

Eschatology as a Psychological Motivational System: Psychological Parallels Between Religious Savior-Centered Psychotherapy and Contemporary Clinical Theories

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Abstract

Religious Savior-Centered Psychotherapy (RSCP) is a spiritually grounded, future-oriented therapeutic approach developed within the framework of Shi'ah eschatology, with a particular focus on near-future anticipatory belief systems. This article presents a comparative and descriptive theoretical analysis of RSCP, examining its conceptual convergence with major psychological models, including Gestalt therapy, Logotherapy, Fromm's theory of healthy needs, Humanistic psychology (Maslow and Rogers), Rotter's social learning and expectancy framework, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Adler's Individual Psychology. RSCP uniquely incorporates eschatological anticipation of the savior as a central organizing principle, enabling clients to transform passive waiting into active moral, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. Core therapeutic mechanisms include the enhancement of behavioral potential through increased expectancy and reinforcement value, facilitation of self-actualization and peak experiences, cultivation of meaning and purpose, and the integration of social responsibility within spiritual practice. The comparative analysis indicates that, while RSCP shares core mechanisms with established psychotherapeutic approaches, it extends these models by embedding future-oriented eschatological meaning and collective ethical orientation within the therapeutic process. The theoretical implications of the present article, together with preliminary clinical evidence from prior studies in this domain, suggest that RSCP may promote substantial psychological and spiritual development, supporting the transition from a predominantly passive or receptive stance toward an active, agentic, and socially responsible mode of functioning. Accordingly, future research is recommended to examine the applicability and adaptation of RSCP within other religious traditions, such as Christianity, in order to evaluate its cross-cultural and transdiagnostic relevance.

Keywords: motivational expectancy theory, transcendent psychotherapy, eschatological coping, self-actualization, existential meaning, purpose-driven therapy

1. Introduction

1.1 Development and Rationale of RSCP

Religious Savior-Centered Psychotherapy (RSCP) is a spiritually grounded, future-oriented therapeutic approach developed within the framework of Shi'ahⁱ eschatology, with a particular emphasis on the concept of anticipationⁱⁱ of the awaited savior (Khayat Hesari et al., 2024). It conceptualizes the anticipation of the awaited savior not as passive waiting, but as an active psychological, moral, and spiritual orientation toward personal growth, ethical responsibility, and collective readiness. Within this framework, eschatological belief is transformed into a dynamic motivational system that organizes cognition, emotion, and behavior in meaningful and goal-directed ways.

Within RSCP, psychological distress is understood not merely as an intrapsychic deficit but as a disruption in meaning and future orientation (Khayat Hesari et al., 2024). Individuals whose identity, coping processes, and interpretations of suffering are shaped by savior-centered religious beliefs may experience distress when this future-oriented structure is

weakened or becomes passive. Accordingly, RSCP seeks to restore an active, purposeful orientation by reframing anticipation as a lived ethical and psychological stance.

Drawing on Shi'ah theology, RSCP distinguishes between the savior's globalⁱⁱⁱ emergence—a divinely promised societal transformation—and a form of personal emergence realized through ethical action, self-discipline, and responsibility (Musawi Isfahani, 2009). Therefore, in RSCP, therapeutic work focuses on facilitating this personal emergence, enabling clients to transform suffering, frustration, and uncertainty into purposeful engagement with life. In this sense, anticipation becomes not a distant expectation, but a present-centered motivational force.

So, the model integrates value-based living, future-oriented hope, and moral agency by framing anticipation as a continuous process rather than a time-bound event. While the physical emergence of the savior is regarded as a future historical reality within Twelver Shi'ah doctrine (Encyclopaedia Iranica, n.d.), RSCP emphasizes that psychological well-being is cultivated through ongoing preparation at individual, spiritual, and social levels. Thus, anticipation of a global transformative event functions as a regulatory system that directs behavior toward higher-order values such as justice, responsibility, patience, and compassion (Yangmei et al., 2018; MacLeod & Conway, 2005; Khayat Hesari et al., 2024).

It is important to note that RSCP does not aim to replace established psychotherapeutic models or to propose a direct theoretical synthesis between religious doctrine and psychotherapy. Rather, it offers a culturally grounded framework that translates indigenous Shi'ah concepts into psychologically meaningful mechanisms, many of which—such as meaning-making, hope mobilization, cognitive regulation, acceptance, and value-guided action—are consistent with principles widely recognized in contemporary psychotherapeutic approaches.

In this sense, the present study seeks to bridge culturally embedded religious concepts with established psychological theories by demonstrating conceptual correspondence rather than formal integration. While various therapeutic models have addressed meaning, motivation, and self-regulation, fewer have systematically examined how eschatological belief systems can function as structured psychological resources. By situating RSCP within this broader context, the study contributes to the growing field of culturally sensitive and spiritually integrated psychotherapy, highlighting how traditionally grounded belief systems may embody mechanisms already identified as effective within modern psychological theory.

2. Method

This manuscript adopts a conceptual and comparative theoretical approach, commonly used to clarify the foundations of emerging psychotherapeutic models. The objective is not empirical evaluation but rather a systematic theoretical mapping and analysis. Specifically, the study involves identifying RSCP's explicit and implicit psychological assumptions, comparing these assumptions with parallel constructs in established psychological theories, and clarifying the philosophical and clinical implications of these conceptual correspondences. The following sections apply this analytic framework through a series of targeted comparisons between RSCP and major psychological paradigms, beginning with Gestalt therapy.

2.1 Gestalt Therapy and RSCP

RSCP aligns with core Gestalt principles through its emphasis on present-centered awareness (Perls et al., 1951; Polster, E., & Polster, M., 1973), particularly as articulated within the School of Anticipation^{iv}. Within this framework, each ethically meaningful action performed in the present moment is understood to contribute to the acceleration of spiritual maturation, symbolically described as a reduction in the time of occultation^v of Imam^{vi} Mahdi (Hesari et al., 2024). Accordingly, no moment is regarded as ordinary or inert; rather, every second carries the potential to become a significant step forward in human growth, self-regulation, and existential integration (Hesari et al., 2024). This perspective resonates with Gestalt therapy's focus on here-and-now awareness, intentional action, and the transformative capacity of lived experience.

In the RSCP framework, an Awaiting Individual^{vii} is oriented toward the future and the promised emergence of the savior while remaining fully responsible for present actions (Hesari et al., 2024). As previously noted, Shi'ah teachings distinguish between a divinely guaranteed global emergence^{viii} (Qur'an 21:105) and a personal emergence that must be cultivated through ethical conduct, responsibility, and spiritual striving (Nasr, 2013). Anticipation is therefore conceptualized as an active psychological and moral preparation (Nuri, 1986).

This concept resonates with Gestalt therapy's emphasis on growth through awareness (Perls et al., 1951; Polster, E., & Polster, M., 1973). Just as Gestalt theory maintains that genuine awareness cannot develop without personal responsibility (Yontef, 1993; Perls et al., 1951), RSCP similarly emphasizes that spiritual awakening requires individuals to recognize that they do not live solely for themselves (Nuri, 1986). Rather, they are participants in a larger collective and moral project. Shi'ah foundations of RSCP, therefore, stress both personal and social growth, especially in spiritual

dimensions (Amir-Moezzi, 2016).

