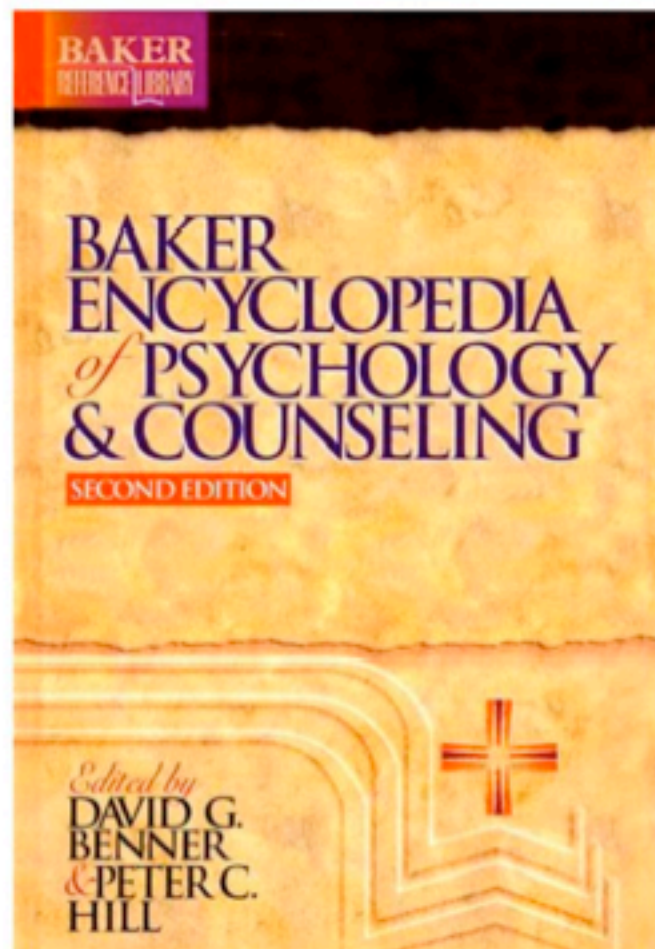


Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling

Edited by David G. Benner & Peter C. Hill

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Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling (2nd ed.)
(1999). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House,



Anthropology, Psychological

By Naji Abi-Hashem, PhD

Anthropology is the scientific study of humanity. It is one of the most comprehensive academic disciplines. Like psychology, it has developed a broad spectrum of interests not sharply distinguishable from other fields already engaged in the study of humans. Anthropology overlaps with and draws from other sister disciplines including archaeology, sociology, religion, psychology, and cultural studies.

Anthropology as a separate field gradually emerged during the nineteenth century. It mainly focuses on the comparison of societies with each other, especially the more traditional and preliterate ones. It specializes in the observation, study, and analysis of peoples' customs, activities, traditions, languages, spirituality, norms, behaviors, belief systems, physical conditions, family structure, social bonding, and worldviews. The subdisciplines of anthropology are naturally consistent with and scholarly relevant to many fields of psychology, like sociocultural anthropology, physical anthropology, and psychological anthropology.

The history of cultures is what most anthropological theories seek to explain. The method commonly used for investigation and research is field-work. The anthropologist lives within the target community passively observing or, when appropriate, actively participating, possibly without disturbing the cultural dynamics of peoples lives he or she is trying to study. Fieldwork procedures and methodologies greatly vary, depending on the anthropologist's theory and past experience, the nature and location of the community, the prior knowledge about the particular people group, and the intent of the research project.

Many anthropological findings and insights are very useful to the Christian professional who is engaged in cross-cultural psychology, counseling, or missions. They can help us avoid mistakes done in the past and virtually provide us with better understanding and reliable tools to carry on our Christian services in more sensitive and effective ways.

See Cross-Cultural Psychology.

— *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling (1999)*

Citation

Abi-Hashem, N. (1999). Anthropology, psychological. In D.G. Benner & P.C. Hill (Eds.), *Baker encyclopedia of psychology and counseling* (2nd ed., pp. 86-87). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

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