investment that hinders research output. These factors may be connected to the issues we discussed earlier: the role of the GCC nations’ public institutions revolves around the fulfilment of granting higher education degrees to citizens and not knowledge creation as such, while private institutions are driven to maximize profit by focusing on enrollments instead of research.

16.5 Cultural Incompatibility of Academic Programs

Considering that most academic programs are imported, they rarely fit the local socio-political contexts making it difficult for students, whether national or expatriate, to intellectually and psychologically engage with the material. This is especially important for culturally dependent fields like psychology. These Western programs reflect Western norms and worldviews. Faculty members are left to either use it blindly, overlooking questions of “fit”, retrofit it to local cultural standards (although, there are no existing guidelines against which to do so), or improvise based on their personal preferences or home country standards. The variation from one class to another is large and there is little acknowledgment of this in institutions; there are also no means to standardize, monitor or evaluate what is actually taught compared to what should be taught. A lack of professional psychology identity and rigor within educational reform hampers any consistency. The disconnected nature of academic programs with students’ realities dampens the interest in research, as students are less internally motivated to participate in surveys that do not fit their contexts. Further, it is possible that faculty and students do not find common grounds of interest to cooperate in research.

The reason research for students has complications is because not all teachers know how to teach us, or how to start or end a research. We need more work on how to conduct research not just for courses, but for later as well.—Undergraduate Psychology & Counseling Student, UAEU

16.6 The Underuse of Research by Policymakers

As there is little tradition of research as an independent endeavor designed to help science advance, psychological research has little utility in the region. Psychological research is not used to inform public policy and faculty are not considered sources of knowledge by policy decision makers (El Borai et al., 2018). The same can be said of industry partnerships where research can be used to inform or lead commercial development. As a result, social science research has no influence and plays little role beyond that of a quantitative showpiece for faculty and their departments. Even as knowledge dissemination institutions, the knowledge serves little purpose beyond teaching students and building a university’s reputation. An example of this can be seen in regional psychology conferences organized by institutions where student projects form the bulk of the content, rather than knowledge production. Research is positioned as a means to help institutions climb university rankings and, where favorable, is quoted by governments to attract good press; yet, research aimed at analyzing, challenging or developing knowledge, as well as applying it to policy is not encouraged or even identified as an option.

Many faculty members who have held jobs since the early days of the GCC countries’ national development may also not see the role of research or lack interest in it as it has not been required as a condition of employment. El Borai et al. (2018)

reviewed detailed university ranking reports, World Bank estimates, and their own surveys of GCC professors, revealing that a third to half of professors had never published a paper in a top-100 journal in the past 5 years. Where research was being done, the quantity and quality was noted as especially low. This may explain why research is not sufficiently used to inform public policy. As universities transition from teaching to knowledge production, how to deal with teaching-oriented faculty who have not previously done research will need to be considered.

This places governments in a catch-22 and forces them to depend upon expensive external international consultants who have no local experience or knowledge (Al-Ubaydli & Mirza, 2017; Lambert, Mulay-Shah, Warren, & Younis, 2019). The consequence is that local capacity for research is never built, the reasons for low research quality are never addressed nor rectified as consultants fill the gap, and local issues of importance are overlooked. Researchers with local experience and superior research skills have to work twice as hard to get noticed by governments who do not trust them despite their international credibility. They are lumped in with the low-quality perceptions of local academia and over time, leave to share their expertise in the private sector or other parts of the world instead (Ryan & Daly, 2019). This results in even larger gaps in the development of human capital.

I've worked with a couple of professors, who are great at teaching in classes, but unenthusiastic when doing research because of the limits that they have from the university, and that concerns me, because I would love to learn how to do research, but would my feelings toward research be changed later in life as well.—Undergraduate Microbiology student, UAEU

16.7 Shortcomings of Existing Research

There is evidence to suggest that the uptake of existing research may be hindered by its cultural validity. Just as academic programs do not adequately fit regional sociocultural contexts, current research faces similar challenges and is often not culturally relevant. Adair (2006) proposed four stages of indigenization of a discipline: Importation, Implantation, Indigenization and Autochtonization. In the Importation stage, a discipline is introduced to a country, and educational initiatives are launched to incorporate the discipline into university curricula and sponsor students to get trained in it abroad (usually in developed Western countries). In the Implantation stage, returning scholars begin practicing in the discipline and apply Western models to conduct research and teach the subject matter. In the Indigenization stage, native scholars identify discrepancies between their context and the Western models in which they were trained and become more critical of these models. Psychometric tests and frameworks are adapted to better suit the local context and culturally unique elements are identified for further study. In the final stage of Autochtonization, native academics take the reigns over a discipline, utilize locally authored books in teaching courses, develop local standards for ethical and professional conduct,

develop novel conceptualizations of constructs, and amass a body of literature that is culturally valid and of national importance.

Adair (2006) also developed a scale to evaluate the indigenusness of a research article by the extent of cultural presence in the research problem formulation, use of local references, adaptation of methodology, and discussion of research findings in light of the cultural context in which it was written. Yaaqeb (2014) applied Adair's (2006) indigenusness scale in a content analysis of the longest running psycho-educational journal in the UAE to explore the presence of culturally valid research in education and psychology. Out of 262 studies that were published since the journal's launch in 1986, 106 studies were conducted in non-GCC settings and were therefore excluded. Of the remaining 156, a content analysis revealed that Western research topics and models were prevalent and most psychoeducational research problems were not sourced from local issues and thus, alienated from the local context.

Policymakers may therefore be justified in refraining from using local research that does not address local issues. Yaaqeb's (2014) analysis concluded that the disciplines of education and psychology remain in the Implantation stage and these findings are likely the case in the other GCC nations given their commonalities. Not only do the GCC states lag behind in research production, they have yet to develop local repertoires of culturally valid research that may have appeal for policymakers. Conducting research in culturally relevant topics may also garner more support from funding agencies. There is nonetheless growing awareness of the significance of culturally relevant frameworks among native researchers in the GCC region, which has been reflected across psychological subdomains (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Darmaki, Dodeen, Yaaqeb, Ahammed, & Jacobson, 2019; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Al-Oraimi & Zayed, 2011; Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005). Yet, other than a few exceptions (i.e., Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology as well as university sponsored journals from Zayed University, Sultan Qaboos University, and King Saud University as examples), the lack of plentiful relevant publication opportunities within the GCC and the difficulty of finding them, relegates indigenous studies to international journals, rather than those that are regionally based and directed at local audiences. It also raises questions about the perceptions of local researchers towards local channels of research dissemination and publishing as these are often overlooked in favor of bigger, but less relevant journals (Lambert & Warren, 2019).

16.8 Research Funding

Scientific research is typically funded by national science centers, charitable research organizations, and/or independent funding bodies. This provides a range of funding opportunities supporting not only scientific development but national and government strategies, as well as specialized fields serving minority interests. As psychological science covers a wide span of applied and theoretical topics, a range of funding sources is vital. Yet, within the GCC, research funding tends to be internal to

institutions, government-sponsored, or through less commonly used business consultancy contracts. El Borai et al. (2018) report that across the GCC nations, research and development (R&D) funding ranges from 0.1% of the GDP (Bahrain) to 0.9% (UAE). This represents an increase in recent years as governments recognize the need to invest in R&D, which is a known strategy to simultaneously increase a nation's GDP over time; however, compared to the OECD countries, this is still a long way off the 2.5% average.

Locally, internal funding is most accessible but necessarily limited, which confines the scope of projects that can be done. For example, small seed-corn funding may be offered to support initial stages of psychological research, but this often would not cover extended studies, full time faculty buy-out or purchase of expensive equipment or space. In universities where investment has been earmarked for psychology research labs and resources, there may be an expectation that further funding be obtained from external sources. Attracting additional funding may be difficult with psychology's low status in the region and a lack of perceived use and relevance of research. A way to extend this, especially for international and branch campuses, may be to utilize international partnerships and conduct collaborative research funded by bodies outside the GCC. However, in some cases, national science funds (for example within the EU and UK) preclude money being used for overseas project support and by default, are not accessible to researchers working in the GCC.

External funding organizations are usually derived from government agencies and directed by government agendas, institutional mandates, and development interests; thus, decisions about what areas of strategic national importance are designated as research priorities. These currently focus on engineering and technology development. An exception is the development of government sponsored research centers such as the UAEU's Emirates Center for Happiness Research focused on regional research on the nature, predictors and outcomes of wellbeing. Yet, such topical themes are also problematic, given that they are tailored to national trends that may or may not persist. The capacity to research around the area of wellbeing is further limited by the knowledge, openness and willingness of researchers to change their research focus and adopt new ones. By the time they are convinced of or have upskilled themselves to the degree necessary to conduct research on such questions, funds have often dried up as other trends and areas of government interest emerge. It also means that topics which are less popular but more important are overlooked as these are not on the government priority list (Rozin, 2007; Suhay, 2017). Finally, funding is available through independent organizations such as commercial consultancies that support research in business or with an applied commercial focus. Researchers in Kuwait for example, may apply for grants with the independent non-profit Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Science. Still, grant applications must support areas of national priority.

16.9 Brain Drain

Strong teaching cultures and corresponding low research productivity lead to a lack of intellectual stimulation within department teams, which not only impacts inactive researchers but drains the energies of those who can make significant scientific contributions. Not enough is being done to retain high performing researchers and equally, little to address and/or terminate low performers who drive down knowledge production and alienate top performers (Ababneh, 2016; Ryan & Daly, 2019). A lack of ethical professionalism exacerbates the problem. Given the propensity to publish for publishing's sake, anecdotes abound concerning researchers paying out of pocket to have their work appear in non-cited journals, plagiarizing others work, or including one's name on a colleague's yet unpublished work to obtain promotion as examples. Such unethical practices do little to motivate researchers who do good work to contribute to the host organization's goals. Instead, such researchers turn to colleagues in other institutions, depriving the host institution of the knowledge transfer for which they have paid.

There is a lack of professional development opportunities as well. Public institutions are large and well-funded with an interest in employing qualified national educators and international academics with research experience. However, beyond offering salary and incentive packages for joining, non-national employees in public institutions are not considered resources in which to invest as they are considered expendable (Dedoussis & Rutter, 2016), and given little academic freedom in research areas (Dakhli & El-Zohairy, 2013; Romani, 2009). Moreover, international faculty are not considered in need of professional development as they were hired for their capacity. Those with research potential are often hired into teaching roles initially and only return to research once departments are established. As a result of doing so, they too lag behind and become gradually deskilled. Locally hired faculty may have been hired directly from international graduate studies with excellent research skills, but also find themselves floundering in their local teaching-oriented institutions. Greater awareness of the need for and investment in professional development in institutions would orient faculty to research and ignite the potential for it. In the private sector, professional development is little better. Where development programs at international home campuses exist, they are not often replicated locally as the remit of the institution is profit. As a result, academics in the region are at additional disadvantage compared to their international peers.

Further, many organizations have become complacent with the status quo that has worked so well in the past and continue to believe they can progress on reputation alone without corresponding development (Diener, 2016). This is often the case in the region where high ranking institutions boast of regional standings without fully acknowledging that neighboring institutions are embroiled in civil wars, occupations, or overall lack of national investment towards not only education, but infrastructure and technology. The playing field is hardly level and high rankings locally may only reflect low standards elsewhere in the region. Improving managerial practises whereby all employees are held to the same standard and transforming

institutions into learning centers where upgrading and developing one's self is considered normal and not remedial is one area ripe for improvement. However, Ryan and Daly (2019) explain that this dilemma is problematic if the low performer is a country national where terminating or criticizing low performance is considered unsupportive of nationalization aims or presents a potential loss of face in front of expatriate faculty members.

The issue of culture is rarely spoken of, but also creates problems. Schoepp and Forstenlechner (2012) surveyed academic faculty in the UAE about their motivations to stay or leave and reported that a lack of academic freedom and involvement in decision making were significant factors. High performing faculty did not feel recognized and engaged; they felt they were seen as financial mercenaries rather than full members of their academic communities, which may work against developing a sense of security or institutional loyalty. As a result, many do not want to conduct research that will be attributed to their current institutions (Chapman, Austin, Farah, Wilson, & Ridge, 2014). These feelings are often exacerbated by cultural and linguistic camps that emerge as a result of the large diversity between different tiers of expatriates (i.e., non-local Arabs, Asians, Westerners, and others) and nationals, which significantly dampens their cross-cultural adjustment during their sojourn (Alshammari, 2013; Quansah, 2018).

Yet, it is not always a straightforward cultural issue. Repatriates, new generations of internationally educated native faculty members, also feel the local disconnection. After years of graduate training abroad and not accustomed to using the *wasta* system, a culturally embedded system of using social connections for personal gain and occupational advantage (Kropf & Newbury-Smith, 2016), upon their return they are often caught in isolating webs of defending cultural loyalties and establishing their own professional identities. They struggle with older faculty members (both native and non-native) who fear being exposed for their lack of competence and do not want to make way for this new, young and highly competent generation (Aldossari & Robertson, 2016). These repatriation struggles prevent newer generations of native academics from gaining research momentum in their professional careers.

