

A book review of:

Leach, M.M. (2006). *Cultural diversity and suicide: Ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual orientation perspectives*. (288 pp. \$34.95 pb, ISBN: 0789030195).

Dr. Leach's work is a pioneering effort to bring together theoretical and clinical scholarship concerning the influence of culture on suicide. The goals of the book are ambitious. In a brief volume, the author attempts to review relevant literature from disparate sources; to elucidate the interplay of ethnicity, religion, age, and sexual orientation with suicide; and to apply this knowledge to clinical practice. Importantly, the book goes beyond the simple association of demographic characteristics with suicide risk to emphasize the real-world *process* of suicide for individuals in their particular context(s); this approach also recognizes the significant variability within a defined cultural group. The merits of this approach are especially evident in clinical application. Leach demonstrates the limitations (and perhaps naiveté) of thinking simply in terms of norms or trends for a group. In essence, he takes a layered, interactive approach that helps to understand a client's experience by placement multiple contexts.

Organizationally, the book comprises a brief general introduction to suicidology and crisis intervention. Subsequent chapters are organized by group: European Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. Subsections within each chapter address age, gender, religion, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) issues. The primary emphases are assessment, prevention, and intervention. The book also includes (largely anthropological) material on cultural beliefs and practices regarding death and mourning, including descriptions of

funeral rites and the implications of suicide for surviving family members. In addition to summarizing empirical research, the author draws from his own practice to animate important points. A number of clinical vignettes invite the reader to apply principles to practice.

The title of the book is sufficiently broad to suggest a global focus, but prospective readers should be aware that the book covers only groups living in the United States. Some of the cited research is international, but the clinical focus is on assessment, prevention, and treatment in the United States. This is not a criticism but a reminder that cultures living outside the States can be different in important ways from those blended with North American culture, not least in terms of the design and delivery of mental health care. This caution is particularly important in an era of increasing circulation of persons, when North American clinicians may be called upon to provide services for clients who reside elsewhere.

Some organizational aspects detract from the effectiveness of the text. The writing is ponderous at times, in part as a function of a repetitive organizational structure and in part because of style. To the author's credit, the preface explicitly addresses the challenges of choosing an organizational structure for the topic. However, I make the respectful recommendation that subsequent editions of this important book revisit editorial concerns.

This book is an important read for researchers and practitioners who wish to acquire culturally informed and competent skills. The material is appropriate for advanced undergraduate courses in the social and behavioral sciences. Researchers will appreciate the comprehensive bibliography drawn from diverse disciplines. Clinical

students and practicing clinicians will find much to improve the quality of their assessments and interventions. First, the information is useful for readers who wish to broaden cultural competencies in populations with which they lack experience. Second, and more importantly, the book provides a framework for the reader to think about culture as part of comprehensive assessment and treatment planning for suicidal clients. At times, the applications from theory for practice are not easily discerned, but that is a function of the complexity of the topic. Dr. Leach deserves praise for his contribution to an emergent field and for bringing awareness of culture compellingly into best practice when working with suicidal clients.

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