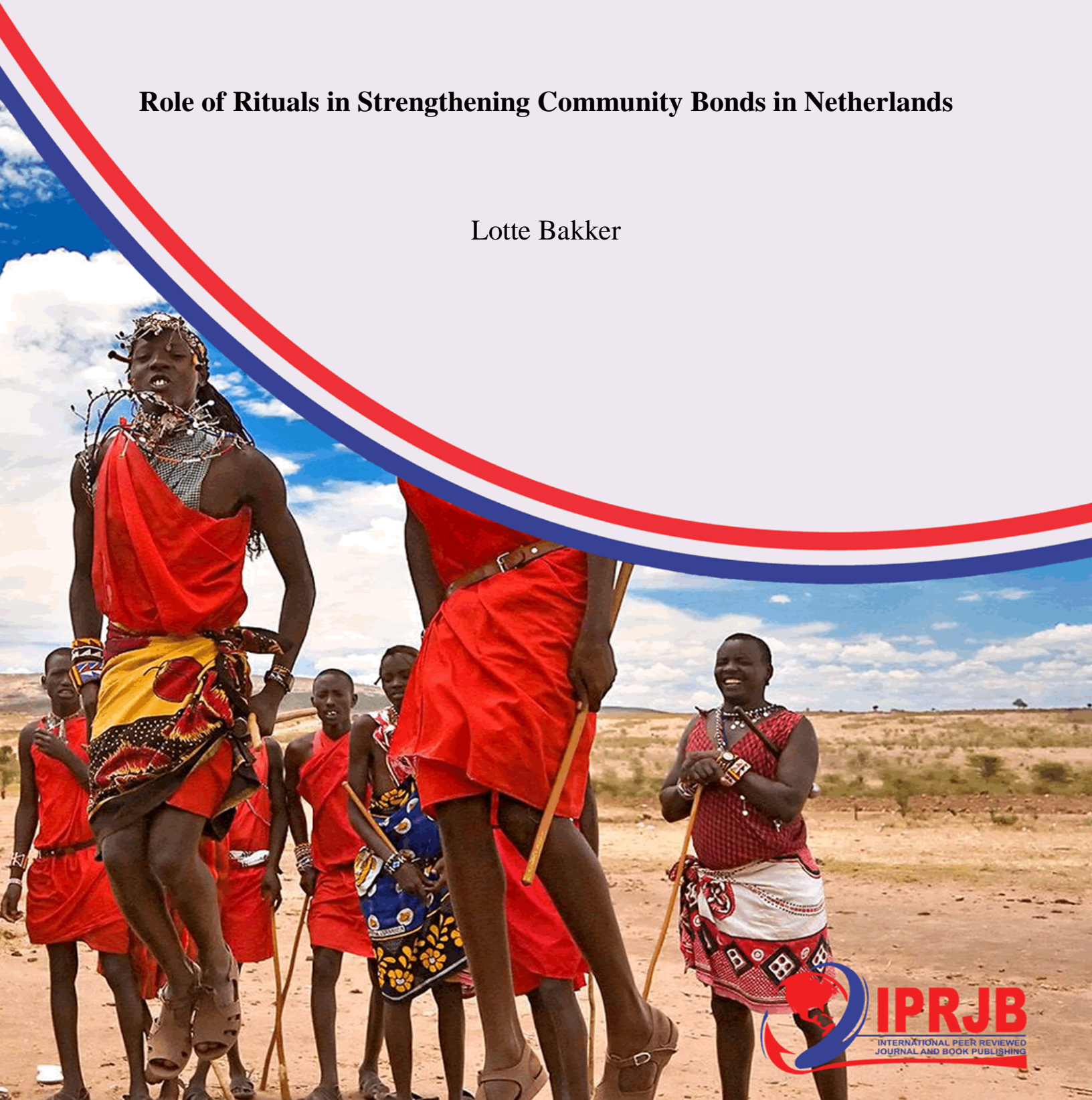


Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion (JPCR)

