

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

MERRIJOY KELNER, BEVERLY WELLMAN, BERNICE PESCOSOLIDO and MIKE SAKS, eds., *Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Challenge and Change*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. 2000, xix + 259 p., Index, \$25.95 (U.S.) paper.

The use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) has increased 45% in recent years, indicating that there is demand for research into CAM and people's experiences with it. This edited collection provides a comprehensive overview of CAM, as the editorial team has drawn upon a wide body of international research. The topics addressed are also reflective of a broad variety of interests and concerns, including conceptualizations of the body and their influence on health care practices, means of assessing the efficacy of CAM, and the characteristics of CAM users.

The project of synthesizing data from several countries is an ambitious one. The contributing authors provide a thorough summary of what is currently known about CAM and point to directions for future research. The orientation to CAM, and the way in which it is conceptualized for the purposes of this collection, is sufficiently broad to allow for the emergence of a variety of understandings of this complex topic. For instance, Kelner and Wellman write of the struggle to find a definition for CAM that will depict its congruence with conventional medicine, as well as the ways in which CAM differs from biomedical paradigms.

The collection also explores some of the limitations of biomedicine for understanding health and illness. For example, O'Connor expands upon biomedical conceptualizations of the body, but it is left to the reader to extend O'Connor's ideas beyond their introduction and into a more critical level of engagement. In this sense, the book does not live up to its potential. Similarly, references to influential scholars who have produced theoretically relevant work (e.g., Bryan Turner, Kathy Charmaz and Arthur Frank) are neglected or are only briefly mentioned. For those new to health research, such references would be helpful guidance for further reading.

The absence of key scholars means that readers interested in critically examining CAM may find the text somewhat limited theoretically. For example, although one author introduces the idea that health is regarded as a commodity in Western societies, he provides very little critique of this

type of commodification. The incorporation of the work of additional sociologists would be helpful in formulating a more critical perspective.

Other criticisms are not as significant as those just outlined, but they are worth noting. The group of authors is described as "multi-disciplinary," yet it is difficult to assess exactly which disciplines are represented in this collection as there are no biographical notes about the contributors. There are also several typographical errors that are distracting and the text would have benefited from further copyediting. For instance, the title of one section as it appears in the table of contents is different from the title presented within the text. More importantly, the order in which the chapters appear is questionable. Readers may find it helpful to read Section 3, a methodological overview of CAM research, before reading about the use and availability of CAM (Section 2). Inverting Sections 2 and 3 would provide some knowledge of various ways of thinking about CAM before pursuing this topic in greater depth.

Conversely, the text does provide a basis for future consideration of CAM. An appendix, consisting of summaries of social scientific research into CAM, provides an excellent point of departure for those who would like to learn more. This book would be useful as a supplement to core health and illness texts, providing a basis for student papers or class discussions. For example, the diagrams of "body as machine" and "body as ecology" could serve as visual aids when comparing cultural conceptualizations of the body. Readers with a background in medicine might also find the text useful.

However, without a more extensive theoretical framework, this text is not likely to generate the type of critical dialogue that might appeal to sociologists. Nonetheless, this is a text that supplies the reader with a useful overview of CAM. The book offers a means of quickly accessing a variety of topics relevant to CAM, thus affording a basic foundation for more critical endeavours.

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