

Book Reviews



Human Socialization. By Elton B. McNeil, 1969. Available from Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, Belmont, California 94002. 287 pp. \$2.60.

Human Socialization is a textbook. But, as the author states, it's not in keeping with the "typical textbook." It's not a rigidly cataloged review of definitions, facts, and figures. It's an attractively illustrated, carefully integrated, free-flowing, easy-to-read summary of that "civilizing process" called socialization. McNeil points out that it is "oriented toward the meaning of facts rather than a detailed consideration of the facts themselves."

He tells what socialization means, and of how such factors as intelligence, social class, race, physical and emotional variations, and education systems operate to promote or impede socialization. The discussion of each of these important factors is, however, disappointingly brief and simplistic. For example, such contemporary issues as "socialization of the black American in our culture," or "the socializing effect of the educational system" aren't given the thorough coverage promised on the dust jacket. Instead, the treatment is a summary of what is already known by alert observers of the American social scene.

When one considers why the book was written, its failure to throw new light on ways to alter the direction of some of America's pressing social problems is less disappointing. This book is written for the beginning student of human development. As an introductory text it provides an excellent overview of the field of developmental psychology.

It incorporates reviews of theories of socialization in clear and succinct terms. The author even suggests that the gap separating the stimulus-response from the cognitive-field theories of human development is

not as cavernous as the proponents of each would have us believe. Throughout the book he refers to recent research and draws from a wealth of up-to-date literature.

In total, this is an excellent book for the student who hasn't paid attention to the meaning of, or to the problems associated with, socialization. For the practitioner in either youth or adult education it is of less value primarily because it provides little in the way of practical proposals for action. Those who are concerned about the socialization of youth through 4-H or family development programs may, however, profit from this book as a stimulating review of theory and problems relating to socialization. Its discussion of the way developmental tasks vary throughout the life cycle places more emphasis on early childhood and young adulthood than on the adult stages.

But in spite of the practical limitations, the adult educator may find in this book cause for taking another look at his programs. For example, the discussion of how education programs are usually directed toward a general audience without sufficient attention to variations in the many factors influencing an individual's socialization raises some serious questions about the wisdom of ignoring the challenging and bothersome fact of individual differences. This book supplies no pat solutions. Its strength is in its comprehensive treatment of a broad range of factors to keep in mind when fashioning ways to use education as a socializer.

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Children and Adolescents: A Biocultural Approach to Psychological Development. By Theron Alexander, 1969. Available from Atherton Press, Inc., New York, New York 10011. 365 pp. \$8.95.

This book could be described as a narrative "handbook" of the biological and cultural developmental processes from conception through adolescence. The author's thesis is that for an individual to understand himself, he must understand his origin and the forces that influence human development. These include biological and environmental characteristics of the culture into which he is born. The effects of biological and cultural influence on human behavior overlap, but Alexander contends that each must be examined separately to fully understand their combined influence. He says that "although the human being must be seen first as a biological being, he also must be seen as a product of his culture. In reality, none of the biological processes remains free of cultural influence."

Alexander suggests that all behavior is actually biological because once environmental stimuli are emitted, they have no effect on the in-

dividual until a receptor within the individual is activated. Then, the stimuli become internal and part of an organic process within the person (to maintain a balance of the organic systems within the individual). The behavior is then a physiological process and each individual interprets the environmental stimuli via internal processes unique to him and responds accordingly. The author points out that organic functioning is dependent on environment stimuli for favorable development, and deprivation of these stimuli may irreversibly alter the course of organic development.

In addition to specific chapters focusing on development from conception through adolescence, other chapters discuss such concepts as motivation and cognitive processes, intellectual development, imagination and creativity, socialization, social learning and authority, and developmental disorders. Case studies and specific examples are used effectively. Each of the 14 chapters is concluded with a "point of view" discussion in which Alexander states his beliefs as a commentary or a summation of the material presented in the chapter. Each chapter is well-documented.

He also: (1) discusses the methods and theories presently used that contribute to child and adolescent psychology and (2) indicates a need for a theoretical approach combining experimental and clinical observation.

The book would interest not only youth development program leaders, but any adult concerned with the plight of youth in today's society. It illustrates that human behavior is complex and that one must look at the total and see interrelationships, and not isolate them.

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Society Against Itself. By George H. Crowell, 1968. Available from the Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 171 pp. \$5.95.

The United States enjoys an enormous advantage in being able to respond to a changing environment by social action when compared to totalitarian regimes that often crush opposition ruthlessly. Dominant cultural values obstruct social action; the American system encourages, and legally and officially sanctions, such action by providing channels through which change can be introduced.

This book grew out of the author's personal concern that change, even in the American system, was not occurring fast enough to keep pace with constantly developing social problems. Some of these endanger the very "survival of the human race." He contends that there

is a desperate need for vigorous social change in justice and reconciliation. However, the realities of daily existence in American society have strongly discouraged the individual from involvement in social action to the point of institutionalizing social injustice. Thus, we have a society that encourages social change, but at the same time tends to make change difficult, if not impossible. Thus the title of the book.

Social action is defined as work designed to bring about change in the institutions of society in the direction of justice and reconciliation. The book is based on the thesis that "people in the United States have great difficulty in mustering sufficient concern or interest or motivation or energy to initiate and to sustain needed social action largely because American culture, whose pervasive influence is inescapable, defines nearly all activities that contribute to the very difficult and demanding task of social action as merely voluntary." Social action is a leisure time activity participated in by only a few. These few are often not the influentials necessary for meaningful action to result.

The norms of American culture place primary obligations on the individual for success in "the job" and devotion to "the family." These two pressures result in a lessening of the time and effort available for leadership leading to social action in voluntary associations. American culture (a democratic society) leaves social action to voluntary associations.

Crowell clinches his argument with an analysis of the objectives and goals of voluntary organizations taken from the *Encyclopedia of Associations*. Admittedly his analysis is not scientifically objective, but it gives Extension workers (who have earned their reward-in-the-hereafter by working with voluntary organizations) something to think about.

As is the case with many volumes, the explanation and analysis of some reasons society works against itself are complete and interestingly presented, but the conclusions about the actions necessary for an individual to become more effective in bringing about social change are left to the ingenuity and imagination of the reader. This is probably as it should be.

This book is addressed to those who are deeply concerned about current and urgent social crises. Crowell, a theologian, has effectively used many basic sociological concepts in developing a meaningful analysis of the counter pressures to social action.

Extension educators will find the book helpful in understanding our changing social environment, developing an understanding of basic sociological and cultural concepts, exploring the effectiveness of their work with voluntary organizations, and clarifying some of the implications of the change agent role.

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