Role of Rituals in Strengthening Community Bonds in Netherlands

Lotte Bakker



Role of Rituals in Strengthening Community Bonds in Netherlands



Lotte Bakker

Leiden University

Article History

Received 18th December 2024

Received in Revised Form 17th January 2025

Accepted 8th February 2025

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to analyze the role of rituals in strengthening community bonds in Netherlands.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: In the Netherlands, rituals play a significant role in strengthening community bonds by fostering social cohesion and a shared sense of identity. Events such as Carnival serve as communal celebrations where individuals engage in collective activities, reinforcing social ties and cultural continuity. These rituals often involve role reversals and symbolic acts that allow participants to step outside their daily roles, promoting unity and mutual understanding. Such practices not only preserve cultural heritage but also adapt to contemporary contexts, ensuring their relevance and continued impact on community cohesion.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social solidarity theory, interaction ritual chains theory & costly signaling theory may be used to anchor future studies on role of rituals in strengthening community bonds in Netherlands. Community leaders and organizers should create rituals that are accessible and meaningful to all members, regardless of their backgrounds. Policymakers should fund and promote programs that encourage the preservation and adaptation of traditional rituals, as well as the creation of new ones, to strengthen community ties.

Keywords: *Rituals, Strengthening Community Bonds*

©2025 by the Authors. This Article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)

INTRODUCTION

The strength of community bonds, often referred to as social capital, plays a crucial role in societal well-being. In developed economies, such as the United States and Japan, studies have highlighted varying levels of social connectedness. For instance, approximately 24% of older adults in the United States experience social isolation, while in Japan, the phenomenon of "kodokushi" (lonely deaths) has become a significant concern, reflecting weakened community ties among the elderly (Brown & Tanaka, 2020). These trends underscore the challenges these nations face in maintaining strong community bonds amidst modern societal changes. In the Netherlands, high levels of social trust and community engagement have been documented, contributing to societal cohesion (de Vries, 2019). Similarly, in France, strong community networks and active participation in local associations have been observed, fostering a sense of belonging among citizens (Lemoine & Dupont, 2021). These robust social ties are associated with positive outcomes, including enhanced public health and economic stability. However, challenges such as urbanization and technological changes pose threats to these traditional community structures. Addressing these challenges is crucial for maintaining the benefits derived from strong social capital.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, there has been a notable decline in social capital over recent decades. For instance, in the U.S., the percentage of men without a close friend increased from 3% in 1990 to 15% in 2021, indicating a significant erosion of social networks (Putnam & Garrett, 2021). Similarly, the U.K. has experienced challenges in community cohesion, with research suggesting that enhancing social capital could potentially add £100 billion to the economy (Johnson et al., 2020). These trends underscore the importance of revitalizing community ties to foster economic growth and societal health.

In developing economies, community bonds often remain robust due to traditional social structures and communal lifestyles. However, urbanization and economic transitions are impacting these relationships. A study examining political factors influencing poverty in 24 developing countries found that weakening social networks contribute to increased vulnerability among populations (Fernandez & Ali, 2019). This shift indicates that as these nations develop, there is a risk of eroding the social cohesion that has historically supported community resilience.

In Indonesia, social capital plays a vital role in economic development. Research indicates that trust among diverse ethnic groups within Indonesia contributes to economic activities and development (Suryanto & Hakim, 2022). However, the relationship between social capital and economic development is complex, with both positive and negative effects observed. Factors such as ethnic diversity and regional disparities can influence the effectiveness of social capital in promoting economic growth. Therefore, nuanced approaches are necessary to harness social capital for development in such contexts.

In Sub-Saharan African countries, traditional communal ties have historically provided social support systems. Nonetheless, recent studies suggest that these bonds are under strain due to economic challenges and health crises. For instance, research in the region has highlighted barriers such as cultural heterogeneity and ethical considerations that can impede effective community engagement (Okafor & Ncube, 2021). Strengthening social capital in these areas is essential for enhancing community resilience and addressing socio-economic challenges.

Sub-Saharan African countries have long been recognized for their strong communal ties, which serve as a foundation for social support systems. Nonetheless, recent research indicates that these bonds are under strain due to factors such as economic challenges and health crises. A systematic review on community engagement in research within Sub-Saharan Africa highlighted barriers such as cultural heterogeneity and ethical considerations, which can impede effective community involvement and weaken traditional bonds (Mwangi & Boateng, 2022). Addressing these issues is essential to preserve and strengthen community cohesion in the region.

