

The Socialization of Muslim Children in America: Toward A Conceptual Framework

by *Hakim M. Rashid*

Introduction

Within the social and behavioral sciences, the study of socialization has occupied a central position. A commonly accepted definition that has been offered by Brim describes socialization as "the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and the society."¹ Thus, socialization is a process that begins at birth and extends throughout the course of an individual's life. For the Muslim, this acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions must be a process guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah. The knowledge of Allah's will and the laws and patterns of His creation represent, in essence, all that can be known. The Qur'an is the guidebook in the quest for knowledge while the skills and dispositions needed by the Muslims are reflected in the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). His Hadith and Sunnah provide the Muslim with a realistic context within which to apply abilities and attitudes in an Islamic manner. It is doubtful that any Muslim would question the relevance of the Qur'an and Sunnah to the socialization process. However, when this processes takes place within a non-Muslim society like America, the complexity of their application becomes an issue that requires considerable attention. This paper will seek to address this complexity by suggesting a conceptual framework for examining the socialization of Muslim children in America. First of all, it will contrast Islamic and Western perspectives on socialization. Secondly, in an effort to "Islamize" our thinking about socialization, it will offer a definition of successful Muslim socialization. Thirdly, the paper will contrast the Islamic and Western world-views and

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¹Orville Brim, Jr. "Socialization Through the Life Cycle," in O. Brim, Jr. and S. Wheeler (Eds.) *Socialization After Childhood* (New York: Wiley, 1966).

discuss their implications for the socialization of minority status groups in America. Finally, the paper will suggest elements of a conceptual framework that can be used to study the socialization of Muslim children in America. *In shā'a Allah*, this effort will serve as a stimulus for those who wish to systematically study Muslim socialization in the American context.

Western Perspectives on Socialization

Levine has suggested that three different perspectives on the socialization process have dominated Western behavioral science theory and research, each reflecting a specific disciplinary orientation.² Cultural anthropology sees socialization as enculturation or the intergenerational transmission of culture. This point of view sees the child as essentially a blank slate (*tabula rasa*), or as an organism that acquires culture by being immersed in it. The enculturation perspective, in its more sophisticated form also recognizes the role of cognitive processes in socialization. The desired outcome seems to be an individual who has absorbed the culture in which he has been raised.

The second disciplinary perspective attempting to explain socialization is personality psychology. Social and behavioral scientists reflecting this orientation have viewed socialization as the acquisition of impulse control, and as primarily a drive reduction process. The socialized person is one whose innate drives and disruptive impulses have been channeled into behavior considered "appropriate" or acceptable by the society in which he lives. Some theorists articulating this school of thought have stressed the role of guilt in the maintenance of social control. The desired outcome of this process seems to be an individual who will not behave outside the bounds of "normal" behavior; normal within the context of his native culture.

The third perspective emerges from the discipline of sociology. Sociologists have tended to view socialization as a process of role training or training for participation in society. This perspective also concentrates on adherence to societally approved values with the goal being the creation of individuals who will conform to the norms and rules of the society.

Each of these three theoretical points of view has built up a large following among Western social and behavioral scientists, and each has generated voluminous amounts of research supporting its position. Levine has noted, however, that:

These three directions of thought about socialization have been

²Robert Levine, "Culture, Personality and Socialization: An Evolutionary View," In D. Goslin (Ed.) *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969).

presented as divergent views on the subject, but it is clear that they are not necessarily incompatible with each other. At the most commonsense level, children do absorb their culture through diverse exposures and communications, they do have their impulse life harnessed and channeled, and they do receive training for social participation . . .

These common elements suggest the possibility of developing a comprehensive view of the socialization process by the more explicit application of the Darwinian model that has proved as fruitful in other fields.³

Levine goes on to make a case for the socialization process being nothing more than an example of evolutionary theory by focusing on 1) the random distribution of personality traits within populations, 2) the interaction of institutionalized sociocultural demands and opportunities with individual behavior and 3) the lack of individual awareness that adaption between personalities and institutions are occurring. As Levine notes, "It should be remembered . . . that this evolutionary model is borrowed from fields in which consciousness and purposive foresight are out of the question."⁴ The socialization process is seen, therefore, as further evidence for Darwinian theory, e.g., the view that organisms adapt to their environments in ways largely influenced by chance.