RSCP further parallels Gestalt therapy through the principle of creative adjustment (Perls et al., 1951). In Gestalt theory, frustration is a prerequisite for growth, as it mobilizes awareness and personal resources (Perls, 1969). Similarly, RSCP reframes frustration and suffering by guiding clients to reinterpret deprivation as meaningful tension oriented toward transformation. In this way, anticipation functions as a creative psychological mechanism that converts existential strain into motivation and purpose.

Moreover, RSCP might conceptualize anticipation of a just, future-oriented society as a powerful emotional and existential response to clients' unresolved "unfinished businesses" (Perls et al., 1951). By situating frustration within a coherent eschatological horizon, RSCP provides a framework of meaning that allows individuals to psychologically integrate unresolved experiences. From a Gestalt perspective, such integration of unfinished business through meaning-making and future orientation is expected to support psychological health and self-regulation (Beisser, 1970).

Finally, in parallel with Gestalt's emphasis on self-acceptance, clients in RSCP learn to value themselves, recognizing that their growth and actions are crucial both to their own development and to the broader moral trajectory associated with the anticipated emergence of the savior.

2.1.1 Spiritual Gestalt therapy and RSCP

In Spiritual Gestalt therapy, Brownell (2014) conceptualizes hope as an inherently transformative and anticipatory process within Christian spirituality, through which suffering is actively engaged and reshaped rather than merely endured—a view that closely parallels the process-oriented function of hope in RSCP (Hesari et al., 2024).

Brownell argues that the Messiah represents a symbol of wholeness toward which psychotherapy implicitly strives, thereby linking spiritual fulfillment with the therapeutic aim of personal integration (Brownell, 2014). Within this framework, hope sustains both faith and the therapeutic process, and suffering becomes psychologically constructive when situated within a horizon of hope rather than approached solely as pathology (Brownell, 2014; Brownell, 2011). A comparable understanding is evident in RSCP, where suffering is reframed as a potential ground for growth through spiritual meaning-making. RSCP, however, situates hope within the belief in the Imam's living presence and imminent emergence—a near-future eschatological orientation that appears to intensify motivational engagement and therapeutic impact.

Brownell further proposes that religious anticipation of salvation parallels the client's anticipation of healing within psychotherapy (Brownell, 2011). From this standpoint, the savior functions not merely as a theological construct but as a phenomenological symbol of hope embedded in human experience, orienting individuals toward meaning and future possibility (Brownell, 2011). This anticipatory stance within Spiritual Gestalt therapy corresponds to the client's lived expectation of restoration and integration, a dynamic that is similarly central to messianic-oriented frameworks such as RSCP.

2.2 Logotherapy and RSCP

Building on the preceding discussion of spiritually grounded therapeutic frameworks, a further point of convergence can be identified within meaning-centered approaches to psychotherapy.

Logotherapy identifies the will to meaning as the primary human motivation, emphasizing that individuals can endure unavoidable suffering when it is experienced as meaningful rather than futile (Frankl, 1985). When external conditions cannot be changed, psychological health depends on the capacity for inner reorientation and ethical responsibility (Frankl, 1969; Reiting, 2015).

RSCP converges with this premise but further specifies meaning within a theologically and eschatologically grounded framework. While logotherapy intentionally leaves ultimate meaning open (García-Alandete, 2024), RSCP operationalizes meaning as active participation in a future-oriented moral mission grounded in faith in God and anticipation of the savior's just governance. Suffering is thus reframed not only as a catalyst for personal transformation but also as a meaningful contribution to collective moral preparation, even when individual relief is delayed.

In this way, RSCP preserves Frankl's emphasis on responsibility and attitudinal freedom in the face of suffering (Frankl, 1985), while simultaneously extending meaning-making into a communal and future-directed horizon consistent with religious belief systems.

2.3 Fromm's Theory of Healthy Needs and Their Nourishment in RSCP

Building on the previous analyses of process-oriented and meaning-centered models, the present section extends the discussion by examining RSCP through the lens of a comprehensive humanistic theory of psychological needs.

Erich Fromm (2013) proposed that healthy functioning depends on nine fundamental psychological needs, including

unity, relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, identity, a frame of orientation, stimulation, effectiveness, and devotion. This section examines RSCP's conceptual correspondence with Fromm's nine healthy human needs.

2.3.1 Unity

Fromm identified unity as a primary healthy need, arising from humans' desire to overcome separateness through love and ethical connection (Fromm, 2000). In RSCP, unity is cultivated by fostering love for all humanity and encouraging clients to orient themselves toward a just global order. RSCP therefore nourishes unity both internally—through self-transcendence—and externally, through ethical, collective responsibility.

This process reflects Fromm's concept of brotherly love through its emphasis on solidarity and compassion toward others (Fromm, 2000). RSCP also fosters self-love as a foundation for psychological health and integrates love of God as a means of transcending existential separation by situating suffering within a meaningful, future-oriented divine horizon (Fromm, 2000). While Fromm conceptualizes erotic love as a form of union that preserves autonomy (Fromm, 2000), RSCP applies this principle by encouraging responsible responsiveness to relational needs, acceptance of the partner as they are, and the channeling of intimacy toward personal maturity and higher moral and spiritual aims.

Taken together, RSCP may support a shift from a predominantly receptive stance toward more active and productive psychological and moral engagement, consistent with Fromm's view of love as a primary response to alienation in modern life (Fromm, 2017).

2.3.2 Relatedness

Relatedness involves forming deep and meaningful bonds (Fromm, 2013). In Shi'ah theology, the living Imam is described as a compassionate spiritual presence accessible to all, transcending physical distance and human limitations (al-Saduq, 1998). Narrations, such as those attributed to Imam al-Ridha^{ix} PBUH, emphasize that he is "closer than mother and father" to each believer (al-Saduq, 1998). RSCP facilitates clients' reconnection with the living Twelfth Imam in a therapeutic process, enabling them to re-experience and repair relationships both in this world and the hereafter. Within Shi'ah belief, the Imam is regarded as the real spiritual father of all believers, through whom individuals will ultimately stand before God (Qur'an 17:71).

This transcendent relational experience surpasses all ordinary, physical connections; although the Imam is considered the closest and most benevolent guide for clients, daily routines and preoccupation with worldly life often obscure awareness of his presence, a gap that RSCP seeks to bridge by reorienting attention toward eternal, meaningful bonds.

2.3.3 Transcendence

As discussed in the preceding sections, transcendence—the movement beyond passive, biologically confined existence toward meaningful creation and moral responsibility—constitutes a central dimension of RSCP. Rather than reintroducing this foundation, the present section focuses on how RSCP operationalizes hope as the psychological mechanism through which transcendence is sustained over time.

In this regard, Fromm emphasizes that authentic hope is "neither passive waiting nor an unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur; those whose hope is weak settle for comfort or violence, whereas those whose hope is strong recognize and cherish all signs of new life and are ready at every moment to assist the emergence of what is ready to be born" (Fromm, 2023). Within the RSCP framework, the therapeutic process aims to strengthen hope from a passive or fragile form into an active and resilient orientation, such that clients move from states of psychological stagnation or despair toward increased motivation and readiness for constructive engagement. This shift from weak to strong hope may contribute to reductions in depressive experience by restoring purpose, future orientation, and meaningful involvement in life (Khayat Hesari et al., 2025).