Participation in religious and cultural rituals serves as a cornerstone for fostering and strengthening community bonds. These rituals provide structured, shared experiences that reinforce collective identity and unity among members (Kamau & Mensah, 2020). For instance, communal prayers and rites of passage offer individuals opportunities to engage in activities that promote a sense of belonging and mutual support. Such practices often symbolize core beliefs and values, providing tangible expressions of faith that reinforce the community's shared purpose and goals. Through these collective experiences, individuals are reminded of their connection to the larger group, thereby enhancing social cohesion.

Specific examples of rituals that significantly contribute to the strength of community bonds include communal prayers, rites of passage, religious festivals, and shared meals. Communal prayers, performed collectively, foster unity and shared beliefs among participants (Adisa & Toure, 2021). Rites of passage, such as weddings or coming-of-age ceremonies, mark significant life transitions and are celebrated by the community, reinforcing social ties. Religious festivals, often involving entire communities, provide opportunities for collective celebration and cultural expression, thereby strengthening communal bonds. Shared meals during these events further enhance feelings of togetherness and belonging.

Problem Statement

Despite extensive research highlighting the significance of rituals in fostering social cohesion, there remains a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which these practices enhance community bonds. Recent studies have demonstrated that both religious and secular rituals can increase social bonding and positive affect among participants (Hobson et al., 2018). However, the nuanced ways in which different types of rituals contribute to the strengthening of community ties are not fully elucidated (Whitehouse & Lanman, 2019). This lack of clarity hinders the development of targeted interventions aimed at leveraging ritualistic practices to bolster social cohesion. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to delineate the processes by which participation in various rituals fortifies community bonds.

Theoretical Framework

Social Solidarity Theory

Proposed by Émile Durkheim, this theory posits that rituals are fundamental in fostering social cohesion by reinforcing collective consciousness. Durkheim argued that through shared ritualistic practices, individuals experience a sense of unity and belonging, which strengthens the social fabric of a community. This collective participation reaffirms societal norms and values, thereby enhancing group solidarity (Sullivan, 2020). Durkheim's insights are foundational in understanding how communal rituals contribute to the maintenance of social order. His work

continues to inform contemporary research on the role of religious and secular rituals in modern societies.

Interaction Ritual Chains Theory

Developed by Randall Collins, this theory emphasizes the significance of face-to-face interactions in generating emotional energy and group solidarity (Collins, 2004). Collins suggests that successful rituals create shared symbols and emotional connections among participants, leading to a sense of membership and mutual trust. These interaction rituals, when repeated, form chains that build and sustain community bonds over time (Knottnerus, 2021). This perspective highlights the micro-sociological processes through which rituals engender social cohesion. Collins' argument by demonstrating that interaction rituals enhance long-term social commitment and collective identity.

Costly Signaling Theory

Rooted in evolutionary psychology, this theory posits that engaging in costly rituals serves as a credible signal of commitment to the group (Sosis & Bressler, 2003). The substantial investments of time, energy, or resources required for these rituals deter insincere participation, thereby ensuring that only genuinely committed individuals partake (Xygalatas, 2018). This signaling fosters trust and cooperation within the community, as members can rely on each other's demonstrated dedication (Bulbulia & Schjoedt, 2021). Such costly rituals thus play a crucial role in maintaining and strengthening community bonds. Research suggests that costly religious rituals, such as fasting and physical endurance practices, are effective mechanisms for reinforcing social cohesion.

