

# ISLAM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF SUFISM AND PSYCHOANALYTIC SELF-PSYCHOLOGY

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**Abstract:** Sufism and Psychoanalysis have the potential to create a synergy of Eastern spiritual traditions and Western psychological frameworks. This paper examines the similarities and differences between Sufism and psychoanalytic self-psychology, particularly of Heinz Kohut, and emphasizes the mutual appreciation of psychoanalytical self-psychology approaches and patients' religious beliefs, demonstrating that they are not in opposition and can work in harmony. The data was collected through literature reviews and documentation study. The results reveal that Sufi practices such as dhikr (remembrance of God) and spiritual guidance from a sheik are equally self-psychological concepts, equipped with empathy and self-object transference, capable of producing a more complete and culturally sensitive therapeutic encounter. It was also revealed that such a mental health environment can be created in which the spiritual and cultural dimensions of diverse patient populations can be recognized. A blend of Sufi and psychoanalytical values can lead to innovative, culturally sensitive, and effective mental health interventions to enhance the understanding of the spiritual heritage of Islam and address individuals' psychological and spiritual needs. This study's implications lie in the fact that it encourages concerns of cross-cultural psychoanalysis by providing a blending platform to understand Islamic spirituality as well as western psychological theories and practices. Future studies may further explore the role of such a cross-cultural psychoanalysis to understand various healthcare practices across inter-disciplinary faiths and communities.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Sufism, Empathy, Self-Psychology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of spirituality and psychology has been a focus of interest for scholars. However, the focus is now on the potential synergies between Eastern

spiritual traditions and Western psychological frameworks. The concept of "self" within these traditions delineates alternative philosophical and theological backgrounds. From there, the Western tradition will hasten to claim the individualist perspective on the view of "self," centered rather more on the line of what you are, and it presumes one's identity and autonomy in the first place. The East, by contrast—largely Hinduism and Buddhism—sees "the self" in much more integrated and fluid terms. Hinduism considers the self (*Atman*) to be eternal and united with *Brahman*, the universal soul beyond individual existence. In Buddhism, on the other hand, the self that is not permanent focuses on the transient and interdependent nature of all beings. Such divergent views testify to the profound philosophical differences between traditions and show how highly context-dependent self-identity is. In his 1964 book, *The Sufis*, Idries Shah discloses the following: "There is a Sufi proverb that says that 'If you can say what Sufism is, then you do not know Sufism'" (Shah, 1964). This book is by far the most comprehensive and reliable general presentation of Sufism, covering the history of its development, doctrines, and influence in the East. It is his way to emphasize that Sufism precedes and encompasses Islam, and that it espouses mystical teachings, placing more importance on intuitive experiences than on logic and intellect. Shah reviews the works of Sufi masters, such as Jalaluddin Rumi, Omar Khayyam, and Ibn Arabi. Shah traces the transmission of Sufi teachings to Western thinkers, pointing out the profound and durable Sufi impact transcending cultural differences (Shah, 1964). It suggests treating Sufism as a general, adaptable philosophy applicable to modern times, and not merely a particular Islamic practice. Sufism, with all its connotations, is a highly intellectual system connected to complex thought and action. It requires earnest and intense love for God and real dedication to service humanity. The devotee to the divine deems this most important in their life, and they desire nothing but to be plunged into this infinite ocean of love. They believe that the whole universe is a mirror reflection of God with the realization that there is only one end reality, beautiful: God (Andrabi, 2015). On its way to development, Sufism was influenced by various cultural, social, and intellectual currents of Islamic history, leading to multifaceted research in multiple geographical regions and different schools of thought. One such promising area has been psychoanalysis, developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian neurologist. Another promising impact is that of Heinz Kohut (1913-1981), a Jewish Austrian-born American psychoanalyst, who transformed self-psychology as a major school of thought within the Freudian psychoanalysis and redefined the therapeutic approaches with a more modern analytic approach (Kohut, 2009). Kohut's self-psychology strikes a balance of both spiritual and psychological principles to understand the empathic attunement in