Socialization: An Islamic Perspective

The Muslim social scientist, however, must view any theoretical perspective that introduces concepts such as "chance" and "randomness" as antithetical to his faith. In Surah 10, ayat 3 of the Qur'an, Allah says:

Verily your Lord is Allah
 Who created the heavens
 And the earth in six days,
 And is firmly established
 On the throne (of authority)
 Regulating and governing all things . . . (10:30)⁵

Chance and randomness must be seen, therefore, as contrary to the Islamic world-view. What the West sees as "chance" and "random," must be seen

³Levine, *Ibid*, p. 510.

⁴Levine, *Ibid*, p. 511.

⁵Qur'an, Yusuf Ali translation, 10:30, pp. 483-484.

by Muslims as Allah's laws undiscovered. An Islamic view of socialization, therefore, has no place for Darwinian theory, nor can it be burdened by the artificial dichotomies of Western social and behavioral sciences. The socialization of Muslim children is best articulated in the following Quranic verses:

Verily this is My Way
Leading straight, follow it:
Follow not (other) paths:
They will scatter you about
From His (great) Path
Thus doth He command you
That you may be righteous. (6:153)⁶

Ye have indeed
In the Apostle of Allah
A beautiful pattern (of conduct)
For any whose hope is
In Allah and the Final Day
And who engages much
In praise of Allah. (33:21)⁷

It is He who doth take
Your souls by night
And hath knowledge of all
That ye have done by day
By day doth He raise
You up again; that a term
Appointed be fulfilled;
In the end unto Him
Will be your return
Then will He show you
The truth of all
That ye did. (6:60)⁸

I have only created Jinns and men
That they may serve me. (51:56)⁹

⁶Ibid, 6:153, p. 336.

⁷Ibid, 33:21, p. 1109.

⁸Ibid, 6:60, p. 304.

⁹Ibid, 51:56, p. 1429.

O ye people
Adore your Guardian Lord
Who created you
And those who came before you
That ye may have the chance
To learn righteousness. (2:21)¹⁰

Whoever submits
His whole self to Allah
And is a doer of good,
Has grasped indeed
The most trustworthy handhold
And with Allah rests the end
And decision of (all) affairs. (31:22)¹¹

Muslims, therefore, see socialization as encompassing more than just enculturation, impulse control, and role training (even though these would, of course, be included). Socialization for Muslims involves providing children with an understanding of their purpose in life (submission to Allah; 51:56, 2:21, 31:22) the goal of their life (return to Allah; 6:60) and a means of accomplishing the purpose and achieving the goal, *surat al mustaqeem*, or the straight path outlined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), (6:153, 37:21). Thus, from an Islamic frame of reference or world-view, Western theoretical approaches to socialization are incomplete in that they fail to articulate a relationship between the agents and mechanisms of the socialization process and an *ultimate* goal of the process itself. This poses no conceptual problem for the relativistically minded Western social scientists, since ideas such as "ultimate goal" are considered the province of theologians and philosophers. The Muslim social scientist, however, must view himself or herself as also a philosopher and theologian. The compartmentalization of knowledge must be as foreign to this thinking as the unity of knowledge is foreign to the Western scientific mind.

Socialization in the Islamic context must be defined, therefore, as the process of maintaining the child's Muslim identity from infancy into adulthood. Socialization is successful when a Muslim adult, both submissive to the will of Allah, and knowledgeable of why Allah's will must be submitted to, emerges from childhood. It is unsuccessful when something other than a Muslim identity is seen in the new emergent adult.

¹⁰Ibid, 2:21, p. 21.

¹¹Ibid, 31:22, p. 1086.

And this was the legacy
 That Abraham left to his sons, and so did Jacob;
 "Oh my sons! Allah hath chosen the Faith for you;
 Then die not except in the faith of Islam" (2:132)¹²

The successful socialization of Muslim children, therefore, is not a matter for debate. A secular humanist will not suffice, a communist will not suffice, an agnostic will not suffice, although they may be integrated into "modern" society. Only a practicing Muslim adult can be considered evidence of successful socialization in the Islamic context.

