Early Muslim Scholars' Conceptions of Character Development and Contemporary Applications in Mental Health and Well-Being

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Well-being, as a comprehensive phenomenon related to an individual's emotional response and life satisfaction, has a vital importance for human beings today. Contemporary perspectives, such as the domain of positive psychology, have shifted from a pathology-oriented perception of well-being and have made efforts to include psychological and spiritual aspects in the picture. The aim of these modern approaches is to activate mechanisms of change and build positive qualities within a person. Similarly, the Islamic tradition has long emphasized the importance of physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being, with the spiritual dimension at the center of the purpose of personal development. Both modern psychological and Islamic theological perspectives consider character development as essential for increasing well-being. While modern psychology uses character development only as a tool to achieve self-actualization, an Islamic perspective includes, within the concept of self-actualization, the notions and objectives of purification from the evils of the world and the self and attaining the pleasure of God. Islamic scholars in the classical period emphasized the importance of keeping a balance between good and bad character traits within the conception of human well-being. This chapter will discuss the mechanisms and approaches to character development suggested by early Muslim scholars, such as Abu Zayd al-Balkhi (9th century), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (112th1th century), Al-Razi (13th9th century), and Birgivi (16th16th century), as well as discuss possible contemporary applications in the light of modern psychological studies. It will put forth strategies for Islamically informed character development and their potential for implementation within Islamically-integrated psychotherapy and well-being counseling within contemporary contexts.

Introduction

Muslim scholars going back to the 8th century wrote about *ʿilm an nafs* (in Arabic, the study or science of the soul), which engaged the Greek philosophical discourse and definition of virtue

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doi: 10.3998/jmmh.6027

ethics or moral psychology but was informed and guided by their knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah as the criterion. Muslim philosophers' approach to psychology (the study of the soul or *ilm an-nafs*) was not only focused on the philosophical discourse about the anatomy of the soul or defining the Islamic view of virtue ethics, but they were also equally invested in applied moral psychology and character development (al-Ghazali, 2015; Miskawayh, 1967).

Whereas the topic of morality within the field of philosophy tends to be concerned with defining right and wrong, within psychology the focus of morality tends to be concerned with how people make moral decisions and how this impacts a person's psychological development (Lapsley, 1996). Thus, for the purposes of this discussion, we are defining "moral psychology" as the study of the human processes of putting morality and ethics into action, and "character development" as the development of practical frameworks, cognitive constructs, and behaviors that can be utilized by a person to impact their psychological health and psycho-spiritual well-being.

In classical Muslim thought, health and well-being were a holistic endeavor, not an allopathic one that treated only the body and physical ailments. Islamic medicine involved an integration of body, mind, and spirit, whereas virtue ethics played just as central a role in the healing of an individual, as did balancing the humors of the body or purifying the blood (al-Balkhi & Badri, 2013). The Islamic approach to bringing the human being into health and wholeness has to do with purification of the body, the self/soul (al-*nafs*), and the metaphysical heart (*qalb*). Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī(d. 1111 CE),a Muslim scholar, theologist, and critic of philosophy, referred to vices as *threatening* (*muhlikāt*) diseases of the heart and virtues as *saving* (*munjiyāt*) cures of the heart. The classical Islamic literature constitutes a vast resource that details methods for healing the heart and soul by actively engaging with practical frameworks such as *riyadat al nafs* (disciplining the self), *tazkiyat al nafs* (purification of the self), and *tahdhib al akhlaq* (refinement of character). It is these traditional frameworks and related practices that the authors are hereby referring to as applied moral psychology, with an emphasis on character development.

This chapter will explore the unique contributions made by Muslim scholars in the classical period in outlining a roadmap for character development within the treatment of health and wellness, and how recent developments in the emerging field of Islamic psychology have begun to incorporate those insights into modern approaches to applied psychology and psychotherapy. The authors will present a comparative analysis of classical Muslim scholars' contributions to character development and contemporary contributions in the field of positive psychology. We will then present recommendations for the development of approaches that integrate concepts and techniques from the early Muslim scholars, considering their ability to meet the needs of current circumstances. Additionally, we will make recommendations for the development of the field of Islamic psychology in the further evolution of character development and well-being.