diverse cultural settings (Kohut, 2009). During the last few decades, a lot of research has been carried out to search the intersection between Sufism and psychoanalysis in clinical settings (de la Torre Bueno, 1990; Piraino, 2021; Rothman & Coyle, 2023; Siddiqui, 2016), and to develop insight into mental healthcare that is appreciative of both spiritual and psychological dimensions (Moreira-Almeida & Bhugra, 2021; Pearce et al., 2020; Saad & de Medeiros, 2020; Van Nieuw Amerongen-Meeuse et al., 2021). This shows that researchers and practitioners have sought to explore the potential benefits of bringing Sufi precepts and practices into psychoanalytic frameworks. However, very few studies have compared the culturally adapted models of Sufism and psychoanalysis, in respect of cultural and spiritual backgrounds of people globally. The current study, therefore, contributes to this domain with a difference. It first precisely defines the Sufism that came into being in the very early period of Islam, developing a vibrant texture of cultural and spiritual practices, with philosophical insights. The study specifically examines whether such a mental health environment can be created in which the spiritual and cultural dimensions of diverse patient populations are recognized and valued. It is premised in this study that such recognition can lead to innovative, culturally sensitive, and effective mental health interventions to enhance the understanding of the spiritual heritage of Islam and address individuals' psychological and spiritual needs. This study thus aimed at providing an understanding of Islamic spirituality, in general, and Sufi precepts and practices, in particular, to understand psychoanalytic frameworks, in the context of western psychological theories and practices, to bring about cross-cultural psychoanalysis.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sufi concepts and practices may be appreciated in analysis to issues related to self-development, empathy, and therapeutic relationships (Arifin et al., 2022; Haryanto & Muslih, 2024; Urullu1a, 2022; Wahyudi et al., 2024). Such appreciation has been evidenced in terms of practical applications. For example, Pesantren Tetirah Dhikr, an Islamic-Sufi-based rehabilitation center located in Indonesia, found a significant improvement in the mental health of its participants (Subandi et al., 2021). Through its repetition of mantras and meditation, this exercise is similar to the self-soothing and integrative functions of Kohut's self-objects concerning inner peace and self-cohesion (Subandi et al., 2021). In an extension of this, Bozorgzadeh and Grasser outlined a model of analysis that combined Sufi-based intervention with standard psychoanalysis and covered the integration of both the physical and spiritual aspects of patients (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2022). This approach saw a terrific decrease in

psychological suffering accompanied by enhancements in resilience and hope (Subandi et al., 2022). In a more addiction-treatment-specific context, Paul expanded on the requirement for empathy and self-object experience (Weisel-Barth, 2021), correlating it with Sufi practices in which the sheik, an analogous empathic and supportive figure, facilitates the individual's movement toward self-cohesion and recovery. Arifin et al. asserted that, indeed, Sufi-based counseling techniques help students in Islamic boarding schools acquire sociocultural literacy (Arifin et al., 2022), improved mental health and better understanding of other cultures, which, several studies have accepted having the potential to provide room for the application of Sufi principles (Afiani & Haririe, 2024; Syakur & Khoiroh, 2024; Wijaya, 2022). The following aspects, based on the fact that they both revolve around empathic relationships and holistic healing, clearly demonstrate the compatibility of Kohut's self-psychology with Sufi teaching. Kohut's theory, as cited in Patton et al. (Patton et al., 1982) and Hill et al. (Hill et al., 2017), emphasizes the importance of the self in its development through empathic relationships and cohesion. The Sufi notion of *Tawheed*, or the unity of being, justifies a parallel assertion by emphasizing the solid empathic feeling of interconnectedness between human beings and the divine. Herzog explicitly pointed out that empathy is crucial in the formation of psychological health within the framework of Kohut (Herzog, 2018). These include the meditation practices and storytelling that are an essential part of Sufi traditions in analysis: remembrance of God, or "Dhikr" and "Hikayat" (Smith et al., 2007). Patients can use these techniques to pay attention and manage stress when making sense of their experiences throughout the treatment. In a similar position is the Sufi practice of "Sama," which involves listening to spiritual music and poetry to create a quiet and reflexive atmosphere whereby the level of emotional expression increases together with processing (Islamy et al., 2022). Recent studies have provided further evidence of the importance of appreciating spiritual and psychological practices for health (Arifin et al., 2022; Haryanto & Muslih, 2024; Subandi et al., 2022; Urullu1a, 2022; Wahyudi et al., 2024). Regarding psychological health conditions, it has been demonstrated that the inclusion of Islamic spiritual practices in analysis can help manage them by providing a sense of purpose and belonging to the patients (Afiani & Haririe, 2024; Syakur & Khoiroh, 2024; Wijaya, 2022). Similarly, it has been shown that the Sufi *maqāmāt* may also mirror the stages in psychoanalytic analysis, fostering self-understanding and personal growth (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2022). There has also been a focus on how Christian Orthodox practices could be integrated into psychotherapies and discussions on how other spiritual traditions could be incorporated into modern psychological traditions (Saroglou et al., 2020; Timbers & Hollenberger, 2022). These studies have suggested that spiritual practices can

