

Muraqabah as the Internalization of the Hawthorne Effect in Islamic Transpersonal Psychology

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Abstract : The Hawthorne Effect has long been understood as a psychological response in which individuals modify their behavior when they feel observed. While this phenomenon has been widely discussed in social and behavioral sciences, its implications for deeper, long-term self-regulation remain limited. This study examines the Hawthorne Effect alongside the Sufi concept of muraqabah, a form of continuous inner awareness of Divine observation central to Islamic spirituality. Using a qualitative hermeneutic approach, this research analyzes how external, temporary behavioral changes triggered by human observation can be contrasted with and potentially elevated into an internal, enduring spiritual consciousness found in muraqabah. The findings show that the Hawthorne Effect produces short-lived behavioral adjustments tied to external attention, whereas muraqabah generates stable internal motivation grounded in Divine awareness. When viewed together, these two concepts illustrate a developmental movement from outward compliance to inward spiritual accountability. Recent studies in Islamic counseling and psychology further support the integration of spiritual awareness into psychological practice, highlighting improvements in emotional regulation, intrinsic motivation, and personal growth. This study argues that muraqabah offers a meaningful framework for Islamic Transpersonal Psychotherapy by transforming the mechanics of “being observed” from a social trigger into a continuous spiritual discipline. The integration of psychological insights and spiritual principles creates a more holistic understanding of human behavior and consciousness, suggesting that lasting personal transformation is more likely to emerge from internalized Divine awareness rather than external supervision.

Keywords : *Hawthorne Effect, muraqabah; Islamic transpersonal psychology; spiritual consciousness; behavioral regulation.*

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1. Introduction

In the early twentieth century, a series of industrial experiments conducted at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago produced one of the most

influential findings in modern social psychology. Led by Elton Mayo and his research team, these investigations sought to determine how changes in the physical work environment such as lighting, rest breaks, and working hours affected employee productivity. Surprisingly, the studies revealed that productivity increased not primarily because of these environmental adjustments but because workers believed they were being observed by the researchers. This phenomenon, later known as the Hawthorne Effect, demonstrated that awareness of being watched can significantly shape an individual's motivation, emotional state, and social behavior (Mayo, 1945).

Although the term was formalized by Roethlisberger and Dickson in 1939, the Hawthorne Effect has since become foundational in educational psychology, management studies, and behavioral sciences. It highlights that human behavior responds not only to material incentives but also to psychological stimuli such as attention, recognition, and perceptions of observation. Yet, most interpretations of this effect remain secular and behavioristic, limiting their analysis to external and measurable aspects of human behavior. Consequently, little attention has been given to the possibility that the awareness of being observed may also operate within a deeper, even spiritual dimension (Dickson, 1939).

Within this context, Islamic spirituality particularly the Sufi tradition offers a profound and parallel conceptual framework through the doctrine of *muraqabah*, a continuous awareness of divine observation. Classical Sufi masters such as al-Ghazali and al-Qushayri describe *muraqabah* as the inner state in which a believer is fully conscious that "God is ever watchful over the heart and actions of His servant." This awareness cultivates sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*), humility, and moral consistency. Unlike the Hawthorne Effect, which is triggered by external human observation and tends to be temporary, *muraqabah* represents an internal, stable, and transcendent form of consciousness rooted in belief in the Divine gaze (Al-Ghazali, 2019). This contrast gives rise to the central theoretical question of the present study: Can external awareness of observation as described by the Hawthorne Effect be internalized and elevated into the spiritual awareness of divine supervision found in *muraqabah*? Put differently, can a secular psychological process be reconsidered and reinterpreted through a religious epistemological lens? Such a question invites an interdisciplinary dialogue between social psychology and Islamic mysticism.

To address this issue, the study presents *muraqabah* as a transcendent mode of consciousness that unites the external concerns of behavioral psychology with the inner dimensions of spiritual psychology. Employing a qualitative hermeneutic approach, this research analyzes classical Sufi texts alongside modern psychological theory to uncover conceptual intersections between the two knowledge systems. Through this approach, the study pursues three main objectives: first, to understand the Hawthorne Effect as a complex expression of human social awareness; second, to explore *muraqabah* as a form of transcendent consciousness in the spiritual journey (*sulūk*) of the seeker; and third, to integrate both perspectives to contribute to the development of Islamic Transpersonal Psychology (Haque, 2004).

The integration of these frameworks offers not only theoretical contributions but also practical implications for Islamic psychotherapeutic intervention. In such an approach, behavioral change is no longer sustained by temporary external supervision but anchored in the stable awareness of God's constant presence. Thus, transformation becomes deeper and longer-lasting. This resonates with the broader framework of Transpersonal Psychology, as articulated by Maslow and Grof, which recognizes that human consciousness can transcend the ego through spiritual experience. Within Islamic tradition, this is conceptualized as the

soul's movement toward nafs mutma'innah, the tranquil and spiritually refined state (Maslow, 1978).

