
Reflecting Personal, Family, and Community Ethnographies to Understand How Fasting Ramadan Fuels the Religious Development of Muslim Youth

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Abstract

As both a consequence of and a precursor to internalizing religious beliefs, engaging in religious rituals or behaviors and the meaning-making surrounding them fuels religious and spiritual development. Particularly for highly religious families, such rituals play a central role in family functioning and identity, often embedding families within broader religious communities. Engaging in collective practice and the meaning-making around them may contribute to resilience, particularly for religiously minoritized youth. Enhanced levels of coping and a sense of purpose or belonging may exist alongside resisting the orthopraxy and/or orthodoxy associated with religious beliefs and ritual practices, particularly ones that represent discordance between varying levels of a youth's developmental contexts.

Grounded in ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methods, this case study explores ritual worship during Ramadan, including fasting and congregational prayer, within a three-generation Muslim family. In particular, it describes how engaging in ritual practices affects developmental processes and outcomes and seeks to better understand how abstaining relates to transcendence and growth in purpose and generosity.

Keywords: *Muslim, Ramadan, religious socialization, family processes, child development, identity*

Throughout human history, faith systems have provided explicit and implicit foundations for family functioning that affect a range of developmental processes and outcomes for families (Burr et al. 2011; Holden and Vittrup 2009). To understand patterns related to how

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youth and families affiliate and practice within the U.S., the Pew Research Center (2018) identified seven typologies of religious engagement ranging from highly religious (39%) to somewhat religious (32%) to non-religious (29%). This range reflects an overall decline in religious affiliation alongside immigration patterns that contribute to an increase in racial and ethnic diversity among religious affiliations (Pew Research Center 2015). While trends toward secularism or disaffiliation may be considered threats by highly practicing or “devoted” families, these contextual factors pose risks for religiously minoritized families, many of whom are of immigrant origin. Within the U.S., Christianity serves as the nonconscious ideology and Christians remain the dominant religious group (Eck 2002). This group enjoys privileges, such as having its primary religious celebrations recognized as federal holidays and having its faith symbols and rituals represented and understood in “mainstream” society (Schlosser 2003).

In addition to broader societal messages that overlook or ignore the primary values and practices of religiously minoritized groups, some faith adherents may experience having certain aspects of their faith and other intersecting aspects of their identity misrepresented, maligned, or even pathologized (Abo-Zena and Rana 2015). For example, beyond normative identity struggles, Muslim youth experience the various harms of being under-represented in the West, particularly in the U.S. Further, even before 9/11, they faced common discriminatory encounters described as knit into their everyday lives (Sirin and Fine 2008). Relatedly, media regularly describes Islam as “a political problem to be solved” (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 2), implying that Islam is inherently violent and that even moderate Muslims, including youth, practicing Islam are “extremists,” “fundamentalists,” or “Islamists.” Further, Muslim American youth endure different levels of minority stress, considering the within-group variations in racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and immigrant status (Ahmed et al. 2015).

Muslim parents, then, need to navigate as well as support their children’s coping with anti-religious and anti-Muslim sentiments (Abu-Ras et al. 2018), while promoting the development of religious identity, beliefs, and religious practice. While religious practice may serve as a form of coping (Abu-Raiya et al. 2011), in some cases its very nature may be perceived or portrayed as overwhelming, particularly in relation to trends toward secularism or liberal interpretations of ritual practice. For example, translating Islam’s religious values into practice (e.g., offering the obligatory five daily prayers and observing the Ramadan fast) requires religious commitment for families and their developing children (Philips 1988).

How Muslim families socialize children toward orthoprax practices and an internalized commitment to sustain them is a central religious duty (Abdalati 1975/1996). While religious practices may support enhanced levels of coping and a sense of purpose or belonging (Fatima et al. 2018), the dynamic may be complex. The potential and actual sense of fulfillment associated with religious practice may exist alongside a reluctance to complete them, particularly when practices seem onerous, overwhelming, or discordant with other social and contextual influences (Abo-Zena and Ahmed 2014).

Specifically, to better understand the meaning-making surrounding engaging in religious rituals, this paper explores observing the fast during Ramadan among a Muslim family. Drawing from a collective autoethnographic family history, it highlights how

family members and other stakeholders (e.g., mentors, family friends, and peers) partner to promote meaning-making around observing Ramadan. While this exploration centers Ramadan, it also includes related religious development among all family members and focuses on the children.

After providing a conceptual grounding for religious development within Muslim American families, the paper highlights the religious context and content of observing Ramadan and related socialization practices. Next, we provide an autoethnographic case study of one family's reflections on experiences within a community context. We conclude by highlighting how findings may relate to other Muslim families and outline implications for practice and future research with other families of faith.

Conceptual Framework of Religious Development of Muslim American Youth

This autoethnographic case study is guided by a conceptual model with three interrelated foci connecting structural, social, and personal levels that reflect religion and spirituality (R/S) within religiously diverse individuals and groups, including Muslim families. First, dynamic ecological lifespan¹ models such as relational developmental systems (RDS) reflect the relations between the individual and the multiple biological, social, cultural, and structural elements within society (Lerner et al. 2015; Overton 2015). RDS provides a meta-theory for exploring R/S development because it examines the particular fit between individuals and complex (i.e., coinciding and conflicting) cultural, religious, and social messages. RDS has been used to account for how youth relate to doctrines, supernatural beliefs, practices, and communities associated with religious and spiritual traditions (Abo-Zena and King 2021). Beyond broad depictions of RDS, intersectional and phenomenological ecological approaches explicitly problematize how socially stratified systems lead to an unequal distribution of status and vulnerability, given variations in how race, gender, religious affiliation, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and immigrant status intersect (Crenshaw 1989; Spencer 2017).

Second, we focus on how broad societal structures inform social interactions; in this study we center interpersonal connections in family contexts. We forefront the developmental niche framework, which considers a child's experiences as being embedded in their ecology and analyzed through three linked subsystems: caretaker psychology, customs and practices of caretaking, and physical and social structures (Harkness and Super 2012; Super and Harkness 1986).

Third, we focus on person-centered variations and specific meaning-making over time within their respective contexts. A phenomenological approach (i.e., considering an individual's perspective on a phenomena) highlights a person's meaning-making around a particular experience (Spencer 2017).

¹ While dominant scholarly perspectives of "lifespan" range linearly from the "cradle to grave" or birth to death, other worldviews include varied phases of prelife and/or afterlife, and circular views of life or time that may reflect connections with Ancestors or reincarnations of body-spirit. The nature of beliefs about life and time as un/related to "conventional" depictions of "lifespan" may have implications on how one lives, or guides others to live.

Moving beyond deterministic approaches highlights that similar events (i.e., experiencing aspects of Ramadan) have various developmental implications. Variability reflects a person's processing, which may vary between members of the same family and within an individual throughout their life, given fluctuations in religious understanding and dedication, relative comparison with others in social groups, or changing factors that affect psychological-physiological health particularly as related to fasting.