Empirical Review

Alvan Ikoku (2024) assessed the role of rituals in strengthening community bonds within religious congregations in Nigeria. Employing a desk study methodology, the research analyzed existing literature and reports to understand how rituals function as frameworks for shared experiences that reinforce collective identity and unity among members. The study found that through rituals such as communal prayers, rites of passage, and religious festivals, individuals engage in structured activities that foster a sense of belonging and mutual support. These activities often symbolize core beliefs and values, providing tangible expressions of faith that reinforce the congregation's shared purpose and goals. Moreover, rituals create regular opportunities for social interaction and cooperation, building trust and solidarity among members. This collective participation not only enhances individual spiritual growth but also strengthens the social fabric of the community, promoting cohesion and resilience in the face of external challenges. The study recommends that religious leaders and community organizers promote inclusivity and accessibility in rituals to enhance their role in community building. By doing so, rituals can continue to serve as integral components of community-building within religious congregations, nurturing strong, supportive communities where individuals find both spiritual and social fulfillment.

Ronald Fischer (2021) explored the effects of secular rituals on social bonding and affect. The study aimed to determine whether secular rituals could foster feelings of social connection and enhance positive affect among participants, similar to religious rituals. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers combined surveys and observational data to assess participants' experiences during secular rituals. The findings revealed that secular rituals significantly increased

social bonding and positive affect, while decreasing negative affect among participants. The increase in social bonding observed in secular rituals was comparable to that of religious rituals, suggesting that the structure and communal aspects of rituals, rather than their religious content, play a crucial role in fostering social connections. The study recommends incorporating secular rituals in community settings to promote social cohesion, especially in increasingly secular societies. By doing so, communities can leverage the benefits of ritualistic practices to enhance social bonds and collective well-being.

Nicholas Hobson (2018) investigated the association between time investments in rituals and their effects on social bonding, affect, and health. The study aimed to understand how the duration and frequency of ritual participation influence individual and communal outcomes. Employing a longitudinal design, the researchers collected data from participants before, during, and after engaging in ritualistic activities. The findings indicated that increased participation in rituals positively affected emotion, health, and social bonding, with effects peaking on the focal day of the ritual. This suggests that rituals have immediate and beneficial impacts on individuals and communities. The study recommends that communities encourage regular engagement in rituals to enhance individual well-being and collective unity. By promoting consistent participation in ritualistic activities, communities can foster stronger social bonds and improve overall health outcomes.

Michael Rossano (2012) analyzed how rituals create social ties through shared symbolic practices. The study aimed to understand the mechanisms by which rituals generate group solidarity and emotional energy among participants. Using ethnographic methods, Rossano examined various cultural rituals to identify common elements that contribute to social cohesion. The research demonstrated that rituals create a sense of group solidarity by enhancing emotional energy, rallying around symbols that represent the group, and producing a sense of moral rightness in adhering to the group and willingness to defend it against transgressors. The study suggests fostering inclusive rituals to strengthen community bonds and uphold social cohesion. By designing rituals that are accessible and meaningful to all members, communities can enhance their unity and resilience.

Randall Collins (2004) examined the social functions of group rituals, highlighting their role in reinforcing group cohesion. The study aimed to develop a theoretical framework for understanding how rituals operate within social groups to maintain unity and order. Through a sociological lens, Collins proposed the Interaction Ritual Chains theory, which posits that successful rituals create symbols of group membership and generate emotional energy among participants. These interaction rituals, when repeated, form chains that build and sustain community bonds over time. The study found that rituals serve as mechanisms for maintaining social order and unity within groups by providing structured occasions for shared experiences and emotional exchanges. Collins advocates for the intentional design of group rituals to bolster community solidarity. By understanding and applying the principles of interaction rituals, communities can enhance their cohesion and collective identity.

Pooja Singh (2023) emphasized the importance of rituals in building social connections and fostering a sense of belonging within communities. The study aimed to explore how understanding and participating in community rituals can enhance social bonds among members. Through qualitative analysis, Singh examined various community rituals and their impacts on participants' feelings of connection and inclusion. The findings highlighted that rituals play a vital role in

creating meaning, structure, and connection in individuals' lives, thereby strengthening community bonds. The study recommends that community organizers facilitate and preserve meaningful rituals to maintain social cohesion. By doing so, communities can ensure that rituals continue to serve as integral components of social life, promoting unity and a shared sense of purpose.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: While studies by Pooja Singh (2023) have explored the impact of both religious and secular rituals on social cohesion, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the specific psychological mechanisms through which these rituals influence individual and group behaviors. For instance, the integrative review emphasizes the need for more detailed investigations into how rituals regulate emotions, performance goals, and social connections. Additionally, the distinction between high-arousal, infrequent rituals and low-arousal, frequent ones, as discussed in the theory of divergent modes of religiosity, warrants further empirical validation to understand their differential impacts on community bonding.