This research is significant in that it creates an epistemic bridge between modern scientific understandings of behavior and classical spiritual conceptions of consciousness. The Hawthorne Effect reveals how awareness of external observation can modify behavior, whereas muraqabah demonstrates how awareness of the Divine gaze can transform the soul. By bringing these two modes of awareness into conversation through a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, the study offers a more holistic understanding of human consciousness—one that encompasses both psychological and spiritual dimensions. The interpretive framework corresponds with Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons," where the meeting of distinct intellectual traditions generates new and enriched forms of understanding (Gadamer, 2006).

In this sense, the study argues that human consciousness is shaped not only by external social stimuli but also by inner spiritual awareness. Muraqabah thus provides a theological foundation for reinterpreting the Hawthorne Effect as an initial stage of awareness that can be transformed into a higher consciousness grounded in the Divine. This synthesis enriches the discourse of Islamic Transpersonal Psychology and opens practical pathways for developing spiritual-based psychotherapeutic interventions rooted in Sufi tradition.

2. Research Results

2.1 External Observation and the Temporality of the Hawthorne Effect

The findings reveal that the Hawthorne Effect operates as a pattern of behavioral change that is fundamentally situational, externally driven, and temporary. During the Western Electric studies, workers consistently improved their performance when they perceived themselves to be under observation. This indicates that external monitoring functions as a psychological stimulant, producing heightened motivation, attentiveness, and willingness to comply with expected norms (Mayo, 1945).

However, the research also demonstrates that such improvements lack intrinsic stability. Once the perceived observation decreases or disappears, the behavioral enhancement tends to decline as well. This confirms that the Hawthorne Effect does not generate deep-rooted transformation; instead, it produces a short-term adjustment motivated by social visibility rather than genuine internal conviction (Adair, 1984).

The study further identifies that external supervision acts as a moral and motivational mirror individuals modify their actions to meet perceived expectations, not because of a stable internal value structure, but because of the presence of an observer. As a result, the effect exposes the fragility of externally anchored motivation: behavior changes rapidly when attention is present but collapses when attention is withdrawn (Dickson, 1939).

This temporality contrasts sharply with more enduring forms of self-regulation rooted in spiritual consciousness, suggesting that the Hawthorne Effect represents only an initial layer of awareness rather than a sustainable source of transformation. Its core weakness lies in its dependence on external conditions, rendering it unable to produce lasting ethical consistency or self-directed improvement (Hodge, 2020).

2.2 Internal Divine Awareness and the Stability of Muraqabah

The findings indicate that muraqabah represents a qualitatively deeper and more enduring form of self-regulation than the externally driven Hawthorne Effect. In the Sufi tradition, muraqabah is defined as a continuous awareness that God is ever watchful over one's thoughts, emotions, and actions. This form of consciousness is grounded not in situational observation but in an internalized spiritual conviction, which renders it inherently more stable and less susceptible to external fluctuation. As articulated by al-Ghazali, muraqabah emerges from the heart's vigilance before the Divine gaze, cultivating sincerity (ikhlaṣ) and moral consistency that remain present even in the absence of human observers (Al-Ghazali, 2019).

Unlike behavior influenced by social attention, the awareness cultivated through muraqabah is anchored in transcendent motivation. It redirects the believer toward an inner orientation shaped by reverence (ta'ẓīm) and love (maḥabbah) for God rather than by the desire for external approval. Al-Qushayri describes this state as a form of spiritual watchfulness that persists across all circumstances, functioning as an internal compass that guides conduct regardless of environmental or social pressures (Al-Qushayri, 2002). This intrinsic character of muraqabah allows individuals to maintain elevated ethical standards even when unobserved by others, illustrating its capacity to generate durable moral transformation.

Furthermore, classical scholars such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah emphasize that muraqabah transforms passive belief into an active, lived consciousness. In Madarij al-Salikin, he describes it as a dynamic spiritual state that restructures the inner life of the practitioner by aligning thoughts, intentions, and behaviors with the awareness of Divine presence. This ongoing alignment fosters emotional stability, self-discipline, and the purification of the soul (tazkiyah al-naḥs), demonstrating the psychological depth of muraqabah as both a spiritual discipline and a cognitive-emotional mechanism (Al-Jawziyyah, 2011).

Taken together, these findings show that muraqabah generates a form of awareness that is self-sustaining, continuous, and deeply integrated into one's moral character. It is not dependent on temporary conditions or external observers. Instead, its stability arises from a belief-driven consciousness that persists across contexts. This internal permanence distinguishes muraqabah from the fleeting nature of the Hawthorne Effect and positions it as a powerful framework for long-term transformation within Islamic spiritual psychology.