Youth's Religious and Spiritual Development Within Family Contexts

Building on the conceptual framework for Muslim American youth, we now focus on R/S development and socialization within families. We focus on caregivers, who usually lead religious socialization across generations (Bengtson 2017). We attend to variations in religious socialization, given social demands on Muslim and other religiously minoritized youth.

Religious Socialization Within Families

The family is considered the strongest developmental context for children's religious development (Hardy et al. 2022). Caregivers' religious lives, including differences in their religious affiliations and levels of practice, considerably influence the R/S development of teenage and young adult children (Smith and Adamczyk 2021). Socialization processes include identity agents (i.e., who and how) and specific socialization content (i.e., what) (Hardy et al. 2011). Despite the burgeoning scholarship on R/S influences, "we know a lot about the 'what' in terms of 'what' outcomes R/S are linked to, but we know less about the 'who,' 'where,' 'when,' 'why,' and 'how' in terms of the processes linking R/S to such outcomes" (Hardy et al. 2019, 244). While some observable practices are relatively easy to measure, other religious experiences and pathways may be more elusive. For example, in their study of intergenerational religious transmission, Smith and Adamczyk (2021) report that a majority of parents attempt to pass religion on to their children partly through "osmosis," where religion is cultivated through indirect, everyday ways.

Exploring how families function at home and in community contexts helps frame religious and other socialization processes. Early work on socialization factors primarily examined unidirectional socialization; however, now multiple bidirectional and genetically informed influences are understood as normative (King et al. 2013). Klingenberg and Sjö (2019) review religious socialization, defining it as "the process in which an individual comes to hold preferences in relation to dimensions understood as religious in the surrounding context" (p. 174). In a critical analysis, youth are not "objects" of socialization, but agentic partners who navigate issues, including socialization, toward an implicit (adult) norm (Klingenberg and Sjö 2019). How children's individual choices align with both converging and divergent contextual influences remains understudied, particularly given the fluctuations in religious belief and affiliation.

Religious socialization processes include symbolic references and religious meaning, observing or modeling spiritual and religious behavior, engaging in family religious rituals and activities, curating elements of R/S in children's physical and social ecologies, and channeling children into social groups and contexts that support their religious identity (see Barry et al. 2022; Cornwall 1988; Oman 2013; Stanford et al. 2023).

While parents are recognized as key agents of religious socialization, there has been only a limited exploration of the nuanced ways religion may be integrated into one's daily life. Smith and Adamczyk (2021) present one of few qualitative studies examining faith transmission through narratives by religious parents, which, in turn, guide the researchers' construction of cultural models that describe parental approaches to passing on religious faith and practices to their children. Contrary to the researchers' expectations, the cultural models were relatively consistent across the somewhat religiously diverse U.S. sample of parents and their varying practices and experiences (Smith and Adamczyk 2021).

Variations in Religious Socialization and Transmission

While models of religious transmission are sometimes described as consistent, starting in early childhood religiously minoritized youth may sense that their identities and practices are rendered invisible in public contexts and not as celebrated as others (Abo-Zena 2011). For example, children likely notice Santa Claus sitting in the mall and portrayed in countless cards and other contexts, Christmas lights decorating public and private spaces, and Christmas songs playing on the radio and television and sung at school "holiday" pageants. Given this context, we adapt features of the racial socialization literature (Hughes 2003) to understand socialization processes for religiously minoritized youth that include developing differentiated sensitivity, preparation for bias, and socialization for religious pride and knowledge.

Differentiated Sensitivity

In addition to not feeling included, religiously minoritized youth may be socialized to recognize being excluded and/or discriminated against. Like preparing racially and ethnically minoritized youth for bias (Hughes and Chen 1997), the caregivers of these youth (many of whom are also ethnically or racially minoritized) may prepare them to be cognizant of messages that threaten their religious beliefs, practices, or identity. As such, religious socialization within religious groups (i.e., at home, community contexts, religious schools, and places of worship) may contribute to their differentiated sensitivity to religious messages, including discriminatory ones. Caregivers may reluctantly, yet intentionally, socialize children toward a heightened sensitivity to proactively counter implicit, negative social messages about their faith group. For youth whose families seek to support a high level of religious commitment, religious socialization may increase their awareness of perceived religious discrimination to help counter social expectations that tend toward secularism or reduced levels of religious practice.

Preparation for Religious Bias

Given the existing stratified contexts, religiously minoritized youth are more likely to cope with religious discrimination, bias, and microaggressions than peers of mainstream religious affiliations (Nadal et al. 2010). These youth often experience singular, repeated, or perceived religious discrimination, including current or historical trauma, pervasive institutional stress, and hostile institutional and interpersonal interactions (Awad et al. 2019). Having their ascribed religious affiliation singled out or questioned makes their affiliation notable, even if their faith is not particularly salient to their identity.

Religiously minoritized youth, particularly those whose commitments are seen as requiring “atypical” behaviors (e.g., refraining from alcohol or sex, requiring prayer) may be stigmatized by peers, adults, and media (Smith and Denton 2005). This stigma includes the general relegation of religion in U.S. society and the prevalence of negative social images about Islam and Muslims (Amer and Bagasra 2013). In addition to these youth and families coping with negative messages and prevalent low public regard, religious socialization may include cultivating positive within-group, private regard (Rivas-Drake et al. 2009).

Religious Socialization and Pride

Drawing on intentional messaging by African American parents to help their children cope with racism and promote well-being, socialization may include messages of pride regarding religious history and heritage. While religious socialization generally focuses on transmitting knowledge of the faith tradition, this dimension centers on emotional transmission related to the religious group’s pride in its history and its members to promote and maintain a desire to self-affiliate. Focusing on positive messaging may expose religiously minoritized youth to positive information about their religious group and its teachings (e.g., contemporary scientific findings that confirm messages in the Qur’ān; Abo-Zena 2013) or to current or historic heroic actions or values by faith partners. Religious socialization that focuses on pride promotes youth’s positive connections to the faith and to other believers. Functionally, positive religious socialization provides a buffer to negative messages, bias, or discrimination regarding religious affiliation.

Muslim Youth and Families Observing Ramadan

Understanding the religious socialization of Muslim youth within family contexts requires recognizing the diversity within their communities and particular families. Relatedly, understanding religious socialization related to Ramadan requires understanding its significance and how families orient themselves to observing it.

Variations in Muslim American Families

Within the U.S., Muslims represent the fastest growing religious group marked by multiple dimensions of intra-group diversity, including visible and less visible differences. Updated demographics of Muslims may be found through research by large institutes (Lipka 2015) and filtered at local levels to reflect specific and fluid dynamics. Muslims represent religious diversity and subscribe to different schools of Islamic thought, which are associated with variations in religious practices and guidelines (Philips 1988). Like any faith tradition, individual Muslims vary in their personal level of religiousness (e.g., beliefs, practices, and doubts). Differences in how individuals orient to religious teachings and practices are also informed by a multitude of familial, cultural, and regional factors.