16.10 Lack of Cross-Collegiate Academic Discussion and Dissemination

Research is not a solitary endeavor and having quality contacts with other researchers is helpful in publishing strong papers. Studies show that the effect of proximity, being in the same building or office block, results in papers being published in journals of a higher standard and 45% more likely to be cited (Lee, Brownstein, Mills, & Kohane, 2010). The clustering effect (Sohn, 2016) facilitates good research, but depends heavily on the quality and number of researchers within departments. Of the psychology programs across the GCC, most are taught by teams

of fewer than ten subject experts and many with fewer than five. Even among the larger psychology departments, academic expertise is spread across a range of areas, reflecting a recruitment focus on diversifying teaching rather than focusing research expertise. As such, psychology researchers are unlikely to share interests with others. As a dynamic collaborative environment requires a degree of research competence to maintain motivation, as well as the ability to collaborate and trust others enough to share one's work and ideas, researchers often work in isolation as these factors are not always present.

Some psychology researchers publish but in a wide range of disciplines and mainly in international journals. A consequence of this is that regional researchers are less likely to know who their subject peers are. A lack of regional organizations, such as professional licensing organizations or general associations binding the community hinders cross-collegiate collaborations (Schuilenberg et al., 2016). An exception to this is the existence of the Middle East Psychological Association (MEPA), a professional association, without legal jurisdiction or licensing influence, attempting to unify professionals and researchers alike. However, without jurisdiction due to association regulations and cross-border legalities, there is no professional mandate or licensing requirement for researchers or even professionals to join, an issue that has been flagged many times. A lack of binding associations is also a missing element in the socialization of new graduates who seek the energy and intellectual stimulation that stems from a research community to develop their ideas, interests and professional identities.

In established psychology communities, associations are tasked with holding conferences for the academic as well as applied communities, and with publishing newsletters or providing forums for people to informally share their research (Schuilenberg et al., 2016). While MEPA attempts to fill this gap, conferences are focused on applied, professional psychology primarily in clinical and mental health fields. Researchers would not think to attend these unless they are focusing on mental health topics. Similarly, while newsletters reporting local psychology research have been started by individuals within institutions, without the support of formal organizations or regional bodies, these have little impact on research activity. These initiatives tend to be taken on by individuals, typically international faculty given their stronger English language skills and/or experience, and not adopted by departments or faculties as a whole.

Indeed, while English is now the language of science in all GCC countries, many academics from Arabic or other language backgrounds may not feel as confident to network, discuss their research, or even put forward written submissions for publication. This might explain why El Borai et al. (2018) report that only 38% of GCC professors have international collaborations compared to the OECD average of 71%. Many partnerships end up being Memorandums of Understanding which do little beyond decorate the walls of institutions as these are not "working partnerships" given the low level of expertise, research and language skills. Indeed, the lack of English skill among faculty is not acknowledged; saving face among managers who have hired them, and cannot or will not terminate them, or face the same language barriers themselves, prevents issues being addressed. Questions of pan-Arab

national identity also enter the fray and make this issue contentious and quickly political as feelings of resentment towards Westernization and English language dominance surface (Karmani, 2005).

16.11 Bias and Sensitivity to Topics and Data Dissemination

Similar to Yaaqeb's (2014) conclusions, regional research has been described as "uninspired" and lacking in critical discourse (Ryan & Daly, 2019). Research questions are disconnected from the empirical body of research and do not stem from identified gaps in the local literature. Instead, faculty may be producing studies that reflect what requires the least effort with a focus on publishing for publishing's sake or for academic promotion. In other cases, faculty may come from nations where return migration is not always possible (i.e., Syria) or desirable, and are cautious in their choice of topics and unwilling to critically analyze the status quo (Fawzy, 2012). These researchers engage in repetitive and imitative research of little utility and value (Yaaqeb, 2014; Yang, 2012; Zebian, Alamuddin, Maalouf, & Chatila, 2007). As a result, areas of inquiry with great social and scientific value, and which may even be driven by citizen concerns are ignored (i.e., learning disorders, admittedly not sexy, but with important social costs to individuals and society), while topics considered popular (i.e., innovation and artificial intelligence) are oversubscribed with what is perhaps interesting, but less socially impactful research (Rozin, 2007; Suhay, 2017). Some topics may also be out of bounds at either a country or institutional level, such as political and religious practices, sexual orientation, or domestic violence, leaving more amenable topics such as obesity to be explored ad nauseum (Alfaleh, 2019; Dakhli & El-Zohairy, 2013; Noori, 2016; Romanowski & Nasser, 2010). Table 16.2 reflects this with the majority of publications 2010–2019 having covered "safe" themes such as business management, teaching, health and psychiatry (mental health).

Academics need to consider not just the sensitivity of the questions being asked but the sensitivity of the results—whether they would offend the national image—rather than whether they are valid and helpful analyses for science and society. For instance, investigating happiness scores and their contributors across the UAE may sound like an innocent topic, but all research holds the potential for unanticipated outcomes for stakeholders. Given the UAE government's commitment to happiness and wellbeing as a policy agenda, results become representative of their efforts towards fulfilling this aim and highlighting areas that are problematic and which implicate social conditions throw researchers and their scientific conclusions into unsavory territory (Suhay, 2017).

While the political influence on the production of scientific knowledge is not direct, government structures, activities and actors in place dictate the parameters of inquiry. At other times, relationships with neighboring nations are less than friendly

and researchers from institutions (especially federally funded ones) need to support government positions and refrain from any form of direct or indirect relationship with such nations, even at the cost of great scientific discoveries and highly beneficial partnerships. Thus, making decisions whether to remove member states' data if it makes other nations look more favorable, or include them and deal with the risk of offending one's host nation, is one of many dilemmas that researchers face.

16.12 Data Collection and Participation Culture

Another challenge facing active psychology researchers in the GCC nations is the lack of familiarity with research participation among students and the general public. While institutions have active research projects in engineering or biotechnology for example, the use of human participants in the social sciences is relatively new. Solicitation for research participation around campuses or on social media is rare. Part of this may stem from a cultural distrust of the meaning of data and research. Clark (2006) contends that a culture of suspicion, due to the uncertainty of how the data will be used and to whom it will go, is a stumbling block in having participants answer honestly. In addition to mistrust of researchers, there is a lack of understanding of research work. Al-Oraimi (2004) described an incident as she was collecting qualitative data:

... the most difficult moment was when I contacted one of the most important government institutions in the UAE. I intended to interview some women there, but these women refused to meet me unless I had approval from their boss. I contacted that official for permission, and he asked me for a written request from the UAEU (local university). After getting the letter, he wanted to see my proposal, the questionnaire, and even he wanted to see the data report when I completed the interviews. When I informed him that the information must be confidential, he did not approve the interview. Thus, I replaced those women with more accessible participants (p. 99).

It is wise to keep in mind the unfamiliarity of local populations with staple research methods like surveys. Al-Oraimi (2004) stated that tribal nations like the UAE have an inherent aversion to indirect communication methods like surveys and prefer face-to-face interaction, making qualitative methods more attractive in conducting social research (Ahammed, 2015).

There is also a lack of institutional support and public advocacy and education around the role of and need for research (Lages, Pfajfar, & Shoham, 2015). Questions may prompt a fear of judgment, a desire for privacy, the threat of social stigma or the need to represent one's nation favorably. Research suggests that once governments adopt specific policies and publicly declare their ambitions, there is political interest and competitive incentive to manipulate or distort scores, or only report on favorable sections of statistical findings rather than their totality (Frey & Gallus, 2012). Individuals, or researchers for that matter, are not blind to government ambition. This is especially the case when national identity is involved, a salient point in many of the GCC nations given high expatriate rates. This issue may

dissipate as the role and utility of psychology research grows, with more students carrying out projects, advertising questionnaires online or asking friends and peers to be part of experiments.

16.13 Moving Forward

Our discussion suggests a number of overlapping challenges for developing a strong, relevant psychology research culture across the region. Seven key points have been raised:

- that the nature of psychology programs as “Western” focused and taught by international faculty, disconnects students from pursuing locally relevant research careers
- that the nature of institutions in the GCC leads to small, isolated psychology departments (or individual expertise) which discourages cross-collegiate collaboration and does not support nor build research capacity through continuing professional development
- a political and cultural bias (at institutional if not governmental level) that discourages research on topics important to the local community and that blocks the academic freedom of motivated researchers
- that psychology research is both underfunded and underutilised by central agencies and policymakers which discourages faculty from investigating locally relevant topics
- a lack of data collection systems and research participant culture which particularly impacts psychology research as it relies on primary human data collection

To address many of these shortfalls, institutions may adopt a policy requiring researchers to produce an annual paper derived from real national or regional need set forth by institutions, industry, government, non-profits and other stakeholders. The publication of this would be valued for its local impact and relevance rather than scientific impact. This would fill the role between academia and industry as the two operate in silos at present. It would also increase the motivation to do research as its impact is easily shown and responds to real issues. It would also counter the current practice of researchers undertaking topics of little interest or value to community stakeholders, but which have a higher likelihood of an international impact serving to increase their personal or institutional status instead (Chalmers, Essali, Rezk, & Crowe, 2012). Moreover, if institutions begin to produce psychology research with local relevance and promote this through regional channels, it is likely that external funding bodies will see the significance of including psychology grants in their portfolios.

While shifting the institutional focus to local impact and away from a singular concern with rankings can boost the production of relevant scientific and indigenous knowledge, universities are loath to do so for what they might lose in terms of credibility and status (Lambert, Mulay-Shah, et al., 2019); yet, perhaps it is time for

regional institutions to commit to their own aspirational values and grow research and learning talent instead. Both the private and public sector are beginning to realize that the work satisfaction of nationals as well as expatriates, on whom the region is largely dependent, must happen for national development to occur and intellectual transfer to happen. Thus, the only competitive resource is to invest in human capital at all levels of academic institutions.

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Chapter 17

The Contribution of Psychoanalysis to a Positive Islamic Psychology



Beyhan Bozkurt and Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

Abstract Psychoanalysis is often regarded as a discipline which emphasizes infantile sexuality and the drive-motivated individual in search for satisfaction. This rather negative perception of psychoanalysis has an exclusive dynamic that disregards the potential influence of psychoanalytic thinking on questions regarding the human condition. In this chapter, the epistemological ground of psychoanalysis is highlighted and linked to the radical deconstruction of subjectivity. Islamic concepts as positive psychological constructs are discussed along with the application of psychoanalysis to the positive Islamic concept of *sabr*. Although *sabr* is most often translated to “patience”, depending on the context, the Arabic term can be understood as moral strength, steadfastness, abstention, forbearance, perseverance, or endurance.

17.1 Introduction

It is now more than 100 years ago that the psychoanalytic theory and method began to develop and be applied throughout Europe. Because of its core component, the unconscious, the scientific positioning of psychoanalysis has been pushed to the edges of academia and psychological discourse to a great extent. This is due in part to theorists condemning psychoanalysis as unscientific and lacking evidence, which then illustrates the strength of their own theories and approaches (Strenger, 1991). Critique should be seen as a key factor for development, so that false or inaccurate theories can be worked on. A non-critical stance can lead to dogmatism, which in return is harmful for science. However, the epistemic foundation of

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psychoanalysis has been criticized to such an extent that the preconceptions and relevant points of the theory are often disregarded in mainstream psychological discussions. With regards to the development of an Islamic psychology, which itself has many detractors in the mainstream, the criticism of psychoanalysis has reflected Freud's negative view of religion (Smither & Khorsandi, 2009) and the emphasis of his theory on infantile sexuality, which provides more positive traits to men than to women as result of their biological differences (Gumiandari & Nafi'a, 2018).

This chapter looks at the meta-psychological assumptions and critiques of psychoanalysis in order to illustrate that the empirical paradigm of academic research is itself contradictory and exclusive in its approach. This is particularly important for Muslim social scientists who have become dependent on Western conceptualizations of knowledge production as the key to modern science. Those who attempt to integrate religious or spiritual inquiry into the social sciences are often ignored by mainstream research or relegated to separate spaces that are considered less scientific in nature. This is similar to the ways in which Freudian theoretical frameworks are often discarded in favor of more positivist approaches to psychology, which render anything that is not measurable as irrelevant. It is at this crossroad that psychoanalysis and Islamic psychology converge. Although Freudian theory does not have a particularly optimistic view of human nature, psychoanalysis should not be dismissed as a tool that solely seeks to uncover pathologies hidden in the unconscious mind. Instead, we proffer that psychoanalysis can be used to critically think about human nature, which from an Islamic point of view, is inherently positive (Khodayarifard, Ghojari-Bonab, Akbari-Zardkhaneh, & Zandi, 2016).