2.3 Muraqabah as the Spiritual Internalization of the Hawthorne Mechanism

The findings reveal that muraqabah functions as a transformative internalization of the behavioral dynamics observed in the Hawthorne Effect. While the Hawthorne Effect demonstrates that individuals adjust their behavior when they perceive external human observation, muraqabah shifts this mechanism inward by cultivating a persistent awareness of Divine observation. In this way, the psychological process triggered by external scrutiny becomes, through muraqabah, a spiritual practice grounded in the belief that God's watchfulness is continuous and inescapable. This internal shift moves the locus of motivation from social approval to Divine accountability, thereby establishing a more enduring foundation for behavioral and moral regulation (Munsoor, 2018).

This internalization transforms the temporary compliance characteristic of the Hawthorne Effect into long-term ethical consistency. Under external observation, individuals may improve their performance due to social visibility, but the improvement fades once surveillance is removed. In contrast, muraqabah generates a stable form of self-regulation

because the believer internalizes the sense of being observed by God at all times. According to al-Ghazali, this transformation produces sincerity (ikhlās) and steadfastness, since the believer's conduct is no longer contingent on human witnesses but anchored in the continuous awareness of the Divine gaze (Mohamed Safiullah, 2018).

Moreover, the internalization process enriches the psychological understanding of self-monitoring by linking it to spiritual ontology. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah explains that muraqabah converts episodic consciousness into an integrated spiritual state (ḥāl) that reorganizes the self from within, aligning thoughts, intentions, and actions with God-consciousness. This alignment elevates the mechanism of observation from a behavioral stimulus to a metaphysical discipline that produces transformation at the level of character and being (Harianti, Huwaida, Adriwiguna, & Qudsyi, 2022). In this sense, muraqabah is not merely a religious analogue to the Hawthorne Effect, but its spiritual culmination where external observation is transcended and replaced by a profound, self-sustaining awareness rooted in faith.

Therefore, the study concludes that muraqabah represents the spiritual internalization of the Hawthorne mechanism, turning a socially induced behavioral response into a continuous moral-spiritual consciousness. This transformation bridges the gap between psychology and spirituality by demonstrating how a phenomenon grounded in human observation can evolve into a stable, internalized awareness with lasting ethical impact. Such internalization highlights the superiority of Divine-centered consciousness over observation-dependent motivation, providing a conceptual basis for integrating muraqabah into Islamic transpersonal psychology.

2.4 Integration of Psychological and Spiritual Frameworks

The findings demonstrate that the integration of psychological and spiritual frameworks provides a more comprehensive understanding of human consciousness than either domain can offer independently. Recent studies in contemporary psychology highlight the growing recognition that spiritual awareness plays a substantive role in emotional regulation, psychological resilience, and personal growth. Cucchi and Qoronfleh (2025) argue that religion and spirituality function as culturally embedded psychological resources that shape cognition, emotion, and behavioral adaptation, suggesting that spiritual dimensions cannot be separated from mental health processes in many cultural contexts (Cucchi & Qoronfleh, 2025).

Within Islamic scholarship, the integration becomes even more pronounced. Empirical research conducted among Muslim learners by Syafii and Azhari (2025) shows that spiritual development particularly practices such as remembrance and self-awareness correlates significantly with psychological maturity and emotional stability. Their findings indicate that spiritual consciousness acts as a stabilizing structure that enhances intrinsic motivation and fosters sustained self-regulation, thereby strengthening the internal mechanisms of psychological growth (Syafii & Azhari, 2025).

This integration is further reinforced in Islamic counseling and psychotherapy literature. Hidayat and Fajri (2025) demonstrate that combining psychological techniques with Islamic spiritual principles produces more effective guidance outcomes, especially among younger Muslim populations who seek both emotional support and spiritual grounding. Their study underscores that spiritual practices such as introspection, dhikr, and muraqabah function as therapeutic tools that deepen self-awareness and promote lasting behavioral transformation,

surpassing the temporary effects of purely cognitive-behavioral approaches (Taufiq Hidayat & Fajri, 2025).

Across these studies, a consistent pattern emerges: psychological processes become more sustainable when anchored in spiritual consciousness. Whereas secular psychology often focuses on observable behavior and cognitive restructuring, spiritual frameworks add dimensions of meaning, purpose, and transcendence that strengthen internal motivation. This aligns with Salicru's integrative model (2025), which identifies spirituality as an evidence-based component of mental health, capable of enhancing therapeutic effectiveness when incorporated into psychological practice (Salicru, 2025).