Early Muslim Scholars' Contributions to Character Development

Character development is concerned with morals and virtue acquisition and how they play a part in the way human beings interact with themselves and the world around them. Psychology is an instrumental aspect of how ethics are applied by people, based on their relative state of being, from which emerges the expression of virtues (Breggin, 1971). This involves a transformation within the psyche or soul of the human being, based on individual effort and striving, to change what is within oneself. For some philosophers, this is about cognitive and behavioral shifts, while others assert that the primary locus of transformation is spiritual and lies in the relative purification of the soul (Mohamed, 2006). Thus, a philosopher's epistemological and

ontological framework influences how they make sense of and define the soul and its nature. This is where a divergence from pre-Islamic philosophies of ethics becomes inherently warranted in the attempts of Muslim scholars to develop an Islamic framework for moral psychology within the Islamic paradigm. Whereas pre-Islamic philosophers, such as the Greeks, were oriented toward a metaphysical view of the soul, the paradigm which defined their view differed from that of an Islamic ontological paradigm.

Between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, Greek thought had a major influence on Muslim philosophers' writings and conceptualizations of moral psychology. For some, like al-Kindī (d.259/873), al-Fārābī (d.340/951), and Ibn Sīnā (d.428/1037), Greek philosophy was the foundation of their perspectives, with some significant differences. Others, like al-Isfahānī (d.502/1108) and al-Ghazālī (d.510/1111), while still largely incorporating those earlier non-Muslim sources, did so more cautiously and critically, with an attempt to develop more overtly and uniquely Islamic perspectives based on revealed sources (Qur'an and Hadith). Still, most of the early Muslim scholars, from Ibn Miskawayh (d.421/1030) to al-Ghazālī, appropriated the Greek paradigm of the tripartite division of the soul: rational (*ʿaqliyah*), concupiscent (*shahwiyyah*), and irascible faculties (*ghadabiyah*). They also adopted the four cardinal virtues: temperance (*ʿiffah*), courage (*shaja'ah*), wisdom (*ḥikmah*), and justice (*ʿadalah*) (Mohamed, 2006). This framework defines moral psychology as the dynamic relationship between these divisions in the soul and their relative balance of character, which leads to vices and virtues. Where Muslim philosophers mainly diverged from this paradigm was not necessarily in the method but in the classification, additions of sub-virtues, and the end point being focused on the Hereafter (*ākhirah*) rather than worldly achievement. Thus, much of the similarities can be found in virtue ethics, which is concerned mostly with character development through habit. The differences appear more clearly in metaphysical ethics and esoteric ethics, where the character development is not separate from the end goal of the state of the human being in the Hereafter (Kukkonen, 2016; Mohamed, 2006).

Much of pre-Islamic ethics was centralized around the development of character (Adamson, 2011, 2014; Galen, 2014; Gutas, 1990). Following this trend, many works in Arabic were later produced with titles such as *The Refinement of Character* (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq)* (Ibn ʿAdī, 2002; Ibn Miskawayh, 1967). At face value, it can appear as though Muslim scholars' focus and treatment of character development is wholly similar to that of the Greek tradition; however, there is a spiritual dimension to the development of character that holds a deeper significance for Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said, "I have been sent to perfect good character," (Bukhari, hadith 273) and his wife Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) is reported to have said, "The character of the Prophet was the Qur'an" (Muslim, hadith 746). The meaning that the scholars derive from this is that the Islamic theological paradigm can and is meant to be embodied through diligent striving to emulate both the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) inner and outer conduct, not just by mimicking action, but by transforming one's inner soul or heart.