Regional factors can be traced to socio-historical contexts in the U.S. and internationally. The first Muslims in the U.S. were mostly literate West Africans taken involuntarily and enslaved; however, this prominent wave of Islam did not survive in its orthodox forms due to the institution of slavery (Diouf 2013). Foreign-born Muslims in the U.S. originate from 80 countries, representing six continents, which contributes to their

tremendous ethnic and linguistic diversity (Lipka 2015). Further, a range of socio-historical circumstances lead to varied lived experiences of immigrant cohorts and their associated status (e.g., undocumented, asylum seeker, refugee, and voluntary immigrant). National births among them include converts and their children, descendants of mostly Arab-origin Muslim immigrants from the early 1900s, and children of post-1965 immigrants. African American youth are the largest group of native-born Muslims (Pew 2011) and vary according to the family's religious trajectory, socio-economic status, and culture (Ahmed et al. 2015).

Religious Socialization Patterns Within Muslim American Families

Particularly for orthodox Muslim families, religious socialization centers on children developing a firm and complete belief in God (Allah, the One) as their creator (and Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him, PBUH] as His final Messenger to humanity) that is embraced and confirmed by their mind (i.e., cognitive), body (i.e., behavior), and heart (i.e., affective) (Abo-Zena and Merchant 2022). As both a consequence of and a precursor to religious commitment, engaging in religious rituals or behaviors and the meaning-making surrounding them fuels religiosity. Being Muslim is not a narrow religious affiliation, but rather a commitment to a broad and comprehensive framework or comprehensive way of life (i.e., *dīn*) that encompasses internal (intellectual and psychological) beliefs found in the *‘aqīda* (creed or Islamic belief system), external physical and social governances of *fiqh* (deep understanding of Islamic law), and spiritual refinement in *tazkīya* (purification) (Abdalati 1975/1996).

For many Muslims, religious socialization and education reflects a multi-faceted, multi-axis conceptualization that includes varied religious beliefs, levels, and types of spirituality and associated experiences. The centrality of cultivating sincere intention within Islam (Abdalati 1975/1996) aligns with scholarship on identity development that highlights dynamic processes between individuals and the environment and yielding “the patterning of more or less disparate parts into a flexible unity” (Marcia 1980, 159). For example, Muslims living in the West face a barrage of negative media portrayals and attacks on their faith and faith adherents (Ramadan 2004). While some families may help model how to navigate these challenges (e.g., reporting religious discrimination, responding to Islamophobic comments, and building rapport with neighbors), others may rebuke their children for doubts or insecurities to express faith in public: “Be strong! We are Muslims and should be proud.”

To cultivate positive religious socialization, caregivers may “channel” their children toward peers, mentors, and social contexts to bolster their religious identity and increase their religious knowledge (Cornwall 1988; Martin et al. 2003). Importantly, sometimes starting in early childhood, families may promote their children's proficiency in a liturgical (e.g., Arabic) and/or a heritage language (e.g., Somali, Turkish, and Urdu) and integrate it with coping processes that serve as protective factors through connections to holy texts and teachings, religious leaders, and members of the faith community (Ellis et al. 2008). Families modeling diverse strategies and religious practices can help children cope with contextual challenges, including anti-religious or anti-Muslim sentiments that threaten their health and well-being (Abu-Raiya et al. 2011; Abu-Ras et al. 2018).

Consequently, families and other stakeholders may create enclaves for religiously minoritized youth to engage in diverse religious practices, including observing Ramadan, without fear of psychological or physical backlash.

The Forms, Functions, and Effects of Observing Ramadan

Understanding the role of Ramadan for Muslim American families requires understanding its spiritual significance, outlining its impact on health and psychology, and exploring Ramadan-specific religious socialization influences.

Spiritual Rewards and Reasons for Observing Ramadan

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, is distinguished because Muslims believe that Allah commanded the holy Qur'ān to begin descending to Earth during it and, relatedly, obligated Muslims to fast from dawn to sunset each day of it (Abdalati 1975/1996). The daily fasts and extended nighttime prayers featuring recitation of the Qur'ān cultivate self-discipline and one's connection to the sacred text and its miraculous revelation to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who was illiterate. The obligation to fast resembles similar religious requirements from other faith traditions, as reflected in verse 2:183 of the Qur'ān: "O you who believe, observe *aṣ-ṣawm* (the fast) as prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become *al-muttaqūn* (pious)" (trans. Muḥammad T. Al-Hilālī and Muḥammad H. Khan).

For Muslims, observing this fast fulfills one of Islam's five pillars of practice. Along with declaring one's faith in One Allah and Muhammad as a Messenger (PBUH), these are establishing the five obligatory daily prayers (*ṣalāt*), purifying wealth through charity (*zakāt*), and making the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to the holy mosque in Mecca (Abdalati 1975/1996).

Like other lunar months, Ramadan begins with the sighting of the new moon and requires that those observing the fast neither eat nor drink during the daylight hours. Fasting is required of those who have reached the age of accountability (i.e., puberty) and are of sound mind and body. Because it is not intended to present an undue hardship, there are compulsory or optional exemptions, among them the elderly, sick, menstruating women, pregnant or nursing women, and travelers on long journeys (Abdalati 1975/1996). The physical, logistical, and health benefits of observing this fast are linked to spiritual refinement and the virtues of fasting, such as *tazkīya* (purification). In addition to the self-discipline required and cultivated, the fast involves restraining from vices, such as "fasting" from vain talk, losing one's temper, and other undesirable behaviors or lapses.

Abū Ḥurayrah reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

Allah the Exalted and Majestic said: Every act of the son of Adam is for him, except fasting. It is (exclusively) meant for Me and I (alone) will reward it. Fasting is a shield. When any one of you is fasting on a day, he should neither indulge in obscene language, nor raise the voice; or if anyone reviles him or tries to quarrel with him he should say: I am a person fasting. By Him in Whose Hand is the life of Muhammad, the breath of the observer of fast is sweeter to Allah on the Day of Judgment than the fragrance of musk. The one who fasts has two (occasions) of

joy, one when he breaks the fast he is glad with the breaking of (the fast) and one when he meets his Lord he is glad with his fast. (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 1151d, bk. 13, ḥadīth 212)

Ramadan also provides opportunities for Muslims to increase their good deeds and multiply rewards for deeds intended or completed.² According to Islamic teachings, during this month the larger devils of temptations are chained, making it easier for worshippers to resist urges for wrongdoing and overcome the laziness that inhibits doing good (Abdalati 1975/1996). Good deeds include increased recitation of the Qur’ān, particularly in voluntary nightly individual and congregational prayer (*tarāwīḥ*); all forms of charitable work, particularly supporting vulnerable people, including the poor or orphaned; continuous charities (e.g., building or maintaining mosques, hospitals, wells, and libraries); and providing breakfast for others. Noble behaviors and their rewards are described in Islamic sources, such as the narration by Zaid bin Khālid Al-Juhanī that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: “Whoever gives food for a fasting person to break his fast, he will have a reward like theirs, without that detracting from their reward in the slightest” (Ibn Mājah, vol. 1, bk. 7, ḥadīth 1746).