17.2 Objectivity Versus Subjectivity in Knowledge Production

The word "psyche" stems from the old Greek and can be translated to mean "soul"; so, we might consider psychoanalysis the process of analyzing the soul. However, application of the term "psyche" is in itself a debatable topic which crosses many disciplines. Within most branches of psychology, the soul is actually an obsolete construct. Instead, psyche is understood to refer wholly to the conscious part of the human mind. All the aspects of consciousness, such as feelings, perceptions and cognitive processes are then studied from the perspective of an absolute reality, one that can be objectively measured and manipulated using scientific tools.

The absolutism of reality, however, is an oxymoron. Human reality is inherently perceived through the lens of individuals and thus, scientific objectivity is an attempt to filter reality through the theories, assumptions, methods, and tools of a particular discipline. Communicating reality implies using the scientific terminology of a discipline to construct a picture of that reality so that we can discuss it using language specialized for that field. Anyone who has worked in interdisciplinary science understands the difficulty of communicating across disciplines as a single

phenomenon may be categorized and defined in different ways. For example, let's look at a few of the ways in which "consciousness" is discussed. In early writings, such as the works of Descartes, consciousness was equated with the mind and the ability to think (Thiel, 2011). Philosophers have used the term *qualia* to express consciousness as the internal experience of moment to moment. Behaviorists have defined consciousness as a shift in the ability of an organism to respond to stimuli from a less differentiated manner to a more differentiated one (Tolman, 1927). Neuroscience considers consciousness to be a state of wakefulness that is defined by one's level of alertness (De Sousa, 2013). Political scientists talk about consciousness as the ability to be self-aware, which Marx noted was a reflection of one's political and economic circumstances (Fromm, 1961). The different ways in which consciousness is conceptualized further defines the pathways in which is discussed. Can you imagine what a discussion of consciousness between a neuroscientist, a political scientist and a philosopher would be like?

In conducting positivistic research, we follow scientific standards that allow for objectivity. The researcher should not in any way be subjectively involved in the scientific process because that would lead to a blurring of the data, making it harder to replicate and to translate. However, excluding the subjectivity of the researcher is a naïve way of looking at the process of knowledge production within social science. Every thought, every cognitive and perceptual process goes through the subjective interpretations of the researcher at the most basic levels. Objectivity is thus an effort to ignore the fundamental impact of the researcher on the interpretation of the data. Given the ways in which Western scientific findings are promulgated globally, setting norms and exporting human values, it is particularly irresponsible of social scientists to disregard the influence of researchers' worldviews and biases on the interpretations that are made regarding human phenomena (See Chap. 3 in this book for ways to de-center researcher worldviews when working with minoritized populations).

In psychology, which literally means "the science of the soul", researchers have traditionally approached the study of human beings through the lens of objectivity where new knowledge builds on the foundations before it. This ideological view of science, however, might be misleading. According to the argumentation of Thomas Kuhn, a philosopher of science, science does not solely progress via the linear accumulation of new knowledge, but rather undergoes periodic revolutions, or "scientific revolutions" (1964). These revolutions, which he called "paradigm shifts", are characterized by the transformation that a field undergoes wherein prior assumptions are revised and viewed from a different perspective.

In a critical analysis of the meta-psychological concept of the unconscious, British philosopher Aisdaire MacIntyre (1958) points out the dilemma of trying to scientifically position psychoanalysis. He writes that psychoanalysis is indeed a science and Freud's approach *can* be labeled scientific, but by doing so, we expand and change the conceptualization of science. In fact, psychoanalysis is one of those sciences whose knowledge is not subject to a linear accumulation process and is thus unlike the natural sciences (Castoriadis, 1981). The positioning of Islamic psychology as a social science brings up similar concerns. Unlike positivistic approaches

that rely primarily on observable and quantifiable data, an Islamic psychology follows the path of cultural and indigenous movements that integrate theological views of human nature and the self into the development of psychological models (Allwood & Berry, 2006). During the Golden Age of Islam (circa 800AD–1200AD), when the seat of scientific innovation was in Islamic empires, this integration was an inherent reflection of the cultural backdrop. Skinner (2019) in discussing Kuhn's (1964) critique of science notes that "science does not evolve within a vacuum but within a cultural milieu, a paradigm, which influences the way the scientist perceives the world, the questions he asks, his methodology and the way he perceives and gives meaning to the pattern of empirical data" (Skinner, 2019, pg. 1089). The paradigm of contemporary psychology that deems positivistic enquiry (which excludes the subjectivity of the researcher) as scientific is also a manifestation of the assumptions that dominate our current paradigm. However, even quantitative methods require some level of interpretation on the part of the researcher (Toomela, 2010); thus, the ideal of a purely objective psychology is essentially an illusion.

This is where the utility of psychoanalysis comes into play. While behaviorists sought to make psychology as close as possible to a natural science (like biology, chemistry, or physics) in order to maximize the ability to predict and control human behaviors, psychoanalysis was more concerned with internal observational standpoints that help us interpret psychic events (Imbasciati, 2006). In its capacity as an epistemology and a method of thinking, psychoanalysis does not itself generate new knowledge; it is not an operationalizing, categorizing and rule-generating science in the positivist sense. It is a practice of thinking and analyzing that makes it possible to conceive new knowledge. It deconstructs conventional contexts, allows new connections and thus new meanings to be generated. In doing so, psychoanalysis contributes to the acquisition of knowledge by providing an approach for the analytical deepening of knowledge and a multiplication of insights, such as the growth of meaning patterns and the development and conceptualization of complex structures of meaning. This is unlike the positivistic-empirical nomothetic methodology, which relies on fundamentally answerable questions and clearly operationalized problems, seeking to confirm preset hypotheses that are limited to the predetermined criteria of operationalization and answerability. The emergence of qualitative research and the growing inclusion of spirituality in psychology may be indicators of a paradigm shift which can open the doors for a unique merger between psychoanalysis and a positive Islamic psychology. This is because Islam provides an optimistic theoretical model of human nature and because the study of internal psychological processes cannot solely be defined in positivistic terms (Skinner, 2019).

17.3 Psychoanalysis as a Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Human Experience

By providing an analytical framework, Freudian psychoanalysis makes it possible to address the history of human self-reflection. These are questions regarding the subject and its *conditio humana*, which are traditionally discussed in philosophy. The epistemology of psychoanalysis is in the analysis of the internal interpretation of the human mind as well as the conditions and the nature of the structure-forming processes that accompany the study of the mind. It is the question of the “very beginning of mental life” (Freud, 1915, p. 134) that psychoanalysis is concerned with. Unlike empirical-nomothetic science, psychoanalysis lends the subject a language, a meaning, a sense and thus a symbolic and discursive representation. It includes subjectivity in the process of generating new knowledge about human thoughts and behaviors. It allows researchers and practitioners to formulate new questions regarding the subject of the mind and opens up space for insights that cannot be reached without this internal journey. In this way, the subjectivity of the researcher—what positivistic quantitative science labels damaging to the process—becomes an integral part of knowledge production, indeed the methodological core element of the scientific epistemological process itself.

With this understanding, we can look at human phenomena from a different perspective. In contrast to other epistemologies and paradigms, psychoanalysis does not aim to find an objective truth, but rather to uncover psychic truths (Busch, 2016). The underlying reason for a certain behavior is believed to be the product of unconscious dynamics which give inner processes a meaning and at the same time hide the powers of the unconscious. Here is an example: If Ammar is scared of dogs, it is not enough to go back in time in the therapeutic setting to find the cause for this fear or phobia. It is possible that on a certain date in history, Ammar encountered a big dog which scared him, and this is the reason for his phobia. However, the crux of psychoanalysis is not about finding the events in our history that lead to certain fears or behaviors; it is about trying to reconstruct the meaning behind our symptoms by deconstructing the events in our memory and modifying the unconscious processes behind these events in such a way that they may be consciously tolerated. The ability to tolerate such unconscious compromises can lead to a reduction in symptoms, less fears, being more active, or just simply feeling better.

This does not mean that all our problems are solved. Psychoanalysis operates on different levels of understanding. Negative psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, anger and fear are not defined as problems, but as expressions of underlying unconscious processes that are expressed in ways that become unbearable for the individual. This looks critically at the ways in which we understand categories of pathology and normality. Every behavior, every symptom is the result of an unconscious process; a phobia or any form of anxiety is only the expression of it. Psychoanalysis does not deconstruct the subject as a whole, but rather deconstructs the unconscious aspects which lead us to become who we are. In the Latin sense, the subject, as *sub-ietum*, is literally *submitted* under a personal

unconscious. By looking at the individual factors that generate meaning to the unconscious processes, the process of deconstruction also includes the dynamic of reconstruction, so that a new individual can be formed and constructed during the psychoanalytic process.

At the same time, when clients undergoing psychoanalysis say something about their past, it is not an empirically real history that is being verbally constructed. Rather, it is a reconstruction of the past, which can never represent a perfect depiction of the events that actually happened. Rather it is a retrospective—what Freud called *nachträglichkeit* (afterwardsness)—view of the events that happened, which is different from an objective reality. This *nachträglichkeit* puts the subject in a time and space that constitutes reality. The transcription of past events, like a translation, does not take place according to topical points of view or even a linear pattern, but in dynamic registers. In this dialectical field of construction and reconstruction, meaning arises, situated in the historical registers of temporality. Freud (1985) writes to his friend, Wilhelm Fliess, the following thoughts:

As you know, I am working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances—to a *retranscription*. Thus, what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that is laid down in various kind of indications (p. 207).

In that sense, human beings do not have memories *from* the past, but rather memories *of* it. *Nachträglichkeit* (afterwardsness) operates through an interplay of recurrences, translations, interpretations, and failed translations in order to generate meaning for the subject. The constitution of subjectivity is therefore an attempt to find an answer to the question “What drives us?” to which we will not have a definitive answer, but rather different options.

A Deeper Dive: Subjects and Objects in Freudian Theory

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

In psychoanalytic theory, the “subject” is the sum of the physiological and psychological parts that make up a human being, and the “object” is the person, thing or concept to which the subject relates. According to Freud, an object is anything that the subject desires to fulfill its needs. External objects are those that exist outside the subject, while internal objects are internal constructions of external objects. These internal representations, which may be quite different from the represented external object itself, become stronger with repetition and emotional connection. The object can be a whole object (like a complete person) or a partial object (like a leg or a breast) which is extrapolated to represent the whole. In Freudian theory, object loss is a part of

(continued)

the process that gives rise to the subject. In recognizing the absence of the object, the psyche must transition to an acceptance of this loss. However, for subjects whose psyche is unable to come to this recognition, the object maintains a silent hold which leads to psychological distress, anxiety, melancholia, and mourning (Ogden, 1983). “The lost object continues to exist, but as part of the dejected subject, who can no longer clearly define the borders between his own subjectivity and the existence of the lost object within it. The structure of this melancholic response is conceived by Freud as an antithesis to the basic well being of the ego, the survival of which is put at risk” (Ferber, 2006, para 1). Freud’s construction of internal psychic structures (the id, ego, and superego) which are developed in infancy and early childhood through interaction with external objects lays the groundwork for object-relations theory, an offshoot of Freudian psychoanalysis that places greater emphasis on object relationships, including “multiple self-organizations functioning in relation to one another within the personality system” (Ogden, 1983, p. 95).

17.4 Accentuating the Positives in Islamic Psychology

Islamic psychology at its most basic level is a positive psychology. Moving away from psychology’s historical emphasis on disease and the behaviorist disregard of free will, positive psychology emerged in the 1990s from the humanistic school of thought (Robbins, 2008), which emphasized the need for self-actualization, or the process of attaining one’s fullest potential. In its most current form, the second wave of positive psychology (PP2.0) focuses on finding balance between positive and negative states and highlights the human need for meaning-seeking and meaning-making (Wong, 2011). Positive psychology has had a profound influence on redirecting research towards topics such as happiness, wellbeing, flourishing, and resilience, and has created space within mainstream psychology for the inclusion of topics such as meaning, transcendence, and spirituality. Although revolutionary to Western orientations of psychology, this focus on human potential, bridging the gap between the real self and the ideal self, is not new within Islamic paradigms. “Indeed, Muslims have always viewed psychological wellbeing as an experience of being unitary and in harmony with oneself, plus a process of divinely-rooted self-consciousness” (Farooqi, 2006a, p. 106). In fact, the relationship between Muslim saints and their followers between the eighth and fourteenth century is akin to the therapist-client relationships in modern psychotherapy, following many of the same techniques, including empathy, rapport, and insight, and relying on the same professional code of ethics (Farooqi, 2006b).