Ibn Rushd (d. 594/1198), a Muslim polymath most famous for his works in philosophy, theology, and medicine, drew a distinction between exoteric ethics, being that of jurisprudence, and esoteric ethics, being that of the soul (Ibn Rushd, 1961). Al-Isfahānī, who was a Muslim historian and musicologist, took a similar approach but further asserted that they are not mutually exclusive. He argued that by cultivating the virtues of the soul, the human being can transcend mere self-actualization, as defined by worldly measures of good and bad behavior, and realize its ultimate potential as vicegerent (*khalifah*) of God (Mohamed, 2006). Thus, the focus of character development is on the state of the soul in its spiritual station with God and its ultimate end in the life beyond this life.

Other Muslim scholars contributed parallel sets of strategies for developing character, even setting out various avenues and specific steps. In Book 38 of the *Ihyā ʿUlūm al-Dīn,* Al-Ghazālī outlines six distinct steps for self-purification: *mushāraṭah* (making a contract with oneself to meet set goals), *murāqabah* (self- monitoring), *muḥāsabah* (self-examination; taking oneself in account), *muʿāqabah* (self-penalization; implementing consequences for breaking the self-contract), *mujāhadah* (self-struggle; working diligently to overcome evil inclinations), and *muʿātabah* (self-admonition or re-committing to upholding the contract) (Al-Ghazali, 2015). While this is an individual strategy that one can employ within their own effort, Al-Ghazālī (2014) also asserted the need for external guidance in the form of a mentor or sound companion. Al-Ghazālī's approach, influenced by predecessors al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) (Böwering, 1980) and al-Makkī (d. 386/996) (Yazaki, 2013), as well as his contemporary al-Iṣfahānī, moved the former focus of ethical inquiry from formal theology towards a science of the soul (*'ilm al nafs*) (Gianotti, 2011).

Contemporary Approaches to Character Development and Well-Being

The American Psychological Association (2022) defines character development as "gradual development of moral concepts, conscience, religious values or views, and social attitudes as an essential aspect of personality development." As a contemporary theory that has emerged with a critical perspective in recent years, positive psychology is an approach that deals with virtue and the power of the mind to change one's state. Seligman (1999, p. 559) defines positive psychology as "a reoriented science that emphasizes the understanding and building of the most positive qualities of an individual." This model bears traces of an Aristotelian approach, and at the same time reflects a humanist and existentialist understanding that focuses on the importance of meaning-making and life purpose (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The aim of positive psychology regarding character development is bringing about a change to build positive qualities instead of the pathology-oriented perception of psychology, as well as increasing positive experiences to reach life satisfaction (Seligman et al., 2005).

According to positive psychology, character strengths, such as positive personal characteristics (Peterson, 2006), are essential means for building positive qualities and achieving life satisfaction. Character strengths are also psychological processes and structures that define and determine universal virtues, and are original ways of demonstrating virtues (Kabakçı, 2016). Although character strengths are conceptually similar to personality traits, the fact that these attributes can be taught and developed makes them different (Shoshani & Aviv, 2012). They can also be improved through implementing social rituals, daily routines, and practices, which can increase the happiness and well-being of individuals.

Positive psychology suggests that character strengths have moral foundations that differ in different cultural contexts but that they have a universal structure (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The claim is therefore made that happiness and well-being can be achieved by developing character strengths. Positive psychology uses two contradictory definitions of happiness that are inherited from ancient Greek philosophy: hedonism and eudaimonism (Ryan & Deci, 2001). While hedonic happiness does not require any effort and, thus, is involuntary; increasing eudaimonic happiness encompasses voluntarily exercising moral virtues (Delle Fave et al., 2011). Also, Arvas (2017) said that eudaimonic happiness is "a positive mood that emerges with character strengths such as optimism, love, hope, and altruism" (p. 114). While Seligman (2002) says that happiness cannot be simply limited to a theory of pleasure, as pleasure can only be a

judgment of small moments in our lives, he distinguishes happiness, which he sees as a permanent activity, from pleasure.