Accordingly, the Ramadan schedule for many Muslim families includes the night prayers and a light pre-dawn meal (*suhūr*), resuming regular work or schooling during the day, incorporating additional good deeds when possible, and breaking the fast at sunset (*maghrib*) followed by additional supplementary prayers (Glasse 1989). Even though not required to fast, children often fast in increments, starting with a half-day and gradually increasing to multiple days in the month, emulating older family members. Children are also often socialized to participate in charitable deeds, like listening to or memorizing the Qur’ān; assisting in meal preparation; and donating food, money, or time (e.g., cleaning mosques).

Documented Effects Related to Observing Ramadan

A growing body of literature on observing Ramadan focuses on its physiological, spiritual, familial, social, and societal outcomes. Studies that center physical circumstances consider eating behaviors and body image (Hasan et al. 2021), managing diabetes (Khalife et al.

² Several Islamic ḥadīth explicate these rewards. Abū Ḥurayrah reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said: “There are three people whose supplications are not rejected: The fasting person when he breaks the fast, the just ruler, and the supplication of the oppressed” (At-Tirmithī vol 6, bk. 46, ḥadīth 3598). ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said: “The fast and the Qur’ān are two intercessors for the servant of Allah on the Day of Resurrection. The fast will say: ‘O Lord, I prevented him from his food and desires during the day. Let me intercede for him.’ The Qur’ān will say: ‘I prevented him from sleeping at night. Let me intercede for him.’ And their intercession will be accepted” (Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ 1963, bk. 7, ḥadīth 7); Sahl ibn Sa’d reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said: “In Paradise there is a gate which is called Rayyan through which only the people who fast would enter on the Day of Resurrection. None else would enter along with them. It would be proclaimed: ‘Where are the people who fast that they should be admitted into it?’ And when the last of them would enter, it would be closed and no one would enter it” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 1152, bk. 6, ḥadīth 2569).

2015), and maintaining athleticism and health (Kirkendall et al. 2012). A longitudinal study of 212 Pakistani Muslim students considered religiosity and spirituality as interrelated yet separate concepts, finding a bidirectional link between religiosity and spirituality with variations based on timing of association (Chen et al. 2022). Religiosity was associated with higher subsequent spirituality during Ramadan, while spirituality near the month's end was associated with higher subsequent post-Ramadan religiosity (Chen et al. 2022).

In a U.S. context, a three-wave experience sampling study analyzed three daily surveys completed by 202 Muslim American youth a week before, during, and after Ramadan to explore their connectedness to Allah, inhibitory self-control, initiatory self-control, patience, and compassion (Balkaya-Ince et al. 2023). Results indicated that adolescents grew more connected to Allah and exhibited greater inhibitory self-control, initiatory self-control, and patience in their daily lives from pre-Ramadan to Ramadan, with continued elevated effects for initiatory self-control and patience, but not for inhibitory self-control, after Ramadan. In contrast, adolescents reported high levels of daily compassion before and during Ramadan, but lower levels after Ramadan. Beyond a youth focus, a qualitative study exploring the influence of Ramadan on 47 practicing Muslim mothers, fathers, and youth in the U.S. suggests that observing this fast serves a sacred, unifying, and integrating purpose within family relations (Alghafli et al. 2019).

Family Socialization Regarding Religion

While identity development is often studied during adolescence, centering Islamic socialization around Ramadan begins in early childhood and reflects experiences and associated meaning-making throughout the individual's lifespan. Socio-cultural perspectives highlight how young children appropriate the values of adult community members through the shared use of rituals and practices that have a particular cultural meaning in context (Rogoff 2003). For example, toddlers imitate adults and follow the leader by "praying" in congregation or "playing dress-up" with Mama's *hijāb*. Further, a young child may contribute to the family's meal preparation in general, but may orient to the ethno-religious identity aspects of the tasks in a qualitatively different manner when distributing dates and milk to people breaking the fast. A child may ritually have been trained to appreciate the significance and healing power of honey, Zamzam water, and black seeds; avoid restricted products with pork or alcohol; and note the lunar cycles and their relation to the Islamic (*hijrī*) calendar.

This Study

Muslims observing the many facets of Ramadan encompasses a range of religious and ethno-religious rituals. While religious rituals have inherent meaning, the overall significance of Islamic rituals performed in the U.S. is amplified, given their contrast with other prevalent celebrations. As such, this autoethnographic case study spotlights Ramadan to explore what may be perceived as an oxymoron: How, for many Muslim children and adolescents, does this month-long daily fast, combined with additional acts of worship, help fuel, rather than deplete, their religious commitment?

Method

This paper draws on autoethnographic methods and reflections embedded in everyday family life (Adams et al. 2015). Adapting methods common to practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009), we consider the practice of parenting as applied human development. Led by the first author, a Muslim developmental scientist and mother, this case study reflects close collaboration with family members. The method was informed by the seminal scholarship of Piaget, rooted in attuned observation of his own children to provide access to in-depth, longitudinal perspectives of children within their natural contexts (Inhelder and Piaget 1958).

Sample

This case study focuses on an Egyptian-origin Muslim American family in a metropolitan New England area of the U.S. self-selected by the first author. Raised as a Muslim immigrant-origin girl in a small Iowa town, the first author was constantly aware of her family being “different.” After working as an educator in PK-12 contexts, she studied developmental psychology to make the process easier for other youth (including her own children) who, like her, were intersectionally minoritized and privileged because of religious, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and/or other identities or experiences. The father immigrated to the U.S. from Egypt in his 20s for educational purposes. Both parents earned the highest academic degree that can be awarded in their respective fields.

This paper draws from direct reflections of the parents and their four children (two daughters, two sons). Given the nature of the focus on family functioning, the study draws initially on the caregivers’ intentions and continues with their children’s reflections. At the time of analysis, the children range from adolescents to emerging adults (aged 17 to 21), and their writings and reflections include those from earlier in their childhood. For five years (starting when the youngest child was 11 years old), the household included two grandparents, both of whom had died by the time the oldest children (twins) were 20 years of age.

Procedure and Data Analysis

This paper draws on three primary data sources and methods: 1) practitioner-inquiry and reflections on parenting practice; 2) collective autoethnography, where personal experiences serve as a primary data source that expands one’s understanding of a social phenomenon by creating “encounters and re-encounters with their memories, with objects, and with people” (Chang 2013, 108); and 3) a variation of a life-narrative task to structure family conversations where each member is asked to share and reflect on approximately five salient memories and experiences. These specific memories fueled a subsequent series of conversations and remembering individually and collectively, with additional data in the form of corollary memories and visual and audio documentation helping to form a family “scrapbook” of reflections. The recurring themes and additional perspectives on memories served as an organic analysis of data among family members, coupled with self-selected family members reviewing themes to identify omissions, redundancies, and other patterns.

