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Positioning Theory in Islamic Sermons: Online Messages to Parents

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Cover Page Footnote

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1. Introduction
Positioning theory offers a theoretical and analytical framework to explore how individuals position themselves, or are positioned by others, through discourse. As Gu et al. explain, "in every social context, there exists a realm of positions in which people are positioned morally, responsibility is ascribed and 'oughts' are involved."[1] It therefore offers a valuable lens for our study in this paper, which aims to understand how Islamic preachers position themselves in the social context of delivering a sermon. To make the data more focused and comparable, we examine here how preachers position themselves when they advise parents about Islamic values in raising children.

Our data is from a corpus of online Islamic sermons that engage with the theme of family. The proper raising of children is an important concern for all parents; it is also a topic that allows us to uncover the positions Islamic preachers assume in these sermons morally, how they ascribe responsibility, and which "oughts" are involved. Before we describe the data and our findings in detail, we introduce positioning theory and Islamic sermons.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Positioning Theory
Positioning theory has been developed as a method for analyzing social realities. The root of positioning theory is the way people share their beliefs about rights and duties through conversations or narratives.[2] People act based on their beliefs and opinions, based on the representation of their positions, rights, and duties in a particular social context. Thus, in our study, those giving sermons that include parenting advice believe they are in a recognized and accepted position to do so. They aim to reflect moral standards in the systems of belief used in the Islamic community and to instill in parents their rights and duties.

Positioning theorists structure the mutual effects of speech acts, positions, and storylines, within theorized moral orders, providing ways to interpret how positioning is achieved. Positioning theory provides a dynamic account of social interaction.[3] The frame of the positioning is composed of the triad of speech acts, positions, and storylines; this enables analysis of how social interactions and speech acts operate. Positioning theory employs Austin's theory of speech acts, the ways in which the words perform certain actions through what is termed illocutionary force.[4] For example, a father says to his child who is sitting in front of TV at night, "It is 9 pm now"; this statement has the illocutionary force of a directive to go to bed. In another example, a preacher says to the congregation, "Allah said disobeying parents is a great sin that can put a person into hell fire"; this utterance has the illocutionary force of a warning.

The second element, positions, can be defined as "a metaphorical concept through reference to which a person's 'moral' and personal attributes as a speaker are compendiously

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[1] Michelle Gu, John Patkin, and Andy Kirkpatrick, "The Dynamic Identity Construction in English as Lingua Franca Intercultural Communication: A Positioning Perspective," *System* 46.1 (2014): 133.

[2] Rom Harré, "Positioning Theory," in *The Wiley Handbook of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, ed. Jack Martin et al. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 263-76.

[3] Ruth E. S. Allen and Janine L. Wiles, "The Utility of Positioning Theory to the Study of Ageing: Examples from Research with Childless Older People," *Journal of Aging Studies* 272 (2013): 175–87.

[4] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

collected."[5] Someone can position himself/herself or be positioned by others as powerful or powerless, confident or apologetic, authorized or unauthorized. The act of positioning refers to "the assignment of fluid 'parts' and 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts."[6] For example, consider this conversation between a mother and her child.

> Mother : Why are you still watching TV? Have you finished your homework?
> Child   : It's just 7 pm, Mum! I'll do it later.
> Mother : Please, do your homework now!
> Child   : Okay, Mum!

In the first line of the conversation above, the mother positions herself as an advisor, employing indirect advice to encourage her child to stop watching TV and do homework. In line 2, the child takes a position of indirectly refusing her mother's advice. In line 3, the mother takes a more powerful position by employing a command to deliver her strong advice; in line 4, the child accepts the duties of doing homework by following the parent's instruction.

A conversation has storylines; people will take positions in a conversation based on these storylines. Storylines can be general narratives, expressions of typical relationships, or typical stories about a person.[7] Storylines are pivotal components of positioning theory, and narratives are the heart of the theory.[8] Through narrating stories or experience, an individual can construct and place their self-position. Analyzing narratives promotes understanding of how people make sense of or reflect on their stories. Through sense-making or reflection, it can be seen how individuals are positioned in the stories and how they see things. A story can serve more than one purpose. It can be referential with an informative function; it may entertain and deliver a piece of moral advice; or it may offer intimacy.[9] Through telling stories, storytellers reshape themselves, situate themselves in stories, and respond to various characters and individuals in the past, present, or future.[10]

Positioning theory has been used to explore academic conversations,[11] classroom discourse,[12] English as a lingua franca,[13] identity in online discourse,[14] and scientific genres.[15] Positioning theory has also been employed in religious discourse such as British Muslim

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[5] Luk van Langenhove and Rom Harré, "Introducing Positioning Theory," in *Positioning Theory*, ed. Rom Harré and Luk Van Langenhove (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher Ltd.), 17.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Allen and Wiles, "Utility of Positioning Theory," 175-87.

[8] Hayriye Kayi-Aydar, *Positioning Theory in Applied Linguistics: Research Design and Applications* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 31.

[9] Michael G. W. Bamberg, "Positioning Between Structure and Performance," *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 7.1-4 (1997): 341-42.

[10] Kayi-Aydar, *Positioning Theory*, 134.

[11] Harriet Cameron, "Bookishness, Blue Skies, Bright Hats and Brickies: Discourse and Positioning in Academics' Conversations around 'Academic Intelligence' and the 'Good' Student," *Studies in Higher Education* 44.2 (2019): 318-32.

[12] Hayriye Kayi-Aydar and Elizabeth R. Miller, "Positioning in Classroom Discourse Studies: A State-of-the-Art Review," *Classroom Discourse* 9.2 (2018): 79-94.

[13] Gu, Patkin, and Kirkpatrick, "Dynamic Identity Construction," 131–42.

[14] Vanessa Dennen, "Facilitator Presence and Identity in Online Discourse: Use of Positioning Theory as an Analytic Framework," *Instructional Science* 39.4 (2011): 527–41.

[15] Laura Hidalgo-Downing, "Stance and Intersubjective Positioning across Scientific Discourse Genres: Negative and Modal Epistemic Discourse Strategies," *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 13.1 (2017): 65-85.

discourse[16] and religious talk online.[17] In addition, this theory has been used widely in family contexts such as child positions in divorced families,[18] positioning of adolescents about domestic violence,[19] positioning of fathers in families,[20] positioning of mothers,[21] and positioning of parents.[22] We aim to contribute to this growing field with our examination of how preachers position themselves as influencers and educators of parents in relation to practices of raising children in the discourse of online sermons.