Finally, since positive psychology gives importance to universality of values and positive character strengths, as is found in the Islamic tradition mentioned previously, it is possible to infer that positive psychology and the Islamic tradition are more parallel compared to other modern approaches; this is because positive psychology also emphasizes virtues, character strengths, and tries to find different answers to the questions about the meaning and purpose of life more than other contemporary approaches. Most importantly, both approaches consider character development as a medium to reach individual authentic happiness and well-being.

Critical Distinctions Between Secular and Islamic Approaches to Character Development and Well-Being

Western psychological models generally exist within a secular paradigm, where pursuit of closeness to God does not play a direct role and the treatment goal can be to get a person to function in their life despite being uncomfortable by the disequilibrium in themselves. Thus, they use character development only as a means to reaching happiness and self-actualization (Patterson, 1978). What distinguishes an Islamic model of applied ethics in this regard is that comfort and removal of symptoms is considered only a secondary result of the development goal (Rothman, 2021). Instead, treatment within an Islamic framework is primarily concerned with the development of the soul, which may include or necessitate some struggle, dysfunction, and discomfort. Hence, Islamic tradition considers character development as a means to reaching spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and attaining the pleasure of God. Likewise, positive psychology points out the importance of character strengths for attaining spirituality and transcendence (Falb & Pargament, 2014). However, the aim of spirituality is for increasing overall psychological health and well-being, unlike the Islamic tradition. Secular Western psychology models put emphasis on physical and psychological well-being and use spirituality as a peripheral goal. Yet, Islamic models put the spiritual dimension at the center of the well-being concept. Also, Western models only consider individual well-being while Islamic scholars see well-being as a multidimensional concept, which includes the social human context, as well as that of all creation. Unlike Islamic models whose ultimate aim is the hereafter, Western psychology theories primarily situate character development concepts to emphasize the importance of increasing self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth to achieve life satisfaction and happiness in this world.

The Integration of Early Muslim Scholars' Contributions to Character Development in Contemporary Islamic Psychology

With the increasing need for mental health support services as Muslim communities suffer from trauma and displacement, there has grown an increasing need for services that are not only culturally relevant but also fit within the Islamic religious framework for ethics and moral guidance. Since 2016, there has been a surge of interest in Islamic psychology, leading to numerous publications and developments (Haque et. al, 2016; Haque & Rothman, 2021), as researchers and clinicians grapple with how to build on the foundational knowledge of Islamic ethics and applied moral psychology and make it relevant to contemporary contexts and contemporary Muslims.

In the Haque et al. (2016) survey of English publications on Islamic psychology, the authors identified a lack of "development of interventions and techniques within Islamic psychology."

There has been an influx of studies from researchers and applied psychologists to develop treatment methods for use in psychotherapy. One example is Rassool's (2016) Islamic Counselling Practice, an 11-stage model that has been conceptualized for a variety of problem behaviors and intervention strategies. Rassool bases his model on the classical work of Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 1349 AD), developing stages based on concepts he deemed useful in a contemporary counseling context. The model consists of the following stages: Awakening (*Qawmah*) and intention (*Niyyah*), consultation (*Istisharah*), contemplation (*Tafakkur*), guidance-seeking (*Istikhara*), willful decision (*'Azm*), goal and route of vision (*Basirah*), absolute trust in God (*Tawakkul 'ala Allah*), action (*'Amal*), help-seeking (*Isti'aanah*), self-monitoring (*Muraqabah*), and self-evaluation (*Muhasabah*). Much of Ibn Al-Qayyim's works referenced and incorporated the practical ethics approach to purification of the soul from early Sufi (*taṣawwuf*) sources (Al-Jawziyya, 2000). Many of the words that Rassool uses for his stages (i.e., *tafakkur*, *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*) are the same used within such esoteric spiritual practices; however, Rassool appears to take a more exoteric interpretation of such concepts and their implementation. The techniques and interventions described in the Islamic Counselling Practice model (Rassool, 2016) are primarily oriented toward cognitive and behavioral change, without a significant focus on the transformation of the state of the inner heart or soul.