To begin to understand the role of Islam in psychology, we must first define the subject of enquiry: the soul or self (used interchangeably here) within an Islamic paradigm. Here Al-Ghazali’s model has been the one most frequently utilized (Abu-Raiya, 2014; Rothman & Coyle, 2018). The theory emerged from Qur’anic

references to the self and shares some of the features and functions of Freudian structures of personality, namely the id, ego, and superego (Abu-Raiya, 2014). The Islamic model divides the self into four parts: *qalb*, *ruh*, *aql*, and *nafs*. The *qalb* (or heart) connects the self to the *ruh* (or spirit). At the center lies the consciousness of God, the part of the human soul that has a sense of its *fitrah* (or human nature), which is considered to be inherently good, and which includes an understanding of right and wrong and is capable of receiving divine guidance. The *aql* is the intellectual and rational part of the self and connects with the *qalb*; and the *nafs* (or life force) houses our instinctual drives and psychic energies. On its own, the *nafs* would operate according to its *fitrah*, much the way animals behave according to their nature. However, in human beings, the *nafs* can be led astray from its natural state of good.

The *nafs ammarah besoa* (or evil-commanding self) is the most influential part of the *nafs*; it operates much like Freud's id—on an unconscious level, composed of impulses and desires that are governed by the pleasure principle and primary cognitive processes. The *nafs al-lawammah* (or reproachful self) functions like Freud's superego, residing in the unconscious as a moral compass. The interaction of the structures of personality in both the Islamic theory and the Freudian theory result in similar outcomes. The *nafs al-mutmaina* (or serene self) is the desired outcome of the interplay between the different components of the *nafs*, whereas the *nafs al-marid'a* (the sick self) is the undesirable outcome that results from a conflicted and troubled *qalb* (Abu-Raiya, 2014). Although *aql* is the closest structure to the ego, which relies on the reality principle and secondary thought processes to balance the id and the superego, Abu Raiya (2014) notes that taming the *nafs ammarah besoa* is not considered the primary function of the *aql* based on Qur'anic analysis.; instead, the focus of *aql* is to look for and contemplate the existence of God in human beings and nature. Skinner (2019) describes the interaction of the parts of the Islamic self in the following way:

In the ideal, healthy, balanced person, consciousness is centred in *qalb* which is open to *ruh* and which directs *aql*, and together with *aql* directs the lower *nafs*. In this state, *aql* is able to exercise sound reason, its perception of the external world is realistic, it sees the value of moral conduct, its operations are imbued with wisdom, and it is able to exercise a wholesome direction on the *nafs*. The disrupting influences on the *nafs ammarah* (the lower *nafs*) is weakened, and their tendency to wrong action countered by the *nafs lawwamma* (the instinct to remorse). And from this state, the self is capable of being transformed, even if only temporarily, into the *nafs mutmaina* (the tranquil or rested *nafs*), which could be described as the state in which the self is in total surrender to the *qalb* and completely incorporated into the worship of God (pp. 1090–1091).

In accordance with a positive Islamic psychology, this definition of the self begins with the notion that human beings are good. The lower *nafs* is vulnerable to the seduction of worldly pleasures, but the soul is always on a journey back to the consciousness of God (*taqwa*) which leads to flourishing and self-actualization.

There are also other factors in an Islamic worldview that link it to positive psychology. The benevolence of God, for example, is invoked continually in Islamic prayer. Consider the Arabic words, “*Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim*”, which

translate to “the name of God, the merciful and compassionate”. These words preface every *surah* (chapter) of the Qur’an except one and are used as a blessing before beginning any activity. In doing so, Muslims are reminded to view God in a positive manner and to consider all circumstances (positive and negative) as a blessing. As such, *tawakkul*, or relying on the will of God, is an important positive Islamic psychology concept (Khodayarifard et al., 2016). Trusting in God’s judgment can be a powerful tool of resilience in the face of adversity and is related to the Islamic emphasis on *sabr* or patience.

17.5 *Sabr* as a Positive Islamic Construct

Even though patience as a virtue has not received much attention within positive psychology literature, possibly due to its association with suffering and struggle (Schnitker, 2012), the concept of *sabr* is essential in a positive Islamic psychology. *Sabr* is considered one of two elements of faith, the other being *shukr* or gratitude. Although the Arabic term *sabr* is most often translated to mean “patience”, the connotations of the term are not easily rendered. In the Arabic language, *sabr* means “to confine” or “to contain”. Words that derive from the Arabic root s-b-r appear numerous times in the Qur’an, generally meaning to persist on the path of goodness and virtue during times of hardship, either personal or collective.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1997) emphasizes that, depending on the context, *sabr* can be understood as moral strength, steadfastness, equanimity, omission, abstention, forbearance, perseverance, or endurance. Watt (1979) and Kam (2019) emphasize that patience is not an adequate way of characterizing *sabr*, as it does not imply a passive acceptance of adversity, but rather, an active process of perseverance in the face of hardship with the conviction that God’s relief is imminent, even if it is not quick. Interestingly, a semantic analysis of the term *sabr* shows that it is consistently utilized in the Qur’an in an active grammatical form, implying that *sabr* is inherently connected to action. Waiting for God to change our circumstances while doing nothing to help ourselves does not amount to *sabr*. “Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” (Qur’an 13:11).

Islamic scholars have identified three aspects of *sabr* with each having a slightly different way of characterizing patience: *sabr* when facing difficulties; *sabr* in refraining from unwanted behaviors; and *sabr* in doing good work (Rusdi, 2016). Thus, patience in Islam is not just a response to negative situations but is needed to engage in positive behaviors as well. Given that *sabr* is used in the Qur’an over 90 times, an extensive review of every verse that uses or alludes to *sabr* is beyond the scope of this chapter. Table 17.1 provides a few quotes from the Qur’an to illustrate the wide applications of the concept and the benefits and virtues that can be attained from practicing *sabr*.

It is important to note that in an Islamic paradigm, human life is temporal and fleeting, whereas the afterlife is considered eternal. Thus, we may not necessarily reap the benefits of *sabr* during this life. Here the focus is not on catering to the

Table 17.1 *Sabr* in the Qur'an

Selected quotes	Benefits and virtues attained
"And We made from among them leaders guiding by Our command when they were patient and [when] they were certain of Our signs." (32:24)	Good leadership
"Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods, lives, and the fruits of your toil. But give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere. Those who say, when afflicted with calamity, 'To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return.' They are those on whom descend blessings from their Lord, and mercy. They are the ones who receive guidance."	Relief from adversity; blessings from God
"Oh you who believe! Persevere in patience and constancy. Vie in such perseverance, strengthen each other, and be pious, that you may prosper." (3:200)	Piety, prosperity
"And be steadfast in patience, for verily Allah will not suffer the reward of the righteous to perish." (11:115)	Rewards from God
"Be patient, for your patience is with the help of Allah." (16:127)	Help from God
"No one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint, none but persons of the greatest good fortune." (41:35)	Good fortune
"To spend of your substance, out of love for Him, For your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; To be steadfast in prayer; And give in charity; To fulfill the contracts which you have made; And to be firm and patient, in pain and adversity And throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing." (2:177)	Relief from pain and difficulty

pleasure principle to satisfy our worldly desires; instead the goal is to work towards self-transcendence (ST). Tornstam (1994) described ST as a developmental process of moving beyond our physical boundaries to become less self-centered (ego-transcendence) and more connected to the spiritual universe (cosmic-transcendence). Islam like other faith systems provides many routes to ST, including prayer, charity, remembrance of God, and altruism. Engaging in positive behaviors is only the beginning; we must also engage in self-reflection and the contemplation of God in all that surrounds us. Although psychoanalysis has been historically linked to dysfunction, its utility is not limited to those who are diagnosed with mental illness. As we noted earlier in this chapter, psychoanalysis provides a way to uncover our knowledge of human nature by helping us approach the unconscious, or in Islamic psychology, the core of our souls, our connection to God. But such an endeavor would require *sabr*. We believe that psychoanalysis can provide the tools needed to build *sabr* and as such, to get closer to self-transcendence. Simultaneously, psychoanalysis can help us understand the underlying unconscious processes in practicing *sabr*.

17.6 Psychoanalysis of *Sabr*

The Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language in order for the people of that geographic and historic period to understand it. This is explained in the Qur'an itself, where it says: “[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded” (38/29). The central idea is that the message of the Qur'an is addressed through a language that was understandable to those individuals. However, not all verses are literal in meaning; some are metaphorical. As stated in the Qur'an, “It is God who has sent down to you the book: In it are verses clear (*muhkamat*), they are the foundation of the book, others are unspecified (*mutashabihat*)” (3:7). Additionally, the messages in the Qur'an are not limited to one time and space, thus leaving room for and encouraging interpretation and debate—a characteristic that is often associated with the “Golden Age of Islam”. While exoteric interpretations of the Qur'an discuss the literal material, esoteric interpretations attempt to discover its inner meaning, reflecting on possibilities and existential insights. In accordance with the latter, we blend psychoanalytic theory with Islamic philosophies of time and self to consider the concept of *sabr*. This is done with the assumptions of psychoanalysis in the “epistemologically essential tensional area between drive-desire and drive-renunciation” (Gast, 1992, p. 395), the conflicting nature of the constitution of the psychic and the dialectical depth in Freud's oeuvre.

According to Iqbal (2013), the self is divided into two parts: the Efficient Self and the Appreciative Self. The Efficient Self operates on linear time, perceiving moments through the senses which connect it to its external reality. In psychoanalytical terms, this would be the self or ego that exists within consciousness and attends to practical matters of daily life. The Appreciative Self, on the other hand, is the inner self, which can transcend human perceptions of time. Within a psychoanalytical framework, the Appreciative Self would reside in the unconscious. As temporally situated beings, humans vacillate between the principle of pleasure and reality. According to psychoanalytic theory, the pleasure principle, which resides in the unconscious id, motivates human beings to seek out experiences that elicit pleasure. This is particularly evident in childhood, where the demands of the id are like a toddler having a tantrum. However, through the workings of the reality principle, which is embodied in the ego, human beings are forced to leave their narcissistic existence. This shaping of the human being towards an appreciative entity is not a linear progression; it is a slow, recurrent process through which we learn to endure the anxiety that comes from consciously overriding the unconscious desires of the id, which expects instant gratification. Maturity of thought develops through repeated interactions between the id and the ego based on the demands of the external reality. Thus, acts of deferred gratification are a necessary part of the human experience, and are particularly relevant in pursuit of long-term satisfaction. Freud (1930) writes:

The programme of becoming happy, which the pleasure principle imposes on us, cannot be fulfilled; yet we must not—indeed, we cannot—give up our efforts to bring it nearer to

Table 17.2 Vaillant's hierarchy of defense mechanisms (Adapted from Vaillant, 2011)

Levels	Defense mechanism	Characteristics
1	Psychotic defenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delusional projection, psychotic denial, psychotic distortions • Common in young children, in dreams, in individuals with PTSD • Requires neuroleptic medication or waking the dreamer
2	Immature defenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting out, passive aggression, dissociation, projection • Maladaptive coping strategies common in adolescents, substance abusers, individuals with personality disorders, brain injury, PTSD • Requires a support network, the development of internal psychic competence to relieve anxieties, and through improved brain function
3	Intermediate (Neurotic) defenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displacement, isolation, repression, feeling without thinking • Manifested through phobias, compulsions, somatizations, and amnesias • Responds to psychotherapy
4	Mature defenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altruism, sublimation, suppression, humor • Maximization of pleasure and gratification, allowing more conscious awareness of thoughts, feelings, and their consequences

fulfilment by some means or other. Very different paths may be taken in that direction, and we may give priority either to the positive aspect of the aim, that of gaining pleasure, or to its negative one, that of avoiding unpleasure. By none of these paths can we attain all that we desire (p. 83).

Given the sheer infinite strength and indestructibility of repressed impulses, the goal of the ego is not to eliminate them altogether; instead, it aims to temporarily disrupt these impulses until a more suitable time or place can be found. In many ways, this corresponds to the concept of *ṣabr*. Perseverance and endurance in a position in which there is no impulsive action means resisting temptation and reassessing the situation. But even this self-reflective resistance is a path to pleasure. Adapting our actions to the reality principle through the act of *ṣabr* does not negate the meta-psychological assumption of the pleasure principle. *Sabr* itself can produce pleasure, even as it represses the desires of the id!

Sabr can also be seen as a positive defense mechanism in response to the anxiety created by the clash of the pleasure and reality principles. Vaillant's hierarchy of defense mechanisms (2011) classifies such coping strategies based on four levels, from psychotic to mature. Within this framework, *sabr* fits well at Level 4. As defense mechanisms by nature are unconscious responses to stress-inducing circumstances, *sabr* as a mature defense mechanism would develop over time and with practice. As noted in Table 17.2, mature defense mechanisms maximize the pleasure principle and allow us to become more conscious of our inner thoughts and feelings.