2.2 Islamic Preachers and Sermons

Preachers and sermons play a prominent role in religious discourse, explaining what is morally good or evil from God's, or the faith's, perspective. Preachers in Islam, who may be an *imam*, *shaykh* (male Islamic scholar) or *shaykha* (female Islamic scholar), or *ustad* (male Islamic teacher) or *ustada* (female Islamic teacher), are expected to teach the Muslim community (*ummah*) about Islamic practices. Preachers generally have a background in Islamic education and a knowledge of Arabic. In Islamic teaching, the prophet Muhammad, as related in Sahih Al-Bukhari, which is recognized as the most authentic collection of the Hadith,[23] states, "Convey (my teachings) to the people even if it were a single sentence,"[24] which means that a Muslim who has knowledge of Islamic religion has the right and also the duty to advise the *ummah* about moral values and spiritual knowledge. The Quran says that God elevates the position people who have faith and knowledge as stated in Surat Al-Mujadila verse 11, "Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees."[25] People who have two characteristics based on the Quran (having faith and religious knowledge) would have authority to guide people in the Islamic society. Islamic preachers are believed to have religious authority because they have knowledge and understanding of the Quran as the Islamic sacred book and the Hadith (a collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad as moral guidance), access to the spiritual realm, and demonstrate pious and exemplary behavior.[26] Although women have the right to deliver Islamic teachings, the number of female preachers is still limited; in some cultures, women preachers cannot speak in front of male audiences.

The power and authority of preachers can be seen in ritual prayers; for example, preachers are the only people who have the authority to speak during Friday prayer services. The congregation has to listen in silence, and conversation is prohibited. This reflects the

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[16] Stephen Pihlaja and Naomi Thompson, "'I Love the Queen': Positioning in Young British Muslim Discourse," *Discourse, Context & Media* 20 (2017): 52–58.

[17] Stephen Pihlaja, *Religious Talk Online: The Evangelical Discourse of Muslims, Christians, and Atheists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[18] Jan Stokkebekk et al., "'Keeping Balance,' 'Keeping Distance,' and 'Keeping On with Life': Child Positions in Divorced Families with Prolonged Conflicts," *Children and Youth Services Review* 102 (2019): 108–19.

[19] Carolina Overlien, "'He Didn't Mean to Hit Mom, I Think': Positioning, Agency and Point in Adolescents' Narratives about Domestic Violence," *Child & Family Social Work* 19.2 (2014): 156–64.

[20] Francesco Arcidiacono and Clotilde Pontecorvo, "The Discursive Construction of the Fathers' Positioning within Family Participation Frameworks," *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 25.4 (2010): 449-72.

[21] Caryn E. Medved, "Constructing Breadwinning-Mother Identities: Moral, Personal, and Political Positioning," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37.3-4 (2009): 140-56.

[22] Erin McCloskey, "What Do I Know? Parental Positioning in Special Education," *International Journal of Special Education* 25.1 (2010): 161-69.

[23] "Sahih al-Bukhari," https://sunnah.com/bukhari.

[24] "60. Prophets," https://sunnah.com/bukhari/60/128.

[25] The Quran Surat Al-Mujādila verse 11, https://legacy.quran.com/58/11

[26] Jacquelene G. Brinton, *Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 5-6.

preachers' high level of authority over the audience.[27] The image of authority can be seen in the elevated location of the preacher above the congregation, who is usually seated on the mosque floor. The preacher may stand in the pulpit at a distance from the audience. The language of a sermon is formal. All these factors position preachers as authoritative, while the congregation is positioned as receiving wisdom and education from the preachers. Although not all of our data comes from Friday prayers, the sermons are all delivered from a pulpit, lectern or desk to a seated congregation. From this perspective, the social context and roles ascribe authority to the preacher, and positioning theory lends itself well to the study of how preachers position themselves in the ways they deliver sermons.

An important aspect of the positioning of preachers with respect to their audience is the function of sermons. Sermons in Islamic teaching have a central role in conveying Islamic values to Muslim society. The sermons play an active role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of the individuals and society at large.[28] Islamic sermons are delivered as reminders and advice relating to Islamic morality and values and should directly impact the practical aspects of Islamic life.[29] Islamic sermons primarily refer to activities aimed at strengthening and deepening the faith for Muslims and helping them lead their daily lives in conformity with Islamic principles.[30] Preachers not only provide information about prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, but also offer guidance on how to treat family and neighbors.[31] Thus, an important aspect of sermons is the framing of this advice and guidance.

Previous studies on the discourse of Islamic sermons have investigated identity and belonging through the use of regional or national language varieties[32] and through the role of art, culture, and youth.[33] The content and style of influential individual preachers[34] and the interpersonal metadiscursive features[35] have been investigated, as have the role of sermons in conveying government policy,[36] and as a means of health promotion and education.[37] Taken together, this body of research underscores the importance of the language and content of sermons as vehicles for influencing and educating listeners.

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[27] Mohd Al Adib Samuri and Peter Hopkins, "Voices of Islamic Authorities: Friday Khutba in Malaysian Mosques," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 28.1 (2017): 49.

[28] Israa Ismaeel Mahmood and Zalina Mohd Kasim, "Interpersonal Metadiscursive Features in Contemporary Islamic Friday Sermon," *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature* 25.1 (2019), 85-99.

[29] Samuri and Hopkins, "Voices of Islamic Authorities," 49.

[30] Johan Meuleman, "'Dakwah,' Competition for Authority, and Development," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 167.2-3 (2011): 263.

[31] Richard T. Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib at the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Quran and the Oral, Nature-based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 42.1 (2012): 201–28; Youssef Sbai, "Islamic Friday Sermon in Italy: Leaders, Adaptations, and Perspectives," *Religions* 10.5 (2019): 312.

[32] Julian Millie, "The Languages of Preaching: Code Selection in Sundanese Islamic Oratory, West Java," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 23.3 (2012): 379-97.

[33] Jessica Winegar, "Civilizing Muslim Youth: Egyptian State Culture Programmes and Islamic Television Preachers," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20.3 (2004): 445-65.

[34] Abu-Bakr Imam Ali-Agan, "An Appraisal of Shaykh Kishk's Khuṭbah Presentation," *Intellectual Discourse* 24.1 (2016): 162.

[35] Mahmood and Kasim, "Interpersonal Metadiscursive Features," 85-99.

[36] Samuri and Hopkins, "Voices of Islamic Authorities," 47-67.

[37] Aasim Padela et al., "Acceptability of Friday Sermons as a Modality for Health Promotion and Education," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 20.5 (2018): 1075–84.

2.3 Parenting in Islamic Discourse

Parents influence their children directly through their beliefs and behaviors in the multiple contexts in which they live.[38] A child's self-concept in early childhood crucially depends on parents. Previous studies have shown that children's self-concept is related to family factors, including parental warmth and acceptance, communication, and affective expression.[39]

In many religions, children are believed to be divine blessings, gifts from God, made in God's image, and even examples for adults.[40] The duties of parents to care for their children and to teach them the faith are important.[41] Parents in Islam thus have obligations to protect, take care of, and educate their children.[42] Children in Islam have been portrayed as pure and innocent creatures; however, there has also been an image of the child as an ignorant creature, full of desires and with a weak and vulnerable spirit, and of childhood as a period of suffering.[43] As a result, Islam highlights the role of parents in raising their children to become righteous and responsible teenagers and adults. Islamic teaching emphasizes the duty of parents to show love, affection, and compassion to their children.[44] Our study will explore how these values are conveyed by analyzing how preachers give advice to parents in their sermons.