Case Context and Description of the Developmental Niche

This case study draws from the developmental niche framework to examine the micro-level ecology that structures family functioning along the three major subsystems that include caretaker psychology, customs and practices of care, and physical and social structures (Super and Harkness 1986). Particularly given the family's religiously minoritized status and fear that the children may feel pressured into being non-religious or feel inadequately supported to develop strong Islamic commitments, both parents' *caretaker psychology* and related parental ethnotheories prioritized developing highly "devoted" Muslim children. Reflecting on what they considered strengths and drawbacks from their own upbringing and understanding of how to cultivate long-term religious commitments (i.e., beyond short-term or superficial compliance), they focused on socialization messages that highlighted the abundance of reward and blessings in observing the Ramadan fast and pleasing Allah, instead of punishments for not practicing.

Relatedly, the family *customs and practices of care* embedded religious content in repeated opportunities for practice. To help convey the concept of additional rewards for good deeds during Ramadan, the parents increased rewarding children for deeds that they tracked in a daily accountability or behavior chart (e.g., praying, being respectful to the young and old, reciting or memorizing Qur'ānic passages, and doing household chores that showed care for people and their belongings). Given the reward provided for helping a fasting person break their fast, they hosted many iftār parties or potlucks, thereby facilitating social connections with an emphasis on including recent converts or those who were without family. Even if the family broke the fast alone, the young and old were keen to prepare food together or at least to offer a date, water, or milk to one another.

The *physical and social structures* in the metropolitan U.S. context were starkly different from what either parent had experienced as children. For the mother, growing up in a small U.S. town led to positive memories of Ramadan that centered her nuclear family, but with limited community fellowship. For the father, growing up in a religiously observant family in Egypt led to countless positive experiences with his family and community (e.g., raising money with siblings and neighborhood children to decorate the street, smelling and tasting foods popular in Ramadan at homes and wafting in from neighbors or in the market). The parents' varied memories contributed to their intentional co-creating of physical contexts that align with their religious goals for themselves and their children, such as attending nightly prayers, decorating their home, and preparing Ramadan and Eid foods.

During the more recent years, the grandparents' physical needs and circumstances notably limited the frequency of group iftārs and coincided with the teenaged children meeting friends for occasional youth gatherings to break the fast. The COVID-19 health pandemic severely limited in-person gatherings for two years, which led to family members adapting with curbside meal exchanges and helping cook and deliver meals to fasting Muslims in need of assistance, given that mosques were no longer open for group iftārs.

Findings

Individual and collective reflections and discussions regarding salient memories about Ramadan yielded several major themes, among them examples of alignment between

parental goals and socialization, pathways to religious practice and development, memories embedded in social celebrations, and navigating internal and external challenges.

Reflections of Parental Goals and Socialization

Many of the primary memories shared by the children reflected their parents' primary socialization goals and memories. Both parents joyfully recalled childhood memories of helping prepare the daily *iftārs* and, in particular, featuring foods popular during Ramadan and Eid. Whether calling or asking family and friends for recipes for *khatiaf* (fried dough stuffed with nuts or cream and drizzled with syrup) or looking up recipes online for the latest craving, every family member discussed joyful commitments for preparing to break the fast for themselves and others. Even memories of their own cooking "fails" or those consumed at potlucks were shared connections.

Young children and guests often helped, particularly when it came to seeking religious rewards in something as simple as arranging dates or pouring milk. Preparing special foods with friends or in community settings added a layer of anticipated connectedness. Family members recalled the generous reciprocity of dishes from potlucks being returned with other food gifts, such as sweets, fruits, or chocolates, thereby emphasizing how plates could *never* be returned empty. They referenced a popular Egyptian movie *Bittersweet* (عسل أسود [Molasses]; 2010) that depicted the extended family seated around the table enjoying *iftār* and describing the plate that was constantly being exchanged among neighbors sharing samples of each other's daily specials.

Parents and children compared and contrasted memories. The mother reminded the family that growing up in a small town with no mosque nearby, her primary childhood memories of Ramadan were primarily limited to her immediate family at home. Before becoming a parent, she moved to a large city and immersed herself in mosque culture. She recalled interactions that made such an impression that she committed herself to trying to create similar contexts if she were ever to become a parent. After a community *iftār* at the *masjid*, she turned to find a girl around 8 years old extending her arms, gifting her a bag of dates and requesting in Arabic, "Please make *du'ā'* for me and my family, Auntie." While she had been friendly with the daughter and her mother, she was touched at the gesture and moved by its layered significance (i.e., giving gifts is explicitly taught in a Prophetic saying, reported by Abū Hurayrah, "Give each other gifts, and you will love each other" (Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, no. 594, bk. 30, ḥadīth 57 and English translation 594). Providing the break-fast food for a fasting person earns the giver the same reward. Further, gifting dates reinforces the *sunnah* or Islamic tradition of breaking a fast with dates, and the supplications of a person when breaking their fast is accepted. Now the children continue the practice of gifting dates.

Another poignant memory from adulthood that Author 1 sought to recreate focused on the *tahajjud* prayer in the mosque, or late-night prayer that lasts until just before dawn. She observed individuals and families coming with pillows, blankets, or sleeping bags. While adults joined the prayers that featured Qur'ānic chapters being recited aloud, younger children often slept, stirring to find themselves among familiar faces with the Qur'ānic recitation and ending supplications lulling them back to sleep. Standing alongside praying mothers who would tend to their sleepy children when needed profoundly

impacted Author 1; she imagined that there could be no better way for a child to grow up worshipping Allah and developing a heart attached to the masjid³ than through the blessed moments during Ramadan's days and nights.

While the mother was building new memories that she wished to establish with their children, the father sought to carry over experiences from his childhood in Egypt to his context in the U.S. Knowing how much children and adults were mesmerized by the Christmas lights and decorations, they decided to decorate their house drawing from Islamic and cultural motifs of light, the moon, and stars. The children crafted signs with religious reminders about the reward of particular acts of worship during Ramadan. Primarily, the father recalled hearing Qur'ān recitation everywhere over the radio, on television, in the streets at corner stores, and through the mosques' loudspeakers. He therefore searched out audio recordings, followed social media, and subscribed to satellite dish services with Arabic channels to expose the family to historic and lesser-known Qur'ān reciters. As a result, many family members became connoisseurs of various recitation styles.

Pathways to Religious Development

The family's pathways in Ramadan followed intertwining religious practices related to observing the fast and elevating their connections to the Qur'ān, given that the Qur'ān began to be revealed during that month. These connected paths and added rewards led to increases in other religious practices throughout the month. The teens reflected on early memories of groggily waking up for the pre-dawn meal. While some recalled being too tired to eat, they joked about the mug of milk their mother had arbitrarily decided was the minimum they needed to consume to observe the fast the following day. They recalled repeated instances where one child was furious that no one tried to wake him up, leading to a collective decision to record the wake-up attempts on a cell phone with countless family replays of the sleepy altercations.