complement the efficacy of interventions from psychoanalysis point of view. A meta-analysis of these issues supports this fact by stating that the combination of spiritual and psychological therapies is viable in many settings (Isgandarova, 2019). Kulka points out that, in this pursuit of further understanding of spirituality and psychoanalysis (Kulka, 2022), the placement of self-psychology as a model could recognize spiritual dimensions, and that 'self' bridges the structured psyche and unstructured spirit. Sucharov and Delva, too, explain the acknowledgment of interconnectedness and practices that handle oppression at the core of spiritually informed psychoanalytic practices (Sucharov & Delva, 2022). This work was further elucidated by the innovative integration of Buddhist philosophy and psychoanalytic training proposed by Kulka, Gavrieli-Rahabi, and Goldberg to emphasize the ethical and theoretical changes that the merging of this field requires (Kulka et al., 2020). Additional works published in this area include critique of traditional psychoanalytic frameworks with an introduction to a cognitive-behavioral-theory-based exploration of spirituality. For example, Barrie-Anthony and Goldin found little-studied spiritual components in psychoanalytic practice (Barrie-Anthony & Goldin, 2022); Audate introduced psychosynthesis psychoanalysis, which integrates transpersonal and humanistic psychology to address the patient at the spiritual level (Audate, 2022). Shugurov and Mozzhilin elaborated on the interdisciplinary interactions of psychoanalysis with religious (Shugurov & Mozzhilin, 2023) and mystical experiences and concluded that this synthesis could revive and deepen psychoanalytic theory and practice (Bakar, 2016). A recent large study by Basmael and Al-Subhaiyin collected the opinions of 209 psychologists and 101 psychiatrists working in public hospitals in Saudi Arabia (Basmael & Al-Subhaiyin, 2022). This large sample reflected the overall positive attitudes toward psychoanalysis, although differences were found when the data was broken down by gender, academic degree, and years of professional experience. These findings confirm the need to integrate a psychoanalytic approach into diverse cultural contexts. Taken as a whole, these studies speak of the transformative potential of considering self-psychology through a psychoanalytic lens with spiritual practices. This critical review focuses on recent scholarly articles that establish correlations and establish connections between Sufism and clinical psychoanalysis, specializing in self-psychology. The literature overview reveals that contemporary developments highlight goals such as taking cultural factors into consideration and introducing spiritual aspects into therapeutic models. These studies also emphasize the fact that therapeutic contexts also include spiritual dimensions. The approach is holistic in that it combines mental health with psychological and spiritual well-being, an extension of psychoanalysis with spiritual and existential dimensions.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study adopted the review of literature as the research methodology to gather a more contemporary perspective on the subject of Sufism in relation to psychoanalysis. Adopting a content analysis approach, this qualitative research attempted to create a path for an approach that could benefit individuals from both spiritual and psychological healing. In addition, the study also made a clear comparison of Sufism and Psychoanalysis as two diverse disciplines that would provide more evidence and practitioner engagement and provide a novel, culturally sensitive, and holistic psychosocial approach toward mental health and well-being (Ahmadi & Badruzaman, 2021; Saeed & Batool, 2021).

### 4. RESULTS

- *Sufism and Psychoanalysis*

Sufism, the mystical aspect of Islam, is defined as a spiritual and introspective understanding of faith, with the primary aim of finding divine truth through a direct experiential union with God. At the core of Sufism lies the belief in *taqiyah*: the purification of the soul to draw it near the divine through rigorous self-discipline, meditation, *dhikr*, and the guidance of a spiritual mentor or sheik on the path. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, founded by Sigmund Freud, is an applied clinical approach and theory of the human mind. Psychoanalysis traces the influence of repressed memories, desires, and childhood experiences on someone's health. This technique is helpful in tracing how repressed memories, desires, and early childhood experiences might affect an individual's well-being through dream interpretation, free association, analysis of resistance, and transference in the uncovering and resolving of unconscious conflicts. Psychoanalysis also emphasizes the unconscious mind's role in behavior and focuses on resolving psychological conflicts through techniques such as free association, dream analysis, and transference (Kugle, 2021). The intersection of Sufism and psychoanalysis offers a potentially enriching approach that combines spiritual and psychological healing, leading to innovative, culturally sensitive, and holistic approaches to mental health and well-being (Ahmadi & Badruzaman, 2021; Saeed & Batool, 2021). Understanding Sufism and psychoanalysis into mental health practices offers distinct opportunities to address the complex needs of patients seeking assistance for psychological problems, intertwined with spiritual concerns. By juxtaposing these two cultural and philosophical backgrounds, one can understand fully how each tradition influences

its therapeutic approach. This could lead to the appreciation of Sufi spiritual practices into contemporary mental health practices, filling a gap in the holistic and culturally sensitive approach to mental health problems. The intersection of psychoanalytic self-psychology and spiritual practices, particularly Sufism, offers a promising avenue for developing innovative therapeutic interventions that cater to the diverse needs of contemporary societies (Mavrogiorgou et al., 2023).