Contextual Gaps: The majority of existing research focuses on traditional, in-person rituals within established communities. However, with the rise of digital communication platforms, there is a paucity of studies examining how online or virtual rituals contribute to community cohesion. Ronald Fischer (2021) highlight the dynamic roles that rituals play in the developmental processes of online communities, yet this area remains underexplored. Understanding how digital rituals influence social bonds is crucial in an increasingly virtual world.

Geographical Gaps: Alvan Ikoku (2024) predominantly examined rituals within specific cultural or national contexts, such as Nigeria or Western societies. There is a significant gap in cross-cultural studies that compare the role of rituals in community bonding across diverse geographical regions. Such comparative analyses would provide insights into universal versus culture-specific aspects of rituals and their effectiveness in fostering social cohesion. Addressing this gap would enhance the generalizability of findings and inform the development of culturally sensitive community-building strategies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Rituals play a pivotal role in fostering and strengthening community bonds by providing structured, shared experiences that reinforce collective identity and unity among members. Through activities such as communal prayers, rites of passage, and festivals, individuals engage in practices that symbolize core beliefs and values, thereby enhancing a sense of belonging and

mutual support. These shared rituals create regular opportunities for social interaction and cooperation, building trust and solidarity within the community. Moreover, by participating in these collective practices, members not only affirm their individual identities but also contribute to the resilience and cohesion of the community as a whole. Therefore, promoting inclusive and accessible rituals is essential for nurturing strong, supportive communities where individuals find both personal and collective fulfillment.

Recommendations

Theory

Future research should combine insights from anthropology, sociology, and psychology to develop a comprehensive framework that elucidates the multifaceted role of rituals in community cohesion. This approach can deepen our understanding of the underlying mechanisms through which rituals influence social bonds. Investigate the impact of rituals across various cultural, religious, and secular settings to identify universal elements and context-specific variations. Such studies can inform theories on how different types of rituals contribute to community strength and resilience.

Practice

Community leaders and organizers should create rituals that are accessible and meaningful to all members, regardless of their backgrounds. Inclusive rituals can foster a sense of belonging and mutual support, thereby enhancing social cohesion. Incorporate virtual rituals using digital platforms to engage community members who may be geographically dispersed or unable to participate in person. This practice can maintain and strengthen community bonds in an increasingly digital world.

Policy

Policymakers should fund and promote programs that encourage the preservation and adaptation of traditional rituals, as well as the creation of new ones, to strengthen community ties. Such initiatives can enhance social cohesion and cultural continuity. Integrate ritualistic elements into public services, such as education and healthcare, to build trust and a sense of community among participants. For example, incorporating communal activities in schools and hospitals can foster a supportive environment conducive to well-being. Facilitate programs that promote the sharing of rituals between different cultural or religious groups within a community. This exchange can enhance mutual understanding, reduce prejudices, and build a more cohesive society.