Given the reward for providing food to a fasting person, family members were particularly eager to contribute to meal preparation in small and large ways. They recalled the range of unpredictable "Ramadan cravings," which were almost always unusually sweet, salty, or greasy. Particularly over the weekends, the family often joined large social gatherings in halls or mosques. Throughout the week, they sometimes shared iftārs at home with other families, usually as a potluck to make meal preparation manageable, often including people who were single and converts. Iftārs in the family home occurred briskly, with breaking the fast followed by prayer and then the meal. Desserts and tea with mint

³ Abū Hurayrah reported Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to have said: "Seven people Allah will give them His Shade on the Day when there would be no shade but the Shade of His Throne (i.e., on the Day of Resurrection): And they are: a just ruler; a youth who grew up with the worship of Allah; a person whose heart is attached to the mosques; two men who love and meet each other and depart from each other for the sake of Allah; a man whom an extremely beautiful woman seduces (for illicit relation), but he (rejects this offer and) says: 'I fear Allah'; a man who gives in charity and conceals it (to such an extent) that the left hand does not know what the right has given; and a man who remembers Allah in solitude and his eyes become tearful" (Riyāḍ aṣ-Ṣāliḥīn 449).

were offered with a to-go option to maintain the pace needed to arrive at the mosque in time for the start of the *'ishā'* (nighttime) prayer. When some guests or family members stated they preferred a leisurely pace, the father reminded them of Ramadan's short minutes. With surprised humor, the family recalled when he ushered a guest to continue sipping tea in the yard while he rushed the family to the car so they could pray at the mosque.

Located in a metropolitan area, the family had many options about where to join congregational prayers. When the children were babies and toddlers, they would attend as a family; usually the mother and children would return home halfway through the nightly prayers to accommodate the latter's needs. Other times, the young children would "pray" following the physical movements, listen to the recitation alongside one of their parents, and continue "prostrating" as they had fallen asleep. As the children grew older, they would join the prayer for longer times and select prayer locations based on their preferred recitation and desire to join the different congregations that often represented the congregation's diverse demographics and their nations of origin. Depending on the location, the night prayers and related religious talks could last between 1 to 3 hours. During the break between prayers or on their way home, they often stopped for a treat; food places open late were overflowing with Muslims, which added to a sense of belonging.

Children and adults enjoyed socializing with others, often while collaborating in service tasks within the mosque. Volunteering was particularly instrumental for children to help channel physical energy while also getting good deeds. For example, the younger brother was a member of a group of reliable youth who would weave through the prayer lines with a donation box during fundraisers. During the last recitations of the night, the older children and teens would join a fleet of volunteers to prepare plates of yogurt, boiled eggs, honey and cheese, and *fūl* for *suhūr*. They finished in time to join the closing *witr* prayer and *du'ā' qunūt*, a humble and comprehensive supplication that they recorded on their cell phones to replay throughout the year at bedtime.

During the day, each family member increased their commitment to reading, reciting, and connecting to the Qur'ān and other religious content. When the children were younger, they raised goals for their daily *muḥāsabah* (accountability chart to recite, read, and memorize Qur'ānic passages), guided by a teacher with whom they met weekly. During Ramadan, they focused on memorizing a "challenge sūrah" designated for a contest. Annually, the children participated, and oral exams sometimes were recorded and posted on YouTube, providing memories for posterity of their "squeaky" voices. A particularly favorite memory was when the imam, examining the younger sister at around age 5, raised his hand indicating that she had passed, yet she continued. He gently interrupted, indicating this was satisfactory; she still continued. He smiled as she successfully completed the longer chapter. In rewatching the video, the family spotted her younger brother as a toddler napping on his mother's lap.

As the children got older, they chose not to participate in the Qur'ān competitions (even though the parents encouraged it) because they worried that the cash prizes might affect their intention to memorize (i.e., connecting with the Qur'ān for material gain, not spiritual guidance). As the children developed proficiency in reading Arabic, they

transitioned to memorizing with religious leaders who could more readily coach their pronunciation. Now older, they set their own daily reading goals but may share progress with friends and family members for additional motivation and accountability. When falling behind, they often share plans on how or when they plan to catch up, usually reading from a Qur'ān app on their phones on the way to/from the nightly prayers.

In conversation, including the family group chat, family members post verses whose meanings they want to discuss or share, given their beauty or instruction. Family discussions include reflections on recitations, or the sense of awe or piety conveyed in readings (i.e., when reciters repeat verses for emphasis or pause because they are so overpowered with emotions that they need to compose themselves before continuing). Given the lower energy at the end of the day coinciding with the sacred time just before sunset, while preparing for the *iftār* the family often played Qur'ān, highlighting local prayers that were streamed online as well as contemporary and historic recitations from around the world.

Celebrations and Social Connections

Collective *iftārs*, service activities, family gatherings, and prayers all provide opportunities to socialize, often in ways not facilitated outside Ramadan. The nighttime gatherings provided an additional element of excitement, such as the large numbers of youth who would gather at parks near mosques for midnight basketball. Ramadan celebrations connected the family with people and traditions from around the world. For example, the family savored reflecting on similarities and variations in *sambūsa*, where a flaky dough exterior (usually fried) was stuffed with a variety of fillings that reflected ethno-cultural and geographic variations. Somali friends shared versions with spiced ground beef and onions, shredded chicken, or fish. One grandmother enlisted her daughter to translate a recipe to the mother in this study, providing a delicious way to repurpose leftover chicken when blended with spices and fresh cilantro. Family favorites included the Pakistani and Indian vegetarian curried potatoes and peas. Even with COVID-19 restrictions, families exchanged recipes and dropped off meals to one another. Because mosques could not provide communal meals, the children and their youth group partnered with an Islamic relief organization to help prepare, package, and deliver *iftārs* through a meal tree for families experiencing food scarcity or difficulty in preparing meals.

Creating memories often reflects older ones. Walking into a *ḥalāl* grocery store during Ramadan to purchase dried fava beans, dates, and pita bread, the husband was transported to his own childhood through the sounds of the Qur'ānic recitation over the loudspeaker and the smells of pastries and savory spices from the catering wing. He recounted his excitement at home with the grandparents seated at the kitchen table peeling vegetables or grinding walnuts, while recalling as a child how they sang songs welcoming the start of Ramadan or anticipated the *musharati* walking the streets clanging a bell to wake people for *suhūr*. As the children got older, they lobbied to exchange the mandatory mug of milk with meeting friends at a breakfast diner. While the parents understood the thrill of late-night adventures, they worried about the recently licensed youth driving late at night. As a compromise, they offered to host a *suhūr* at their house for youth and their friends, which became an anticipated event in their friend group with simple favorites such

as waffle stations with turkey bacon and a youth-led prayer amplified through a karaoke machine.

In addition to anticipating the start of Ramadan, the family looked forward to celebrating Eid together and with the community. The family established a tradition of inviting close friends for a potluck for the last iftār of Ramadan. With bittersweet feelings, they reminded themselves of the joy of Eid, reflected on their worship throughout the month and prayed for its acceptance, and lamented the end of the precious month that brought them and other Muslims together. All month they had rushed to the mosque for night prayers, but this night they would enjoy a leisurely meal and several cups of tea with each other. Around dawn, everyone dressed in new Eid clothes, with young children initially receiving two new Eid outfits, with a “dressy” or “traditional” one for the Eid prayer. On their way to prayer, they recited Eid *takbīrāt* in the car and then joined the community’s chanting as they approached the mosque. After exchanging good wishes with community members, the family usually returned home and children opened gifts, leaving trails of photos and video footage for posterity.