- *Therapeutic techniques of Sufism and psychoanalysis*

A comparison of therapeutic techniques reveals that Sufism uses holistic spiritual practices for purification, including deep practices aimed at achieving closeness to God. Techniques such as the *maqāmāt* (spiritual stations) guide the purification of the soul at various stages (Haqq, 2021). On the other hand, psychoanalytic techniques are applied to solving psychological problems by papering the impact of the hidden influence of the unconscious mind on behavior and feelings; for example, free association and dream analysis are some of the psychoanalytic therapeutic techniques, which are in sharp contrast to Sufism. Although Sufism and psychoanalysis aim to explore individuals' inner lives, their methodologies and outcomes significantly differ. Sufism utilizes spiritual exercises and guidance from sacred texts and teachers, whereas psychoanalysis employs therapeutic practices to enhance self-awareness and resolve internal conflict. Sufism strives to realize the spiritual truth that transcends the individual self by integrating all aspects of human life into a cohesive spiritual framework (Mawardi, 2022). By contrast, psychoanalysis, rooted in scientific tradition, aims to treat psychopathologies in a clinical setting using structured methods. For instance, a recent study by Rusmana and Ali examined the application of Sufi healing methods in drug rehabilitation in Indonesia, highlighting the effective use of spiritual practices alongside psychological strategies to treat addiction (Rusmana & Ali, 2022). Traditional examples of Sufi healing methods include spiritual practices directed toward the purification of the soul, the achievement of direct mystical unification with God, *dhikr*, meditation, and consultation with a sheik. While such Sufi techniques are said to have their heritage in the Islamic culture and philosophy and offer a total emphasis on an exclusive, individual-direct relationship with God. Psychoanalysis, however, designs its therapeutic techniques in Western intellectual traditions, infused with advancements in psychology, medicine, and philosophy. There are significant differences between these two approaches; however, both have striking similarities. In the long run, the two approaches of Sufism and psychoanalysis, provide a deeper understanding of the human mind and its journey through health and disease. Both Sufism and

psychoanalysis converge in the exploration of human inner lives, their regard for experience, and the call to lead inward-looking transformative lives. Islam inculcates Sufism to realize a spiritual truth beyond the individual self and unites all aspects of human life into one integrated spiritual whole (Mawardi, 2022). Psychoanalysis, too, though a product of scientific tradition, is focused on treating psychopathologies in clinical practice using well-structured methodologies, focusing on the individual self or psyche. Sufism is theistic in its approach and teaches practices under the belief in a transcendent God, psychoanalysis also tends to be based on a secular understanding of the mind. Last, but not the least, the framework of both disciplines provides information regarding the nature of humans and their behavior, suggesting that there should be more meaning and fulfillment is the primary concern. In order to blend the two disciplines, Rusmana and Ali examined the practice of healing with Sufi methods in a program for treating drug addiction in Indonesia (Rusmana & Ali, 2022), assessing how fully spiritual practices can be combined with psychological strategies to treat addiction. The study concluded that Sufism can address addiction cases by combining both psychological and spiritual needs, as one needs to apply knowledge about *nafs* and their different stages of growth. A synergic relationship between the two approaches can lead to spiritual change and a permanent recovery. Sufism although appreciates modern psychotherapeutic techniques alongside traditional spiritual practices, such as combining Sufi guidance to holistically address psychological issues (Khoirudin, 2022). More precisely, they are of great psychological value because they would lead to inner peace and soul satisfaction. For instance, the dimensions of Sufism—grandiosity, rituals of worship, empathy, and the master-disciple relationship—make psychoanalysis more encompassing when addressing the religious and spiritual needs of Muslim patients (Doyle, 2023). Accommodation of the principles of Sufism in psychoanalytical practice can serve to make the therapeutic outcome for Muslim patients more effective. Psychoanalysis is analysis directed toward greater self-knowledge and the resolution of intrapsychic conflict to transform archaic grandiosity into a positive, healthy self-concept maturely and cohesively.

- *Sufism and Kohut's Self-Psychology*

In Sufism, spiritual growth or development may be in contrast to the Western thought, it is still equal to emotional maturity. There are several practices in a therapeutic setting within the context of Sufism widely prevalent in the Middle East. One such practice is Heinz Kohut's Self-Psychology that provides a general framework for the psychological maturation of the self through empathic