It appears to be common among many new developments of Islamic psychotherapy models to follow the general approach to Western counseling or psychotherapy as being focused on cognitive behavioral strategies, which embrace the definition of psychology as the study of "mental processes and behavior." While these are novel attempts to Islamize the secular conception of psychology to fit more within an Islamic framework, much of this work can amount to a "top-down" approach (Kaplick et al., 2021). These methods are still effectively influenced by the materialist paradigm and the "mind/body problem" from a Western philosophical perspective, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and do not centralize the goal of treatment in the spiritual transformation of the inner heart, as was the primary focus in traditional Islamic practical ethics.

Recent attempts in the development of Islamic psychotherapy from a "bottom-up" approach (Kaplick et al., 2021) have devised therapeutic models that go beyond cognitive-behavioral based techniques, attempting to include the state of the heart in the application of traditional Islamic practices of purification, as explored by al-Ghazālī and others. Khalil Center, a well-established clinic with multiple locations in North America and Türkiye that has been serving the Muslim community for many years, has recently published a book outlining their model of Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy (TIIP) (Keshavarzi et al., 2020). The authors provide the foundations of Islamic psychology from the early Muslim scholars and present ways in which they have taken that knowledge and devised therapeutic modalities and strategies for the modern clinical setting. Among these, for example, is the use of al-Ghazālī's *6 M's* (*mushāraṭah*, *murāqabah*, mu*ḥ*āsabah, *muʿāqabah*, *mujāhadah*, and *muʿātabah*), as a practical framework for guiding clients through a traditional process of applied practical ethics that combines Islamic theology and purification of the *nafs*. The authors even provide a daily log for practitioners to use with clients as a supplemental tool to therapy, which they do as "homework" (Keshavarzi & Nsour, 2020, p. 256), along with a self-grading system for patients to use on their own. While the authors recognize and pay tribute to the original method and application of these strategies, they apply them to a somewhat conventional notion of psychology within a clinical setting, which needs to fit into treatment markers that can be measured to demonstrate success. Due to this, the tendency is to focus again on the behavioral change, which can be measured and classified easier than the more wholly spiritual domain of the station of the heart, which can only be truly determined by God. This is a tension that practitioners of Islamic psychology will have to continue to grapple with and navigate as the field develops and negotiates a place for

faith-based approaches within the clinic, which often is defined by the very empirical bias that fueled the avoidance of the soul in psychology.

Rothman (2021) presents a framework from which to develop spiritually-based interventions that aim to go "deeper" than behaviors, thoughts, and emotions, and delve into spiritual states, with the presentation of the Iceberg Model of Islamic Psychotherapy (Rothman & Coyle, 2020; Rothman, 2021). This approach embraces the centrality of the heart (*qalb*) and spirit (*rūḥ*) in the Islamic conception of the soul and attempts to put into therapeutic practice the mechanisms of traditional methods of purification of the soul (*tazkiyat an nafs, riyadat an nafs*, etc.) within clinical contexts. In this model, the practitioner identifies the "disease" or negative character trait (*muhlikat*) presenting problems in the client's character when they come to therapy to assess the character traits that need addressing in the focus of treatment. The practitioner then uses the "cure" or positive character traits (*munjiyat*) as the treatment for those traits (Rothman, 2020, 2021). While in some cases, practitioners may use this overtly for religious clients, at other times, it may serve as an internal process they do without sharing with clients as the theoretical orientation (Rothman, 2018). The practitioner engages the behaviors (*nafs*) and cognitions (*'aql*) but views these as manifestations of deeper-seated imbalances within the heart (*qalb*) and spirit (*rūḥ*) of the person and aims to move beyond to encourage more transformative levels of spiritual healing within the inner state of the integral soul.