As they got older, following a family practice stated by the older daughter, the children gifted each other and their parents, initially “regifting” small objects and later combining their allowances to purchase gifts for one another. In the evening, when meeting the community or friends for an outing (frequently a pizza parlor with games), the children changed into new, casual outfits. As they grew, the family adapted their practice to praying together, yet allowing the youth time to coordinate photoshoots with their friends given the “Eid drip” that they had orchestrated in fashion consultations with one another. Eid celebrations often continue community wide over the next few weekends, with carnivals or trips to amusement parks and, recently, some cities hosting Eid events for Muslim residents.

Challenges Within and Beyond Family Contexts

While Ramadan brings Muslim individuals, families, and communities together in worship, it also brings various challenges within and beyond family contexts. Family members joked about the range of reactions they receive from non-Muslim peers and teachers including, “Isn’t it hard?” with concern about the death toll of Muslims fasting for a month (i.e., unaware that fasting is from dawn to sunset each day and that people who are physically vulnerable due to age or illness are exempt). The question-turned-meme, “Not even water?” provided an opportunity to compare parameters for fasting across religious traditions. The family reflected on the varying religious literacy of teachers, coaches, and health care professionals. One year, a teacher attributed the increasing sleepiness of one high school sibling to a lack of interest or motivation. After discussing the daily Ramadan schedule of the student-athlete, her context shifted. This disconnect reminded the family of the need to communicate proactively each year with professionals in their service network and reassess their own schedule in order to balance priorities. Other professionals modeled awareness, as the family recalled soccer coaches and team managers who thoughtfully prepared coolers of cold, wet washcloths for fasting players who they understood could play, but not drink.

Parents tried to normalize discussing challenges, including worrying at the start of the month about their children's energy and workload, but knowing that without fail each year they would not want Ramadan to end. Female family members talked about challenges to stay connected to worship during their menstrual cycle (i.e., when certain acts of worship such as ritual prayer and fasting are forbidden). Family members lamented being fatigued but described it as the "good" sort of tired. In other cases, they admitted religious worries of not doing enough or that deeds may not be accepted, particularly when feeling physically fatigued without a corresponding emotional or spiritual high (e.g., sense of satisfaction after the end of *tarāwīḥ*, heartfelt tears during prayer). Family members discussed how signs of preferred or accepted worship vary, including simple acts offered consistently and particularly ones that extend beyond Ramadan. They also discussed how whisperings by the devil about the inadequacy of their worship may lead to reducing or abandoning it altogether; in unison they repeated the preamble to the du'ā' by a favorite local imam, "Ask Allah, and be certain of the answer to your prayers."

In addition, family members encouraged themselves and each other to review their own actions, lest they be committing sins that hinder worship. Children and adults described being exposed over the years to religiously discouraged or forbidden actions, including within Islamic circles and the mosque community. The list included smoking (e.g., weed, cigarettes, hookah, and vape), not establishing prayer, vulgar or other sins of the tongue (e.g., swearing, backbiting, vain talk, lying, and bullying), using technology for illicit purposes (e.g., viewing lewd or pornographic content, and cheating). Parents and children discussed how even in the most religious or upright contexts, there may be "bad" influences. They discussed the need to be critical about our influences (including our inner desires), surround ourselves with positive role models, and challenge ourselves to be better than we currently are. While the family agreed that playing basketball was not sinful or undesirable, they extensively debated the value of playing during the times that supplementary prayers are usually offered. Discussions acknowledged that different people, including family members, have varying capacities for many forms of worship. Further, they explored the fragile and volatile nature of spiritual life, needing to balance challenging oneself with avoiding self-righteous and narrow forms of judging others in favor of fostering sincere advice and critical feedback to promote growth.

Most recently, the family struggled with how to respond to feedback that reflected intersections related to race/racism, age/ageism, and variations in religious stances and personal styles. Previously known for weaving in and out of prayer lines with the donation box, the family's younger brother had trained with multiple religious leaders and was invited to lead a portion of *tarāwīḥ* prayers in several mosques. Hearing words of encouragement from community members, religious leaders, and his peers (including his siblings) motivated him to continue improving his recitation and vocal inflections. One congregation livestreamed the prayer, and then posted the recording to their YouTube channel. Within days, the recording got thousands of views and likes, but the family and the community were immersed in the explosive comments. There was consensus on the recitation itself (i.e., vocal control as well as correctness of pronunciation that reflects rules regarding where and how long to pause at particular syllables and words). Struck by the

reciter's young age, many people posted comments suggesting that he create an independent social media account to post recordings, even requesting particular verses.

The family did not anticipate the controversial comments: How could a religious leader wear his hair like that (i.e., referencing relatively tight curls worn like an Afro on top, with the sides shorter). A robust debate erupted online, with some arguing that such a long hairstyle was un-Islamic (i.e., *qaza'*) generally and unbecoming of a religious leader. Others replied that hairstyle is a matter of preference, that his hair appears like many youth, and that people should encourage his religious commitment and keep "negative" feedback to themselves. Comments online and offline highlighted how many youth are disaffiliating from religion generally, including Islam, and that the community should encourage him (and other youth), not erect barriers. Additional discussion suggested cutting the hair or using various head coverings for men, which some Muslims believe are preferred for any male leading a sermon or prayer, given their Islamic school of thought. Within the family, there was candid discussion about what some perceived as the "real" nature of the concern, noting that long, straight hair would likely be less problematic, particularly given reports that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) wore his hair long. Critiques of his hair texture reflected elements of racism within Muslims and society generally and a particular form of anti-Blackness. The brother later met another young reciter of South Asian background with straight hair, who shared receiving similar critiques of his slightly spiky and gelled coif. The youth joked that unless hair was extremely short, the "look" for the religious leader was to be balding.

While Ramadan connects people to their Creator and one another in worship, fulfilling its potential includes navigating personal, familial, and social challenges related to worship and cultivating ourselves and society in a manner that enjoins good and forbids evil.

Discussion

Despite the burgeoning scholarship on R/S, scholars acknowledge the dominance of its mainline Protestant Christian orientation (see Hill and Pargament 2003; King and Boyatzis 2015), underscoring the need to broaden research to account for variations between and within denominations or affiliations. Understudied experiences include those represented in immigrant-origin and religiously diverse samples, particularly because existing quantitative survey measures may miss nuances of their lived experiences (Marks and Abo-Zena 2013). Because R/S experiences are intersectionally interwoven into children's developmental contexts, a sustained focus on family and community contexts provides details about their proximal influences on children's development. This focus is important, given the limited attention to contextual and cultural variations, including R/S influences (Cohen 2009). More than clearly elucidating how Muslim youth in Western contexts develop religiously (i.e., acquire religious knowledge and beliefs, integrate beliefs into practices, and forge positive identity trajectories), it is important to promote their grounded sense of self and how they relate to family, community, and civil society. Family-focused youth development scholarship can attend to demographic variations in Muslim families, and varied family constellations including grandfamilies (Babu et al. 2017) and families with members who have autism and/or other dis/abilities (Jegatheesan et al. 2010).