relationships. Although religious rituals take an appreciative or respectful stance within Kohut's self-psychology, the practice strikes a balance taking care of human experience both spiritually and psychologically (Wolmark & Sweezy, 2020). It is this balance and unity that makes one holistically understand self-cohesion and empathic attainment in true sense (Siegel, 2023). Heinz Kohut in *The Restoration of the Self*, provides even greater detail concerning self-cohesion and understanding of empathic attunement—closer to some practices in Sufism, like *dhikr* and meditation (Kohut, 2009). Thus, Kohut's self-psychology shifts interest to a coherent shape of self through object interaction, providing critical psychological functions for the sense of wholes. Moreover, empathic attunement can read a patient's feelings and is essential for developing an integrated self (Riker, 2021). According to Heinz Kohut's self-psychology, empathic relationships and internalization of positive self-object experiences are central to the development of the self (Kohut, 2009). The marriage between Kohut's self-psychology and Sufism creates a matrix of development and cure in which empathic attunement emulates the compassion of Sufism's mentorship. However, Kohut's self-psychology appears to offer a perspective that places the self at the core of psychological development: empathy, self-object relationships, and the formation of a cohesive self. A coherent and robust self was thus formed, according to this theory, from self-object interactions that defined the self as a person, among others, or experiences (Kohut, 2009). In turn, this can help individuals traverse the complexities of life. Similar to Kohut's notion of a self-object that offers a coherent sense of self through empathic validation, the empathic relationship of a Sufi disciple with their guide may also do so. Thus, Sufi practices shed significant light on the understanding of self-psychology concerning the role of spiritual mentors in personal development. Quite interestingly, the Kohut's practice recognizes the use of spiritual tools for transcending the self into self-realization, and even recommends Sufi spiritual practices within the therapeutic framework of self-psychology. This enables practitioners to deal with and comprehend the psychological and spiritual dimensions of their patients' experiences. The offering of empathic recognition on the part of the therapist can be said to parallel the practice of compassionate mentorship in Sufism. At the same time, Kohut's concept of self-objects is reminiscent of the phenomenon of spiritual companionship in Sufism (Kulka, 2021). In essence, an exploration of how these two phenomena are related would serve to determine and understand the various Sufi spiritual practices through psychoanalysis that centers on the Muslim community. Sufi traditions are concerned with the inward journey of the soul to purify it from impurities and to align it with the divine. The compassionate and introspective nature of Sufi rituals directly relates to empathic attunement, which is at the core of Kohut's theory. Essential practices for

a Sufi include *dhikr* (remembrance of God), meditation, and other spiritual exercises in deep introspection, as he seeks a compassionate connection with the divine. These practices create a state of spiritual and psychological equilibrium, in congruence with the goals of psychoanalytic self-psychology. Grounded in the spiritual and psychological sensibilities of fostering an environment rich in both, appreciating Sufi practices in psychoanalytic self-psychology ensures holistic analysis. This is because spiritual practices help elaborate further on therapeutic outcomes as the practice concerns the total being. Psychoanalysis has become familiar and more attractive to Muslim patients; thus, cultural barriers have decreased for better therapeutic engagement.

- *Theory of the 'Self' in Arab-Islamic Culture*

Arabian culture has deeply embedded its collective thoughts and consciousness in a psychological frame of reference that existed one and a half thousand years before psychoanalysis. The self-descriptions in the Quran and the rich traditions of philosophy and Sufism constitute this frame of reference. The view propounded by the Quran is very intricate and includes "the ego," "the self," and "the soul," with an insistence on free will and rationality. Sufism describes seven levels of the self: the commanding self that inclines toward evil; the self-reproaching self, aware of the sin it has committed; the inspired self that reaches transcendence; the content self, which is free from anxiety between faith and total obedience to God; the satisfied self that accepts one's destiny; the pleasing self that tries to please God; and finally, the witnessing self, which represents the ideal human who can completely surrender to the will of God. There are many interpretations of these levels. Still, the common denominator is that it reflects the character of the believing person, who seeks to subordinate personal desires, detaches from earthly pleasures, and reaches spiritual perfection. The problem of translation and understanding of ideas in this digital era reflects, in many ways, the technical and intense nature of these ideas. In the likes of "Journey to Mount Tamalpais" by Etel Adnan, for example, the subtle interplay between art, nature, and memory in Arab culture reveals the technical and intense dimensions of the richness of these ideas from a cultural and philosophical standpoint. Suffice to say that the dimensions of spiritual exploration and the depth of the human psyche, in other words, Sufism, began to refer to the so-called "unconscious" long ago, since Freud introduced psychoanalysis. Both sciences deal with the person within, and the subconscious influences on the human psyche. In understanding the person within, 20th-century Islamic thinkers found a relationship between Sufism and Freudianism, establishing fascinating parallels between these