3. The Sermon Data
3.1 Description of a corpus of Islamic Sermons Online

The source of data in this research is the Islamic Sermons Online (ISO) corpus. The ISO corpus consists of twenty Islamic sermon transcripts on the subject of family delivered by global Islamic preachers in mosques, in conference halls or auditoriums, in front of a congregation or audience, in settings ranging from Friday congregational prayers to Islamic seminars and conferences. The corpus itself was developed for this research project and cannot be freely accessed, but the individual sermons can be found on YouTube.

The context of preaching generally influences the length of sermons; it also can be seen in the length of sermons in the ISO corpus (see Tables 2 and 3). In the sermons delivered by male preachers in the ISO corpus, for instance, sermons in the ritual Friday congregation service are about a half-hour (Bilal Philips, Nouman Ali Khan, Waleed Basyouni), similar to the length of sermons in a conference (Abdelrahman Murphy, Mokhatar Maghraoui, Suhaib Webb, Wisam Sharieff, and Yasir Qadhi); however, an Islamic lecture in the mosque can be an hour long (Mufti Menk). On the other hand, female preachers in the ISO corpus tend to speak less in their sermons, between 12-24 minutes. Overall, the duration of sermons and the number of tokens (a single occurrence of a word form in the text) [45] of male preachers are higher than female preachers, as can be seen in Table 1.

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[38] Marc H. Bornstein, "Parenting Infants," in *Handbook of Parenting,* ed. Marc H. Bornstein (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2002), 24.

[39] Janina Uszynska-Jarmoc, "The Image of a Child in His Parents' Minds and Self-image of Six-Year-Old Children," *Early Child Development and Care* 169.1 (2001): 5.

[40] Marcia J. Bunge and John Wall, "Children in Christianity," in *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts*, ed. Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 85.

[41] Ibid., 86.

[42] Avner Giladi, "Children in Islam," in *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts,* ed. Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 159.

[43] Ibid., 156.

[44] Uriya Shavit, "Raising Salafī Children in the West," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 28.3 (2017): 338.

[45] Vaclav Brezina, *Statistics in Corpus Linguistics: A Practical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 39.

Table 1. Comparison of male and female preachers

Gender of preachers	Average length in minutes	Average word count	Total number of tokens
Male preachers	33.68	5460.3	55,532
Female preachers	19.50	2564.5	28,857

Table 1 shows that, in general, male preachers deliver longer sermons than females; a male preacher delivers his preaching about 33.68 minutes on average, while a female preacher speaks about 19.50 minutes on average. Male preachers have about 55,532 tokens, and female preachers have 28,857; it could be seen that the male preachers have almost twice the number of tokens compared to the females. This ISO corpus suggests that Islamic women preachers speak less in a public sphere. In this paper, we focus on extracts about raising children, in order to explore how these Islamic preachers position themselves in relation to parents through their talk.

3.2 Sermons on raising children

From the twenty videos of sermons on family, there are nine given by male preachers (Table 2) and four by female preachers (Table 3) on the subject of raising children; this is a fairly standard sample size in the study of corpus linguistics. It is interesting that the number of male preachers who speak about parenting is higher than female preachers, particularly when there is a stereotype in the Islamic society of mothers having a primary role in raising children.

All preachers generally deliver their sermons in a standing position, and their positions are higher than the audience. On the other hand, Shireen Ahmed is the only female preacher who delivers her sermon in a seated position in a relaxed and informal context.

Table 2. Sermons by male preachers about raising children

Male preacher	Sermon Title	Duration	Word count	Occasion / Location
Abdelrahman Murphy	I am Bored!	29:07	5,367	ICNA (the Islamic Circle of North America) conference, Baltimore, Maryland
Bilal Philips	Educating Our Children	29:39	3,354	Friday sermon service at Masjid (Mosque) bin Zaid in Qatar.
Mokhatar Maghraoui	Save Your Family, Living and Passing the Legacy	23:35	3,032	ICNA conference, Hartford, Connecticut.
Mufti Menk	Keys to A Happy Home	1:10:41	13,769	A lecture in the mosque at Muhiyadeen Jumuah Masjid, Mayura Place, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Nouman Ali Khan	The Quranic Essence of Parenting	29:00	6,552	Friday sermon service in the Bayyinah Mosque in Fort Worth, Texas
Suhaib Webb	The Role of Fathers	39:22	7,093	A lecture in the mosque at the EIIS (European Institute of Islamic Sciences), Oldham Greater Manchester, UK
Waleed Basyouni	Learning from our Children	29:32	5,119	A Friday sermon service in the mosque at Green Lane Masjid, Birmingham, UK
Wisam Sharieff	My Parents Don't Understand	27:10	5,136	ICNA conference, Hartford, Connecticut
Yasir Qadhi	The Etiquette of Dealing with Parents and the Elderly	34:13	6,814	Annual United for Change Conference – Our Families: Our Foundations, Montreal, Canada

Table 3. Sermons by female preachers about raising children

Female Preacher	Sermon Title	Duration	Word count	Occasion / Location
Hujrah Wahhaj	The Prophet's Family Life	13:38	2,445	Conference of the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
Shireen Ahmed	Planting Seeds in Your Children	11:20	1, 986	SeekersGuidance conference, in Toronto, Canada
Zainab Alawani	A Mother's Advice to Her Children: The Catastrophe of the Breakdown in Marriage	24:20	2, 656	Annual United for Change Conference – Our Families: Our Foundations, in Montreal, Canada
Suzy Ismail	Save Yourself & Your family from the Hellfire	22:17	3,171	ICNA conference, Baltimore, Maryland

The tables show that male preachers speak more about parenting in their sermons than female preachers; it suggests that Islamic women speak less about raising children in a public sphere. It could be concluded that male preachers in online sermons speak longer and discuss more parenting themes than female preachers; however, this conclusion may not represent the broader context of the Islamic sermons.

The tables also show that the sermons were performed in different settings, such as in Friday services in the mosque or Islamic conferences in halls and auditoriums in various countries, namely UK, USA, Canada, Sri Lanka, and Qatar. We therefore expect to see a range of preacher positions in the sermons.

3.3 Data Analysis

Positioning theory provides a lens through which to explore how preachers describe the duties of parents in sermons. As stated earlier, the analytical framework is composed of the triad of speech acts, positions, and storylines. We have established that preachers assume an authority and a duty to expound Islamic parenting values when they preach, and so the analysis here will focus on the speech acts they use and the stories they tell.

