

## COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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### *Are Counseling and Psychotherapy One or Two Different Fields?*

In talking about Western counseling and psychotherapy, we are in fact talking about one specialization. The 'no man's land' between the boundaries of counseling as a specialty of educators and psychologists who offer guidance to normal people and students with mild emotional and academic problems, mainly practiced in educational institutions, and that of psychotherapy as the profession of experts in clinical psychology and psychoanalysis, mainly practicing in clinics and hospitals, has already been so much constricted that many modern references treat them as one subject. Modern textbooks on counseling psychology have chapters on therapeutic relationships based on psychoanalytic, behavioral, cognitive, group therapy and other topics which were previously the sole domain of clinical psychology and psychotherapy. On the other hand, one will find areas like career development and client-centered and other humanistic therapies in clinical psychology books which were once the 'property' of counseling psychology. For example, Richie Herink edited a large handbook of psychotherapy which included headings such as "Conjoint Family Counseling", "Holistic Counseling" and "Correctional Counseling"<sup>1</sup>.

One of the main developments that brought about this merger is the emergence of the highly successful new fields of behaviour modification and cognitive therapy which rendered the medical model of Freudian psycho-

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<sup>1</sup> R. Herink, *The Psychotherapy Handbook* (New York: Meridian Books, 1980).

analysis an obsolete psychological and psychiatric investment. Freud thought of the psychoanalyst as a 'surgeon' of unconscious complexes and conflicts which according to him are the real causes of abnormal behaviour in a way very similar to the concealed pathology of germs and tumours in the human body. Through laboratory investigations, medical specialists can uncover the microbes and tumours that are responsible for the physical symptoms of the patient. They do not treat the symptoms themselves in a direct manner, but rather treat these underlying causes. Following this medical model, a psychoanalyst will not treat the psychological symptoms directly but uncovers the unconscious underlying causes. By resolving these, the patient's symptoms are supposed to be alleviated. Psychoanalysts believed that direct symptomatic treatment of psychological symptoms would not work since the unresolved unconscious complex will develop a new different symptom. This is the unconfirmed conception of symptom substitution. They perceive the human psychological symptom as an active volcano. You cannot stop it by closing its fire-spitting mouth. Even if you succeed in this hypothetical venture, the internal pressure will erupt in another weaker area of the earth's crust.

For a very long time, almost all kinds of psychological therapies in the West followed this dynamically oriented Freudian approach, thus giving psychotherapy a medical psychiatric flavour. This caused counseling to develop as a separate, though related specialization, mainly applying vocational and career guidance and Rogerian client-centered therapy. However, psychoanalysis and all psychoanalytically oriented schools of psychotherapy proved to be a miserable failure and many therapists were disappointed with them. This prompted psychologists like Eysenck<sup>2</sup> to

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<sup>2</sup> H. J. Eysenck, "The Effects of Psychotherapy: An Evaluation" in *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 16 (1952), 319-24.