Fromm also further observes that "to hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime" (Fromm, 2023). Consistently, a closely parallel principle is found in Shi'ah tradition, which holds that if an individual awaiting the Imam dies before the Imam's reappearance, their reward equals that of one who lives to witness it (Majlisi, 2016). From this perspective, the teaching may be understood as reflecting the psychologically sustaining function of strong hope itself, rather than solely the realization of its external outcome.

2.3.4 Rootedness

Rootedness reflects the need to feel at home in the world and to experience security and belonging (Fromm, 2013). RSCP addresses this by positioning the client as an agent in the near-future ideal government—a moral and spiritual community in formation. This perspective allows clients to actively and meaningfully engage with the world, providing a sense of belonging grounded in both religious narrative and moral responsibility.

2.3.5 Sense of Identity

A coherent sense of identity involves experiencing oneself as a distinct, autonomous individual (Fromm, 2013). RSCP addresses this need through the Shi'ah principle of *niyyah*^x (intention), whereby actions are organized not solely around personal benefit but around conscious commitment to the welfare of others. Through this intentional orientation, clients experience themselves as morally unique agents whose choices carry personal and collective significance.

Although Shi'ah clients may be theologically familiar with *niyyah*, RSCP translates this principle into lived psychological practice by linking intention to concrete daily behavior. As clients recognize their actions as meaningful contributions rather than isolated efforts, they may experience enhanced self-worth and coherence of identity, grounded in perceived usefulness to both self and others. While such changes warrant further empirical investigation, clinically, this process appears to support identity consolidation and the strengthening of self-esteem through sustained moral engagement.

2.3.6 Frame of Orientation

A frame of orientation provides stability through beliefs, values, and guiding principles (Fromm, 2013). RSCP strengthens this by using Holy Qur'anic verses, narrations, and Shi'ah teachings to guide clients toward moral and spiritual excellence, helping them understand life events and suffering within a coherent, purposeful worldview (Almajri et al., 2023). This process stabilizes their cognitive and existential framework in alignment with Fromm's model of psychological health.

2.3.7 Excitation and Stimulation

RSCP promotes this need by helping clients to transform daily actions into purposeful contributions toward personal and collective preparation for a just society. By altering intentions and motivations, clients experience renewed energy, agency, and psychological stimulation, satisfying Fromm's need for active engagement (Fromm, 2013).

2.3.8 Effectiveness

It has been well discussed that the need to feel capable of influencing the world is fulfilled in RSCP through active, intentional behavior. Clients are guided to recognize that their choices and actions have a tangible impact on their own lives, the lives of others, and the preparation of a just society.

2.3.9 System of Devotion

Fromm's need for a stable object of devotion or commitment is addressed in RSCP by orienting clients toward the overarching moral goal of preparing for a just society under the Imam's guidance. Within this framework, clients are encouraged to prioritize daily actions that are understood, within their theological worldview, to contribute to the conditions for the savior's emergence, rather than organizing behavior primarily around immediate personal advantage.

Within RSCP, one of the most frequently practiced devotional exercises—both during sessions and as therapeutic homework—involves guiding clients to intentionally reorient moments of intense frustration. When clients experience distress and feel compelled to plead with God for immediate personal change, they are encouraged to momentarily disengage from outcome-focused demands, consciously detach from the desired result, and instead direct their prayer toward the collective emergence and well-being of the world as a whole. This practice promotes emotional regulation by reducing self-focused rumination and shifting attention toward broader, value-consistent meaning.

This therapeutic stance is consistent with a narration attributed to Imam Mahdi^{PBUH}, which emphasizes that in times of hardship, one should prioritize supplication for the welfare and salvation of humanity rather than exclusive concern for personal relief, suggesting that genuine contentment emerges through this outward, value-oriented orientation (Majlisi, 2016). Within RSCP, this devotional reframing functions both as a spiritually grounded practice and as a psychological mechanism that supports affect regulation, patience, and sustained commitment to transcendent values (Nuri, 1986).

Therefore, RSCP or, in other words, the School of Anticipation (SOA) within Shi'ah's theology, appears to systematically nourish all nine of Fromm's healthy human needs, transforming passive religiosity and suffering into active, morally grounded, and spiritually meaningful engagement.

Accordingly, viewed through Fromm's framework, RSCP may facilitate a movement in Shi'ah clients from a predominantly receptive character orientation toward a productive character (Fromm, 2013).

Beyond these correspondences, additional conceptual parallels between Fromm's broader theoretical framework and RSCP can also be identified.

Fromm (2013) asserts that "Man's task in life is to give birth to himself" and that "Growth requires the capacity to tolerate frustration," principles reflected in RSCP's emphasis on patient endurance during the period of awaiting the savior, where conscious tolerance of setbacks fosters ethical maturation and personal development (Qur'an 103:3).

Fromm (2013) further observes that "Immediate gratification often stands in the way of genuine fulfillment" which

aligns with RSCP's emphasis on long-term, altruistic goals, where fleeting or superficial pleasures are deliberately deferred to support spiritual development and preparation for the savior's emergence.

Fromm (2013) also highlights that "Self-love and selfishness are opposites," a principle reflected in RSCP's cultivation of self-development rather than self-centeredness, where love for the savior is expressed through ethical, communal engagement. In line with his assertion that "The productive character overcomes narcissism," RSCP fosters a productive character in the awaiting individual, oriented toward moral responsibility and spiritual contribution rather than self-interest.

Ultimately, Fromm's statements that "Man is responsible for himself and for society," "Man lives toward the future," and "Hope is a decisive element in every attempt to bring about change" (Fromm, 2013) are operationalized in RSCP through the integration of anticipatory engagement and reformative action.

2.4 Humanistic Approach and RSCP

Extending the discussion of humanistic and existential frameworks, the present section examines RSCP in relation to classical humanistic psychology, particularly the works of Maslow and Rogers.

According to Shi'ah belief, the highest level of human spiritual development occurs when an individual becomes actively useful for others and assumes the role of an active awaiting individual in preparation for the Justice world (Al-Majlisi, 1983). When translated into humanistic psychological terms, Self-actualizing individuals are those whose tendencies are directed to goals outside of themselves, they demonstrate greater acceptance of others and a deeper ethical concern — including justice and the welfare of others (Maslow, 1970; Maslow, 1971); and within Shi'ah thought, this highest level of fulfillment is expressed through deliberate personal and social preparation for moral development and the anticipated emergence of the savior of humankind (Amir-Moezzi, 2016).

According to Maslow, transcendence in self-actualizing individuals often involves an experienced sense of unity with something larger than the self (Maslow, 1971); consistently, within RSCP, this expanded sense of unity is expressed through engagement with the savior in promoting the welfare of humanity.

Thus, it seems that RSCP bridges classical humanistic theory and Shi'ah spiritual anthropology, demonstrating how being-values, peak experiences, and self-actualization can be cultivated within a religiously meaningful therapeutic context (Maslow, 1968). The approach highlights the inseparability of psychological growth, ethical action, and spiritual purpose, providing clients with a holistic pathway toward both personal and collective flourishing.