The first stage of the analysis involved identifying those sermons that include parenting advice (see Tables 2 and 3) and then classifying the advice they offer. We present the analysis here in a layered fashion, with the type of story first, and any explicit speech acts of advice that accompany it. As the stories provide essentially moral examples, that is, stories that the audience are expected to listen to, reflect on and learn from, the preachers do not always need to make the point of the story explicit.

4. Findings and Discussion
4.1. Classification and sampling of data
An examination of the way that parenting advice is delivered shows that stories are a typical vehicle, and they can be differentiated in the extent to which they draw on religious texts and personal experience. Figures 1 and 2 show the relative frequency of each.
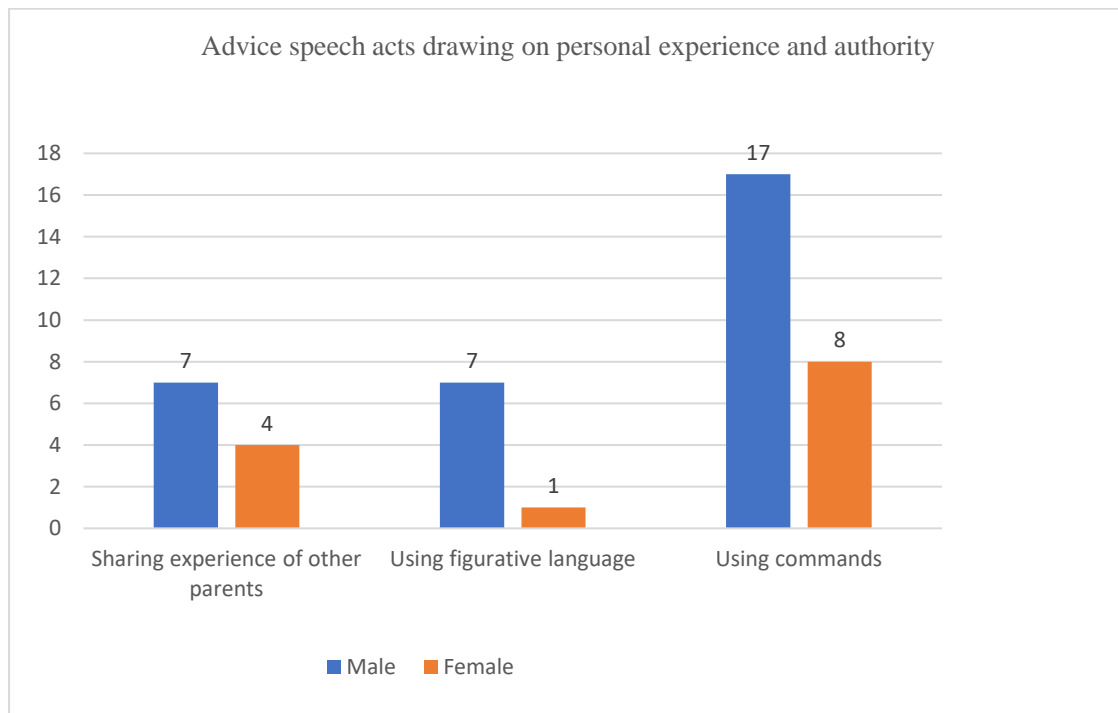
Figure 1. Preachers' advice speech acts drawing on religious texts
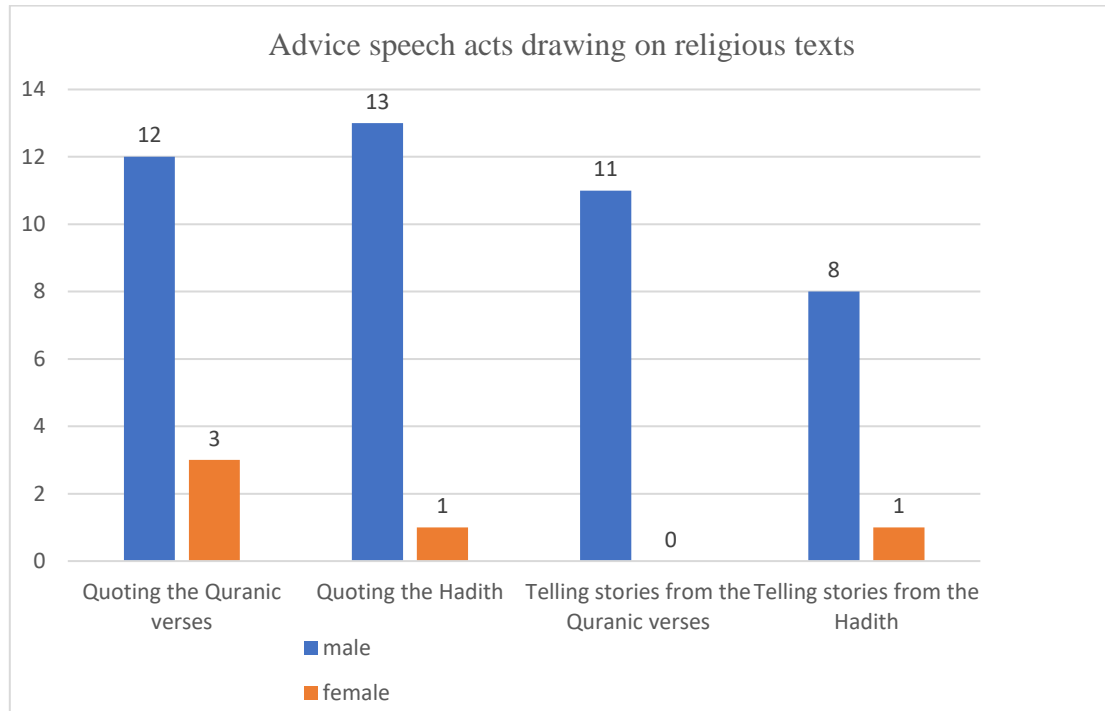
In Figure 1 we see that the most frequent sources of religious texts are the Quran and the Hadith, with fifteen instances of advice-giving drawing on specific Quranic verses and fourteen instances of drawing on the Hadith. In contrast, there are only nine pieces of advice conveyed through stories of the Hadith about the narrative stories of the Prophet Muhammad. The first two categories involve quoting a short section of religious text and interpreting it, while the second two categories involve exampled stories, where stories are used to convey advice.

Regarding gender, we see that male preachers seem to draw on religious texts more frequently than female preachers. What is interesting here is that there are no female preachers giving advice by drawing on stories from Quranic verses about parenting. Overall, the results in Figure 1 indicate that male preachers engage religious texts in delivering advice speech acts in their messages, which can be interpreted as male preachers positioning themselves as having authority in understanding sacred texts as the guidance for raising children.