Taken together, these findings confirm that the integration of psychological insights and spiritual consciousness particularly within the Islamic tradition creates a holistic model that unites external behavior, internal cognition, and transcendent awareness. In the context of this study, such integration provides a conceptual bridge that links the externally induced behavioral adjustments seen in the Hawthorne Effect with the enduring, spiritually grounded self-regulation cultivated through *muraqabah*.

2.5 Implications for Islamic Transpersonal Psychotherapy

The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating psychological mechanisms with spiritual consciousness particularly the Sufi concept of *muraqabah* offers significant implications for the development of Islamic Transpersonal Psychotherapy. Unlike behavior change driven by external observation, as seen in the Hawthorne Effect, *muraqabah* fosters an enduring inner awareness that promotes self-regulation rooted in Divine consciousness rather than social evaluation. This inward orientation provides a stable psychological foundation, making it highly suitable as a therapeutic modality in Islamic contexts.

Recent research in Islamic mental health shows that incorporating spiritual practices into psychotherapy enhances emotional resilience, moral coherence, and overall psychological well-being. Hidayat and Fajri (2025) report that Islamic counseling frameworks that integrate spiritual principles—such as introspection, *dhikr*, and awareness of Divine presence produce deeper therapeutic engagement and more sustained behavioral transformation, especially among Muslim youth seeking spiritually aligned psychological tools (Taufiq Hidayat & Fajri, 2025).

Furthermore, empirical studies indicate that spiritual consciousness strengthens intrinsic motivation, a critical element in long-term therapeutic success. Syafii and Azhari (2025) found that the spiritual development of Muslim learners directly correlates with emotional stability and psychological growth, suggesting that spiritual awareness functions as a reinforcing mechanism that supports transpersonal development beyond ego-centered motivations. (Syafii & Azhari, 2025) This aligns closely with the objectives of transpersonal psychology, which seeks to cultivate states of consciousness that transcend the ego and integrate higher dimensions of selfhood.

From a clinical perspective, the internalized and continuous nature of *muraqabah* offers a robust alternative to secular mindfulness models. While mindfulness emphasizes present-moment awareness, *muraqabah* orients the individual toward a theocentric awareness grounded in the belief that God is constantly present, observing, and guiding. Salicru's (2025) evidence-based spirituality framework reinforces the therapeutic value of such theocentric practices by highlighting how spiritually anchored mindfulness improves emotional regulation and long-term psychological stability (Salicru, 2025).

The integration of muraqabah into Islamic Transpersonal Psychotherapy contributes not only to emotional healing but also to moral and existential transformation. It elevates therapy from merely modifying behavior to guiding individuals toward a deeper alignment between cognition, emotion, and spiritual purpose. This aligns with the ultimate goals of Islamic psychology, which emphasize the cultivation of the tranquil soul (*nafs mutma'innah*) and the restoration of harmony between the self and its Divine origin.

The results confirm that muraqabah offers a promising and theoretically sound foundation for Islamic Transpersonal Psychotherapy. It provides a mechanism for sustainable inner change by internalizing the dynamics of observation, shifting them from human surveillance to Divine presence. This shift enriches therapeutic practice with a depth of meaning and continuity that external behavioral models cannot replicate.

3. Conclusions

This study shows that the Hawthorne Effect and the Sufi concept of muraqabah represent two different forms of awareness, yet they share an important point of connection. The Hawthorne Effect illustrates how people often improve their behavior when they feel observed. However, this improvement is usually short-lived. Once the sense of supervision disappears, behavior tends to return to its original state. This suggests that changes driven solely by external attention are fragile and do not lead to deeper personal transformation.

In contrast, muraqabah offers a more stable and enduring form of self-awareness. The belief that God is constantly aware of one's thoughts and actions encourages a type of self-regulation that does not depend on external observers. This inner awareness supports sincerity, moral consistency, and long-term personal growth. Muraqabah does not merely influence outward behavior; it shapes one's inner life and sense of responsibility before God.

The findings indicate that the mechanism behind the Hawthorne Effect feeling watched can be internalized and elevated through muraqabah. What begins as a reaction to human observation can develop into a continuous spiritual awareness that guides a person even when no one else is present. This connection shows that modern psychological insights and Islamic spiritual traditions can complement each other rather than stand apart.

Recent studies in Islamic counseling, education, and mental health also highlight the value of integrating spirituality into psychological practice. Spiritual awareness has been shown to strengthen emotional regulation, intrinsic motivation, and overall well-being. These insights support the development of Islamic Transpersonal Psychology, which seeks to connect human experience with deeper spiritual dimensions.

This study concludes that muraqabah provides a promising foundation for Islamic transpersonal psychotherapy. Its emphasis on continuous Divine awareness offers a more lasting source of self-regulation than models based on external observation. By bringing together psychological concepts and Sufi metaphysics, this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of human consciousness and personal transformation.

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