In RSCP, clients experience peak experiences when they perceive themselves as genuinely useful for humanity and for the emergence of the savior (Imam Mahdi), and this conceptualization is consistent with Maslow's view that self-actualizing individuals are not only characterized by personal fulfillment but also by heightened compassion, social responsibility, and active opposition to injustice and exploitation (Maslow, 1964).

Individuals in RSCP encounter being-values—such as truth, justice, compassion, altruism, and ethical responsibility—not as abstract ideals but as existentially actionable guides for thought and behavior (Maslow, 1968). In this respect, RSCP aligns with the founder of humanistic psychology's view that therapeutic growth involves movement toward self-actualization through living in accordance with being-values, integrating personal development with responsibility for social and moral transformation (Maslow, 1964).

There are also other similarities between the humanistic approach and RSCP, such as in the field of peak experiences. Peak experiences often lead to a reordering of priorities (Maslow, 1964). Accordingly, in RSCP, the client is guided to realign their focus beyond the self through active prayer as well as cognitive and behavioral practices. Similarly, the School of Anticipation cultivates this capacity by steering individuals away from regression toward purposeful self-actualization. As discussed earlier, within RSCP, therapeutic change is facilitated by shifting the client's motivational focus from fear-based regression to future-oriented responsibility for humanity.

It is noteworthy to mention that in RSCP, self-actualization is not a singular or transient event; it is a repetitive, dynamic process just as Maslow states (Maslow, 1968). In fact, clients learn how to continuously experience recurrent peak moments of fulfillment through their daily life.

Additionally, the leading figure in humanistic psychology noted that self-actualizing individuals delay lower pleasures in favor of higher values they regard as more real and sacred (Maslow, 1964). The existence of this idea in RSCP has been previously discussed in System of Devotion section of Fromm's nine healthy needs.

In RSCP, clients are guided, for a structured period of 10 weeks, to intentionally focus on these higher-order spiritual and ethical concerns rather than on their individual problems—a practice that may facilitate movement toward gradual and sustained self-actualization (Khayat Hesari et al., 2025).

This process also mirrors Rogers' notion of the fully functioning person, who continuously encounters challenges,

processes experiences authentically, and actualizes potential in relation to both self and others (Rogers, 1961). Thus, a key innovation of RSCP is its practical use of Shi'ah principles in line with Maslow's view that religion cannot be reduced to ethics alone but also involves epistemological and ontopsychological experience (Maslow, 1964).

In conclusion, it seems that RSCP facilitates the alignment of clients' real self with their ideal self, fostering a spiritually and morally integrated state (Rogers, 1995). This process could diminish existential anxiety and enhance well-being, reflecting Rogers' concept of self-congruence and paralleling the Shi'ah notion of divine acquiescence and inner fulfillment (Rogers, 1995).

2.5 Rotter's Social Learning Framework and RSCP

Extending the behavioral-learning perspective introduced in previous sections, RSCP can also be interpreted through Rotter's social learning framework, which emphasizes expectancy-based motivation and reinforcement value in shaping behavior.

Within Rotter's social learning framework, behavior potential (BP) is a function of expectancy (E) and reinforcement value (RV), reaching its maximum when both are high (Rotter, 1954). RSCP creates a therapeutic context in which both components are systematically enhanced, thereby maximizing behavioral change.

RSCP increases expectancy by cultivating generalized beliefs that moral, psychological, and spiritual actions—such as self-regulation, altruism, and ethical commitment—lead to meaningful outcomes. As Rotter emphasized, individuals develop generalized expectancies regarding the likelihood that their actions will produce desired results (Rotter et al., 1972). By embedding personal effort within a coherent, future-oriented moral narrative, RSCP enables clients to perceive their actions as effective and consequential. Moreover, when reinforcement is experienced as contingent upon one's own behavior, purposeful and persistent action becomes more likely (Rotter, 1966), a condition explicitly fostered in RSCP through responsibility and moral agency.

RSCP also substantially amplifies reinforcement value by framing positive behavior not merely as personal gain but as participation in a collective and divinely valued mission aimed at the future establishment of justice. As Hall et al. (1998) note, motivation is sustained when action both reduces inner tension and directs the individual toward a highly valued outcome. Thus, by linking present ethical effort to transcendent, future-oriented meaning, RSCP sustains motivation with exceptional strength. When expectancy and reinforcement value are simultaneously elevated, behavior potential is correspondingly maximized.

Drawing additionally on Hull's learning theory, the Oscillation Effect (sOr)—reflecting motivational fluctuation, fatigue, and behavioral variability—tends to diminish when behavior is oriented toward higher, purpose-driven goals (Hull, 1945). In RSCP, alignment with a transcendent moral horizon may contribute to a reduction in internal instability and motivational fatigue, resulting in greater behavioral consistency and self-regulation. This potential reduction in sOr further might enhance the overall behavior potential.

Hope and expectancy, therefore, occupy a central role in RSCP, as the savior figure provides a powerful expectancy structure that enables clients to envision meaningful and achievable futures, thereby strengthening resilience, emotional regulation, and sustained commitment to change.

2.6 Cognitive–Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and RSCP

A central mechanism in RSCP that parallels—but also significantly differs from—traditional Cognitive–Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is its method of cognitive restructuring (Beck, 2020). In this regard, while CBT aims to modify dysfunctional cognitions through empirically-based cognitive challenges (Beck, 2024), RSCP instead grounds the process of cognitive change entirely in Qur'anic verses, eschatological reasoning, and the Shi'ah worldview of active anticipation.

From a conceptual standpoint, this distinction is crucial because in RSCP, cognitive change is not merely the replacement of maladaptive thoughts with more realistic ones; rather, it involves a comprehensive transformation of the worldview grounded in divine guidance, reshaping the interpretive lens through which clients understand suffering, responsibility, agency, and the purpose of existence.

Within Islamic theology—especially within Shi'ah thought—worldly life is short, transient, and incomplete (Momen, 1985); many existential questions find their ultimate coherence only within the framework of the Afterlife (Ma'ād). Accordingly, by reintroducing Qur'anic concepts related to divine justice, accountability, human mission, and the coming reappearance of the Savior (Imam Mahdi), RSCP reconstructs the client's cognitive schemas at a deep, worldview level.

Consequently, this transformation results in tangible behavioral change (Khayat Hesari et al., 2024), consistent with Beck's assertion that modifying core beliefs alters not only emotional responses but also long-term behavioral patterns

(Beck, 2024).

From this perspective, RSCP can indeed be considered a religiously grounded form of cognitive-behavioral therapy, in which the cognitive restructuring process is anchored in sacred texts rather than solely in empirical logic (Koenig, 2015).

2.7 Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and RSCP

From a process-based therapeutic perspective, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is grounded in the development of psychological flexibility—helping clients accept internal experiences, commit to valued actions, and live meaningfully in the present (Hayes & Wilson, 2011).