Figure 2. Preachers' advice speech acts drawing on personal experience and authority

In Figure 2, we see three categories of advice speech acts that draw on the preachers' personal experience and authority. Examples from the first category might be thought of as contemporary stories, stories from sharing personal experience. The second category involves figurative language; some may have been inspired by religious texts, but it is presented as images for reflection and inspiration. For instance, preachers describe a father as a "light" which shines in the family and portray a child as a "plant" which needs to be taken care of. In the final category, we see preachers being very direct in their advice-giving, using a range of commands. This is the most frequent category (twenty-five instances), but these commands are short, and generally occur following a piece of advice from one of the other categories. Compared to Figure 1, we see both male and female preachers in Figure 2 draw more on direct commands in their sermons than on any other category.

Regarding gender, the data show that only one female preacher quoted Quranic verses and the Hadiths in the sermons; on the other hand, male preachers tend to quote Quranic verses and the Hadiths more frequently. Female preachers tend to share personal experiences, and male preachers tell stories based on Quranic verses and the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

There seems to be a correlation between being seated in an informal context and using stories of personal experience; this situation mainly applies to a female speaker (Shireen Ahmed). Where sermons are more formal and involve preachers who are standing, there is a greater likelihood of the use of commands. Interestingly, all male preachers offered advice in a standing position and drew on religious texts in all contexts of sermons in the mosque or auditorium, in the Friday sermon service, public lecture or conference.

As the numbers are small, and none of the female preachers are situated in mosques, these observations are not conclusive, but the implication seems to be that male preachers are more inclined to draw on the authoritative holy texts than female preachers, irrespective of the preaching context. It can be concluded that male preachers position themselves as having religious authority for their expertise in understanding and interpreting the Quran and the

Hadith; on the other hand, female preachers position themselves to be more intimate by delivering moral advice through personal experience.

We now provide examples of parenting advice from the four different types of religious texts, and from the three ways that preachers draw on their personal experience and authority.

4.2. Drawing on Religious Texts

The most frequent strategy used by the preachers is to engage with religious texts. Preachers do this in four ways: quoting Quranic verses, quoting from a Hadith, telling a story from a Quranic verse, and telling a story from the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

4.2.1 Quoting and interpreting the Quranic verses

As we have seen in section 4.1, preachers use quotations from the Quranic verses as the highest authority in Islamic teaching to describe the roles and responsibilities of every Muslim to help, educate, advise, and protect their family. They provide the Quranic verses in Arabic, then translate and interpret them for the audience. Here we see not only the important role that parents are expected to play in protecting their children, but also how the preachers position themselves as those who have the authority to interpret the Quran.

In the storyline of protecting children, Mokhatar Maghraoui delivers his advice indirectly by quoting a famous Quranic verse on the duties of protecting family: *Ya_ay yuhal lazina a_manu_ qu_ anfusakum wa ahlikum na_ra*[46] ("O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a fire. All know that Allah reminded us…we must shield and protect ourselves and our families from the touch of hellfire").[47] As Franceschelli and O'Brien state, Islamic teaching is a prominent source in building the system of values and it has been used to transmit a sense of morality and to control unlawful practices among children.[48]

In the storyline of positioning parents in the family, Suhaib Webb[49] quotes a short Quranic verse: *Allah subhana wa ta ala said Lasta alaihim bimusaitir*[50] ("you're not a supervisor but *nasihah* (advisor), the *nasihul amiin* (trusted advisor)". The preacher, through his interpretation of the Quran, positions parents as trusted advisors for their children; they should not be supervisors who fully control the children. By positioning parents as "trusted advisors," it seems that the preacher encourages parents to have broad knowledge and have a good relationship with their children.

In the storyline of delivering indirect advice to the audience to protect their family and take on a role as an advisor for their children, the preachers quote the Quranic verses in classical Arabic and provide their interpretation in English. The preachers position themselves as having authority in interpreting what God says because they have abilities in memorizing the Quran and mastering classical Arabic.

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[46] The Quran Surah At-Tahrim chapter 66 verse 6: *Ya ay yuhal lazina a_manu_ qu_ anfusakum wa ahlikum na_raw wa qu_duhan na_su wal hija_ratu* ("O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones") (Sahih International Quran Translation).

[47] Mokhatar Maghraoui, "Save Your Family, Living and Passing the Legacy," Islamic Circle of North America, July 6, 2010, video, 23:35, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l318135ltZo.

[48] Michela Franceschelli and Margaret O'Brien, "Islamic 'Capital' and Family Life: The Role of Islam in Parenting," *Sociology* 48.6 (2014): 1204.

[49] Suhaib Webb, "The Role of Fathers," European Institute of Islamic Sciences, March 3, 2015, video, 39:22, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MVT7EkDFII.

[50] The Quran Surah Al-Ghasiyah chapter 88 verse 22: *Lasta alaihim bimusaitir…* (not over them a controller…") (Sahih International Quran Translation).

4.2.2 Quoting and interpreting the Hadith

Preachers quoted the Hadith (prophetic traditions) to support their beliefs about the duties of parents in a family. The Hadith is the second highest authority in Islamic teaching after the Quran. Preachers informed parents of their duties by quoting the Hadith; they believe in quoting prophetic tradition as a trusted source in delivering Islamic teaching. Interestingly, the data show that three different preachers quoted the same source of the Hadith about the responsibility of every individual to their flock.

The Hadith contains much guidance for parents, so it is not surprising that it is often cited by preachers; in fact, one of the sayings is found in several sermons: *Kullukum ra'in wa kullukum mas'ulun 'an ra'iyyatihi*[51] ("we are like shepherds, responsible for our flock"). Preachers use this saying to explain that it is parents' responsibility to children to "provide for them, to teach them, to raise them to be righteous, to protect them, and so on."[52] Bilal Philips goes further and says that children have a right to be raised according to the teachings of Islam and if parents don't fulfill that right, they will be held responsible. Indeed, he says "we have to consider the education of our children as our primary responsibility."[53]

The Hadith talks about how to treat children are also often quoted by preachers. Suhaib Webb refers to the saying *kullu bani adam khattaa'un*[54] ("every one of you will make mistakes") to suggest that parents should not be too hard on children: "they are human beings, they are people, they will make mistakes, they're going to fall, they're going to slip, they are going to you know steal something out of *sadaqa* (charity) box or you know wear their shoes in the Masjid, or, you know, something crazy that kids do. Because kids are kids." In a similar vein, Suzi Ismail tells parents not to be too quick to criticize, saying "this is not what we have been taught by the *Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam*,[55] this is not what we have been taught by our Quran."

More explicit instruction is also supported by the Hadith. For example, Bilal Philips reminds the audience that the Prophet Muhammad said parents should teach their children *salah* (prayer) by the time they are seven, and Waleed Basyouni refers to the Hadith which says "it's much better to leave your family rich," to which he adds "than to leave them poor asking or seeking help and charity."

