

Book Review

Promoting Adolescent Health: A Dialog on Research and Practice. Edited by T. J. Coates, A. C. Petersen, and C. Perry. Academic Press, New York, 1982.

It is hardly a new custom for people engaged in research or practice to meet together in conference, present papers, and then publish the proceedings; but this practice remains a potentially important mechanism for the distribution of findings and new ideas. Unfortunately, the pressure to publish has produced an overabundance of such reports. Often the idea which inspires or binds the conference together is a very good one, as in case of the book under review. To link together adolescence and health, and to link together research, practice, and policy in the area of adolescent health, are admirable notions. If we were to assign grades, the editors would deserve honors for the choice of subject matter, and satisfactory for choice of participants. For the chores of editing *per se*, they get poor grades. Sometimes the problem seems to lie in poor proofreading; for example, one well-known surveyor of adolescent behaviors is variously referred to as Bachmen (p. 42), Bachman (p. 464), Backman (p. 132), Backham (p. 467), and Bachme (p. 467). And it is most distracting to find in a discussion of anorexia nervosa and bulimia that one of the best known psychoanalytical theorists, Hilda Bruch, is called Brunch (Freudian slip?).

The conference report contains an introductory section called "Crossing the Barriers," but it is not clear which barriers we are crossing. Sometimes the barriers are between disciplines, sometimes between researchers and practitioners, and sometimes there are barriers to "adolescent health promotion." The editors add that "This volume sets up a barrier of its own in that it merely begins an inquiry." Without getting involved in this steeplechase, it seems worth pointing out that moral and humanistic dilemmas must be faced: What do we mean by "health" for adolescents? We have lived for some time with the image of a Samoan idyll of a reasonably uninhibited, freewheeling, pleasurable adolescence, an image which is now being seriously questioned. Must we choose between this image and constricting, totalitarian, cult-like rule structures, or can there be freedom with rules and

limits? That this dilemma troubles the editors is apparent in these lines:

What happens when interventions are successful? If abstinence from alcohol or drug use is achieved, do adolescents take up other health-compromising habits? Is personality growth somehow thwarted? Are there important personal and interpersonal tasks that need to be accomplished, and lessons that need to be learned by experimenting with tobacco, drugs, sex, and alcohol? The health promotion movement can begin to sound like a new moralism. If preached at adolescents, will they rebel against health? (p. 15)

The conference report groups papers under the following headings: "Smoking, Drugs and Alcohol"; "Sexuality"; and "Coronary Risk Factors." People interested in these problem areas will probably find something of interest, although the reader is warned that some discussions have been carelessly put together. Thus, a discussion of adolescent mortality is confusing, to say the least, when a figure is labeled for age groups 15 to 25 but the text discussing the figure shifts to ages 12 to 17 (pp. 25-26). The review of longitudinal research and strategies in prevention of adolescent substance abuse is good, but the subsequent chapter on adolescent drinking is limited to viewing drinking behavior as an isolated phenomenon. The chapter on adolescent sexuality emphasizes the narrowing of the gap between boys' and girls' sexual behavior; although a variety of explanations are examined, one possible reason for change is not discussed—the change in girls' willingness to respond openly and frankly. Perhaps young women are less likely today to conceal and deny behaviors that would have created more shame, guilt, whatever, a generation ago?

It would have been helpful if the editors had tried to integrate and summarize in each area. One of the strongest parts of the book is the final chapter, an integrative paper by Jessor. Here, critical issues for both explanatory research and intervention research are discussed, and a real challenge is issued by Jessor's hope that the next phase of research will be more theoretically based, emphasize personality and situational variables, follow behavior over time, and deal with the "meanings of health-related behavior." It is devoutly to be wished. This volume raises some very good questions, even while it demonstrates the dictum: "Publish in haste and wince at the goofs in leisure."

Edith Gomberg
University of Michigan