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Review of *Cultural-Existential Psychology: The Role of Culture in Suffering and Threat*. Daniel Sullivan. Reviewed by Daniel Liechty.

Daniel Liechty
Illinois State University, dliecht@ilstu.edu

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influences on those three types of immigrants: DACA recipients benefited from prosecutorial discretion, while undocumented parents were threatened due to the flexibility of it (the expansion of the types of deportable serious offenses, e.g., DUI), and unaccompanied minors were constrained by the limited use of prosecutorial discretion. For another thing, the emphasis on prosecutorial discretion reflects the reality that the present U.S. immigration practices are largely relying on executive orders rather than legislative actions. However, the authors are optimistic that using prosecutorial discretion can achieve the balance between the guarantee of public safety and the promotion of family unity and humanitarian causes.

The authors' systemic perspective is highly valuable. By examining the policy processes from multiple systems, the authors reveal the complexities of immigration practices in order to propose reasonable and concrete policy recommendations. For example, by situating the immigration of unaccompanied minors into the context of the deteriorating social-political environment in Central American countries, the authors provide the rationale to define this phenomenon as a humanitarian crisis and legitimize the recommendation of granting prosecutorial discretion to gang-affiliated youth from those countries. Moreover, by bringing the criminal justice system, child welfare and immigration enforcement systems together into discussion, the authors are able to identify the issues that hinder the goals of family unification and children's best interests, including timeline colliding and spatial incoordination, as well as the segregation between federal and state governments. In general, this book is a combination of informative resources, rigorous social science research, and is well written to boot!

Xiafei Wang, Ohio State University

Daniel Sullivan, *Cultural-Existential Psychology: The Role of Culture in Suffering and Threat*. Cambridge University Press (2016), 295 pages, \$110 (hardcover).

The field of social psychology has for decades provided much of the theoretical knowledge base for social work. Social

psychology endeavors to look at human behavior as a complex interplay between the individual and cultural environment, and hence, while social psychology often lacks an interest in the practical application of theory which animates social work, the approach of social psychological research is usually very compatible with what we in social work call the psychosocial perspective. It behooves social work educators, therefore, to keep up on the research in social psychology. Indeed, the last decade has seen some very important developments in social psychology.

One such development has been the emergence of Terror Management Theory (TMT) as a leading theory in the field. TMT is rooted in the ideas of psychological anthropologist Ernest Becker, whose summary works *Denial of Death* (1973) and *Escape from Evil* (1975) have been in continuous print up to the present time. Ernest Becker drew on a wide variety of work, particularly in philosophy and depth psychology, to suggest that the basic human anxiety, the force that motivates much of human behavior, is the mostly-unconscious need to deny our creature mortality, and to make our lives "count" for something that is transcendentally larger than life. This actually creates human psychology, for as far as we know, we are the only species that must deal with knowledge of mortality and death in an ongoing manner. Becker thought that we do this in myriad ways, but TMT hones in especially on the role of culture in creating life scripts for people, informing them about what is considered to be of transcending value and providing many avenues through which people can be assured that they are living up to, and thus participating in, the transcending values of the culture. Thus the central function of culture is to allay human anxiety about meaninglessness, insignificance, futility and worthlessness, all of which are seen as manifestations of mortality anxiety.

If this basic picture is true, then well-functioning cultures provide not only plausible narratives of transcending meaning—of how maintaining the standards and values of the culture add to the enhanced well-being of all humanity—but also present individuals with knowledge that in one's own station, no matter how humble, a valued contribution is being made as well to the larger whole. If a culture is unable

to maintain the stable plausibility of its narrative, widespread malaise and ennui begins to set in on the collective level, and depression begins to set in on the individual level. Therefore, each member of a given culture has an "existential" stake in maintaining the cultural narrative, or the collective mythology, as vibrant and credible.

If and when the credibility of the collective cultural narrative is attacked, either explicitly, as for example when someone publicly undermines the worthiness of key heroes in the cultural narrative (e.g., pointing out that many of the "founding fathers" were racist slaveholders), or implicitly, simply by holding to a significantly different cultural narrative (e.g., religion) than the majority, people will feel this as an existential threat and move to devalue the attackers (up to and including violence against them) and to reestablish the validity of the majority narrative (through public displays and rituals, by gathering together with others who share that narrative, and so on). Thus while Becker's depth psychology, like all depth psychology, relies heavily on degrees of speculation, these behavioral reactions in defense of cultural narratives can be predicted, measured, and studied in classic laboratory conditions, as well as in actual human life when clear threats to the dominant cultural narrative occur on a large scale, as happened, for example, with the largely successful 9/11 attacks on the very symbols of cultural power (Twin Towers, the Pentagon, the White House.) The heart of TMT has been to bring the sharpest possible empirical methods to the study of cultural-defense behaviors, which are interpreted in turn as providing data in support of Becker's death anxiety thesis.