Importantly, in ACT, the distinction between “values” and “goals” is considered one of the most fundamental theoretical and clinical distinctions. (Hayes & Wilson, 2011). Values are defined as chosen, ongoing, and internally driven directions for living a meaningful life; they have no endpoint and are not “achievable” in the traditional sense. Values reflect how a person chooses to be and live moment by moment, rather than what must necessarily be obtained. From this perspective, values are process-oriented, existential, and spiritual in nature, and are closer to a way of life than to an outcome (Hayes & Wilson, 2011).

In parallel with this framework, RSCP conceptualizes active and hopeful anticipation as a meaningful life orientation that reflects how the client chooses to think and live. In contrast, self-awareness and the advent of Imam Mahdi are understood as achievable goals, which may occur at any time in the process of living based on high values, personally and universally.

Accordingly, just like ACT, actions in this model are not merely outcome-oriented; rather, they embody a meaningful way of living. Although the ultimate fulfillment of this eschatological vision is certain, its temporal realization remains indeterminate and may not occur within the client’s lifetime.

Nevertheless, RSCP emphasizes that psychological meaning and stability are derived not from the timing of the goal’s realization, but from living a value-driven life and engaging in committed action toward that transcendent purpose—an orientation that fosters inner coherence and enhances psychological flexibility.

Furthermore, a central feature of values in ACT is that they remain livable even in the presence of failure, loss, or external constraints. Individuals can continue to act in accordance with their values even when desired outcomes are not achieved; thus, failure to attain specific goals does not result in psychological collapse. Rather, suffering intensifies when values are conflated with goals and personal identity becomes contingent upon external outcomes (Hayes et al., 2006).

In a conceptually parallel manner, this distinction between values and goals is also reflected in Shi’ah devotional teachings concerning Imam Mahdi. In one supplication, the Imam is addressed as “Peace be upon you, O light of God by which the guided are guided,” emphasizing that the essential function of belief in the Imam is not merely the timing of his emergence but ongoing moral and spiritual guidance. Accordingly, in RSCP, while the emergence of Imam Mahdi constitutes a future-oriented goal, the enduring value for the awaiting individual lies in continuous preparation—spiritual, personal, and social—for such an event. Thus, anticipation is lived as a present-oriented, value-driven mode of existence rather than a goal-dependent expectation (Hesari et al., 2024).

Moreover, ACT highlights psychological pain as not an obstacle to a meaningful life, but often “the price of admission” (Hayes et al., 2011). Consistently, in RSCP, clients learn how to befriend their pain, which has led them to RSCP sessions and to reframe their innate values, which have been neglected for a long time. Clients find that a meaningful life often includes pain, uncertainty, and sacrifice (Hayes, 2025), and where there are values, there will be pain (Hayes et al., 2011). In fact, they recognize that values are not about what feels good now, but about what gives life meaning over time (Wilson & Murrell, 2004). Thus, psychological flexibility involves staying in contact with values even when the journey is painful (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

Therefore, in RSCP, just like ACT values-based action is the core of psychological health (Wilson & DuFrene, 2009). RSCP and ACT both foster hope through engagement, not through the promise of a quick relief of pain (Hayes, 2019). Also, in both RSCP and ACT, committed action is about building patterns of living over time (Hayes et al., 2011), and values in RSCP involve contribution to something larger than the self (Wilson & Murrell, 2004). Both paradigms emphasize that the goal is not a painless life, but a rich and meaningful one (Hayes, 2005). Value of active anticipation in RSCP functions like a compass, guiding behavior over time rather than providing immediate reward (Wilson, 2009). Likewise, ACT explicitly teaches persistence in the absence of immediate reinforcement (Hayes & Hofmann, 2018).

In essence, in RSCP, the future is shaped by present-moment actions guided by values (Wilson, 2009).

Additionally, ACT assumes that growth occurs not despite limitations, but through them (Hayes, 2004). Similarly, in

RSCP, it is assumed that human growth—before the advent of the Savior and the establishment of utopia, a world without limitations—is achieved through accepting limitations, committing to action within domains that are changeable, and integrating the suffering that arises from limitations. In other words, it is only through understanding suffering before abundance that abundance itself, and the transcendence of life in that era, can be truly perceived and appreciated.

Consequently, improved quality of life, not symptom elimination, is the primary outcome of ACT (Hayes et al., 2011) and RSCP. RSCP is also an approach in which less emphasis is placed on symptoms. Rather, as a religious adaptation of Frisch's Quality of Life Therapy (Frisch, 2016), it seeks to help improve individuals' quality of life within the context of their religious values and beliefs, and it does not aim at identifying and then eliminating symptoms in the conventional manner of psychology (Frisch, 2016).

Furthermore, ACT aims to create a way of living that continues beyond the therapy room (Hayes, 2020). It seeks to cultivate a mode of living that extends beyond the confines of therapy. In the same vein, RSCP pursues a similar goal by translating the concepts of the Savior-expectation framework into the individual's everyday life and teaching clients how to live in accordance with their spiritual goals and the higher values of their religion. RSCP promotes an active and constructive engagement with suffering and life's difficulties, grounded in hope for the advent of the Savior and in a commitment to making value-consistent changes within domains that are open to change. Therefore, like ACT, it is better understood as training in a way of living rather than as a symptom-focused therapy (Hayes, 2004).

Importantly, the eschatological grounding of RSCP also strengthens the ACT component of commitment to valued action. In standard ACT, clients frequently struggle to commit because, although values are personally meaningful, they often do not translate into a sense of collective significance or future impact. In contrast, RSCP links committed action to the belief that even small acts of reform, patience, kindness, or self-regulation contribute to the broader preparation for a just global order. Thus, clients no longer feel that their efforts are isolated or futile; rather, their behavioral commitments become part of a historical, communal, and spiritual project.

In this sense, RSCP may be seen as a spiritually expanded ACT, in which: Acceptance is grounded in eschatological purpose rather than mere tolerance, Values are enriched by religious commitments and collective eschatological goals, and Committed action gains long-term motivational strength from the belief in contributing to humanity's future transformation.

2.8 Adler's Individual Psychology and RSCP

From an Adlerian theoretical perspective, "Mental health is measured by the degree to which a person feels connected to humanity as a whole" (Adler, 2013).

Within Individual Psychology, Adler's framework places social interest^{xi} at the center of mental health, arguing that neurosis and discouragement arise from a mistaken lifestyle dominated by self-centered private logic rather than cooperative, community-oriented goals (Adler, 1938). Healthy functioning, by contrast, involves organizing one's life around contribution, belonging, and responsibility toward humanity.

Consistent with this framework, RSCP closely aligns with the Adlerian framework through the Shi'ah doctrine of active anticipation^{xii}, which defines the believer's purpose as actively contributing—cognitively, morally, spiritually, and behaviorally—to the preparation of a just global community under the Savior's leadership. In this view, "waiting" is transformed into prosocial striving, whereby everyday actions gain meaning through their perceived role in advancing justice and human flourishing.

From a psychopathological standpoint, whereas Adler held that psychopathology emerges when personal goals are detached from communal welfare, RSCP systematically redirects clients away from isolated, self-referential concerns toward universal and socially embedded aspirations. The client learns that psychological maturity and authentic worship are expressed through actions that facilitate future justice, compassion, and collective well-being.