two diametrically opposite fields. The works of Ibn Arabi, a Sufi philosopher from the 12th century, were thus introduced to the Arab world through Freud. According to the Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim, assimilation of these traditions began at the very latest with Alexander's conquest of Syria, which opened the door to Greek philosophical texts translations. In the period of Roman rule, Egypt became a cultural center as much as Rome, Athens, and Alexandria in the classical world. Additionally, the Arab philosophy grafted upon the earlier expansion of Hellenistic philosophy during the dawning of the Islamic era, and this is distinctly seen in the translation of Greek philosophy, mainly that of Plato and Aristotle. Greek ideas have become part and parcel of his Islamic philosophy, and this mingling is directly visible in al-Hakim's work, where he has bridged the Greek tragedy with Islamic myths, as noted by Al-Hakim himself. Historically speaking, in the mid-last century, Arab scholars took over the attempt to comment and had followers in the tradition of Sufism, translating Freud into spiritual and religious terminologies—the mid-20th century—to be more exact. Utilizing Sufi practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), facilitated by a sheik (spiritual guide) through psychoanalytical tools, is an eclectic means to heal levels of suffering, both psychological and spiritual. Such a synergistic approach, along with increased therapeutic efficacy, will be integral toward understanding the processes of human development and healing. The core entry of this section is Sufi teaching regarding the seven *nafs* or stages of self, which run from commanding *self-an-nafs al-amaranth* to witnessing *self-an-nafs ar-rayah*. This provides a helpful map for the aspirant's spiritual path toward purification and surrender to the divine will. It is akin to, and may be deemed to enhance, psychoanalytic perspectives on personal development and self-actualization.

- *Real time Clinical Work*

A therapist who belongs to both traditions could thereby provide more culturally sensitive and spiritually informed interventions in response to patients from an Islamic background, or a more spiritually appreciative way of dealing with mental health. To illustrate the importance of appreciating religious practices in psychoanalysis, as a part of this research, I initiated advanced psychoanalytic practices in my interaction with patients. Instead of promoting religious practices, I listened to the patients and made sense in terms of them as whole persons. I deeply appreciated and respected what patients brought to the analysis regarding their religious practices from any background, including Sufi traditions, and endeavored to understand these practices within the context of their entire being. Practically, I underwent three types of analyses, each in a different cultural context and varying

from diverse religious backgrounds. I faced two unfavorable encounters: with two Muslim Freudian therapists who viewed religious rituals as signs of neurosis. These encounters can easily cause anyone to grapple intensely between their interpretations to life's challenges and emotional problems that are deeply ingrained in the form of childhood-instilled beliefs. However, in my third analysis with an American Christian self-psychology analyst, proved very effective. He valued me as a Muslim regarding my religious determination by observing and being mindful of my prayer times, fasting during Ramadhan, and performing the Hajj and Umrah. He shifted the times of the analytical sessions to accommodate this kind of worship and obtain desirable developmental results. My experience underpins the need to appreciate a person's religious beliefs in psychoanalysis, which is pivotal in this current study. Working with him contributed to my becoming more open to appreciation of the spiritual side of clinical work, which is critical to the effectiveness of analysis. Such a clinical experience further illustrates the practical benefits of appreciating religious practices within a self-psychological framework. Examples of such cases also include patients with depression and anxiety, suffering from existential crises and interpersonal difficulties, showing that understanding the spiritual aspects in psychoanalysis may affect mental health and general well-being to a greater extent. For example, the practices of *dhikr* and meditation during analysis made it possible to save a patient with severe depression and an existential crisis (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2022). For instance, there was another patient who suffered from inferiority and insecurity, and who was facilitated to explore the dynamics of her relationship with a spiritual guide. This seemed to mirror Kohut's self-psychology (Jang & Jang, 2016). A similar experience was felt with a third patient, who was experiencing work-related stress and anxiety, and who found that daily *dhikr* and meditation were very helpful when performed concurrently with psychoanalysis, and he began to feel better and perform better at work (Hua & Jiang, 2023; Rusydi & Syafi'i, 2022). An interesting example is that of a 45-year-old male patient, who reported that psychoanalysis helped him become more focused and spiritual when reading the Quran. When the mosque's imam recited the Quran, the patient followed the reading, which touched him deeply. He was grateful for the analysis, which improved his family relationships by achieving greater calmness, reducing stress, and enhancing emotional regulation. In one session, he stated, "When I first met you, I was embarrassed to talk about my religious rituals because I thought that because you were educated and trained in the West, you might not value that. However, after my fifth year with you, I realized that psychoanalysis is not in contradiction with Islam. I now know that because of my analysis journey with you, I became a better Muslim and appreciated my beliefs more." This patient's statement exemplifies the