Daniel Sullivan is a former student and now colleague of that small group of social psychologists who pioneered TMT, and Sullivan appears as author and co-author of some of the key works in the growing TMT bibliography, which by now numbers in multiple-hundreds of entries. In this current work under review, Sullivan attempts to expand the basic TMT perspective into new areas of research and interpretation. Specifically, he brings his wide reading in cultural psychology into conversation with TMT (also referred to, as it is here, as experimental existential psychology) to create an even more far-reaching approach which Sullivan refers to as Cultural-Existential Psychology. What Sullivan does in this book is

quite nuanced, and as a reviewer I face the danger of clumsily stomping through his well-tended garden. But with that caveat in mind, I will summarize that Sullivan is paying particular attention to the role that cultural narrative plays not only in buoying up the sense of meaning in face of external threats, but also in providing the stories through which people buoy up the sense of meaning in face of internal suffering.

Sullivan maintains that Cultural-Existential Psychology, while currently shoring itself up as a disciplinary field and thus heavily involved on the theoretical side, is ultimately an empirical discipline, which makes clear and testable predictions about how threat and suffering will be managed in specific cultural settings. In very broad strokes, cultural narratives will tend toward assertions of the value of individuals as the highest good, or will tend toward assertions of the value of the collective as the highest good. In situations of threat and suffering, members of the former culture will lean toward interpretations of the heroic individual standing tall and exemplifying the strengths of individual courage and fortitude, while members of the latter culture generally subsume the individual into the collective and tend toward interpretations that support collective values, even at the expense of the individual (for example, willingness to see one's own self as in need of "correction" so as to maintain the correctness of the collective ideology).

Sullivan lays out the theoretical material in the first part of the book, and then moves in the second part of the book to demonstrate its application in research. Here he presents the results of in-depth interviews he was able to conduct after a particularly destructive weather event ripped through a Kansas community as he pursued his doctoral studies at the University of Kansas. One group of interviewees, members of an active Unitarian Universalist congregation, represented the individualist-tending (sub)culture. A second group, a rural congregation of conservative Mennonites (Holdemann), represented the collective-tending (sub)culture. Indeed, the differences in interpretation are clear, as the theory would predict. Sullivan has transparently included all of the research tools and data in a series of appendices, so that anyone wanting to check him on his readings can easily do so.

Sullivan's work in this book, as well as that of upcoming colloquia and consultations in this new area of cultural existential psychology, should be of great interest and importance to social work theorists and educators. It will yield valuable insights into the lives of families, communities, and individuals who seek social work services in situations of threat and suffering. Furthermore, it will soon become (or at least I hope so) a central discipline in the social work knowledge base. I would expect that future social work doctoral studies will begin to fill out the literature in this new approach. This book is like an initial starting pistol shot that I hope is heard widely through our field.

Daniel Liechty, Illinois State University

Javier Auyero (Ed.), *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City*. University of Texas Press (2015), 280 pages, \$24.95 (paperback).

In the tradition of Burawoy's *Global Ethnography* (2000) and Bourdieu's *The Weight of the World* (1993), Auyero and his student ethnographers collectively embark on the task of mapping the social and institutional landscapes of the lives of marginalized workers living in Austin, Texas, the now-booming, rapidly gentrifying, 'liberal oasis.' As the contributors to the volume deftly demonstrate, capital flows into the city from ventures in creative and digital technology, new construction, corporate headquartering, and energy production, aided in part by a low tax burden, but also by the growth of the service sector and a two-tiered labor market. As Austin grows increasingly 'hip,' living in the city grows increasingly inaccessible for people working in the marginalized segment of the bifurcated labor market, as they are increasingly pushed to the periphery of urban life, while simultaneously facilitating and maintaining the lifestyles of those who make up the 'core.'

Each chapter is the result of ongoing participant observation and a series of life history interviews conducted with a single respondent, all of whom were selected to represent various facets of the processes of urban change described above. Following a chapter that provides an historical