4.2.3 The preachers delivering messages by telling stories from the Quranic verses

Stories from the Quran are told to provide moral examples and advice about parenting. Such stories include several about the wise Luqman al-Hakim and about Ibrahim's (Abraham's) relationship with his son when he was commanded to kill him, as well as stories about Adam, Nuh (Noah), and Yakub (Jacob), all of whom resolved tensions with their children. The Quran does not provide detailed stories and is not interested in history in itself, but rather in the educational dimensions of historical events and the didactic lessons from those stories.[56]

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[51] The Hadith narrated from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim. It was reported by Abdullah ibn Umar: "The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, 'Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock'."

[52] Waleed Basyouni, "Learning From Our Children." Green Lane Masjid, March 29, 2019, video, 29:32, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLxJ7zY6rLc.

[53] Bilal Philips, "Educating Our Children," Digital Mimbar, October 5, 2016, video, 29:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5679RkThzU.

[54]The Hadith narrated from Tirmithi, Ibn Maajah & Ad-Daarimi: *kullu bani adam khattaa'un,wa khayrul khattaa'een at-tawwaaboon* ("son of Adam is a sinner (commits sin), and the best of sinners are those who repent [constantly]").

[55] *Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam* ("peace and blessings of Allah be upon him") is an Arabic term used specifically when saying the Prophet Muhammad's name.

[56] Louay Fatoohi, *The Prophet Joseph in the Quran, the Bible and History* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006), 2.

A story of Luqman is often quoted by preachers in the storyline of advising children. For example, Nouman Ali Khan interprets a story of Luqman by quoting a Quranic verse and providing its interpretation: "*Wa iz qa_la luqma_nu libnihi*[57] Luqman said to his son...Luqman doesn't just give his son lecture after lecture after lecture, he finds the right time, the right opportunity, he thinks of a strategic opportunity…he doesn't just throw that lecture on his son constantly. There's actually *wa huwa yaizuhu* (was instructing him) suggesting he was very strategic."[58] In this storyline, the preacher positions himself as a storyteller. He advises the audience how to teach children by interpreting a story of Luqman. The interpretation of a story emphasizes finding the right time to talk to children and reminding them that parents love them rather than laying down laws.

Stories of Biblical prophets frequently appear in the sermons preached by males. For example, Abdelrahman Murphy gives advice about how parents can build good communication with children. He tells a story of Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son: "when Ibrahim has his own son, and Allah has told Ibrahim in a dream that you have to sacrifice your son *ya_ bunay ya in ni ara_ fil mana_mi an ni azbahuka fanzur ma_za_ tara* [59] I have to slaughter you. Ibrahim says to his son *fanzur ma_za_ tara_* (tell me what you think?)...he's having a conversation with his son. and he's not yelling or demanding, he's talking to him…by the way there is no choice in this situation."[60] The story of Ibrahim suggests that when fathers discipline their children, they are doing it as part of their duty to God, and they want to hear from their children that they understand and accept this.

In the stories of Luqman and Ibrahim, the preachers position themselves as those who not only know the stories, but are able to interpret the Quran in classical Arabic for the audience, and thus help them understand the meanings intended, as the preacher does. Preachers deliver indirect advice speech acts through telling stories; they position characters in Quranic stories such as Luqman and Ibrahim as models of excellence to be followed for raising children.

4.2.4. Stories based on the life of Prophet Muhammad

The preachers believe that Muhammad is a model of real practice on raising children, and many stories are told about this. Some examples include there is no record of Muhammad beating his children, so corporal punishment should be avoided; children need to develop self-confidence, so tell your daughters they are beautiful from the inside; every child needs to feel loved, so listen to the concerns of children who do not have parents.

In a story of Muhammad in the storyline of disciplining children, Bilal Philips highlights that Muhammad never beat his children: "We all know from the life of Rasul *salahu alaihi wasallam* (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who raised children and we don't have any record of him beating his children. So, he was the best of examples, and we should

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[57] The Quran Surah Luqman chapter 31 verse 13: *Wa iz qa_la luqma_nu libnihi wa huwa yaizuhu_ ya_bunay ya la_ tusrik bil la_h in nas sirka lazhulmun azim* ("And [mention, O Muhammad], when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, 'O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice.'") (Sahih International Translation).

[58] Nouman Ali Khan, "The Quranic Essence of Parenting," Bayyinah Institute, April 14, 2017, video, 29:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alSMirHDUDE.

[59] The Quran Surah As-Saffat chapter 37 verse 102:*Falam ma_ balaga ma'ahus saya qa_la ya_ bunay ya in ni ara_ fil mana_mi an ni azbahuka fanzur ma_za_ tara_ qa_la ya_ abatifal ma_ tumaru satajiduni in sa_ al la_hu minas sa_birin.* ("And when he reached with him [the age of] exertion, he said, 'O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think.' He said, 'O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast.'") (Sahih International Translation).

[60] Abdelrahman Murphy, "I Am Bored!" Islamic Circle of North America, September 18, 2017, video, 29:07, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dwhi0jJHM2s.

consider our child-rearing techniques if all we do is the stick."[61] In this story, Philips positions Muhammad as the best example and advises the audience to follow him in disciplining children. Because Muhammad never practiced corporal punishment, the preacher positions himself against corporal punishment.

A story of Muhammad giving a compliment about a young girl's dress is told by Wisam Sharieff: "Prophet *salahu alaihi wasallam* (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told Athma *radiallahuallahu anha* (May Allah be pleased with her) on how what she was wearing that yellow dress what did he say to her? he said to her pretty dress, and what did she do? She grabbed her dress and said pretty she felt beautiful."[62] Sharieff emphasizes the importance of complimenting young girls to make them happy and feel worthy through telling the story of Muhammad who complimented Athma's dress.

A story of Muhammad making a connection with a child is told by Abdelrahman Murphy:

> The Prophet Muhammad *salahu alaihi wasallam* walked by and noticed that this child was crying, and he said to him… "Hey what happened to your bird?" ...and the child looked up at the Prophet Muhammad *salahu alaihi wasallam* with tears in his eyes and he said "My bird…he passed away, he died"…What did he do *salahu alaihi wasallam*? He put his arm on his shoulder, and he actually took the bird and they buried the bird and they gave the bird a burial, like a *janazah* (Islamic funeral ritual) for a bird, and that made this young boy feel like he was worth something to the Prophet Muhammad.[63]

Murphy tells the story of Muhammad who made a connection with a young child who was sad because his bird had died by creating a funeral ritual for a bird. This story reflects how a connection is essential for children in order for them to feel worthy.

These stories from the life of Muhammad provide further examples of good parenting that extend beyond the immediate family to caring for all children. The preachers positioned themselves as having the authority to tell and interpret stories from the life of Muhammad who is believed to be the best model and example for teaching and making a connection with children.

