

Health education and resource development is the focal point of the fourth section, which contains four chapters. In the first chapter, the author presents theories of health education, but foremost underscores the importance of developing health education messages that consider the historical and current psychosocial dynamics of the African American experience. In reviewing the implementation of health education programs in African American communities, the second chapter emphasizes the importance of having indigenous community health care workers whose economic, social, and cultural characteristics are homogeneous with the target population. Similarly, the third chapter discusses the importance of understanding cultural beliefs and how they can be used to facilitate the success of health education programs in African American communities. The last chapter covers strategies for increasing the number of African Americans who work as health care providers.

The final section is perhaps the most thought provoking in its focus on the future of health for African Americans. The four chapters in this section cover health policy issues as well as conceptual approaches to enhance the health status of African Americans. Among health policies discussed are those supporting reproductive rights and removing access barriers to health care. Also, there is discussion focusing on community organization and development as an approach when engaging African American communities in health education and health promotion programming. The last chapter in this section culminates with a framework for social action.

In summary, *Health Issues in the Black Community* provides a much needed resource for health educators, other public health professionals, and health policymakers. The book is especially helpful for training health educators and health care professionals who work in African American communities. Not only does the book offer a comprehensive review of relevant health issues, but it also provides sociocultural models for developing efficacious health education and health promotion efforts.

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Self-Help in America: A Social Movement Perspective, A. H. Katz, New York, Twayne Publishers, 1993, 128 pp.

Self-help groups are settings where individuals who share a problem or concern come together to offer each other mutual help and support. They address a variety of concerns such as physical and mental health, bereavement, parenting issues, and addiction. While these groups vary tremendously in their problem focus, group process, and organizational goals, they share some common qualities. Self-help groups are voluntary associations in which leadership and control are in the hands of the members. Help and support are provided by peers who have experienced a similar problem.

The number and variety of self-help groups has grown tremendously over the past two decades. It has been estimated that 500,000 to 750,000 groups operate in the United States, with over 10 million members. In a climate of shrinking resources for addressing social, physical, and mental health problems, self-help groups have thrived. These groups are a source of information, fellowship, and support. They are locally defined, community-based organizations with the potential to enhance coping skills, empower members, and provide emotional and instrumental support.

In his new book, Katz explores the role of self-help in American society. The title of this book, *Self-Help in America: A Social Movement Perspective*, leads one to expect a work focused primarily on understanding self-help as a social movement. In fact this book has a much broader scope. In the preface, Katz states that he "seeks to detail why self-help has become so important in modern day life" (p. ix). In doing so, Katz addresses self-help from the individual, group, organizational,

and societal levels of analysis. He discusses many issues including distinctions between different types of self-help groups, characteristics and functions of self-help groups, effective mechanisms, and relationships between self-help groups and professionals. As such, much of the book diverges from the question highlighted in the title and also raised by Katz in the preface: "whether the diverse manifestations of self-help constitute a social movement?" (p. x).

Scholarly interest in self-help has been increasing, but as Maton¹ points out, most of this research has focused on the individual level of analysis. Few researchers study group- and organizational-level questions, and even fewer have explored self-help as a social movement. One reason research has focused on the individual level of analysis has been the growing tendency of researchers, policymakers, and professionals to view self-help groups as alternative human service organizations.^{2,3} While this conceptualization has helped to legitimize self-help, it has also limited our understanding of these organizations. When we view self-help groups as alternative service agencies within a particular service sector (e.g., health, mental health), we tend to study them much as we would any service program, by measuring individual outcomes.

As self-help groups become increasingly viewed as service alternatives, many are turning to the social service sector for resources and legitimacy. Katz suggests that, while collaboration with professionals has potential benefits for both self-help groups and the professional community, professionals may negatively influence these organizations by imposing mechanisms of accountability for funds that are inconsistent with self-help ideology, misunderstanding the voluntary nature of self-help, and supporting only those groups that do not challenge authority.