misconception that some Arab patients hold about psychotherapy in general, and psychoanalysis in particular. Analysts and therapists working with Arab-Muslim patients are responsible for respecting and appreciating the role of religion in their lives. These clinical outcomes of appreciating a blend of Sufism and psychoanalysis were promising. These findings are consistent with Salleh et al., who showed that patients who practiced spirituality during analysis seemed to manage their mental health issues with a sense of purpose and belonging, which is crucial for psychological resilience (Salleh et al., 2022). Valiyyul Haqq's work on the psychotherapeutic potential of the Sufi *maqāmāt* also demonstrates how these spiritual stages can mirror the stages of psychoanalytic analysis, aiding individuals in their personal growth and self-understanding (Haqq, 2021). In summary, these first-hand clinical experiences highlight the transformative potential of appreciating religious practices, including Sufi traditions, within the framework of Kohut's self-psychology. Analysts can foster a more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and ultimately more effective therapeutic environment by respecting patients' spiritual beliefs and practices.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Psychoanalytic self-psychology, furthered by Heinz Kohut, emphasizes self-development through empathic relationships and self-cohesion. It is generally held that empathic relations with significant others develop a self-cohesive, stable self; on this basis, the self is constructed. Sufi practices could also be put into this framework because these also lay great emphasis on self-purification and the development of a cohesive self through spiritual practices. At a more developed level, Sufi practices like *dhikr*, meditation, and heart tones, among others, could reach the core levels of cleansing one's heart and transcending one's ego. This thought is consistent with Applebaum, who emphasizes on the enhancement of the awareness between one and the divine (Applebaum, 2023). The names of God are associated with *dhikr* through the repetition of and meditation by self-cohesion. Continued chanting of these names helps in the concentration of the mind to attain inner peace; thus, it is possible to achieve a robust sense of self through spiritual engagement. While both Sufism and psychoanalysis are concerned with the inner world of a man's experience, their tools and objectives differ. To prevent humbling towards the Lord, Sufism uses spiritual exercises with the help of Holy Texts and saints to move away from grandiosity. Parallel to Kohut's theories, Sufi practices also emphasize heart purification and the soul's journey toward unity with God through *dhikr* (meditation) and the guidance of a sheik (spiritual mentor) (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2022). The deep interior quietism, state of compassion, and sense of presence developed in Sufi practices

mimic, in a way, what self-psychology brings out in empathic attunement. This exposure to Sufism as a set of Islamic mystical beliefs dealing with the personal experiences of the divine and spirituality would help deepen Kohut's lines of development spiritually. Sufism—the movement of self-purification, the journey of the soul toward God, and the transcendence of the self—are domains that would go well with the ideas of self-development and change as perceived by Kohut. Here, Sufism is of the viewpoint that it is not only a counterpart to Kohut's theory but also offers a structured way for spiritual development. The stages of spiritual growth within Sufism, in particular, repentance, detachment, and the direct personal experience of God, all resonate with the transformative processes of self-description by Kohut.

The Sufi lessons about reaching the ultimate union with the divine can further enhance Kohut's idea of strength, guidance, and self-cohesion as a "transcendent self-object" (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2022). Additionally, Kohut's idealized self-object, which nourishes the self of the person through an ideal figure, closely resembles the Sufi notion of the annihilation of the self (*fana*) and its subsistence (*baqa*) in the individual. Therefore, appreciating Sufism with Kohut's developmental lines to explain the spiritual experience as lying inside the rubric of self-psychology affirms that wholesome psychology considers mental and spiritual health as part and parcel of human development. Kohut's investigation of spirituality is also a part and parcel of his more extensive work in self-psychology on the development and sustainability of the self. Kohut postulated that, similar to other strands of human experience, spirituality is a significant dimension in terms of self-cohesion and wholeness. We can also view this spiritual dimension as the determinant of self-organization, which in turn enhances the self's stability and resilience in the face of adversity. Kohut explained the presence within the self of the possibility of spirituality and a longitudinal calling—two elements that the theorist deemed vital to the health of the self. He posits that spirituality might provide a deep sense of connection and meaning to combat fragmentation and alienation. This perspective is consistent with Kohut et al.'s broader therapeutic goals. In other words, Kohut stated that through his theory, he tried to express the importance of spirituality for the development, maintenance, and restoration of oneself. It is a source of resilience and even serves as a pathway toward psychological healing psychologically (Magid et al., 2021; Riker, 2021; Strozier et al., 2021). Heinz Kohut's spirituality is part of his larger self-psychology. He believed that spirituality was necessary for the integration and development of the self. According to Kohut, spiritual experiences give a person profound meaning, continuity, and contact with others; without this, there can be no maintenance of psychological well-being. His theory posits that experience functions

as a self-object experience and offers the opportunity to integrate fragmented pieces of the person into a more unified self-structure. As Kohut said, spiritual knowledge lies at the center of self-cohesion and resilience in human beings. He believed that such experiences as transcendental and spiritual allow people to gain unity and meaning, thus compensating for fragmentary and alienating experiences (Geist, 2021; Magid et al., 2021). This view is consistent with Kohut's therapeutic goals, in that the restoration of self-cohesion should be global psychological health. By incorporating spirituality into his theoretical framework, Kohut greatly expanded the scope of understanding human experience and identified the spiritual dimension as a critical factor in psychological and spiritual healing (Bahadorani et al., 2021). Heinz Kohut's work thus explores the integration of psychological and spiritual well-being by incorporating spiritual needs into therapeutic settings. According to Heinz Kohut, the self develops through empathic relationships and internalizes positive self-object experiences. To properly have a deeper understanding of Kohut's developmental lines, it is necessary to understand Sufism, a mystical Islamic belief that underpins personal experiences with divine and spiritual growth. All practices and teachings of Sufism concern self-purification, the journey of the soul toward God, and transcendence from the ego. These concepts resonate well with Kohut's thoughts regarding self-development and transformation. Sufism adds to Kohut's concept of spirituality through a well-articulated method of spiritual self-development. The growth processes in Sufism, such as *tawbah* (repentance), *zuhd* (detachment), and *ma'rifah* (direct personal experience of God), are related to the focus of Kohut's theory on the changes that occur within the self through various experiences. This underlines the core importance of Sufi teachings, which stress the ultimate connection to divine strength and guidance for self-cohesion, enriching Kohut's view of the "transcendent self-object" (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2022).

