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Book review

Book Review of
Lambert, L., & Pasha-Ziadi, N. (Eds.). (2019).
Positive Psychology in the Middle East/North Africa:
Research, Policy, and Practice.
Cham, Switzerland: Springer

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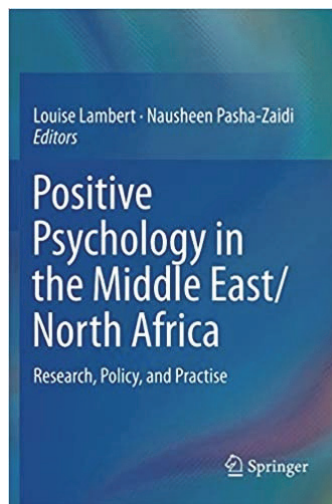
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Psychology is developing more quickly outside the USA and Europe than within it, with recent estimates indicating over 75% of the world's one million psychologists live outside the USA (Zoma, Gielen, 2015). However, most of psychology's textbooks and research remain focused on Western Europe and the United States (e.g., Henrich et al., 2010; Rich et al., 2017; Rich et al., 2020).

Positive psychology, which originated in the late 1990s with work by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) also has typically been heavily centered on positivistic methodological approaches by researchers based in these regions utilizing samples from these regions. Recently however there has been a surge of activity towards internationalizing psychology, including positive psychology. One instance of work internationalizing positive psychology is Brown, Lomas and Eiroa-Orosa's 2018 volume *The Routledge International Handbook of Positive Psychology*, which offers diverse methodological approaches as well as an international approach to the topic.

Another welcome addition to the international positive psychology literature is a new edited book by Louise Lambert and Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi, entitled *Positive Psychology in the Middle East/North America* (2019). The book editors are experienced and well-qualified for the present role. Lambert has lived in the United Arab Emirates for nine years and is the Founder and Editor in Chief of the *Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology*. Pasha-Zaidi has worked as an international educator for twenty years, and has worked in the UAE for eight years and now is



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based at the University of Houston-Downtown and serves on the Board of the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Together these editors have assembled a well-written and informative set of chapters on a unified theme. In the book's introduction the editors note the need to develop an indigenous positive psychology across the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region to "not only counter the indiscriminate use of Western positive psychological models and interventions in the region, but equally, to encourage the growth of this new science of wellbeing by offering a platform for regional research to be showcased" (p. 1). Furthermore, the editors aim to include focus of recent developments in positive psychology overall, such as emerging trends in Big Data, community level positive psychology as in developing thriving cities, and the implementation and application of positive psychology research to inform decision making by policymakers. The editors have crafted a book that brings together authors who have lived, worked or conducted research in a range of nations in the region including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar, and more.

The book is sensibly organized in five parts: 1) government and policy, 2) education and the workplace, 3) measurement: research trends and challenges, 4) culture and religion, and 5) physical and psychological health. As the editors note in their introductory chapter, one emphasis in the book are efforts to ensure that the science component of positive psychology is present, and is not lost among calls by consultants for positivity that make lack evidence bases.

In the first section one finds chapters on the pursuit of national wellbeing policies across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), on the private sector's contribution to wellbeing, and on happiness and the built environment. The book's second section includes chapters on taking positive psychology to Gulf Cooperation Council universities, on positive psychology education and research in Saudi Arabia, and on resolving possibly contradictory agendas while promoting positivity in the workplace. The third section of the book is devoted to measure issues, and includes helpful chapters on the utilization of Big Data for wellbeing research in the Arab world, developing a meaningful and significant research agenda for positive psychology (with an aptly titled chapter called "Because a citation and a contribution are not the same"), and a chapter on the challenging issues of how and why to appropriately measure wellbeing. The fourth section of the book focuses on culture and religion and includes chapters focused on Islamic perspectives on wellbeing, on developing a positive Islamic identity, and on advances in wellbeing in the MENA region. These chapters are especially must-reading for psychologists less familiar with religious perspectives on human affect, cognition, and behavior and seek to understand the implications of such worldviews on psychological wellbeing and distress. The final fifth section includes a variety of chapters focused on physical and psychological health, including contributions focused on incorporating positive health into health promotion initiatives from the UAE's physically active, cross-cultural application issues in positive psychotherapy, and repercussions of individual and societal valuing of happiness. The book ends with a final summative chapter from the book's two co-editors synthesizing the status of positive psychology in the Middle East/North Africa, and aiming to include roles for a range of professions and organizations, from educational institutions and ministries to non-profits and other stakeholders. In particular the editors

advocate for a balance between positive psychology and work on psychological disorders and distress; for instance they are concerned about “smiling fascism” where at its worst, a naïve positive psychology may be too much like Pollyanna and too much focused on seeing the world through rose-colored glasses to be effective (p. 396).

Taken as a whole, this book is a critical addition to international psychology, positive psychology, and indeed to psychology in general, as it offers a glimpse of diverse human functioning around the globe and offers both empirical research and theory-based analysis that in sum will help bring psychology and psychologists to the next step in their evolution.

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