Another way of psychoanalytically exploring the concept of *sabr* is to look at what is promised to the people who practice it. As mentioned earlier, *sabr* distances human beings from bad or evil and situates us on a righteous path. Therefore, in psychoanalytical thinking, we must consider what individuals obtain in their unconscious conflictual subject-structure when practicing *sabr*. In psychoanalytic theory, time and reality cannot be thought of linearly, thus leaving us with an approach, in which we have to think dialectically. With the concept of *nachträglichkeit*, we are confronted with a phenomenon in which the recall of memory cannot be simply understood as a retrieval of constant contents of memory, but rather as a constructive effort, in which the past of the individual is subject to finding and establishing a new meaning. Therefore, reality must be understood with the interplay of the past and present, and time is simply, psychoanalytically speaking, a way of expressing the unconscious conflicts that the human subject is dealing with. Through its subsequent imprints, the subject creates its present, but at the same time does not live in it, since it is only a representation of what it will have experienced once. To be temporally situated, however, also means to struggle with ambivalences and dilemmas of subjectivity, as the requirements of reality can cause contradictions, ambiguity and suffering that are given meaning through repeated attempts of translation (Kirchhoff, 2018).

A Deeper Dive: Physical and Metaphysical Conceptualizations of Time

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi and Rabia Dasti

Time as we know it in everyday life is composed of physical markers such as the ticking of the clock, the change in seasons, and in most parts of the world, the Gregorian calendar that marks the linear passage of days, weeks, months, and years in a rational, organized fashion. “Because of our own familiarity with these reckoning systems, it can be tempting to view clock and calendar time as simply charting the *natural*, objective dimension in which all life occurs” (Hom, 2020, pp. 9–10). However, philosophers have been debating the concept of time for centuries, which when combined with questions about God, creation, and timelessness become even more opaque and open to interpretation (Bardon, 2013). While the measurement of time is used quite extensively in psychological science, it is the larger questions about the *nature* of time that have captured the attention of both philosophers and scientists.

Mohammed Iqbal’s (2013) work on Islamic philosophy, which was originally published in the 1930s, describes the self in relation to time from two different perspectives: divine (also known as pure or real) time and serial time. Divine time operates outside of human consciousness, whereas serial time is characterized by a linear series of moments. Iqbal’s conceptualization most closely follows the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859–1941), who argued

(continued)

that time is inherently different from space, a notion that put Bergson and Iqbal in juxtaposition with Einstein's theory of relativity which considers time to be the fourth dimension of space (Wiersma, 2005). While philosophical constructions of time were re-appropriated into physical science discourse as a result of Einstein's mathematical approach (Canales, 2016), Iqbal's theoretical conceptualization is not completely in opposition to Einstein (Altaf, 2018). In fact, there are notable similarities between time as described in the Qur'an and Einstein's time dilation (Al Nakhshabandi, 2015; Altaf, 2018). According to the concept of time dilation, time slows down as you travel closer to the speed of light; for a subject traveling *at* the speed of light, time would theoretically stop. Within physics, the speed of light is absolute, meaning that it always remains the same. It is the unchanging and ultimate Real. In fact, the Qur'an uses the term, *Noor*, or "light" in reference to God: "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35) Additional verses note that divine time is not the same as the human perception of time: "A day of your Lord is like a thousand years of what you count" (Qur'an, 22:47) and "He arranges [each] matter from the heaven to the earth; then it will ascend to Him in a Day, the extent of which is a thousand years of those which you count" (Qur'an, 32:5).

Iqbal's (2013) view of time is primarily inspired by Qur'anic injunctions. The distinction he made between serial time and real time is indeed a revolutionary one. It rejects the notion of predeterminism and functions as an explanation of the exercise of free will inasmuch as it explains the two dimensions in which humans can exist and operate. Serial time as Iqbal views it, is the lawful operation of worldly affairs as manifested through the mechanical workings of the universe. In this sense, everything is moving according to a certain predictable pattern. However, Iqbal also recognizes the existence of a parallel conceptualization of time. Pure or real time is the dynamic, creative consciousness which breaks the chains of serial time and in its womb exists the boundless expanse of possibilities. For Iqbal, time is a necessary component of reality, but is not reality itself. "God is not the unmoved mover, the God portrayed by the Qur'an is an active, changing and living God. For Iqbal, God lives in eternity and in serial time. The former means change without succession while the latter is organically related to eternity in so far as it is a measure of eternity" (Hassan, 1973, pp. 113–114). The future is constantly and intricately woven by the hands of thought, life and purpose to form an organic unity. Through this creative activity the ego transverses and strives to form intimacy with the Ultimate Ego, which according to Iqbal, is the only form of worship.

Iqbal paints a simulating picture of pure time in one of his poems in *Javid Nama* (Iqbal, 1966, pp. 113–114).

I passed beyond the bounds of this universe
And set foot in the undimensioned world,

(continued)

A world . . . without both right and left,
 A world devoid of night and day.
 In that universe was another world
 Whose origin was from Divine fiat,
 Undecaying, and every moment transformed,
 Unimaginable, yet there clearly visible;
 Every moment clothed in a new perfection,
 Every moment clad in a new beauty.
 Its time had no need of moon and sun;
 In its expanse the nine spheres are contained.

The psychoanalytic concept of transference, in which the subject redirects emotions or desires for one person toward a different person, is not only a representation of the past in the present, but rather an “entanglement of the present and the past” (Küchenhoff, 2008, p. 485). We can understand transference as a search for the lost primary object, the goal and the source of the unconscious wish, because its absence will be expressed in all its descendants. Modifications in the conditions of pleasure-unpleasure production are achieved and the “return of the repressed” in symptoms and substitute formations can be understood as an expression of the sheer infinite strength and indestructibility of the repressed impulses. If the unconscious removal of impulses in the form of the illusionary transformation of reality according to the demands of infantile desires and the impulsive reaction results in satisfaction for the subject—an economic reduction from an increased state of tension—then the work on and in the transference (see Körner, 1989) indicates that the past can be subsequently charged with a new, possibly non-suffering meaning. This future-oriented design is always determined by the past of the unconscious wish, but without being able to completely catch up with it and remember it. The traumatic thing about the transmission would then be the insignificance, which is repeatedly staged in the compulsion to repeat, as an attempt to experience something from the moment at which everything started. It would only become meaningful if it were bound to psychological representations and became editable and possibly dispelled. At the same time, this means that it would have become a thing of the past, which would be a progressive step, especially as the tie to a psychic representation would result in the displeasure becoming weaker with each transcription. In many ways, this corresponds to the act of *ṣabr*, as it describes an active endurance of circumstances that should (eventually) emancipate individuals.

Sabr can also be understood as a means of approaching the Real, the unavailable; a conduit for dealing with unconscious desires and connecting the Efficient Self to the Appreciative Self. It is essential that the unpleasant and unbearable, what should be endured through *ṣabr*, reforms our being, opens up space in our minds for new perspectives, and brings us closer to timelessness. As the world is full of ambiguity (Bauer, 2011), the subject within psychoanalysis is concerned with the constant struggle for certainty, leading credence to the claim that the psychoanalyst’s work lies in “finding security in uncertainty” (Kittler, 2016). This can also apply to the Muslim believer, whose job it would be to traverse the uncertainty of human existence by contemplating existential questions and practicing *sabr* with the

expectation that all human experiences are from God. *Sabr*, thus, can lead to a positive state of being while negotiating a negative external reality.

17.7 Conclusion

Considering a positive Islamic psychology concept such as *sabr* through the lens of psychoanalysis provides a fresh perspective on cognitive processes using a language of psychological discourse that can readily entertain esoteric approaches to human phenomena. To understand *sabr* from a psychoanalytical point of view, we must remember that the being of the human subject is tied to time and to how this time is subsequently given meaning. It is essential that the unpleasant and unbearable, that which is to be overcome by *şabr*, reforms our being, and opens up space for new things, thus bringing time to a standstill for a short period. The attempt to find a world full of unambiguity and certainty is an endeavor for the psychoanalytic subject that drives it, but at the same time, the human subject is also driven by confrontations with negatives and failures. If it can be assumed that the world is full of ambiguity, then for the subject, it is about the constant struggle for certainty. However, *sabr* should not be understood as a panacea for all human problems. Life takes place along the axis of the subject's libidinal structure and what is disturbing about the unconscious is that the subject cannot break away from it. However, numerous compromises (thinking, symbolization, negation, defense, etc.) lead to a recognition of the Real, which at the same time also represents a narcissistic empowerment of reality as a validation of the instinctual desire. By enduring tension and overcoming it through *şabr*, a space is opened up in one's own libidinal economy that confronts the previous and creates opportunities for new things. The new is hopefully expected and hallucinatory charged by the drive economy. So perseverance, patience and the work with tension (doing what you do not want to do) is not only a way to resist temptation and to develop further as a person and subject—it is at the same time pleasurable and narcissistically charged to achieve the attitude of *şabr* and to (unconsciously) occupy the resistance with pleasure.

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Chapter 18

Sufism and Jungian Psychology: Ways of Knowing and Being



Mansoor H. Abidi

Abstract This chapter introduces the teachings of theoretical Sufism vis-à-vis Jungian psychology. Many religious scholars versed in Islamic psychology believe that Sufism differs from the major branches of the Islamic faith, such as jurisprudence or philosophy, because it stresses on *ma'rifa*—a direct mode of knowing the world, the human soul, and God. Similarly, Jungian psychology, which places great emphasis on knowing the personal shadow to the archetypal or transpersonal aspect of the psyche, has been dismissed by the scientific community and traditionalists. This chapter illustrates the Sufi path to spirituality using a Jungian approach. Identifying parallels and outlining the soul's journey, the discussion draws similitudes from the inverse relationship of the Sufi notion of the soul's descent (*tanzih*) and ascent (*tashbih*) to Jung's model of the individuation process. This interdisciplinary framework is not only significant to the contemporary understanding of Sufism, the esoteric dimension of Islam, but also contributes to the expansion of Jungian psychology.

18.1 Introduction

Psychology as conceived by Swiss psychiatrist, C. G. Jung (d. 1961 CE), takes us on a journey inward towards the unconscious mind. Imbued with aspects of spirituality, paranormal phenomena, and symbolism, Jungian psychology allows for integrating religious traditions into psychological discourse. Several scholars have noted parallels between Islamic traditions and Jungian analytical psychology (Spiegelman, Khan, Fernandez, & Spiegelman, 1991; Vaughan-Lee & Tweedie, 1998; Nouriani, 2017). Sufism, the metaphysical branch of Islam, applies to Jungian psychology as both frameworks rely on similar metaphors of inner reflection to describe the processes leading to psychological wholeness. Rooted in the Qur'an, the teachings

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of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH¹), and the Shi'a Imams, Sufism is a discipline and a body of knowledge that is anchored in Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy (Hasan, 2012). While Jungian psychology and Sufism share common goals, the path to psychological unity is slightly different. This chapter discusses the areas of similarity and the differences between these two approaches. In doing so, the work of Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE), the Andalusian metaphysician and theoretician who is known as *al-sheikh al-akbar*, "the greatest master" in Sufism, is of particular importance.

18.1.1 A Note on Methods of Enquiry

As evidence obtained through laboratory experimental data cannot capture the essence of meaning in metaphysical enquiry, empirical knowledge within Sufi perspectives is primarily attained through the analysis of symbolic images that constitute feelings, metaphors, dreams, visions, and revelations. These ways of knowing and being have been cultivated in the Islamic world for centuries. In fact, the concept of *mundus imaginalis* (or imaginal world) which was introduced into Jungian analytical psychology by James Hillman was borrowed from Henry Corbin, the French philosopher and scholar of Islam, and originally coined by Ibn 'Arabi in the twelfth century (Nouriani, 2017). While Hillman's conceptualization of the imaginal world was limited to the unconscious aspects of the psyche, in Sufism, it is viewed much more expansively as it encapsulates spiritual realms that are beyond the individual psyche. "Sufis believe that the world was created out of Divine love and that the entire cosmos is the result of God's primordial imagination. From this perspective, imagination is not in us; rather, we are in imagination. When we are engaged in actively imagining, from the Sufi perspective, we are emulating God and engaging in a co-creative process on a microcosmic level" (Nouriani, 2017, p. 14). While modern neuroscience technologies have provided psychologists with the ability to study subconscious phenomena through brain waves and somatic responses, for Sufi mystics, empirical evidence pertaining to the nature of the psyche is primarily attained through philosophical hermeneutics (*ta'wil*).

Ta'wil (a term that occurs in the Qur'an seventeen times) is a psychological process of discernment to discover, interpret mystically, and explain esoterically (Chittick, 1989; Corbin, 1969). This method includes not only reason as the scale from which everything is weighed, but also the realities of dreams, visions, feelings, and revelations which are relative to the person who experiences them. The principle goal of Sufism is to experience or "taste" (*dhawq*) the divine reality (*haqīqah*) within the human experience by specific ways (*tariqah*; pl. *turuq*) set by the Islamic law (*sharīah*). Thus, Sufi psychology is not concerned with absolutism, only

¹PBUH stands for "Peace Be Upon Him", an honorific used by Muslims to refer to the prophets in Islam.

self-determination in its particular phenomenal form. Within this perspective, the inner self in Sufi gnosis (*ma'rifa*) and the deeper aspect of the psyche in Jungian psychology may both be representations of God's reality envisioned through the unique conceptualizations of each theoretical framework (Corbin, 1969; Edinger, 1972). Although the archetypal reality of Sufism is historically much older than the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad, it is important to bear in mind that Sufism and its proponents are rooted in Islam, and that Islam, as a world-religion (*dīn*), is itself a third branch of monotheism.