Accordingly, RSCP can be understood as a spiritually grounded extension of Adlerian psychology—providing a theological foundation for social interest, an eschatological orientation toward communal progress, and a corrective pathway through which personal purpose becomes inseparable from responsibility to humanity as a whole.

2.9. Emmons' Theory of Personal Strivings (with Emphasis on Spiritual and Religious Goals) and RSCP

From the perspective of motivational psychology, Emmons (2005) emphasizes the central role of spiritual and religious goals in sustaining motivation and guiding behavior toward long-term objectives. He argues that individuals with clearly defined spiritual aims—such as connection with God, pursuit of ultimate life purpose, and altruistic action for higher values—exhibit greater self-regulation and can delay immediate gratification, including impulsive or pleasure-seeking behaviors.

Within this theoretical framework, RSCP operationalizes this principle by what has been discussed in previous sections. The alignment between spiritual goal-setting and psychological motivation supports sustained engagement in ethical behaviors, fosters resilience in the face of suffering, and transforms passive religiosity into active, purposeful striving, echoing Emmons' assertion that spiritual aims provide structure, direction, and enduring motivational power in human life.

2.10 Allport's Theory of Healthy Functioning and RSCP

From a humanistic personality perspective, Allport characterized psychological health as mature, future-oriented functioning guided by personal values and goals rather than past conflicts or reactive impulses (Allport, 1961), with appropriate striving representing the active realization of one's core values and potential (Allport, 1955).

In conceptual alignment with this model, RSCP parallels Allport's view by fostering value-driven, goal-directed engagement and reducing fixation on past setbacks.

More specifically, RSCP embeds personal striving within a future-oriented moral and eschatological framework, thereby extending Allport's concept of healthy functioning into a spiritually grounded domain of meaning and responsibility.

3. Results (Conceptual Findings)

The comparative theoretical analysis revealed that Religious Savior-Centered Psychotherapy (RSCP) demonstrates systematic conceptual convergence with multiple established psychological theories, while maintaining a distinct eschatological and culturally grounded framework.

Across Gestalt therapy (Perls et al., 1951), RSCP aligns with present-centered awareness, the transformation of unresolved experiences (unfinished business), and the principle that psychological integration emerges through meaningful engagement with lived experience. Anticipation within RSCP functions as a structuring mechanism that assigns significance to present actions in relation to future-oriented moral development.

Without an organizing horizon of fulfillment, many existential tasks—justice, repair, reconciliation, and self-actualization—risk remaining perpetually incomplete, generating chronic tension and psychological distress. RSCP reframes these unfinished tasks not as failures but as meaningful participation in an ongoing moral process whose culmination may transcend the individual lifespan. In this sense, anticipation does not suspend life; rather, it allows individuals to live meaningfully despite incompleteness, a stance consistent with Gestalt conceptions of psychological health.

In relation to Logotherapy (Frankl, 1985), RSCP corresponds with the central role of meaning-making under conditions of suffering. However, RSCP further specifies meaning within a theologically defined, future-oriented moral mission, thereby extending meaning from individual attitudinal adjustment to collective and eschatologically framed responsibility.

Within Fromm's theoretical framework (Fromm, 2013), RSCP corresponds with all nine dimensions of healthy psychological functioning, particularly unity, relatedness, transcendence, identity, and devotion. Across these dimensions, RSCP consistently reorients motivation from self-centered functioning toward socially embedded and morally directed action.

In relation to humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961), RSCP demonstrates correspondence with self-actualization, being-values, peak experiences, and self-congruence. The findings indicate that RSCP frames self-actualization not as an individual endpoint but as an ongoing process embedded within ethical and collective responsibility.

Regarding Rotter's social learning theory and expectancy models (Rotter, 1954), RSCP systematically enhances expectancy and reinforcement value through a structured moral and eschatological framework, thereby increasing behavioral potential. This includes strengthening goal-directed action through future-oriented expectancy structures.

Within Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (Beck, 2020), RSCP demonstrates conceptual correspondence with cognitive restructuring processes; however, RSCP situates cognitive change within a worldview transformation grounded in religious and eschatological cognition rather than solely empirical evaluation of thoughts.

In relation to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes, 2019), RSCP aligns with the distinction between values and goals, emphasizing values-based living and committed action. RSCP extends this framework by embedding values within a collective eschatological horizon that provides long-term motivational continuity.

Finally, within Adlerian psychology (Adler, 1938), RSCP corresponds strongly with the concept of social interest, redefining psychological health as active contribution to collective moral development and social responsibility.

Overall, the analysis indicates that RSCP functions as a multi-layered conceptual system integrating mechanisms of meaning-making, cognitive restructuring, values-based action, expectancy enhancement, and social responsibility within a unified eschatological framework.

4. Discussion

The present study positions Religious Savior-Centered Psychotherapy (Khayat Hesari et al., 2024) as a culturally embedded psychospiritual framework that operationalizes anticipation as a central motivational and meaning-making system. While the Results section demonstrated conceptual convergence between RSCP and multiple established psychological paradigms, the present discussion extends these findings by considering their broader theoretical, clinical, and cross-cultural implications.

In this regard, a key implication of RSCP is that it illustrates how eschatological belief systems can function as structured psychological resources rather than purely theological constructs. The integration of anticipation (*intizār*) into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral regulation suggests that culturally grounded belief systems may inherently contain mechanisms that support meaning-making, resilience, and value-driven action (Yangmei et al., 2018; MacLeod & Conway, 2005; Khayat Hesari et al., 2024). This positions RSCP not as an isolated therapeutic model, but as part of a broader class of spiritually integrated psychotherapies in which future-oriented belief structures play a regulatory psychological role.

Building on this broader perspective, it is important to note that, although RSCP is grounded in Shi'ah eschatology, the underlying constructs of savior expectation, moral ideality, and utopian orientation are not exclusive to a single religious tradition. Similar future-oriented salvific or utopian narratives are present across monotheistic religions, including Christianity and Islam, and also appear in secular philosophical traditions that envision ideal societal states. This suggests that the psychological mechanisms identified in RSCP may have broader transdiagnostic and cross-cultural relevance (Khayat Hesari et al., 2024).

Accordingly, greater sensitivity is required when interpreting eschatological constructs within clinical and psychological frameworks, particularly within the emerging field of spiritual and positive psychology, where meaning systems are increasingly recognized as central to well-being.

From this cross-cultural vantage point, the development of culturally adapted or parallel versions of RSCP—such as Christian-based, Islamic non-Shi'ah, or even secular-utopian adaptations—may represent a promising direction for future research. Such adaptations could preserve the core psychological mechanisms of anticipation, meaning construction, and value-based action while embedding them within alternative cultural or philosophical frameworks. This would allow RSCP-like interventions to be examined as part of a broader family of “anticipatory meaning-based psychotherapies” rather than as a tradition-specific model.

At a more specific theoretical level, it is worth noting that another distinctive contribution of RSCP lies in its grounding within Shi'ah near-future eschatology. While Islamic theology places significant emphasis on *ma'ād* (resurrection and the afterlife), which remains temporally distant and abstract, Shi'ah belief in the living Imam introduces an anticipatory horizon that is immediate, emotionally salient, and experientially accessible (al-Kulaynī, 1981). The belief that the savior may emerge at any moment establishes a continuous orientation toward the future that actively shapes present behavior, sustaining motivation, ethical responsibility, and hope without deferring meaning exclusively to a distant afterlife (As-Sadr, 1980). This near-future expectancy may hold particular psychological value, as it embeds purpose within everyday life and ongoing moral action.