4.3 Drawing on personal experience and authority
Having examined a range of examples where preachers draw on religious texts and interpret them for their audiences, we now turn to more contemporary examples, where preachers draw on their own experiences and interpret them in a similar way.

4.3.1. Sharing the experience of other parents
Some of the stories here ask the parents to reconsider their actions directly. Waleed Basyouni tells a story about how a father learned from his son not to quickly judge something, and Mufti Menk explains that parents should read the Quran in their calmest manner to their children. Basyouni narrates a story of a father who was angry with the attitude of his child:

> There is a father said once I saw my son holding two apples, and I asked him to share one of them with me, but he quickly took a bite from both. and I started lecturing him about how important to share...but the son quietly told his father "actually I was not

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[61] Bilal Philips, "Educating Our Children," Digital Mimbar, October 5, 2016, video, 29:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5679RkThzU

[62] Wisam Sharieff, "My Parents Don't Understand," Islamic Circle of North America, June 27, 2012, video, 27:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvgNXBaNprg.

[63] Murphy, "I Am Bored!"

> trying to eat both of them; I was trying to see which one's sweeter to give it to you" ...I can see that I learned something from my son. I learned from my son not to rush to judge, not to rush to preach, not to rush to judge them, and to lecture them.[64]

In this story, the preacher positions himself as a storyteller who advises the audience not to rush to judge their children's attitude and learn a pearl of wisdom from their sincere children. In this storyline, the preacher positions children as divine blessings and examples for adults.

Menk tells a story about how a daily ritual such as reciting the Quran can help parents model a calm manner and soften the hearts of their children:

> If you sit and read the Quran in a beautiful way you're smiling and when you close the Quran, your attitude is so sweet and so calm and you're looking at your children and it's made you softened the children will want to read the Quran. The problem with us sitting and reading the Quran we get angry "Hey stop making noise! I'm reading Quran"…when we finished "I told you not to disturb me I was reading" then what were you reading the Quran is supposed to soften you man, it's supposed to calm you down...the child says "hey this Quran's dangerous, every time someone reads it, they get angry before, during, and after."[65]

The preacher advises parents to read the Quran in a lovely way because their attitudes in reading it can influence their children's thinking about the Quran. The preacher positions reciting the Quran as a ritual activity of remembering Allah which promotes calmness and a beautiful manner. As it has been said in the Quran Surah Ar-Ra'd chapter 13 verse 28, "Surely in Allah's remembrance do the hearts find peace."[66]

More often, however, the preachers ask parents to reflect on their immediate responses, and consider longer term consequences, with topics including the evil traps of smartphones, criticism of children, and the differences between parenting boys and girls.

Mufti Menk tells a story about how the smartphone becomes a problem if we do not use it responsibly: "The phone and the technology is a gift of Allah, but if you don't know how to use it it becomes a trap of the devil. Nobody can say that it's only bad, no it's a gift but it depends how you use it; please use it responsibly."[67] The preacher positions the smartphone as a neutral object which can be good or bad depending on how we use it. The preacher directly delivers advice to the audience to use smartphones responsibly.

Regarding a storyline of a teenager being ill-treated by her parents, Suzi Ismail recounts a story of a teenager who consumed drugs and got into a relationship with the wrong people because her parents never said she was beautiful:

> When we have a teenager, a 16 year old 17 year old, who comes to our Counseling Center...and speaks to me and says I cut, I do drugs, I hang out with bad people…little by little as we talk to the youth, we find that this same child is the one who was molested, when she was seven years old. This same child was the one that grew up in

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[64] Basyouni, "Learning from our Children."

[65] Mufti Menk, "Keys to A Happy Home," MuslimAkhi, December 16, 2018, video, 1:10:41, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgRvWmULXDE.

[66] Quran Surah Ar-Ra'd chapter 13 ayat 28: "Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured."

[67] Menk, "Keys to A Happy Home."

a home with parents who never said she was beautiful. This same child was the child who grew up constantly feeling that she was criticized that she was put down.[68]

Here, the preacher positions teenagers as human beings who should be treated carefully so that they can grow up normally. She also positions parents as people responsible for protecting their children and making them feel worthy.

In a storyline about parenting boys and girls, Abdelrahman Murphy talks about girls who felt their parents employed religion as a reason for limiting their activities:

> The young girls, they come to me and they say "we want to have a dinner, we want to have something at our friend's house," and my parents say "no, because it's against Islam"… but I look at my brother and he's out as long as he wants to be. Is there like a gender like they say that *Shaitan* (Devil) comes out at *maghrib* (evening) but the *Shaitan* only chases women?'[69]

The preacher positions parents as needing to listen to their girls and cautions them not to use "Islamic teaching" to favor boys over girls. Murphy highlights how parents should not use "religion as a way of making your child feel insufficient" or "use religion to be the scapegoat of things that you want your child to do."[70]

The preachers use a range of personal experiences to illustrate the difficulties parents might be storing up for themselves if they punish or ignore their children. These experiences are intended to make the parents consider their own behaviors and motives within their cultural context. These stories position the preachers as experienced not only in religious messages about love, but also in the ways of the world and the kinds of behavior that children can exhibit.

4.3.2. Using figurative language

As well as drawing on personal experiences, preachers aim to present images of good parenting through the use of appropriate metaphors, similes, and other sayings. Figurative language is employed as indirect advice about what parents should do in raising children.

In the storyline of describing the position of a father in the family, Suhaib Webb positions a father as a "light" in the family: "the family shines *the light* of the father, the father is this illuminating body who in his obedience to Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* (May He be praised and exalted), and it's in his relationship to *subhana wa ta'ala* his light shines and casts itself upon the family in the darkness of this *dunya* (world). So, the brighter the father's light, the brighter the family will be."[71] The preacher positions a father as an essential figure in a family by employing the metaphor of light; the brighter the "light" of a father, the more shining the family will be.

In the storyline of being an example to children, Shireen Ahmed uses "water" as a metaphor for giving advice on the importance of a role model in parenting: "So if you were to choose *water* for your child you would seek the purest and the cleanest *water* for them. So, when we neglect our own character, it's almost like we're polluting that *water*."[72] Shireen

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[68] Suzy Ismail, "Save Yourself and Your Family from the Hellfire," Islamic Circle of North America, August 4, 2016, video, 22:26, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjQtpCfqRkQ.

[69] Murphy, "I Am Bored!"

[70] Ibid.

[71] Suhaib Webb, **"**The Role of Fathers," European Institute of Islamic Sciences**,** March 3, 2015, video, 39:22**,** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MVT7EkDFII, emphasis added.

[72] Ustadha Shireen Ahmed, "Planting Seeds in Your Children: Rethinking Our Habits and Actions," SeekersGuidance: The Global Islamic Seminary, August 30, 2016, video, 11:26, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ybzl_XXQ-G8, emphasis added.