The Islamic vs. Western World-View

Muslim social scientists interested in studying socialization must recognize that it is a process that entails absorption of a world-view. The origin of man, the nature of man, theism vs. atheism, rules of social intercourse, perspectives on knowledge; all of these are elements of a people's world-view. The view of the world ordained by Allah (SWT) and exemplified by his Messenger Muhammad (SAAS) is in sharp contrast to that which has come to dominate Western civilization.

Figure 1 presents seven critical areas where the Islamic and Western world-views are in sharp contrast. They include: 1) the Islamic view of man as born good and pure vs. the Western view of man as born evil; 2) the Islamic view of an absolute moral authority vs. the Western view that morality is relative; 3) the Islamic view of a single, all-powerful, unified Creator vs. the Western perspective of the Creator as, at best, fragmented (the trinity), and at worst non-existent; 4) the Islamic concept of brotherhood based on faith vs. the Western concept of brotherhood based on race and ethnicity; 5) the Islamic view of women as the mothers of civilization needing protection and sustenance vs. the Western view of women as sex objects; 6) the Islamic view that earth should be dominated for Allah (SWT) vs. the Western view that the earth should be dominated for European man; and 7) the Islamic view that knowledge is unified and emanates from Allah vs. the Western view that knowledge is compartmentalized and emanates from the mind of man. Muslim children and parents, particularly those living in a society like America, are daily confronted with the two paths of socialization dictated by these divergent views of the world. A Muslim child cannot be raised in America without being confronted with the Western world-view on a continuous and sustained basis. Every aspect of his or her Islamically oriented socialization is undermined by various elements of Western culture. Television, popular

¹²Ibid, 2:132, p. 54.

music, association with non-Muslim children (or Western-oriented Muslim children), public schools; each of these phenomena has the potential of influencing the Muslim child's view of the world. It is incumbent upon Muslim social scientists to develop research strategies which can both document these influences and suggest socialization strategies that increase the likelihood of an Islamic worldview developing within the Muslim child.

FIGURE 1
Contrast Between Islamic and Western Worldviews

Islam	The West
1. Innate Good of Human Being	Innate Evil of Human Being
2. Moral Absolutism	Moral Relativism
3. Unitary Concept of Creator	Fragmented Concept of Creator
4. Brotherhood Based on Faith	Brotherhood Based on Race and Ethnicity
5. Women as Mothers of Civilization	Women as Sex Objects
6. Domination of the Earth for Allah	Domination of the Earth for European Man
7. Unity of Knowledge	Compartmentalization of knowledge

World-View Differences—Minority Socialization

Studies designed to conceptualize and assess the socialization of Muslim children in America can be significantly enhanced by a number of critiques of Western social science, particularly culturally sensitive conceptual frameworks offered by Afrocentric African-American social scientists. Afrocentricity here refers to a view of the world, and a perspective of reality that emanates from African cultural and philosophical contexts. Akbar, for example, has outlined the essential characteristics of the Afrocentric social science paradigm. It is a model that is highly consistent with the Islamic world-view—a not so surprising phenomenon if we believe that, a) Islam (submission to the will of Allah) was an innate characteristic of the first human being, and b) the first human being originated in Africa. According to Akbar, the Afrocentric model is comprised of four basic components.

1. A concept of self that is dependent upon group consciousness.
2. The identification of spirituality as the essence of the human being.
3. The innate "goodness" of the human being, goodness being synonymous with morality.
4. The existence of a universal knowledge that is understood through knowledge of the human being.¹³

These components are also found in the following Qur'ānic verses:

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favor on you, for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace ye became brethren; (3-10)¹⁴

Behold! Thy Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create man from sounding clay from mud molded into shape,

When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) And breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him; (15:28, 29)¹⁵

Soon will we show them Our signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth...(41:53)¹⁶

Akbar (1985) has also provided a critique of the dominant paradigm in Western psychology from an Afrocentric perspective. He writes:

"In the most simple terms, the currently accepted model is the middle-class male of Caucasian or European descent. There are many elements of linguistic and scientific jargon by which this model is identified, often in ways to obscure its true identity; but when properly analyzed and understood, there is no doubt of who is being characterized by the model of human functioning.

In other words, throughout the existing conceptualization of human psychology in the Western (and most of the rest of the

¹³Naim Akbar, "Africentric Social Sciences for Human Liberation," *Journal of Black Studies*, 14:4, 1984, pp. 395-414.

¹⁴Qur'ān, Ibid, 3:10, p. 124.

