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Review of *Indigenous Social Work Around the World: Towards Culturally Relevant Education and Practice*. Mel Gray, John Coates, and Michael Yellowbird (Eds.). Reviewed by Jon K. Matsuoka.

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Mel Gray, John Coates and Michael Yellowbird (Eds.), *Indigenous Social Work Around the World: Towards Culturally Relevant Education and Practice*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008. \$99.95 hardcover.

The publication of this book is very timely given the groundswell of interest in Indigenous issues across societies. Global climactic change and the threat of natural disasters, growing interest in ethnoecology and biomedical solutions, and spiritual depravity in the industrialized world drive this growing interest. The social work profession is also finally coming to terms with the non-viability of traditional social work practices across cultures and the need to find or develop fundamentally different approaches to human helping and healing. Although the literature on Indigenous social work and related matters is somewhat patchy, this book represents seminal work in Indigenous social work and is an excellent review of existing concepts and issues.

While offering a broad and global view of the issues, concepts and theories on social work with Indigenous groups, this book is framed within a political process related to competing epistemologies and efforts to decolonize perspectives. One of the most meaningful points found throughout the text is the problem of the wholesale acceptance of Western epistemology on which contemporary social work theory and practice is founded. The authors describe a continuum of colonial impositions that morphed into a post-modern emphasis on the presumed universality of human behavior. Thus, localized practices drawn from alternative epistemologies of human processes and psyches have historically been neglected and with unconfirmed effectiveness.

The dominant Western paradigm that structures much of social work practice is alleged to be in collusion with economic forces that subjugate Indigenous societies. The authors argue that the very purpose of professional social work is to placate and pacify as a means to maintain the power differential between majority and minority cultures. Sadly, as a result of colonial domination, many of the beliefs and narratives of Indigenous people are really those of colonialists and cultural hegemony whose rendition of history and reality serve

to justify colonial mastery. These unchallenged assumptions regarding the ontologies and epistemologies of Indigenous groups are often reproduced at the level of social work education and practice, which tends to valorize its own history of propping up communities pillaged by rampant capitalism. For social work to progress in its quest for social justice, it must deal with different versions of reality in which rival claimants compete to assert their notions of what is meaningful and effectual.

While the book offers deep analysis into the social and political challenges associated with the need for corrective action, it does not necessarily offer tangible options or suggest ways to change existing systems. Despite the obvious need, resistance to indigenization is profound, even within the presumed liberal circles of social work. Infusing new paradigms into established pedagogy poses significant challenges. As mentioned in the book, most social work scholars were indoctrinated with Western principles and epistemologies and subscribe to little else. Thus, shifting schools of thoughts would serve to disempower and render less advantageous their knowledge, the same process that Indigenous people have been subjected to for centuries.

There is immense power and control associated with normalized knowledge. To make room for Indigenous voices, the entire academic/research complex must be reconstructed. Social work practice is validated through evidence derived from a narrow set of standardized methods and metrics. Programs offering evidence-based practices are more likely to receive funding and continue to operate. It is a tidy self-fulfilling cycle involving cost-effective short-term interventions, evaluations that prove immediate success, branding and packaging programs, and building curriculum around techniques. The majority of these evaluations involve compliant and homogenous cohorts that are most likely to adhere to treatment. However, as argued in this book, Indigenous practices do not readily lend themselves to measurable outcomes, are not always restricted to Western timeframes, do not always manifest immediate results, and are rarely published in professional journals. Nevertheless, uncounted numbers of Indigenous-based social service programs exist nationally and internationally. Many

receive government or private funding and are not averse to the notion of evaluation. Indigenous programs must initially convince sources of their merit and potential for making a positive impact on the disaffected, those least likely to participate in mainstream programs. Administrators of Indigenous programs understand the need for an articulated theory of change and accountability through evaluation. The crux of the matter is about goodness-of-fit and the development of methods that best apprehend both short- and long-term programmatic impacts.

Conspicuously missing from the book is coverage of critical Indigenous concepts such as historical trauma. This concept applies to most Indigenous populations whose populations and lifeways were decimated following Western contact. Severe and persisting social problems among Indigenous groups are attributable to ancestral trauma, and the study of disenfranchisement provides critical clues into the restoration of their well-being.

Finally, the book tends to connote pure and unadulterated Indigenous cultures and practices. The use of metaphor describing fabrics with invasive Western threads detracts from the reality of most Indigenous peoples' experience. They have been Christianized, Western-schooled, become entrepreneurs, and many aspire to have the same modern materials as everyone else. Indigenous program design must have a core of Indigenous principles, but in the majority of instances must likely be based on an amalgamation of cultural techniques. Overemphasizing the exceptionality of Indigenous culture may be akin to exoticification, creating a different set of problems related to goodness-of-fit.

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Leland T. Saito, *The Politics of Exclusion: The Failure of Race-Neutral Policies in Urban America*. Stanford, California: Stanford, 2009. \$60.00 hardcover; \$22.95 paperback.

When I was an elementary school student in Korea, we were taught about the "melting pot" which characterized a country called the United States. The melting pot was defined