At this point, a key theoretical question emerges: how can such a religiously structured anticipation be understood in broader human psychological terms that are not limited to theology alone? Addressing this requires moving from a doctrinal description of eschatological expectation toward a more universal existential-psychological interpretation of meaning, responsibility, and human fulfillment. In this regard, the humanistic-existential tradition in psychology offers a particularly suitable conceptual bridge, as it seeks to understand religious and moral striving in terms of universal human needs for meaning, growth, and self-realization.

Within this broader framework, and moving from a theological-existential description toward a more explicitly human-centered ethical psychology, Eric Fromm's humanistic-existential analysis provides a particularly illuminating lens for understanding RSCP's ethical and motivational structure. Fromm (2013) states, “Man's fulfillment lies in becoming fully human.” In Shi'ah theology, the Imams are regarded as exemplars of the fully realized human, having perfectly embodied God's guidance as revealed in the Qur'an (al-Kulaynī, 1981). The concept of Imamate is central: only by following a fully human exemplar who has actualized divine teachings can individuals aspire to their own fully human potential. RSCP operationalizes this principle by encouraging clients to pursue self-actualization in their personal lives and to extend ethical and spiritual growth into their social worlds. This personal and collective

development aligns with the Shi'ah belief that the savior's reappearance occurs when a sufficient number of people have cultivated moral and spiritual maturity, enabling them to actively support the establishment of a just and ethical world alongside the savior (As-Sadr,1980; Hesari et al., 2025).

Fromm's ethical emphasis further converges with this theological stance. As he asserts, "The ethical problem is man's problem, not God's" (Fromm, 2013). Similarly, Shi'ah theology holds that the emergence of the savior is contingent upon humanity's moral and spiritual readiness rather than divine will alone (As-Sadr,1980). The savior's delayed appearance is understood not as divine postponement but as a reflection of insufficient ethical maturity and collective responsibility. Fromm's observation that "The capacity to wait is a decisive trait of maturity" (2013) resonates strongly here, underscoring that true readiness involves patience, endurance, and sustained ethical effort. RSCP embodies this principle by fostering personal development, moral engagement, and active anticipation, emphasizing that individual growth must precede and contribute to collective readiness. In this process, RSCP aligns personal ethical labor with broader spiritual and social objectives related to justice and responsibility (Hesari et al., 2025). In this context, Fromm's warning that "Man's greatest danger is not evil intentions but moral laziness" (2013) functions as a direct critique of passive waiting, reinforcing RSCP's emphasis on responsibility and action.

Fromm's critique of immediate gratification further clarifies RSCP's motivational logic. As he notes, "Man often seeks immediate gratification, yet such pleasures are fleeting and do not contribute to genuine happiness. True well-being requires self-discipline, the postponement of short-term satisfaction, and dedication to higher aims that benefit both the self and society" (Fromm, 2013). RSCP reflects this principle through devotional and ethical practices attributed to Imam Mahdi, in which individuals are encouraged to sacrifice immediate personal desires in prayer and action for the sake of the savior and collective well-being. Fulfillment is thus reframed as emerging from disciplined ethical striving and commitment to long-term, morally significant goals, rather than from transient pleasures (Hesari et al., 2025).

Extending this motivational logic toward behavioral-process models of change, RSCP also shows conceptual convergence with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes, 2019). ACT offers a relevant framework for understanding RSCP's structure of psychological flexibility.

RSCP's dynamics also converge with principles articulated in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes, 2019). RSCP similarly distinguishes values from goals, emphasizing that psychological coherence arises not from the realization of utopian outcomes, but from committed, value-based living oriented toward a meaningful future. While the ultimate realization of a just society is certain yet temporally indeterminate, RSCP highlights that well-being is cultivated through present-moment actions aligned with higher values. In this way, anticipation functions not as a fragile hope dependent on outcomes, but as a stabilizing motivational structure that enhances psychological flexibility and resilience.

Taken together, these behavioral-contextual and existential-humanistic convergences suggest that RSCP operates at the intersection of meaning-based and process-based models of psychological change, thereby bridging motivational, behavioral, and developmental accounts of human functioning.

Finally, RSCP's orientation toward becoming fully human aligns with classic humanistic psychology. Maslow (1954) asserted that "becoming fully human is not only a possibility but a moral obligation". In Shi'ah theology, this idea is echoed in the Qur'anic verse, "Today I have completed your religion for you," which Shi'ah interpretations understand as signifying the completion of the path to full humanity through Imam Ali^{xiii} (Qur'an 5:3 ; Al-Majlisi,1984), The first Imam, who embodies the fully human ideal and, subsequently, the line of Imams as living exemplars of divine guidance^{xiv} (Al-Majlisi,1984).

In this view, humanity is not guided solely through written revelation (The Holy Qur'an), but through embodied models of ethical and spiritual actualization (The 12 Imams). Shi'ah belief maintains that while earlier Imams were martyred, the Twelfth Imam^{xv} (Mahdi) has been divinely preserved until sufficient societal readiness emerges (al-Kulaynī, 1981).

A Shi'ah or even a non-Shi'ah person who becomes a true "awaiting individuals" contributes actively to preparing the world for the final Imam's reappearance, which, in concert with Christ^{xvi} (Al-Nu'mānī, n.d), facilitates a just world where all humans^{xvii} can realize their potential (As-Sadr,1980).

Therefore, RSCP emphasizes that individuals need not wait for the global event to experience existential fulfillment. By becoming "awaiting individuals," clients actively participate in preparing themselves and their social worlds for justice, thereby approximating full humanity in the present.

Overall, RSCP illustrates how a theologically grounded system of anticipation can function as a psychologically coherent and clinically relevant framework. The findings suggest that eschatological belief—when oriented toward responsibility, ethical action, and personal growth—may serve not as an escape from life, but as a powerful resource for mental health, resilience, and human flourishing.

A key limitation of the present model is its primarily conceptual and non-empirical nature. Although RSCP is grounded in theoretically coherent correspondences with established psychological frameworks, the present analysis does not provide direct experimental verification of its proposed mechanisms. Accordingly, the identified parallels should be interpreted as theoretical convergences rather than evidence of causal equivalence or clinical superiority. Furthermore, because RSCP is derived from a specific Shi'ah eschatological context, its cultural and religious specificity may limit its immediate generalizability to non-Shi'ah populations, although this same specificity also constitutes its conceptual depth.

Taken together, these conceptual implications provide a foundation for considering RSCP as a framework with emerging empirical relevance that warrants systematic scientific investigation.

Building on this, preliminary evidence already exists from controlled studies (Khayat Hesari et al., 2024; 2025), suggesting effects on depressive symptoms and quality of life. However, these findings require further validation through longitudinal and randomized controlled trials across broader populations and they should be interpreted cautiously due to limited sample sizes.