¹⁵Ibid, 15:28-29, pp. 642-643.

¹⁶Ibid, 41:53, pp. 1302-1303.

industrialized world), it turns out that the more you look like, think like, speak like, and in general, behave like the Caucasian male of European descent, the more you are defined in accord with the paradigm of an acceptable, functional and effective (i.e., "mentally healthy,") human being.¹⁷

This view of healthy human functioning sees individualism, competition, greed, materialism, exploitation, conspicuous consumption, and other hedonistic values and behaviors consistent with the goal of self-gratification, as the norm. The value system promoted by the Afrocentric and Islamic world-views are considered "abnormal" and anyone behaving in a manner consistent with these world-views is considered "deviant."

Implications for Muslim Socialization in America

What are the implications of this dominant paradigm of healthy psychological functioning for our efforts to understand the socialization of Muslim children in America? Another Afrocentric perspective may prove instructive to the Muslim social scientist. Boykin has coined the phrase "triple quandary" to characterize the socialization of African-American children. While simultaneously being socialized into the mainstream of American culture through parental childrearing practices, educational institutions and the media, African-American children have also internalized beliefs, values, attitudes and behavior that reflect their African heritage. According to Boykin and Toms, however, the African aspects of their cultural identity are not promoted within the context of socialization into an Afrocentric world-view or value system. Rather, children acquire certain "modes, sequences and styles of behavior" through a "tacit cultural conditioning process."

"As motifs or styles become the basis, the foundation for the child's behavioral negotiation with the world, they can conceivably extrapolate to tacit embracement of the values, if not belief systems that correspond to a lost cultural legacy of their African ancestry."¹⁸

The behavioral elements of their "lost cultural legacy" are often at odds with the requirements of participation in the mainstream of American society. This discontinuity between mainstream and Black cultural value orientations is compounded by the historically racist and oppressive socio-economic

¹⁷Naim Akbar, "Our Destiny: Authors of a Scientific Revolution," in H. McAdoo and J. McAdoo (Eds.) *Black Children: Social, Educational, and Parental Environment* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985).

¹⁸A. Wade Boykin and Forrest Toms, "Black Child Socialization: A Conceptual Framework," in H. McAdoo and J. McAdoo, *Ibid.*, p. 18.

structure of America. Being an oppressed minority has also, therefore, become part of the identity of the African-American.

Thus, according to Boykin:

There is dynamic interplay among three competing contexts for socialization: socialization in the mainstream of American society, socialization formed by oppressed minority status, and socialization linked to a proximal Black cultural context that is largely non-commensurate with the social dictates of mainstream American life.¹⁹

The message conveyed by the process of socialization into the mainstream of American society is clear: to be successful you must “look like, think like, speak like, and in general, view the world *like*, in Akbar’s terminology, “the Caucasian male of European descent.” The message conveyed by the socialization process formed by oppressed minority status is equally clear: members of minority status groups can only be successful in America to the extent that they *look like, think like, speak like*, and in general, view the world *like* the Caucasian male of European descent. These two intimately related messages make any socialization agency emanating out of an alternative cultural context extremely problematic. The Muslim child in America, like the African-American child, is in a “triple quandary.” He clearly sees the material success of those who emulate Western values and behaviors. Secondary agents of socialization such as television, popular music, peers (non-Muslim or non-practicing Muslim) and schools (non-Muslim or Western-oriented Muslim), both overtly and covertly convey the message that Islam is either un-American, fanatical, too restrictive, oppressive of women, anti-intellectual, unscientific, boring, or some combination of all of these. It is obvious that a parental socialization process that has as its goal the creation of a practicing Muslim, committed to the Islamic way of life, is up against stiff competition. This is true for both immigrant Muslim parents who, having been raised in Islamic societies, often fail to see the subtle cultural threats to their children’s Islamic identity; and indigenous Muslims who, having often “reclaimed” Islam as adults, are trying to socialize their children as Muslims while simultaneously learning the religion themselves.