This approach is somewhat controversial given the unconventional approach of taking the unseen aspects of the human being that are defined by revealed sources seriously, rather than hard science. Additionally, within the Islamic tradition, many believe some Sufi (*taṣawwuf*) healing and *dhikr* practices to be an innovation (*bid'a*) and assert that they should not be prominent in mainstream models of Islamic psychology and counseling/psychotherapy (i.e., Rassool, 2021). Additionally, even among those unopposed to the esoteric nature of the Sufi tradition, some assert the need to have a formal relationship with a Sufi Shaykh or Murshid (guide) to benefit from the science of *taṣawwuf*. However, it follows Al-Ghazālī's articulation of another pathway to purification, which is enlisting a sound companion to act as a mirror in the pursuit of self-knowledge and self-mastery when one does not have a formal shaykh (Al-Ghazali, 2014). In response to these cautionary criticisms, models for delineating the scope of the Islamic psychotherapist and that of the traditional Sufi shaykh have been put forth (Khan et al., 2020; Rothman, 2021, Rothman & Coyle, 2021) to help clarify the differences and allow for a path to benefit from what the traditional science of the soul has to offer contemporary attempts to put applied ethics into practice. Given the major contributions from early Muslim scholars who integrated the Sufis' practical approach to moral psychology and developed exhaustive manuals for what can be considered application and treatment, it would be difficult to conceive of a robust indigenous Islamic psychological approach to applied ethics without the integration of these esoteric scholarly resources.

Recommendations for Further Integration of Islamic Character Development to Enhance Well-Being in Contemporary Clinical and Non-Clinical Contexts

Considering the similarities and differences of traditional Islamic and modern approaches to the concepts of well-being and character development, it is necessary to consider the implications of implementing an effective integrative approach for use in contemporary clinical as well as non-clinical contexts. To make the best use of the wisdom from the early Muslim scholars'

conceptions of character development for the purposes of psychotherapy and general well-being, there is a need to adapt interventions that fit within the worldview of contemporary individuals.

Non-Clinical Well-Being Interventions

There is a wide scope for the application of Islamic approaches to character development to enhance well-being in communal settings outside of the clinic. A common approach within contemporary orientations to wellness and positive psychology is to focus on lifestyle choices and structuring daily routine as a focus of treatment for lower levels of depression, stress, and anxiety. From within an Islamic religious framework, there are numerous daily practices, such as prayer (*salah*), ablution (*wudu*), dietary requirements (*halal*), and so on, that are obligatory on the Muslim that can constitute similar well-being enhancing routines. However, given the obligatory nature of these practices, many Muslims do not approach them as a well-being enhancing lifestyle with transformative potential and may see them as transactional behaviors. One way of understanding such practices from within the Islamic scholarly tradition is that they have both exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) meanings and reasons for being obligatory. In this view, the Muslim performs the acts because they have been instructed to do so by God and, at the same time, there is an understanding that the acts have an intrinsic value for enhancing the state of the person. Thus, it can be posited that behavioral lifestyle practices are necessary to create a baseline of balance and alignment with nature and the natural state of the human being (*fitrah*) to reach their highest potential and maintain a consistent state of well-being (*'afiyah*).

Given the view that Islamic religious behaviors can potentially enhance the Muslims' well-being, there is a vast resource in this regard in the study of the daily life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The study of the life of the Prophet (*seerah*) and Prophetic tradition (hadith) has been and is still a staple of Muslim religious life in contemporary times. However, what is often not given enough attention and acknowledgment among many Muslims is that the daily lifestyle of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), his companions, and the early Muslim scholars, was in many ways entirely different from contemporary ways of life. Earlier societies were slower-paced, connected to natural cycles and seasons, incorporated rest in daily life, and had a notion of spirituality and sacredness embedded into culture and society. The absence of these aspects for most modern people has an enormous impact on the ability to achieve holistic character development, as exemplified in the lives of the righteous predecessors (*salaf al salih*). Thus, it is recommended for the enhancement of general well-being through character development that communal efforts be made toward the adoption of a more *fitri* (being of the natural disposition) lifestyle by looking not only at the character of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as an example but his daily routine and way of life as well, and to provide tools for adapting such principles to modern circumstances.

