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Counseling and psychotherapy with Arabs and Muslims : a culturally sensitive approach

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Abstrak

The reader of this book will find within it ideas and models based on my 25 years of experience in clinical, educational, developmental, and medical psychology among Arabs, Muslims, Jews, and Americans, but mainly among Palestinian Arabs. I studied for my master?s degree in clinical psychology at Haifa University in Israel, during which time I received some practical training at Jewish psychological centers in Israel. Thus both my theoretical study and practical training were based on the Western-oriented theories of psychology. Immediately after graduation I opened the first psychological center in my native city, Nazareth, which is the largest Palestinian Arab city in Israel. The main experience I remember from my first year of work in Nazareth is that my clients seemed to be different from those described in the context of psychological theories. They reacted differently to my diagnostic and therapeutic interventions. They tended to focus on their external circumstances and were unable to address internal and personal issues. Terms such as self, selfactualization, ego, and personal feelings were alien to them. They emphasized duty, the expectations of others, the approval of others, and family issues. In conversation with my clients, the task of distinguishing between the client?s personal needs, opinions, or attitudes and those of the family was almost impossible. This experience was very disappointing, even threatening, to a new and enthusiastic psychologist who believed that the psychology he had learned was universal and should therefore work as well among Palestinian Arabs as among any other people. Using the premise ?If I did it, they can do it,? during the first years in Nazareth I tried to fit the clients to the ?Western-oriented psychology,? using a variety of educational community projects to mold them. Only after several years did I realize that it was I who should be fitting my theories to the community. Since then I have been trying to adjust Western theories to fit our social and cultural reality.