Ahmed positions parents as having to be good models, and she reminds parents how the bad examples can be like pollutants for children's characters.

Bilal Philips describes the importance of children's environment through the concept of a glass: "If you pour milk into a dirty *glass* you get dirty milk. Common sense, you need to clean that *glass* out. When you want to pour it and you need that clean the *glass*. Same word same way the home should be clean…similarly for your children, you should try to find good companions, good friends, to play with, to grow up with them."[73] Philips positions environmental factors such as home, friends, and companions as essential factors which influence children's characters. The preacher advises parents to provide the right environment for their children.

Regarding the importance of parents as role models for their children, Mokhatar Maghraoui advises parents to internalize what they teach by employing the word "home": "*For we cannot invite others to a place where we are not*, can you imagine that? you invite somebody to a place, you are not. What would you call that?...*We are inviting them to an empty home*…if we do not live what we teach, if we do not internalize what we teach."[74] The preacher positions parents as role models for their children, so they should practice what they preach.

Abdelrahman Murphy says raising a good child is similar to nurturing a healthy plant: "So we're gonna talk about how to raise amazing young Muslim children. We have to understand something, *that the plant is only as healthy as the soil that it came from*."[75] The preacher positions children as plants that should be nurtured by parents to grow well and healthy. In this storyline, the preacher wants to highlight that children's attitudes depend on their parents, as Murphy quotes Islamic scholar Imam Al-Ghazali: "if you see your child being a certain way, ask yourself what I am doing and how can I change this in myself?"[76]

The extracts of sermons above use images of light, cleanliness (pure water, clean glass), and the importance of nurture (healthy soil for a healthy plant). These are all everyday domestic concepts used to emphasize how parents can raise good children who follow the light of their fathers. The use of figurative language positions the preachers as experienced in bringing out emotions and helping the audience understand abstract concepts of the divine language of parenting. This figurative language makes it easy to visualize the positive aspects of raising children. As we shall see in the next category, preachers can also be quite direct in their advice.

4.3.3. Using commands

Preachers can also be very direct in advising parents what they should do, and direct imperatives are not out of place in preaching. In this direct advice speech act, the preachers employ imperatives and semi-modals "need to" and "have to" in delivering what parents should or should not do.

In the following examples the preachers employ imperatives with the word "please" as a polite marker and an emphasis on an urgent message for the audience to build harmonious communication, maintain children's emotion, and inspire them to establish a love for the Quran.

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[73] Philips, "Educating Our Children," emphasis added.

[74] Mokhatar Maghraoui, "Save Your Family, Living and Passing the Legacy," Islamic Circle of North America, July 6, 2010, video, 23:35, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l318135ltZo, emphasis added.

[75] Murphy, "I Am Bored!," emphasis added.

[76] Ibid.

1. *Please* and in this I really ask all the parents to start listening to our children, to develop nice communication with them.[77]
2. Parents, if Allah decrees a divorce for you, *please* don't leave your children in emotional turmoil. They will spend the rest of their lives trying to fix what happened in their childhood.[78]
3. So, parents, I ask you today, I beg you today, *please* inspire your children to establish a love for the Quran.[79]

In those examples, preachers position themselves as having authority to direct the audience what to do through straightforward advice. The use of "please" seems to reduce the degree of force in delivering direct advice.

In the next three examples, the preachers use the semi-modals "need to" and "have to" to deliver direct advice for parents on reflecting on their own attitudes.

4. For those parents who are struggling… we *need to* look internally; We need to realize that that pointing finger leaves three fingers pointing back at ourselves.[80]
5. If we don't know anything else but the belt and the stick, then we *need to* learn online; now we have online you can go online child rearing discipline, very easy google them.[81]
6. We *have to* be righteous parents, if we want our children to be blessed and how they would be righteous children when they grow up.[82]

By employing the inclusive pronoun "we," the preachers position themselves as parents who need to reflect as an internal evaluation when raising children. In these extracts we see preachers giving explicit advice speech acts about divorce and corporal punishment, as well as the more abstract advice around parents examining their own behavior and inspiring children. These commands position the preachers as people who have duties and rights to direct what parents ought to do in raising their children.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we have explored the discursive resources that Islamic preachers use to position themselves as persons of authority in conveying to parents advice on how to raise their children. We identified broadly two different strategies that preachers use: they draw on religious texts and they draw on their personal experience.

We can see in these sermons the mutual effects of interpreting Islamic texts and drawing on personal experience, which together give the preachers the religious and secular authority to instruct the congregation in the raising of their children. The preacher is positioned as an authority, empowered to deliver advice through his/her religious and linguistic education and through his/her moral duty to do so. The vehicle of the sermon, and the "higher" position of the monologic speaker that we see in the online sermons, both lend further onus on the preacher to do so. The preachers have put themselves in a position of authority by virtue of their physical

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[77] Zainab Alawani, "A Mother's Advice to Her Children: The Catastrophe of the Breakdown in Marriage," unitedforchangetv, November 22, 2011, video, 25:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_211voLIyc, emphasis added.

[78] Hujrah Wahhaj, "The Prophet's Family Life," ShuraTV, March 26, 2013, video, 13:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiyC7AAevU0, emphasis added.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ismail, "Save Yourself and Your Family from the Hellfire," emphasis added.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Philips, "Educating Our Children," emphasis added.

position in relation to the congregation/audience, and by their expertise in quoting and interpreting the authoritative sacred texts of the Quran and the Hadith. However, the preachers' positioning is fluid through the sermons as the preachers position themselves as reporters of God's words, as storytellers, or take a more authoritative position by employing direct commands.

In terms of speech acts, we see the preachers giving both advice and encouragement to parents. They use quotations and stories from religious texts as indirect advice. They use examples from other contexts that the audience can reflect upon; they use stories from their personal experience as examples of everyday events worthy of reflection. On the other hand, preachers also employ a direct form of advice through explicit commands so the audience can easily understand what they should or should not do in parenting. Both combine to instruct parents to consider their children in the various storylines on how to listen to children, to love them – and at the same time to teach them and to be an example to them.

From the perspective of positioning theory, these components are interrelated. The positioning of the preacher is crucial in enabling the words of the sermon, including telling stories, to be interpreted as parenting advice (in another context, such as an academic context or an informal social context, they could be differently interpreted). The extent to which these messages carry through to online audiences is a question we have not investigated. We assume that those listeners who position themselves as sympathetic members of the audiences or congregations would take the intended messages from the sermons. Whether other messages would be received by alternative viewers is a matter for future research.

In terms of positioning theory on Islamic parenting, the higher number of male preachers who talk about parenting suggests that it is essential for men to also play an active role in parenting. The preachers' use of stories of paragons of Islamic parenting such as Luqman, Ibrahim (Abraham), and Muhammad also suggests that Islam positions fathers playing an important role in raising children.