Community leaders and mental health practitioners working in a communal capacity can use practical tools to orient community members to a healthier, natural lifestyle inspired by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and informed by Islamic principles and priorities. One example of such a tool has been developed by Mohammed Faris (2018), from The Productive Muslim Company, who created a useful diagram of the daily routine of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), which divides the Prophet's activities into three domains: spiritual, physical, and social. This helpful tool can act as a framework for guiding peoples' decisions and structuring their life to align with health and well-being goals in these three domains. The Productive Muslim Company also offers useful worksheets that community members can fill out to reflect on how they can adapt the Prophetic ways of being into their own life in a bespoke and realistic fashion. One of the central aspects of integrating traditional principles

into modern contexts successfully is to make well-being interventions relevant, practical, and accessible. Muslims, like most contemporary people, tend to have a lot of "red tape" around matters of faith, which is largely separated from "regular" secular life. Community leaders and well-being practitioners serving the Muslim community are recommended to make efforts to demystify these theological concepts and translate or reframe them as tools to support wellness.

Clinical Interventions in Psychotherapy

Whereas Muslim scholars were often operating in a religious context, where overt religious motivation was precedented, even with Muslim clients within a psychotherapeutic setting, the primary orientation is that of mental health and well-being informing treatment goals over religiously motivated goals. This does not mean that therapy is unvaluable. On the contrary, values are what direct a moral framework that situates notions of the goal of therapy—a healthy personality or "perfected character." As stated earlier in the review of classical approaches, the character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is considered that of the ideal human model for people to strive toward. Thus, by utilizing this character model embodied in the Prophetic character, the psychotherapist has a practical example that can act as a framework and virtual model of treatment. Therefore, a focus on the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is more than religiously motivated as it has clinical utility as a therapeutic tool. Rather than reciting hadith (prophetic traditions) narrations and potentially inciting feelings of inadequacy for not being "as good" as the model of perfect character, the therapist can focus on positive, practical habits and methods that the client can implement in their daily life to affect change in their state of being. The types of tools referenced in the section above on non-clinical settings can also be utilized in the clinical content with clients in parallel with those reflective directives and frameworks developed by the previously mentioned practitioners (Keshavarzi & Nsour, 2020; Rassool, 2021; Rothman, 2021).

As discussed earlier in the discussion of the works of early Muslim scholars' approach to character development, the Islamic theological paradigm is meant to be embodied through diligent striving to emulate the character of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), in addition to emulating his actions, to transform one's inner soul or heart. Thus, an Islamic approach to psychotherapy should engage in character development in ways that orient the client to change what is within their inner self, in addition to and in parallel with the changing of behaviors and cognitions. As it says in the Qur'an, "Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest" (13:28). This contrasts with the dominant orientation to the mind and thoughts being the central point of focus for both religious practices of remembrance and clinical interventions like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). The practice of remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) can be used as a practical tool to orient clients to their spiritual heart. While the metaphysical heart is not necessarily located in one specific place (Al-Ghazali, 2012), the Qur'an and *tafsir* (exegesis) tradition points to the chest as a location of focus within the physical body. Therefore, the treatment of character development in Islamic psychotherapy and well-being can and should involve an expressly spiritual dimension that engages the inner reality of the state of the client's heart and the process of training oneself to "change what is within oneself" (Qur'an 13:11). True healing is that which integrates mind, body, and soul. The Islamic approach to character development, as seen from the early Muslim scholars' work, incorporates all dimensions of the human being and provides us with a blueprint to work from in adapting clinical approaches relevant and effective for today's world.