Alternatively, failure to support adaptive identity processes could yield negative processes and outcomes (e.g., mental health, disaffiliation, “splitting” public and private selves, and radicalization) that negatively affect individuals and their communities (Ramadan 2004).

Qualitative scholarship has contributed thick details of lived experiences, particularly regarding the role of family conversations about religious life (Dollahite et al. 2019). Studies that focus on family processes contribute to understanding the role of R/S ritual in family functioning (Smith and Adamczyk 2021), with case studies providing added detail and context. An autoethnographic case study that is anchored in experiencing Ramadan, but encompasses other aspects of socialization, provides insights into the socialization goals, strategies, and outcomes of a Muslim family in the U.S. embedded in a broader religious community. In particular, detailed description of the developmental niche (i.e., caregiver psychology, physical contexts, and practices) provide context for the ways in which four siblings developed an attachment to Ramadan and religious practices, despite the challenges associated with demanding prayer schedules, fasting, and desire to increase their religious commitment.

This positive attachment, not unique to these children, was formed in early childhood and sustained and internalized through their teen years, including adjusting worship given COVID-19 restrictions (Piela and Krotofil 2021). Intentional practice toward building positive memories (i.e., emotional and affect) seem central within and beyond the family. Specifically, channeling practices serve robust functions of socialization and belief acquisition. Channeling includes selecting informal and formal identity agents (e.g., friends, religious schools, community leaders, and religious youth groups) to help youth mediate larger social influences (Schachter and Ventura 2008). As children developed, they honed their own agentic capacity of selecting (and deselecting) particular peers, physical contexts, and media influences. The need for agency was shared by children and adults, given religiously minoritized families and social groups that sought to integrate marginalized identities by co-creating a hybrid “third space” to house alternative social representations between dominant and unequal cultural models (Bhabha and Rutherford 2006). So, while decorating and celebrating religious holidays are important across traditions, they serve a qualitatively psychological and broader need for religiously minoritized families.

Given the fluctuating levels of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic behavior and rhetoric, many Muslim families acutely sense a need to promote positive religious socialization and identity (Peek 2005). Adverse effects of the impact of perceived and actual religious discrimination and Islamophobia-related stress on Muslims are so pervasive that scholars and practitioners have called for a public campaign to educate health care professionals and government workers about their impact and to enact policies at all levels to better protect the civil rights and support the well-being of Muslims (Abu-Ras et al. 2018). Relatedly, families of Sikh and Indigenous parents report incorporating positive ethno-religious socialization messages in community programming, partly to counter negative external social messages about in-group memberships (Rana and Lara-Cooper 2021).

For some youth and adults, internal and external challenges lead to lower levels of religious commitment, identity, and even lead to disaffiliation. In a national study on youth

religiosity, some types of channeling had an undesirable effect, such as participants observing the hypocrisy or phoniness they perceive in parents, peers, or individuals within their faith community negatively affecting their own practice and desire to associate with person, faith, or religious institution (Pearce and Denton 2010). Other youth, however, may take examples they perceive as negative and develop resolute counter stances forging a pathway authentic to them, as evidenced by youth religious conversion or adopting a religious position or level of practice different from their parents. Given social undesirability, discouragement within Islam to discuss or judge others, and warnings of engaging in the type of religious questioning that can lead to disbelief, themes regarding religious doubt may be understudied, particularly within Muslim family contexts. How individuals relate to, make meaning regarding, and respond to varied contextual factors contributes to their development. While these processes can be studied, youth point out that a major source of religious commitment that might be difficult to understand empirically is that Allah guided them (Abo-Zena and Midgette 2019). Like other developmental experiences, the range of possible positive and negative developmental outcomes depends on personal and contextual factors.

Limitations, Implications, and Future Directions

While case studies provide an in-depth exploration, such observations do not generalize to all children and families and they reflect bias (e.g., selection and socially desirable responses). Nonetheless, an idiographic or close examination of a particular case may have relevance to broader groups and populations and a nomothetic approach may be of particular utility in exploring varieties in religious experiences (Allport 1965; Schachter and Hur 2019). Studying the role of observing Ramadan in Muslim families in the U.S. suggests a range of implications and directions for future research, largely grounded in the perspective of the stakeholder. Muslim caregivers may seek to co-create a context that supports immersing their children in multiple dimensions of faith and their faith community, particularly given a societal context with many negative social mirrors about their religion. Depending on the geographic area and other features of family and community circumstances, some families may have difficulty identifying a community of like-minded believers. Indeed, within the same family, caregivers may represent different faiths, levels of commitment, or orientations about how to guide children's religious development (e.g., not taking Eid off due to school or work).

In addition, caregivers may seek tools and guidance to help themselves and youth navigate "normative" experiences, including conflicted or anxious feelings about the beginning of Ramadan and other issues related to faith and managing doubts. Muslim religious leaders and youth workers need training to work in ways that are relatable to a range of Muslim youth, including those who are "unmosqued." In collective contexts that incorporate a range of resources (e.g., online lectures or podcasts, regular in-person events, and opportunities to cultivate social connections), families, community organizers, and faith leaders may seek to develop informal and formal educators and processes to promote capacity to meet daily and long-term developmental needs in reality-based ways.

Given the ongoing socio-political issues relevant to the diverse Muslim population, adequate supports require coordinating across groups, including legal experts, social

workers, mental health providers, educators, religious leaders, community organizers, relief workers, and civil rights advocates. To reduce bias and promote rapport, researchers, educators, health care providers, and public servants need ongoing opportunities to develop religious literacy. Such literacy fosters “the ability to recognize and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social, political and cultural life through multiple lenses” (Moore 2015, 4) so that practitioners can more effectively recognize variations in experiences related to religion and respond accordingly. Future directions in scholarship, applied practice, and relevant policy would work to reduce stigma around Islam and Muslims to promote religious experiences and literacy about them and diverse methods to explore variations across and within Muslim families during and beyond Ramadan.

Conclusion

Particularly for highly religious families, religious rituals play a central role in family functioning and identity, serving dual roles that provide a shared socialization context that facilitates bonding, while also serving to transmit religious knowledge through experiential learning. More broadly, engaging in collective ritual practice and the meaning-making around it may contribute to religious development and resilience, particularly for religiously minoritized youth. As both a consequence of and a precursor to religious beliefs, engaging in religious rituals and the meaning-making surrounding them fuels religious and spiritual development. Exploring a case study of family practices around the observation of Ramadan provides insights into interrelated rituals and other practices. Complex interactions between personal orientations and connections with family and community contexts provide meaning-making opportunities and contribute to religious commitment of religiously minoritized family members. In this way, religious observation and identity can enhance coping and sense of purpose or belonging, particularly given the prevailing religiously minoritized status and contexts that skew toward non-religiousness or secularization. For Muslim family members, fasting during Ramadan and observing its associated practices provides a shield from outside pressure and an opportunity to cultivate internal drive fueled by faith and family.

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