18.2 Jung's Model of the Psyche

From the Jungian perspective, the human psyche is a mini universe made up of two principles: consciousness and the unconscious. Consciousness is a subjective part of the psyche, namely the rational ego that has separated itself from the unconscious. The ego is aware of itself and thus, as the experiencer, the ego often considers itself autonomous. In Jung's theory, the unconscious is separated into (1) the personal unconscious, which is closer to the ego and holds experiential memories, and (2) the collective unconscious, a deeper layer that comprises the universal memories across all human experiences. The collective unconscious, for Jung, is the container of archetypes, which are psychic images projected as symbols that appear across cultures through art, literature, myth, and religion.

According to Jung, the psyche is a self-regulating system, like the human body, that seeks to achieve balance between opposing forces as it strives for growth, a process he called *individuation*. This process creates tension between the ego-consciousness and the unconscious. In Jung's psychology, the unconscious holds a greater influence on the psyche. The ego is an emergent phenomenon within the psyche which is a part of consciousness where human awareness lives. Jung (1954/1969b) states:

Everything of which I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking; everything of which I was once conscious but have now forgotten; everything perceived by my senses, but not noted by my conscious mind; everything which, involuntarily and without paying attention to it, I feel, think, remember, want, and do; all the future things which are taking shape in me and will sometime come to consciousness: all this is the content of the unconscious (p. 185).

We can say that the unconscious for Jung is a symbol for the unknown, unseen, arational, or dark reality. This conceptualization imparts a scientific context to the manifestations of the transcendent reality, a reality beyond human consciousness. In fact, the collective unconscious—the transpersonal or archetypal aspect of the psyche or soul—is considered immortal from the perspective of the ego-consciousness.

In Jung's model of the psyche (Fig. 18.1), both the ego-consciousness and the unconscious have their own archetypal or spiritual nucleus within them. Like the yin/yang, two opposing principles within the one, both parts of the psyche have

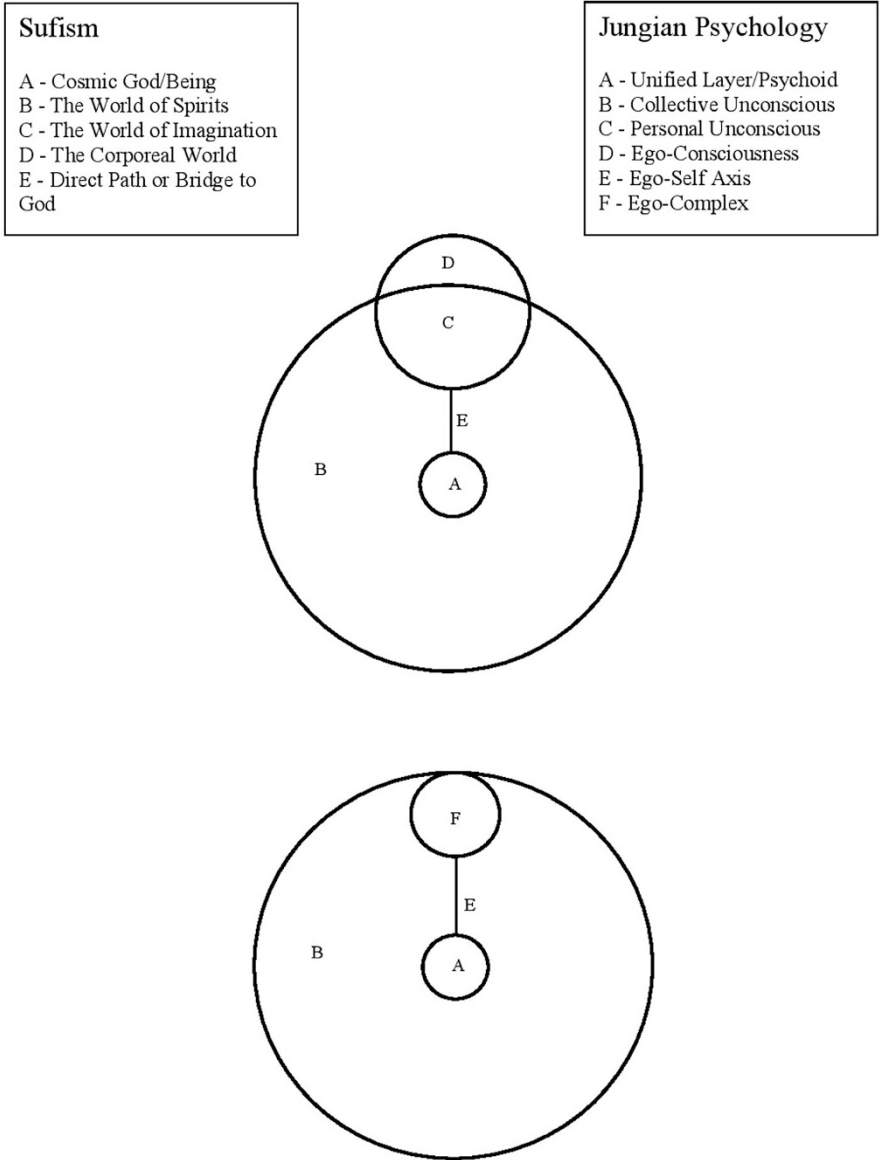


Fig. 18.1 Jungian model of the psyche

psychological systems (i.e., organs and their functions) that reflect one another in a compensatory dynamic. It is important to note that much of Jung’s psychology was not focused on curing the mind, but rather on providing a new way of looking at the monotheistic myth. “The main interest of my work,” says Jung, “is not concerned with the treatment of neurosis, but rather with the approach to the numinous” (Ribi,

2013, p. 280). Jung borrowed the Latin term “numinous” from Rudolf Otto’s book *The Idea of the Holy*, first published in 1917, to refer to qualities and states of mind that are holy but not necessarily associated with goodness. In 1940, Jung described the *numinosum* as

a dynamic energy or effect not caused by an arbitrary act of will. On the contrary, it seizes and controls the human subject, who is always rather its victim than its creator. The *numinosum*—whatever its cause may be—is an experience of the subject independent of his will. At all events, religious teaching as well as the consensus gentium always and everywhere explains this experience as being due to a cause external to the individual. The *numinosum* is a quality belonging to a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence that causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness (Jung, 1940/1969a, p. 138).

As a concept, the *numinosum* is difficult to capture in words. It is a state-specific form of knowing. Think about a dream in which you have found the answer to a problem with which you have been struggling, but upon waking, the answer eludes you. It was right there in your dream, but in the waking state of consciousness, it slips out of reach. Like the dream from which one wakes, the *numinosum* is experienced on a plane of existence that is intangible, just out of reach of the ego-consciousness. The *numinosum* is also a paradox because it contains both positive qualities such as bliss, rapture, and sublimity, and negative qualities such as fear, haunting and bewilderment—both of which are likely to be encountered with the Divine. Objects like trees, mountains, and rivers, for example, may be numinous for indigenous peoples who consider them holy. The planet itself may exude numinosity for those who consider it “Mother Earth”. The *numinosum*, thus, takes multiple forms in images that inspire awe—images that may be personifications of archetypes, the formative principles in the collective unconscious that are set by energetic laws which function in the psyche in the same ways that they function in the physical world.

18.3 The Nature of the Soul in Sufism

The Arabic word for Sufism, used by Muslims to describe the spiritual path of knowing and being, is *tasawwuf*. Sufi wisdom (which is referred to as *al-hikmat*) is the divine wisdom that a seeker (*mūrad*) aims to achieve after being initiated by a spiritual master (*murshid*) on the path. This knowledge has been divided into two, namely, *al-tasawwuf al-‘ilmī* (theoretical Sufism) and *al-tasawwuf al-‘amalī* (practical Sufism). Sufi teachings model the Prophet’s nocturnal ascension (*al-mi’rāj*)—the night journey where the Prophet was taken by the archangel Gabriel to the highest degree of God’s manifestation and his descent back to the human world. Therefore, Sufism is concerned not only with *knowing* God in the Heavens but also *being* with God’s commands on Earth. The Sufi way of spiritual development is a psychological move from the outer everyday physical reality to the inner divine one. Sufis theorize energetic laws using the Qur’anic idea of *fitrah*, which is used by Sufi sages to denote the nature of the psyche or soul. In Sufi metaphysics, angels and *jinn*s

correspond to creatures of the spirit and body, respectively. They are conceived in the mind and are invisible to physical eyes. The human ego-self can experience both directly because of its ontological position in the middle of both types of energies. In Islamic gnosis, the soul (*al-nafs*) is trapped between the spirit (*al-ruh*) and the body (*al-jism*). It can not only think and feel but also sense and intuit, which allows it to unite the inner and outer realities. In other words, *al-nafs* is the experiencer, experiencing itself as it moves through higher and lower energetic states of knowing and being. Self-understanding, thus, requires one to unite body and mind, bringing human consciousness closer to the divine realm. In this way, the totality of the psyche can convey both spiritual and embodied principles of the soul.

This is different from the dualistic or Cartesian view of the self, which positions the mind as a separate entity (*res cogitans*) from the body or extended reality (*res extensa*). For both Jung and Ibn ‘Arabi, the image of God is not a different reality cut off from human consciousness, but rather a representation of the bi-unity of the soul (Corbin, 1969; Edinger, 1972; Izutsu, 1984; Chittick, 1998) which reflects the components of *tawhid*, or the Oneness of God, within Jungian psychology. Sufis often use the Qur’anic concept of death and rebirth metaphorically to show the psyche’s natural processes: its resurrection, development, or transformation. Despite going through these differentiating processes or stages in the physical world of phenomenal reality, the psyche’s *essential* nature, the spiritual reality, remains unchanged. It retains its divine purity throughout its life and death.

For Sufis, this innate and undifferentiated nature of the soul is the sacred potential of the psyche, the divine within. In the Islamic sense, it is God’s power (*qudrah*) in the human being as *fitrah* given to Adam, the original man (*Anthropos*; Corbin, 1969). The Qur’an (2:31) states that God taught Adam all His Names (Chittick, 2000), which implies that God’s knowledge multiplies in the human soul. This movement of the spirit to the body is the starting point of all suffering and agony, because in the knowledge given to human beings, there is a conscious moral dilemma of good and evil. The spiritual *qudrah* is born in the human soul as the bodily *fitrah*. The soul desires this body (*jism e nafs*), but also calls human beings to the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God, providing an inborn religious instinct to return to its spiritual roots. In Sufism, the nature of the soul (*al fitrat al nafs*), therefore, necessarily holds a memory, a habitual tension between spirit and body.

18.4 Comparing Sufi and Jungian Conceptualizations

In comparing the Sufi model of *fitrah* with Jung’s model of the psyche, we can envision the outer ego-conscious aspect of the psyche to be the soul in a weaker energy state, while the stronger unconscious aspect of the psyche is akin to the soul in its inner spiritual state. The unconscious *fitrah* encourages bodily instincts and Freudian sexual impulses to disturb the intellectual mind away from its spiritual affinity, pulling spirituality down to the unconscious level when unconscious forces have more energy than the ego-consciousness. When this happens too much, the

spiritual *fitrah* compensates to bring balance to the psyche, manifesting its subtle shaded images, revealing its own desires in dreams, visions of angels, or producing religious nostalgia. On the other hand, when the soul is spiritualized too much in the pursuit of intellectual or religious endeavor, the neglected darker shades of bodily desires emerge, often with a powerful force to balance the mind. The key in both Jungian psychology and Sufism is to make the unconscious contents conscious by going into the inner world, by realizing ego delimitations, and experiencing the nondelimited *numinosum*. This way the psyche is altered and expands via self-analysis or knowing of the self.

In Islamic literature, self-knowledge is the journey of the soul to knowing the human-God relationship, which has been discussed for centuries connecting Sufi teachings with ancient philosophies such as Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, Gnosticism, Alchemy, and Astrology. Muslim philosophers in the Persian and Arab world wrote a great deal about the journey of the soul. They described different methods of healing the psyche by way of spiritual alignment, and to this day, modern interpreters such as the perennial philosophers continue to investigate various psychic states connecting religious traditions (see Sotillos, 2013). But Sufism is unique in a way that it focuses on unification with the essential nature of the psyche, the divine attributes within. Egyptian Jungian psychologist, Mohammed Shaalan, defines Sufism as an understanding of reality through Islam of what is essentially the universal mystical essence of all religions (Spiegelman et al., 1991). The word “mystical” here implies becoming one with God. However, for Ibn ‘Arabi, this would be a misleading definition. Instead, Ibn ‘Arabi would define mysticism as *knowing one’s self by being* in the presence of the divine secrets. Knowing and being are thus two different but interrelated constructs. They deal with the dynamics of our epistemologies and ontologies. Our existence itself speaks to our being. What we know affects our behavior. Knowing, thus, is about *becoming*. This knowing and then becoming is mirrored in Jung’s concept of the process of individuation. Becoming individuated or in-divisible is about becoming whole through the knowledge of one’s self or the totality of the psyche. It is a process by which the ego-consciousness approaches the numinous unconscious, and/or vice versa.