The increased acceptance of self-help groups as legitimate service alternatives and the accompanying availability of government funding may pose a threat to the future of self-help that is even more powerful than that suggested by Katz. Organizational theorists argue that the beliefs and values in an organization's environment have the power to shape organizational structure and behavior.^{4,5} In order to survive, organizations come to look like the other organizations in their institutional environment. This is referred to as organizational isomorphism.⁶ When self-help groups seek to function in the human service sector, they may come to look more like traditional service organizations, which are characterized by professional control and hierarchical organizational structure. Yet self-help groups were founded based on an ideology of voluntary association, member control, and personal choice. When they compete with traditional human service organizations for resources and legitimacy, self-help groups may change in order to conform to the ideologies that characterize the human service sector. If they resist change, they must contend with the ongoing conflicts that arise when an organization's internal ideology conflicts with the dominant ideology in its external environment. Both of these scenarios pose a potential threat to the self-help tradition.

This is not to say that self-help groups with strong leadership, clearly articulated ideologies, and well-developed organizational structures cannot accept support from the human service sector without losing their identity as member-run, voluntary organizations. For example, in a study of GROW, a mental health mutual-help organization, Zimmerman et al.⁷ found that when faced with accountability requirements for the receipt of state funds that conflicted with the organization's philosophy and methods, GROW was able to convince mental health officials to fund them based on the organization's own method of counting client contact hours. This should caution us, however, that even the most well-intentioned efforts to support self-help groups as part of the human service system may threaten their uniqueness. In another study of the same organization, Toro et al.⁸ compared member-run GROW groups to groups that, in order to speed expansion to unserved areas, were being run temporarily by professional leaders. They found that, in spite of extensive leadership training by GROW, the social climate of professionally led groups was more like that found in therapy groups than member-run GROW groups.

In his consideration of self-help as a social movement, Katz elevates the study of self-help beyond the individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis to consider history, social influences, ideology, and social policy. He links modern self-help groups to the history of populist and consumer action in the United States and examines their ideology, structure, actions, and collective identification. In so doing he presents self-help as a phenomenon in its own right, with its own unique history and ideology, that stresses member control, volunteerism, and choice.

Although this may not be the author's intention, this focus serves as a timely reminder that self-help is ideologically and historically distinct from a traditional human service model. This is important because it implicitly challenges the view of self-help as a human service and articulates the ideology that has sustained a self-help tradition in the United States.

Answering the question of whether self-help constitutes a social movement, Katz concludes that self-help can best be described as a social trend. Based on the criterion that a social movement is characterized by an ideology, a sense of common purpose, a structure, and an action plan, Katz concludes that self-help groups are too diverse to be considered a social movement. However, the contribution of this work lies not simply in Katz's answer to the question, but in the many interesting issues he raises along the way, including consideration of self-help ideology, consumerism, populist tradition, and public policy. Katz considers the impact of the growth of self-help not only on individuals, but also on social attitudes and beliefs. He suggests, for example, that the growing popularity of self-help has contributed to the legitimization of experiential knowledge in forming public policy and the reduction of stigma for disenfranchised groups.

If the strength of Katz's book is that it covers so many topics at varying levels of analysis, its weakness is that it lacks a cohesive thread tying the issues together and linking them to the main themes of the book. It provides the reader with a taste of the many issues related to understanding self-help, but does not go into great depth on any of them. As Katz points out, the work draws on personal accounts by self-help group members, chronicles of self-help organizations, scholarly research, and on his personal observations of self-help activities over more than 30 years. For those familiar with and knowledgeable about self-help, this work invites reflection on many important issues. For those who are novices to the area of self-help it may not always be clear that on some issues Katz is essentially offering an informed opinion. In many areas little research has been conducted, and consensus within the field is lacking. For example, in his discussion of the effective mechanisms of self-help, Katz states that social learning theory and immunological competence together supply the most adequate understanding to date about why self-help works. While the integration of these two theories provides a viable hypothesis about the effective mechanisms of self-help, there is no research that supports this conclusion.

Nevertheless, this work provides a resource for researchers, policymakers, health educators, and service providers. Chapter 1 reviews the history of self-help traditions in the United States. Chapters 2 through 5 describe different types of self-help groups and discuss their characteristics, functions, and effective mechanisms. Chapters 6 through 10 focus on aspects of self-help that are less well represented in the literature, including leadership, growth patterns, and ideology (chapter 6); relationships between self-help groups and professionals (chapter 7); populism and social action in self-help groups (chapter 8); self-help and public policy (chapter 9); and self-help as a social movement (chapter 10). For those seeking an introduction to self-help, the book describes the phenomenon and provides an overview of the important issues in the field. For those already familiar with self-help, it provides a useful perspective that is not well represented in the current literature.

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