An Ecological Perspective on Socialization and the “Triple Quandary”

Recognizing, therefore, that the concept of “triple quandary” for Muslim

¹⁹Boykin and Toms, *Ibid*, p. 46.

children, (e.g., socialization into mainstream, minority and Islamic identities) has validity as an element of a conceptual framework, let us move on to consider another theoretical perspective that may prove useful to the study of Muslim socialization in America. Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to the study of human development has focused on the interaction between the developing person and the immediate environment in which he or she lives, and the influence of the broader context in which this interaction takes place.²⁰ This perspective recognizes that a process like socialization, for example, cannot be effectively examined without a knowledge of each context, and interrelationship between contexts, experienced by the child. These contexts include, according to Bronfenbrenner: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and the macrosystem. They are defined as follows:

1. A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics.²¹
2. A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer groups; for an adult, among family, work, and social life).²²
3. An exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person.²³
4. The macrosystem refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exosystems) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief system or ideology underlying such consistencies.²⁴

Within the context of the Muslim community, for example, a microsystem may represent the family, the school or the *masjid*; a mesosystem may represent the relationships that exist between the family, the peer group and the school; an exosystem may represent the impact of the parent's occupational setting on the child; and the macro system may represent the dominant cultural context

²⁰Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

²¹Ibid, p. 22.

²²Ibid, p. 25.

²³Ibid, p. 25.

²⁴Ibid, p. 25.

within which the Muslim child is raised. Historically, research on the socialization process has focused on status measurements of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations within one or another of the child's microsystems, e.g., home and school. Most studies have examined home and/or school influences on child development. Relationships between settings, analyses of settings where the child is not present, and examination of cultural influences are rare in the literature. Research on Muslim children, if conducted from an ecological perspective, could offer considerable insight into the variety of environmental influences on Muslim child development. A synthesis of the Bronfenbrenner and Boykin theoretical perspectives allows the researcher interested in the socialization of Muslim children to come up with a variety of questions related to the micro, meso, exo and macrosystems.

Questions concerning the microsystem largely revolve around the Islamic orientation of the child's activities, roles and interpersonal relations. Is there a weak, moderate, or strong practice of *al-Islam* by parents? What is the Islamic orientation (if any) of the child's peer group? Does the child attend an Islamic school, a Western-oriented school or a non-Muslim school? What is the attitude of non-Muslim family members toward *al-Islam*?

Questions concerning the mesosystem, for the most part, relate to the extent to which the child's Islamic beliefs, values and practices are supported by other (non-home) settings with which the child interacts. Do members of his or her peer group ridicule or respect the family's practice of Islam? Do teachers and other secondary socialization agents (i.e., coaches, tutors, etc.) covertly undermine or overtly support the family's Islamic value system?

Questions concerning the exosystem primarily relate to the impact of external settings and institutions on the Muslim child's life. How does the Islamic orientation of parents affect parent employability? How does employability and the nature of employment affect parent-child relations, child self-esteem and quality of living conditions? How are decisions made by police, judges, social workers, educators, etc., affected by the Islamic orientation of the parents?

Those questions related to the macrosystem are primarily concerned with the extent to which the child's parents support the ideological and cultural underpinnings of the dominant society, in this case America. Are parents involved in conspicuous consumption or are they satisfied in comfortably meeting their needs. Do they judge others by what they have or by their deeds and beliefs? Are there parental efforts to assimilate into non-Muslim cultures or to promote co-existence with non-Muslim cultures? Do parents promote a view of *al-Islam* as a temporally constrained religion (i.e., *Jumah*, *Eids*) or one of *al-Islam* as a totally integrated way of life?

The set of choices confronting those responsible for the socialization of Muslim children in America is clearly indicative of what is, in Boykin's terminology a "triple quandary." Those who practice Islam in America are Muslims; they have a particular ethnic and cultural heritage and they are American (by choice or by birth). Each of these identities has elements that negate the other two. The outcome of the socialization process will more than likely be the projection of one of these identities as the true self, to either the exclusion or suppression of the other two.

How Muslims in America cope with this "triple quandary" will ultimately affect the inter-generational transmission of Islam in the Western hemisphere. *In shā'a Allah*, this paper will stimulate research in this area that contributes to a deeper understanding of Muslim socialization processes within the American context.

This research must be of both qualitative and quantitative in nature. In addition to surveys, we must conduct in-depth case studies of Muslim children being socialized in the West. These kinds of studies should illuminate both effective and ineffective socialization practices and thus provide a knowledge base essential to the survival of *al-Islam* in America.



The Holy One, The Source of Peace.