Discussion

When psychology is defined as mental processes and behavior, and when the locus of the human being is believed to be the brain, as is accepted by most contemporary people, the subject of morality, both phenomenological and elusive, can be tricky to navigate, especially in societies made up of people with diverse worldviews. Humans tend to be more comfortable with what they can control and determine on their own, according to what makes sense from their vantage point, rather than to surrender to mystery and the unknown or give over control and obedience to something beyond them and their world. This orientation to the human experience in many ways runs counter to what the Qur'an teaches about how the human being should be oriented in this life and reveals the distinction of Islamic psychology from that of conventional notions of psychology. Whereas conventional, and perhaps Western, psychology does not necessarily have one defined, universal set of moral guidelines to hold people to or encourage alignment with, an Islamic psychology necessarily involves the moral framework and guidance set out by the Qur'an and Sunnah as the benchmark for human ethics.

Within the contemporary landscape of secular orientations to mental health and well-being, there could be a danger for Muslims to lose touch with the practical aspects of the implementation of their religion through character development to change what is within the soul, and instead adopt an approach to Islam which separates ritual practice from personal development. If such separation of the sacred and profane is adopted, the practice of Islam can become transactional rather than transformational. In other words, the religion can become a set of exoteric rules and sets of behaviors to comply with in exchange for some end goal (i.e., paradise, blessings, etc.) rather than a path of transformation that requires self-accountability to change one's inner state. The development of modern Islamic psychology stands to help remedy this potential contemporary problem by operationalizing practical ethics, not only for piety but for psycho-spiritual well-being. Within this model of psychology, the experience of illness is not limited to physical or mental illness, but rather is understood holistically and integrally, as is the nature of the human being. Physiological and spiritual aspects are not understood to be separate, however. It is important to distinguish causes of ill health to inform the appropriate treatment. Thus, within an Islamic framework, there is room for multiple dimensions, which requires that we operate in nuanced ways to navigate the integration of a spiritual reality within a material reality, and chart new ways of working within a uniquely Islamic psychology and not just follow the conventional paradigm.

Conclusion

In his 1979 book *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists*, Dr. Malik Badri, known widely as the Father of Modern Islamic Psychology (Rothman et al., 2022), describes the pitfalls in embracing conventional notions of psychology akin to that of following the non-Muslim into "the lizard's hole" (Badri, 1979). Badri was referencing the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), which states, "Even if they manage to get themselves into a lizard's hole, the Muslims will follow irrationally" (Muslim, hadith 2002). Much of what has occurred over the past 15 years in the development of modern Islamic psychology amounts largely from many Muslim psychologists getting out of or avoiding the "lizard's hole" and embracing the unique understanding of the human being derived from primary and secondary sources within the Islamic tradition. As much as these developments are encouraging and make for an exciting future ahead in terms of the new horizons in the intersection of Islam and psychology, it is not without caution that those in the emerging field should proceed, for the pitfalls and traps continue to loom in the ground ready to pull in those who follow blindly.

Without the traditional approach of applied practical ethics, often confined to people's limited understanding and conception of Sufism, we are left with cognitive behavioral modalities

that aim to address symptoms and not necessarily the type of transformation or purification of the heart that the Qur'an references, "He has certainly succeeded who purifies himself" (87:14). If success is defined merely by the human experience of this life and what we can measure based on the corporeal dimension, then attempts at an Islamic practical moral psychology will inevitably look more like Islamized versions of the dominant secular materialist stance of psychology that defines identity by thought and behavior and success by removal of discomfort.

More efforts must be made to develop applications that maintain the authenticity of an Islamic framework while adapting to contemporary contexts and assumptions about psychology. As with the development of any field of inquiry, the more data and evidence, the better our understanding of what works. There is a need now for more experimentation in practical applications of traditional approaches to psycho-spiritual ethics within clinical or therapeutic settings to support findings with evidence. However, practitioners should be cautious about the desire to adopt experimental psychology in a conventional way as positive empiricist epistemological bias will render these attempts merely Islamic in name, becoming easily veered away from the centrality of the unseen reality of the human being and the state of the heart rather than just behavioral markers of change. Therefore, Muslim psychologists should remain wary of the trap of the lizard's hole while diligently pursuing indigenous approaches to applied moral psychology and character development.

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