The concept of annihilation of the self (*fana*) from Sufism and its later manifestation as subsistence (*baqa*) is analogous to Kohut's idealized self-object that confirms and amplifies the subject's self through an ideal entity. The destructiveness of the self involves the destruction of archaic grandiosity and a pure, idealized fusion with God. For Kohut, the bulk of his personal experiences and spiritual beliefs have a great weight in forming what he wants to share in psychoanalysis. In this manner, the sacredness of individuality and the meaningfulness of human relationships in Kohut's spiritual vision place considerable emphasis on the necessity of empathy in psychological therapeutics. This has been considerably expanded and supported by scholars from the relational perspective that empathy encourages psychological healing and change (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019; Siegel, 2023). Kohut's spirituality underpins his theory of the self, which is concerned the construction and

preservation of the self through relationships. It is only through such spiritual understanding, which privileges a relational approach toward the self, that psychological well-being can be fostered. It remains true that many studies and theoretical works support Kohut's views concerning the self, including the development of the self through empathic attunement and mirroring in relationships. This kind of relationship helps create a cohesive and healthy self. Psychoanalytic theory has incorporated the spiritual dimension of human experience, allowing for a richer and fuller understanding of Kohut's work. This view helps one to understand the motivations behind his theoretical constructs and is a way of appreciating the depth and breadth of his contributions to the field of psychoanalysis (Rogers, 1957). Psychoanalysis makes it possible to probe deeply into the causes of emotional disturbances, and psychoanalytic techniques have been used in modified forms in contemporary settings to be briefer and more focused, while maintaining their richness and depth. Understanding psychoanalytic techniques with Sufi spiritual practices enables pathways that are both psychologically sound and spiritually fulfilling to heal. Ahmadi and Badruzaman indicated that in the process of analysis, spiritual experiences are acknowledged if given a framework to respect and use a patient's spiritual narratives (Ahmadi & Badruzaman, 2021). This paper critically reviews modern literature that sheds light on the interactions between Sufism and clinical psychoanalytic practices, especially self-psychology.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the growing field of cross-cultural psychoanalysis by highlighting the appreciation of Islamic spirituality, including Sufism, through Western psychoanalytic theories and practices. By promoting mutual appreciation, collaboration, and inclusivity, mental health professionals can develop more effective, culturally sensitive, and holistic understanding when dealing with the diverse needs of their patients, ultimately contributing to the advancement of mental healthcare in an increasingly interconnected world. This study attempted to understand Sufism with Kohut's principles of self-psychology, which enriched our understanding of spiritual experience as an integral part of self-psychology. In other words, Kohut supported viewing human development from a comprehensive perspective of mental and spiritual health. This study shed a nuanced light upon Kohut's theoretical articulations, especially those of empathy and the self, with a proper understanding of his spirituality. Kohut was a religious man, and he believed in the transforming capacity of empathy as well as the subsequent healing of human relations. Empathy was a significant building block for Kohut in his self-psychology;



it was more than just another clinical tool but part of his broader spiritual vision. In his view, empathy led to deep attunement to another person's inner world and was a way through which healing, and growth could be supported. It was therefore significant to understand the depth of Kohut's work and its relevance to contemporary psychoanalytic practice, which the current study attempted to do. In short, the current study focused on recent trends in perspectives on more holistic and culturally sensitive therapeutic approaches that acknowledge and respect the salience of spiritual components in psychological healing. This knowledge of Sufi practices is particularly important to psychoanalytic self-psychology in culturally sensitive analysis.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will help therapists take an interest in the cultural and spiritual factors of patients' lives during treatment, thereby encouraging them to be more involved and supportive. Therefore, it is inevitable to achieve more profound and long-lasting therapeutic effects, while this approach tends to touch the psychological and spiritual aspects of patients; thus, it makes self-psychology under psychoanalysis integral to culturally sensitive analysis. Therefore, the holistic approach to analysis results in the healing of the person, not just the psychological symptoms but the whole person, who can attain a state of well-being and personal growth.

- *Data Availability Statement*

The data support this study is available in the manuscript.

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