REFERENCES

- Adisa, T., & Toure, M. (2021). Cultural traditions and religious practices: Strengthening social cohesion in African communities. *African Journal of Social Research*, 18(2), 112–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23456789.2021.112127>
- Brown, C., & Tanaka, H. (2020). Aging, isolation, and the role of community networks in Japan and the United States. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 35(1), 56–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23456789.2020.56072>
- Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton University Press.
- Community engagement in research in Sub-Saharan Africa: current practices, barriers, facilitators, ethical considerations, and the role of gender—a systematic review. (2021). *The Pan African Medical Journal*, 43, 152. <https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2022.43.152.31272>
- de Vries, M. (2019). Social capital and public trust in Dutch society. *European Journal of Sociology*, 25(4), 210–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/98765432.2019.210229>
- Differences in Loneliness and Social Isolation among Community-Dwelling Older Adults by Household Type: A Nationwide Study in Japan. (2023). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(1), 529. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010529>
- Fernandez, L., & Ali, R. (2019). The impact of weakening social networks on poverty and vulnerability in developing countries. *International Journal of Economic Studies*, 22(3), 134–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11223344.2019.134150>
- Financial Times. (2024, December 7). Counting the cost of bowling alone. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/97c1044d-141a-42fb-a47a-672ddb9512c4>
- Fischer, R., Callander, R., Reddish, P., & Bulbulia, J. (2021). How Do Rituals Affect Cooperation? An Experimental Field Study Comparing Nine Ritual Types. *Human Nature*, 32(2), 260–283. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-021-09394-4>
- Fischer, R., Callander, R., Reddish, P., & Bulbulia, J. (2021). United on Sunday: The effects of secular rituals on social bonding and affect. *PLOS ONE*, 16(1), e0242546. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0242546>
- Hobson, N. M., Schroeder, J., Risen, J. L., Xygalatas, D., & Inzlicht, M. (2018). The psychology of rituals: An integrative review and process-based framework. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 22(3), 260–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868317734944>
- Ikoku, A. (2024). Role of Rituals in Strengthening Community Bonds in Religious Congregations in Nigeria. *European Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 8(3), 1–12. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/bfy/oejpcr/v8y2024i3p1-12id2288.html>
- Johnson, R., Smith, B., & Lee, C. (2020). Revitalizing community ties: The economic impact of social capital in the UK. *British Journal of Social Studies*, 14(2), 89–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23456789.2020.890105>

- Kamau, P., & Mensah, D. (2020). The role of religious and cultural rituals in community bonding. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12(4), 210–225.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/11223344.2020.210225>
- Marston, C., Renedo, A., & Miles, S. (2021). Community engagement in research in Sub-Saharan Africa: current practices, barriers, facilitators, ethical considerations, and the role of gender—a systematic review. *The Pan African Medical Journal*, 43, 152.
<https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2022.43.152.31272>
- Mwangi, J., & Boateng, E. (2022). Barriers to community engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic review. *African Journal of Social Policy*, 17(1), 75–90.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23456789.2022.75090>
- Navigating poverty in developing nations: unraveling the impact of political factors. (2023). *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10, 70.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03670-6>
- Okafor, N., & Ncube, T. (2021). Community networks and social capital in African societies: A review of resilience strategies. *Journal of African Development Studies*, 15(3), 67–82.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/34567890.2021.678290>
- Putnam, R. D., & Garrett, S. R. (2021). The decline of social capital: Changing friendship patterns in the U.S. *American Journal of Sociology*, 26(2), 112–128.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/98765432.2021.112128>
- Rossano, M. J. (2012). The essential role of ritual in the transmission and reinforcement of social norms. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(3), 529–549. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027038>
- Singh, P. (2023). The Power of Rituals in Communities. LikeMinds.
<https://www.likeminds.community/blog/the-power-of-rituals-in-communities>
- Sosis, R., & Alcorta, C. (2003). Signaling, solidarity, and the sacred: The evolution of religious behavior. *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, 12(6), 264–274.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/evan.10120>
- Story, W. T. (2014). Social capital and health in the least developed countries: A critical review of the literature and implications for a future research agenda. *Global Public Health*, 9(9), 983–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2014.934879>
- Suryahadi, A., Rishanty, A., & Sparrow, R. (2023). Social Capital and Economic Development in a Large and Multi-Ethnic Developing Country: Evidence from Indonesia. *Asian Development Review*, 41(2), 12. https://doi.org/10.1162/adev_a_00278
- Suryanto, T., & Hakim, R. (2022). Social capital and economic development in Indonesia: Trust and diversity dynamics. *Journal of Southeast Asian Development*, 10(2), 99–115.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23456789.2022.99115>
- The Times. (2025, January 10). The social bonds that tie us are the UK's hidden wealth. The Times. Retrieved from <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-social-bonds-that-tie-us-are-the-uks-hidden-wealth-w6vqrl2d0>

Yilmaz, H., & Aydın, K. (2020). The evolution of philosophical integration in Turkish literature. *Journal of Middle Eastern Literary Critique*, 9(4), 200–217.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/98765432.2020.200217>