As Sufism is rooted in the Qur’an, the self or soul (*al-nafs*) is divided into many levels: for example, *nafs al-ammārah*, *nafs al-lawwāmah*, *nafs al-mutmaina*, *nafs al-riḍiyah*, and *nafs al-kāmilah*, in a hierarchical manner. Although there is no restriction to the number of levels of the soul in Islam, these particular ones are the most commonly known. From outer to inner or from body to spirit, these levels contain archetypal forces that provide meaning to suffering in the world. They lead the ego to spiritual realization. In Jungian psychology, bringing these inner meanings up to the conscious level is also personified through hierarchical levels from lower animal instincts to the higher moral instincts, and ascending further to spiritual attainment, spiritual contentment, and finally, to complete conscious being. This is the soul’s journey. These inner forces of the human soul, which Jung calls archetypes, derive their existence from the deeper divine spirit (*himmā*) within the human psyche. In the same way as Jungian analysis, Sufi rituals entail confronting these forces, starting with the “shadow”, the unwanted material traits. Sufis purge (*tazkiyat*

an-nafs) and recognize ego desires (*taqliyyat as-sirr*) espoused by the dark nature or instinctual *fīrah* of the soul. In their spiritual practice, they reprogram their ego-defenses by identifying habitual patterns and reorienting the egoic interests using the inner eye (*'ayn al basira*) of the soul.

18.4.1 *Wahādat al Wujūd and the Jungian Process of Individuation*

In Sufism, divine attributes are reflected in human beings and may be known by refining the soul. This knowledge is *al 'irfān or m'arifa*. It is a monotheistic framework of *Wahādat al Wujūd*, which for Ibn 'Arabi, contains two opposing poles of Being: (1) *Al-Tawhīd* or Oneness of God, which Ibn 'Arabi preferred calling *Al-Haqq* or the Real, and (2) God's multiple Divine Names or God's manifestations in the world in which and by which human beings experience their present reality and move forward onto the spiritual path to seek nearness to the Real.

According to Jungian psychology, religious theologians who are concerned with dogmas and observance of religious doctrines have an extroverted attitude. Their aim is chiefly to achieve salvation, and so they look for the spirit of God *outside* themselves in the physical cosmos. An introverted orientation turns to the inner self to experience the spirit of God-*image*. Similarly, Sufism emphasizes both the exterior (*zāhir*) and interior (*bātin*) aspects of the spiritual path. The former is a broader path focusing on the *shariah*, or orthodox Islamic Law. The latter is a narrow path preferred by the heterodox mystics, which leads them inward to redeem the divine within. In this narrow path, the focus on the ego, the "I" principle is cleansed by "killing" the shadow (*fanā*) so that the soul may reunite with the Divine (Corbin, 2014). The ultimate goal for a mystic is thus to transcend the prison of personal individuality and become subsumed within the eternal presence of God who alone is the Real.

Ibn 'Arabi's concept of *Wahādat al Wujūd* can be understood as Jung's notion of the psyche becoming whole or individuated. The psyche is the domain where all experiences, inner and outer, spiritual and corporeal, are perceived. Human psyches for Jung are the collective containers of all the images experienced in the past, their symbolic meanings, universal ideas, and archetypal forms, which take part in the individuation process. For Ibn 'Arabi, this corresponds to the imaginal, where the knowledge of God's Names takes place and cultivated toward the spiritual path of an *'arif* (the knower). Using Jungian psychology, we can symbolically interpret that the Names of God are to Ibn 'Arabi what the archetypal images in the psyche are to Jung. Although the transcendent or metaphysical God, Allah, in Islam has no image, and cannot be known, all of His manifestations belong to His Names, which human beings can imagine in the imaginal field (*alam al mithal* or Barzakh). We can say that God's Names act as images to our knowing (*ilm*). They are living symbols, or signs (*ayat ullah*) to our minds and hearts as evidence of God's existence. This is not a

fantasy (*wahm*). On the contrary, the entire cosmos is witnessed by relating in this way with God (*tashbih*). For Muslims, in fact, God's creation and everything in it, is an *ayah*, a sign of His Presence that glorifies Him. For He is, in the Qur'an, the All-Merciful (*Al-Rehmān*), All-Compassionate (*Al-Rahīm*), the Owner (*Al-Mālik*) and Lord (*Al-Rabb*) of the worlds (*alamīn*). However, He is also the Abaser or the Remover (*Al-Muzil*), the Inflictor of Death (*Al-Mumeet*), and the Preventer or Withholder (*Al-Maani*). In Islam, and thus in Sufism, all the Names of God symbolize the Absolute Reality of God in the knowing of His Names. As soon as we say the word "symbol", we have an image, and as soon as we have an "image", we have human "psych-ology", which means an understanding (*logos*) of the psyche, the domain of image-making, or soul-making.

18.4.2 *Divine Reality and Psychic Reality: "No God but God"*

The term "islam" has many meanings or images. The root word "*s-l-m*" is deeply related to the concept of wholeness, which in Sufi psychology, symbolizes submission of the ego-self to the Will of God. In that submission, a Muslim must verbally acknowledge the Absolute Reality of God through the formulaic declaration of the *shahadah* (witnessing): "There is no god, but God" (Murata & Chittick, 1994). For Ibn 'Arabi, the key to understanding the metaphysical *and* phenomenological reality of God is in this formula. Exegetically, mystic philosophers interpret the first part of this formula as a negation ("no god") and the second, as affirmation ("but God"). Sufi sages interpret *no god* to be the unreal that is to be annihilated (*fanā*) through God, who is the Real Being alone, *but God* (*baqā*). In the Jungian sense, the *God-image* is turned upside down where *no god* in the formula above can be associated with the hidden or misunderstood God, who remains a mystery in the unconscious per se, and the second part, *but God*, is a self-revealing God that comes into human consciousness as the manifestation of the Real. This inverse approach toward a divine reality acknowledges that the psychic reality of our world is not independent or detached from The Real. The *God-image* is reflected as if the human soul is a mirror. According to Izutsu (1984), "in between these two [*no God* and *but God*] is situated a particular region in which things 'may rightly be said to exist and not to exist', i.e., the world of the permanent archetypes, which is totally inaccessible to the mind of an ordinary man but perfectly accessible to the ecstatic mind of a mystic" (p. 48). From a Jungian perspective, therefore, archetypes have two sides: one facing God's light, the Absolute Being, and the other facing nonexistence.

18.4.3 *Archetypes (A'yan Thabita)*

According to Jung, archetypes are formative principles of the psyche. They are universal images reflecting their patterns in the conscious world as they emerge from

the collective unconscious. The conscious psyche is the medium through which archetypes display their existence and non-existence, their goodness and evil. Because they reside in the unconscious, or the unknown realm, their existence enters human consciousness directly when meanings enter through symbols, stories, art, myths, and religion. Archetypes actualize their potential in events such as birth, death, marriage, and through personified figures such as the hero, the devil, anima, animus, or the trickster, to name a few. Archetypes for Ibn ‘Arabi, *a’yan thabita*, represent all the possibilities of creation as determined by God. They are immutable entities in nonexistence. Archetypes are things latent in the Godhead without physical form. Creation is given form by God when He speaks to it, “‘Be’, and it is” (Qur’an, 2:117). Metaphysically we can say that God’s knowing of things comes before they exist in the world. In other words, even though they do not have existence, they are in God’s knowledge, in the nonexistent reality from the perspective of the creatures. The word “Be” thus holds archetypal meaning, the eternal ideas of God’s knowledge (*loh-e-mehfooz*). He gives form to the universe. Nonexistence becomes existence just as the unconscious becomes consciousness in Jungian understanding. The human psyche is thus like a mini cosmos where ideas are given existence by archetypes.

Like Jung’s archetypes within the human microcosm, *a’yan thabita* for Ibn ‘Arabi are a prototype of every created thing in the macrocosm. Psychologically, ideas in the mind are produced and crystallized by archetypes in this way, which for Ibn ‘Arabi are none other than God’s speech and the attributes of His Names, which “He taught Adam” (Qur’an, 2:31). That is why, in Sufism, the practice of invocation or remembering (*dhikr*) God’s Names is the fundamental sacred act of worship. By remembering God’s Names, Sufis archetypally reach the Divine Realm. However, the Names of God for Sufis have a dual aspect to them: the hidden (*bātin*) and the revealed (*zāhir*). Because God’s Names are infinite in their power, the psyche is only able to contain them as symbols. Although the Names are revealed to humankind, they remain always with God and belong only to God. This hidden aspect of God (pure Light, pure Spirit, the Absolute, or *tanzih*) can never be described (Chittick, 1998). For Jung, this aspect is the underlying reality of the imperceptible unconscious which is reflected in the psyche as much as humanly possible as the *imago dei* (God-image), an archetype which for Jung holds infinite possibilities of human experiences. It is the archetype of the Spirit, which is the all-encompassing archetype. It is the Self, or the archetype of meaning. It is God’s light within the human kernel that reveals itself to human consciousness through spiritual work. For Ibn ‘Arabi, it is the potential image of The Real which manifests itself as self-disclosure of God (*tashbih*). For “wherever you turn, there is the Face of God,” says the Qur’an (2:115). Thus, the world of permanent archetypes in Jung’s notion of the collective unconscious and Ibn ‘Arabi’s notion of *a’yan thabita* can be said to be the same reality from where all archetypes of humanity originate, a reality that has both positive and negative attributes.

18.4.4 *The Archetypal Path*

According to Ibn ‘Arabi’s metaphysics, the Divine Descent is in God’s word “Be”, through which the entirety of creation is realized. He describes this in several stages where God in His emanation from His isolated Oneness manifests Himself in multiplicity to Himself. This is called the Arc of Creation, or the Arc of Descent, which is depicted by the act of differentiation or separation. This arc or horn-like image symbolizes the first half of the soul’s journey from birth to the midlife crisis in Jung’s psychology. The second half of the soul’s journey is symbolized by the Arc of Ascent back to its original source as the soul returns to its Creator by doing beautiful work (*ihsan*). The Arc of Ascent represents the return of our earthly existence to the tip of the horn image, which is the point of Being, the Real Existence. According to most scholars who have studied Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings, this is the basic structure of the sheikh’s metaphysical vision of cosmic imagination and love (Fazeli, 2012; Faali, 2014).

We see a similar model of the soul’s journey in Jungian psychology; but here, the cosmos is inverted. Instead of going upward in its return to God, the differentiated soul or consciousness goes *down* into the depths of the human psyche, back to its undifferentiated self, seeking to reunite with the unconscious light through self-analysis. Here, the image of God is envisioned by the conscious psyche introvertedly because the divine spark or the original Adam or *Anthropos* in the gnostic sense, is embedded within the human unconscious, and the work of the philosopher-mystic is to render the unconscious into consciousness using alchemical operations of purification (for more information, see Jung’s “Religious Ideas in Alchemy,” 1937/1968). The direction of this movement of the soul illustrates the subtle difference between Jung’s psychology and Sufi metaphysics. For Jung, instead of descending from the Heaven above, human consciousness emerges from the depths of the unconscious psyche—that is to say, from the body. Therefore, naturally it should return to the body. However, the conceptualization of the soul’s journey is similar to the Sufi notion of existence emerging from nonexistence (a hidden realm unknown to living creatures and to which only God has access)—what Jung calls the unconscious. As the container of all knowledge, past, present, and future, the collective unconscious is the “universal mind” or the “supra-conscious”. Jungian psychologists envision this through the image of a mandala (or circle) which is used to convey the outer/inner directionality and the dual nature of the ego/supra-ego dynamic. We can compare this directionality with the Arc of Descent and Arc of Ascent in Sufi terminology (Fig. 18.2).