In addition, future investigations may benefit from examining RSCP using process-based and mechanistic research designs in order to identify which components (e.g., anticipatory cognition, meaning reconstruction, or value-based commitment) are most strongly associated with therapeutic change.

Future research should also explore neurobiological mechanisms, particularly within neurotheology, to examine how anticipation and meaning-based cognition affect neural systems of reward, regulation, and executive control. However, such neurobiological hypotheses remain speculative at this stage and require systematic empirical validation before any firm conclusions regarding neural mechanisms can be drawn.

A limitation of RSCP is its current cultural specificity within Shi'ah populations, which restricts generalizability and requires cross-cultural validation.

Overall, RSCP may be understood as an integrative psychospiritual model in which culturally embedded eschatological narratives are translated into psychologically actionable systems of meaning, behavior, and transformation, thereby offering a theoretically grounded and culturally sensitive framework for future psychotherapy research and application.

5. Conclusion

Religious Savior-Centered Psychotherapy (RSCP) introduces anticipation (*intizār*) as a novel psychological mechanism through which future-oriented eschatological belief is translated into meaningful cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes. The present theoretical analysis indicates that anticipation can function as a structured system for organizing hope, meaning-making, expectancy, and moral commitment, thereby transforming religious belief from a purely theological construct into a psychologically actionable framework.

By conceptualizing eschatological belief as a regulator of cognition, motivation, and behavior, RSCP demonstrates how individuals may reinterpret suffering, strengthen psychological flexibility, and sustain long-term engagement in value-consistent action. In this model, expectation of the savior enhances both expectancy and reinforcement value, providing a motivational structure that promotes persistence, self-regulation, and resilience. Waiting is therefore reframed not as passive postponement, but as an active and prosocial mode of living characterized by ethical responsibility, social contribution, and continuous personal growth.

The comparative findings show that RSCP converges with core mechanisms identified in major psychological traditions, including meaning-centered, humanistic, cognitive-behavioral, behavioral, and process-based approaches, while extending them by integrating collective eschatological purpose. In doing so, RSCP bridges spirituality, positive psychology, and psychotherapy, offering a culturally grounded yet theoretically integrative model of human flourishing.

Overall, RSCP suggests that future-oriented spiritual narratives can serve as powerful psychological resources for enhancing meaning, hope, and social responsibility. As such, the model provides a promising foundation for the development of culturally sensitive psychotherapies and for future empirical research examining anticipation as a transdiagnostic mechanism of psychological change.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. Khayat Hesari and Dr. Mahrooz were responsible for study design and revising. Fatemeh Azimi was responsible for data collection. Dr. Khayat Hesari drafted the manuscript and Dr. Mahrooz revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the study.

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ⁱ Twelver Shi'ism (Ithnā 'Ashariyya) is the largest branch of Shi'ah Islam, characterized by belief in a lineage of twelve divinely appointed Imams descending from the Prophet Muhammad^{Peace and blessings be upon him, and his Ahl al-Bayt}, the last of whom—Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi^{PBUH}—is believed to be alive in occultation and destined to reappear at the end of times to establish justice, accompanied by 'Isā ibn Maryam, ^{PBUH} (Jesus Christ)

ⁱⁱ In Twelver Shi'ah theology, anticipation (intizār) denotes the faithful and conscious awaiting of the reappearance of the Twelfth Imam, who—according to this tradition—is in occultation and will return to establish universal justice at the end of time (Al Faqir, 1995).

ⁱⁱⁱ It is important to note that, in Shi'ah theology, the savior's emergence is understood on two distinct levels: personal emergence, realized within the individual's heart, character, and behavior, and global emergence, referring to the divinely promised societal transformation.

^{iv} A Doctrine that teaches a person how to become an Awaiting Individual for real.

^v Occultation (al-Ghaybah) in Twelver Shi'ah theology refers to the divinely ordained concealment of the twelfth Imam,

Muḥammad al-Mahdī—following the martyrdom of the first eleven Imams—whereby he is preserved alive by God until human society attains the moral and spiritual capacity for his re-emergence without subjecting him to martyrdom.

^{vi} A divinely appointed and infallible leader who embodies the guidance of The Holy Qurʾān, interpreting both its outward (exoteric) and inward (esoteric) meanings, and providing continuous spiritual and moral direction to the community.

^{vii} Refers to someone who believes in the Twelfth Imam and his imminent reappearance, and actively engages in prayer and effort for the emergence of the occultation.

^{viii} “And We wrote in the Psalms after the [previous] mention that the land shall be inherited by My righteous servants.”

^{ix} Shiʾah’s 8th Imam

^x Niyyah denotes the intentional and value-based orientation of action in Islamic theology, whereby behavior is evaluated according to conscious moral purpose rather than outcome alone.

^{xi} Gemeinschaftsgefühl

^{xii} intizār-e faʿāl

^{xiii} Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib ^{PBUH}, in Twelver Shiʾah Islam, is regarded as the first Imam after Prophet Muhammad ^{Peace and blessings be upon him and his Ahl al-Bayt}, the divinely appointed continuation of his spiritual and ethical authority. In Shiʾah belief, he is understood as the exemplar of the fully perfected human being (al-insān al-kāmil), whose life represents the complete realization of divine ethical guidance intended by God. Accordingly, the mission of Prophet Muhammad is seen as the completion of moral and ethical perfection, while Imam Ali embodies and continues this perfected ethical path after the Prophet. From this perspective, the distinction between Sunni and Shiʾah Islam is not about political leadership after the Prophet, but about who represents the divinely confirmed and most fully realized model of human ethical perfection, and therefore who is to be followed as the authentic continuation of God’s moral and ethical guidance and as the proper example through which others may model themselves in the pursuit of becoming fully human.

^{xiv} Throughout history, there were different religions that in the eyes of the Holy Qurʾān are all Islam in content, meaning being Taslim (Qurʾān 3:19), and the most complete religion and the very last one is Islam, in which, besides the written guidance from Allah (the Holy Qurʾān), the exemplar of becoming fully human has been introduced as Imams (Qurʾān 5:3).

^{xv} In Twelver Shiʾah belief, the Mahdi is the twelfth Imam, the son of Imam Hasan al-Askari and a descendant of Imam Husayn ibn Ali (the third Imam). He is also referred to by the Qurʾānic expression “Baqiyyat Allah” (بَقِيَّةُ اللَّهِ), meaning “the remaining proof of God” or “that which remains with God.” According to Shiʾah tradition, upon his reappearance at the end of time, he will introduce himself to humanity with this title, declaring “I am Baqiyyat Allah,” signifying his role as God’s enduring authority and representative on earth (al-Kulaynī, 1981).

^{xvi} According to Shiʾah narrations, Jesus Christ (ʿĪsā ibn Maryam) is expected to return and support Imam Mahdi in establishing a just world order, symbolizing the convergence of divine guidance and moral reform across prophetic traditions (Al-Nuʿmānī, n.d.).

^{xvii} In Shiʾah tradition, his role is not limited to interpreting or embodying the guidance of the Qurʾān for human beings alone, but extends to all creatures. Likewise, he is not regarded as the guide exclusively for Shiʾah Muslims, but for all humankind of his time, reflecting his universal and non-restrictive status as the Imam of all creation within his era (al-Kulaynī, 1981)