BOOK REVIEW

Counseling people of African ancestry
by Elias Mpofu (Editor)

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The first thing that you need to know about this book is that it is not a primer on the art of counselling itself. It is aimed at readers who are already au fait with ‘eurocentric‘ counselling, as the authors put it. It attempts to highlight the contrasts between eurocentric and African epistemologies so that the counsellor in question can have a deeper understanding of the process of counselling people of African ancestry. The way that the book approaches this is quite logical. It is divided into four main sections, consisting of twenty chapters in total. The book begins by examining the theoretical and empirical underpinnings for counselling in an African setting. This section looks at various topics, including the indigenous worldview of healthcare, deconstruction of counselling psychology and hot topics such as racial oppression, colonisation and identity.
The second section examines various contexts within which counselling generally takes place, such as schools, universities, pastoral settings and family environments – all of course as seen through the lens of African epistemologies. Upon this foundation the book then turns to applications for counselling, covering the most likely areas where counsellors are needed: trauma, HIV, substance use disorder, career counselling and disability. It closes by considering the future of counselling in an ‘African Heritage’ setting.

This general topic is a daunting one for any publication to take upon itself. Consider that the clash between Western Psychology and an emerging Indigenous Psychology is more than an academic issue. There is an actual clash occurring in the real world that parallels the theoretical debates.

The rise of the so called black Middle Class and the perpetual grind of globalisation imply that when an African client walks through the door for counselling, they will represent a *melange* of the old and new, the modern and traditional.

*Counseling People of African Ancestry* touches on almost all of these issues. While it is impossible for a text with such breadth to delve deeply into the topics, it serves as a way of creating awareness of which issues are pertinent in an African context.

Does the textbook succeed at what it sets out to do? This depends on who you are. If you are a student who has completed the ‘standard’ material on counselling then you will find that it rounds off your knowledge admirably for use in Africa. Since this is a textbook, it is aimed at students and therefore that it should display such usefulness is unsurprising. However, I also believe the text is to be recommended for experienced counsellors who wish to reconsider how they engage in counselling relationships with African clients. As Africa and South Africa in particular become increasingly westernised the demand for mental health care will keep increasing. Working through this textbook should serve as a comprehensive primer to forewarn you against what to expect and what factors are in play.

In terms of editorial quality the text rates well. I did pick up the odd spelling and typographical error, which is expected for a first edition, but not necessarily one by Cambridge University Press. The price of the text is a hard one to swallow at R1515 (from Excluslves), but the digital copy can be had for as little as R654 (from the same reseller) which is far more palatable.

Do I recommend this text? If you feel that you need a broad treatment of the general issue of ‘African‘ or ‘Indigenous‘ Psychology you could do far worse than *Counseling People of African Ancestry*. At the very least the text is genuinely interesting. It is filled with information about people of African descent that you may never have otherwise known, even if you are such a person yourself. The tone remains neutral throughout and the various authors make a valiant effort to synthesise mainstream Eurocentric psychological theories with the context specific issues raised by Indigenous Psychology.
As to the veracity of the contents one can but speculate. I do not doubt that what the book tells us about counselling African people reflects current research on the matter accurately, but what defines African Psychology is in a constant state of turmoil. It will only be upon reflection by counsellors who apply what this book wishes to teach that we will know whether the goal is successfully met or not.

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**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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