Like Sufi gnostics, Jung saw the God-*image* symbolized by the center of the mandala, which represents the archetype of the Self. This psychic center, for Sufi metaphysicians such as Ibn ‘Arabi, represents the undifferentiated divine psychic cloud where the knowledge of all things (i.e. “God’s Names”) belongs solely to God. For Jungians, this is the domain of the trans-psyche pleroma, where there is no inner and no outer because at this center point; there is no human-God relationship. According to von Franz (1980), the regulatory processes of the psyche are controlled

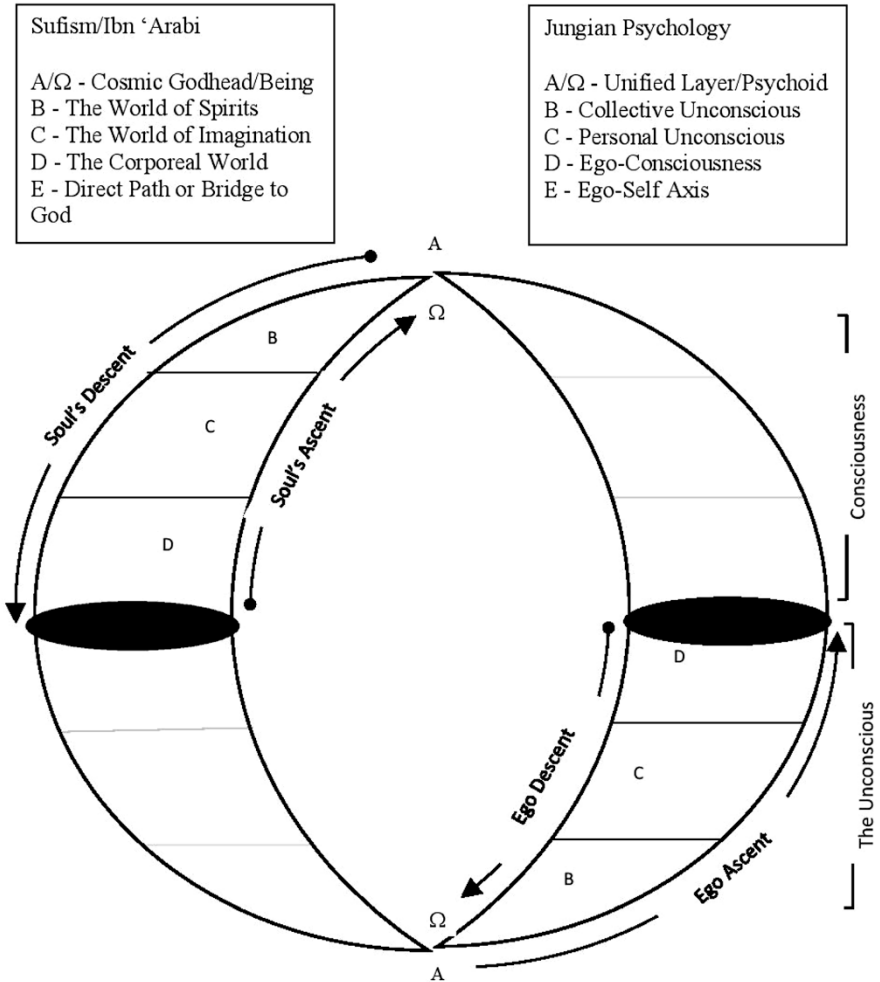


Fig. 18.2 The arc of the cosmos and psyche

by the Self-archetype, which lies at the center of the collective unconscious and is independent of and far away from ego-consciousness and human will. For Ibn ‘Arabi, this definition of the Self-archetype is akin to the Islamic principle of *tanzih*, God’s transcendent distance from humanity. As can be seen in Fig. 18.2, Sufis represents *tanzih* in the mandala by a multitude of concentric circles that symbolize different worlds—physical world, imaginal world, spiritual world—each with God at the center. Some spiritual circles may come closer to God, while others are farther away; and even though all worlds have God at their center as the sustainer, they can never reach that center, because of their inherent incomparability with God.

Tanzih represents one of the two dichotomous poles that attempt to capture the nature of the human-God relationship, the other pole being *tashbih*, where humans

are endowed with the attributes of God. In Sufism, it is imperative to understand both concepts which are referenced in the Qur'an. *Tanzih* appears in verses such as "Nothing is like Him" (Qur'an 42:11), and "Glory be to God, the Lord of Inaccessibility" (Qur'an 37:180). Similarly, *tashbih* is reflected in verses such as "To God belong the East and the West; wherever you turn, there is the Face of God; God is All-Embracing, All-Knowing" (Qur'an 2:115); "And indeed We have created man, and We know whatever thoughts his inner self develops, and We are closer to him than his jugular vein" (Qur'an 50:16). *Tashbih* is symbolized in the mandala circle by an infinite number of radii extending outward from the center to the circumference (Fig. 18.3). We can say that a spiritual traveler therefore works on this path from the circumference to the center to reach the divine light directly. Each radius is a potential path on which a human soul gains its own understanding of reality.

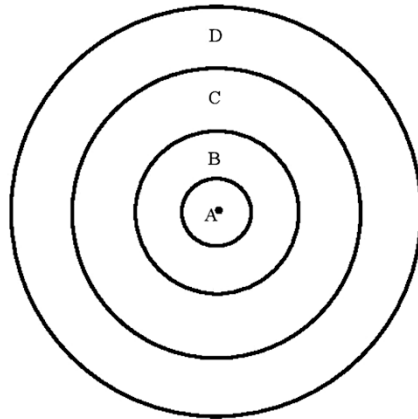
Connecting Ibn 'Arabi's ideas to Jungian psychology, the metaphysical *tanzih* and the cosmic *tashbih* are the totality of the human psyche where the former symbolizes God's transcended Self, and the latter represents His Names as the psychic realities of the collective unconscious and archetypal consciousness. Jung symbolizes the nature of the Self as being everywhere in the mandala image. Inasmuch as it is the center point of the spherical psyche, the Self for Jung is the entire image. Jung is not concerned with the metaphysical God, though we can see the individuation process follows a similar path to that which is described by Ibn 'Arabi, namely, the tension between the two modes of knowing God, *tashbih* and *tanzih*. What for Jung is the emergence of the ego by separating from the unconscious as the psyche develops in the first half of life, for Ibn 'Arabi, is the Arc of Descent, where the ego becomes separated and inflated from its original state of wholeness. The separated ego, in the second half of life, or the Arc of Ascent in Ibn 'Arabi's model, attempts to return to its original state through the process of active self-realization and self-cultivation. The individuation process, therefore, results in the tension between consciousness and the unconscious. This tension is a struggle (*jihad*) in Islam, which in Jungian psychology results in the inevitable suffering of the psyche during the process of individuation.

Unfortunately, many Islamic schools of thought and sects emphasize one facet over the other, which renders one-sided belief systems. By stressing *tanzih* alone, Islamic fundamentalists, for example, emphasize external aspects of religion, while the image of "drunken" Sufi mystics illustrates a lopsided leaning toward *tashbih*. Instead, Jung and Ibn 'Arabi advocate for a psychological and spiritual realization that highlights both perspectives of the human-God relationship simultaneously. Balance is needed for a healthy psychic life. In Sufi psychology, the human soul strives to gain knowledge of God's Mercy and His Wrath. The focal point of being separated from the divine root is not to attain individualism by the ego, but to realize human connection to the divine root via archetypal meaning in suffering. What Sufis call spirituality is in Jung's psychology the goal of the individuation process. It is to achieve a conscious relation to the unconscious Self, which, as an archetype, contains both positive and negative, or light and dark. The process of integrating with goodness has been the goal of Sufi mystics throughout history, but not by ignoring the evil or dark aspect of the Self. Similarly, the individuation process in

Sufism
A - Cosmic Godhead/Being
B - The World of Spirits
C - The World of Imagination
D - The Corporeal World
E - Direct Path or Bridge to God

Jungian Psychology
A - Unified Layer/Psychoid
B - Collective Unconscious
C - Personal Unconscious
D - Ego-Consciousness
E - Ego-Self Axis

Tanzih



Tashbih

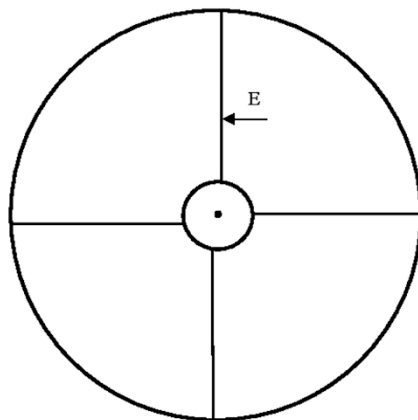


Fig. 18.3 *Tanzih* and *Tashbih* conceptualized in the mandala image

Jungian psychology does not result in an entity separated from others, but one that is integrated and connected with the human spirit and evil.

A Deeper Dive: Three Ways of Knowing

Mansoor H. Abidi

The scholarly work of Henry Corbin (d. 1978) is important to the study of depth psychology and Sufism. Corbin met Jung in 1949 at the Eranos conference in Switzerland. They maintained a professional relationship until Jung's death in 1961 (Cheetham, 2012; Kingsley, 2018). In Istanbul from 1939 to 1946, Corbin studied the writings of Shahāb ad-Dīn Yahya Suhrawardi (d. 1191). He also turned to the philosophical work of Ibn Sina (d. 1037) and metaphysics of Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1240), which led him to Ismailism and the Shi'a gnosis of prophetology, angelology, and Imamology (especially the doctrine of the Hidden Imam in Twelver Shi'ism²—which for Corbin corresponds with the gnostic Christ or C. G. Jung's postulate of the Self). As a phenomenologist, Corbin (2006) realized that Sufis (the "people of *turuq*", or those who organized congregational orders) faced difficulties from Sunni theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and Shi'a theosophists. While they practiced Islamic legal injunctions such as worship in the form of prayer (*salah*, *dhikr*) and fasting, Sufi orders (*tarīqah*) traced their spiritual lineage (*silsila*, meaning "chain", referring to the line of succession in Sufi orders) back to the Shi'a Imams.

Although many Muslim philosophers attempted to address Sunni and Shi'a understanding of *walayah* (guardianship and the esoteric aspect of prophecy), Corbin (1986) was particularly interested in the work of Haydar Amuli (d. 1385), one of the few Shi'a Sufi masters who addressed *walayah* from a psycho-spiritual perspective. Supported by the Qur'an and *hadith*, Amuli (1989) explained the relationship between people of *shariah* (law or canon), people of *tarīqah* (way or path), and people of *haqīqah* (truth). For Amuli, *shariah* affirms the Prophet's actions and behavior; *tariqa* is the realization of the Prophet's deeds, his ethical intentions, and the methods behind his actions; and *haqīqah* is witnessing the Prophet's revealed spiritual station and his closeness with God. Corbin (1986, 2006) recognized that Amuli's three levels

(continued)

²Twelver Shi'ism is the most common form of Shi'ism today, and focuses on the spiritual and political succession of the 12 Imams, beginning with Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, who are believed to be divinely ordained to lead the Muslim ummah, or community. According to Twelvers, the final imam in this chain is the twelfth imam who disappeared in the ninth century. This "Hidden Imam" is the Rightly Guided One (*mahdi*) and is expected to return to begin the processes associated with the final days on earth (when Jesus is also expected to return) and the Day of Judgment (Newman, 2019).

are not different in origin, but rather, are aspects of one reality, *haqīqah Muhammadiyah* or Muhammadan reality. This reality is like a pleroma expanded in existence and in time as the Muhammadan period until the appearance of the Hidden Imam, the Seal of the *walayah*. These categories (*shariah*, *tariqah*, and *haqīqah*) correspond respectively to the psychological discussion of corporeal, imaginal, and spiritual worlds depicted in Fig. 18.2.

18.5 Conclusion

Derīn's (2009) monograph provides insight into Jungian psychology as a Sufi experience:

Jung using his knowledge of psychology shows us the way of feeling God in ourselves: "God is a Passion which mankind must treat." Thus, the ardent desire of the creature, inborn within him, to know himself and his Lord, and the ardent desire of God, eternally latent within Him, to know Himself as His creation is the divine love between the one of multiplicity and the one of singularity (p. 113).

Although Jung never claimed to be a metaphysician, only a psychologist who realized the light and dark aspects of the human soul, his theoretical framework of individuation closely parallels the religious elements described by Sufism. As Nagy (1991) points out, Jung's philosophical approach "defends religious truths from the reductionist conclusions of scientists" (p. 265). Understanding Western and Eastern wisdom traditions with their sacred expression of reality, the exoteric *and* the esoteric, provides us with a language of discourse to examine principles such as the duality of good and evil from a psychological lens. In this way, I believe, we can illustrate the similarities that exist across faith systems and psychologies.

Certainly, a dogmatic purview of religion may declare Ibn Arabi's theories to be outright heretical and pantheistic, in the same manner that a rigid view of social science can dismiss Jung's work as "occult science" or "pagan cosmology"; but from an esoteric perspective, the similarities between their conceptualizations of the soul's journey are undeniable. Integrating the Sufi concept of self-knowledge with Jung's notion of the individuation processes provides a bridge across Islamic teachings and Western traditions. This is exemplified by some Sufi circles where Jung is considered a mystic and through the esteem in which Jungian scholars hold Ibn 'Arabi's psychological perspective (Nouriani, 2017). As the newest wave of psychologies focuses on balancing the duality of nature inherent in human experience, by connecting esoteric expression of Sufism with the language of Jungian psychology, we add to the discourse a meaningful exploration of the journey and struggle of the psyche, while providing a glimpse into the vastness of the Sufi body of knowledge where the wisdom deep within human beings can be tasted by understanding the spiritual path.

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