

BOOK REVIEWS/REVUE DE LIVRES

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Momism: The Silent Disease of America, Hans Sebald, Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1976, 289 pp. \$8.95.

Reviewed by:

Marie-Louise Abrioux
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In his most recent work Hans Sebald attempts to diagnose and analyze a type of devastating motherhood which is silently sweeping the nation and specifically the middle class. Within the study he has undertaken an ambitious enterprise which seeks to break the unhealthy silence surrounding the negative aspects of motherhood by presenting scientific and clinical studies which expose its possible illeffects.

Momism, a term originally coined by Philip Wylie in *A Generation of Vipers* and implicitly presented in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is ironically a detrimental mode of child rearing which is capable of inflicting severe psychological damage to a child under the pretense of good mothering. The Mom, or leading figure of this phenomenon, is most commonly the domineering, overindulgent, overprotective or martyr type and less commonly but as persuasive the pseudointellectual, charmer, or child worshipping type. Aside from such characteristics the necessary and often sufficient conditions

peculiar to Momism are twofold; conditional love which is based on compliance; a remote or ineffective father. The damage that this particular individual, Mom, is capable of inflicting is insurmountable. Such latent afflictions as insecurity, guilt, anxiety, disorientation or more covert and drastic afflictions like pseudo retardation, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual deviation, psychopathology, schizophrenia as well as suicide and divorce are demonstrative of her effects.

Sebald effectively presents his exposé by unmasking this particular malfunction of motherhood in an essentially candid manner and with great tact. Besides delivering valuable critiques of such spokesman as Dr. Spock, he skillfully implements the basic premises of such theorists like Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and Karen Horney to provide a framework in which to assess Momism. Although the author advocates that Momism is on a rapid and inevitable increase, he discusses preventive and developmental models as well as a therapeutic or cure model for its victims.

The major shortcoming of this work is Sebald's ability to contradict himself incessantly. For example, he suggests that the book be read by the lay public and yet be adopted by universities and colleges. The fact that Sebald utilizes a highly advanced style of language and incorporates the names of other authors and renowned psychological theorists suggests that his implied audience is a well read and selective one. More-

over, by critically opposing the intellectualized or educated approach to child rearing which invariably focuses on the vulnerability of the child, he discredits the significance of his own publication which follows a similar pattern.

The author justifies the emphasis that he places on the mother as opposed to the father in the cause of Momism because of the abundance of research available in the one area and the scarcity in the other. It does not logically follow, however, that because Dad is not predominant in the literature that Dad is not the procurer of the

disease. Although Sebald recognizes this discrepancy he avoids developing the father's contribution to the disease in any great depth. Consequently, Sebald's work is not a provocative contribution to the already expanding literature on motherhood, but rather echoes the theories of Freud, Adler and Berne.

Despite these limitations the most profound theme that Sebald submits is that raising children is the most challenging and responsible job in our society while simultaneously being one of the most dangerous.

If I Tell You, Will I Feel Less Scared? Gregory SASS, Toronto: McDonald House, 1975, 91 pp.

Reviewed by:

Brian R. Usher
Board of Education
Etobicoke, Ontario

I can only concur with views expressed about this book in the publisher's release; the experience of reading this book is truly moving and filled with a sense of sharing the intimate frustrations and agonies of children who seem so worthy of love, respect, and a sense of belonging but are so deprived of these qualities in life.

The need for greater understanding of these children, if not all children is definitely demonstrated by the author. Perhaps these children make us aware of their particular problems, but we should not overlook the vast numbers of similarly "disturbed" children who go undetected, unnoticed, without any sense of being able to talk with someone. The book is not as such an

indictment of education but rather it shows us how far we have yet to go in order to achieve a more rationally sensitive environment for the growth of children both at home, in schools and in society.

For those persons about to embark on a career in teaching it is an excellent work to sensitize the prospective teacher to some of the behaviours, thoughts, feelings, and fantasies of children who may await them. For those concerned with "disturbed" children it is a moving book in that it transmits one into the world of this type of child. Hopefully, the experience will serve to assist such teachers in their work. For educators generally, the book is an awakening which may perhaps disturb the educational system sufficiently enough that the problem becomes not one just for the parents of these children but one that must concern the public at large.

I would highly recommend this book and intend to do so in a number of courses and committees for which I am responsible.

Readings in Psychological Tests and Measurements (3rd ed.), W. Leslie Barnett, Jr. (ed.), Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1976, 415 pp.

Reviewed by:

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The publishing of another edition of a popular book creates the expectation of new, interesting and useful information. This third edition of Barnette's readings, first published in 1964 and revised in 1968, may be somewhat disappointing to those familiar with the earlier editions. The editor has deleted 19 articles from the second edition and balanced this with 19 additions to maintain the previous total of 52. Of these, 35

are journal articles, six are excerpts from books, six are papers and five are reports. An earlier section on "Response Sets" has been deleted and replaced with a new section on "Testing the Disadvantaged" which contains an excerpt from Jensen's now-famous *Harvard Educational Review* article on racial differences. Each entry is introduced by an editorial comment and several have been specially adapted.

The collection has been directed toward "advanced undergraduate majors in psychology who have already been exposed to a required course in Elementary Statistics." The focus is on empirical studies containing material that is "unusual and interest-promoting". There is a wide range of application oriented studies and relatively few theoretical articles.