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Teens Are Affected by Reading, Survey Shows

Catholic Press Features

New York—A nun-psychologist who surveyed more than 3,000 high school students on the moral and emotional effects of reading has reported that "there is not the slightest doubt that books, magazines and illustrations not only have the power to arouse emotion but do so."

The results of her survey, published in a 300-page book by the New York firm of Charles Scribner's Sons, refutes the frequently made contention that teenagers are not harmed by "objectionable" reading, according to Sister Mary Corde Lorang, a Maryknoll nun who surveyed junior and senior boys and girls in both public and Catholic high schools in California, Illinois, Iowa, Pennsylvania, New York, Hawaii, the Philippines, Tanzania and Guatemala.

"We do have evidence that reading effects and affects behavior for good or evil," reported Sister Mary Corde, who tabulated and analyzed answers to an extensive questionnaire filled out by 3,206 students. "Every one of the young people indicated on some part of it that he had been affected by reading."

The questionnaire asked the students to list books and magazines they had read, to tell which had had a good effect and which had had a bad effect and to answer a series of questions such as: "Did you every try to act like a character in a book? In what way? Did you ever do anything because you read about it in a magazine? What did you do? Have books ever had a bad effect on you? How? Did illustrations in a magazine ever make you act in a special way? How did you act?"

Sister Mary Corde's book, "Burning Ice: The Moral and Emotional Effects of Reading," reports students' reactions to more than 3,700 different book titles, ranging from "Alice in Wonderland" to "Candy" and more than 800 magazines, ranging from "National Geographic" to "Sun Nude." Among her findings: Forty-seven per cent of all the boys and 41 per cent of all the girls answered "Yes"



Sister Mary Corde Lorang, Ph.D., of Maryknoll, received an A.B., M.A. and Ph.D. in psychology from Catholic University, where, in 1944, she conducted a similar reading survey for her doctoral dissertation. She is a member of the American Psychological Association and a charter member of the American Catholic Psychological Association.

'Chipper by the Dozen'

Nearly 4,000 book and magazine titles were covered in Sister Mary Corde's survey and some of the responses indicated her next survey ought to be on spelling. Some of the odd titles reported by the students were: "Chipper by the Dozen," "The Sinning Nun," "Dairy of Anne Frank," "Peton Place," "Hound of the Basketvilles," "The Non Story," "True Love Confusions," "Cain Mutiny," and, particularly for after-dinner speakers, "Please Don't Eat the Daisies."

to the question: "Did you ever do anything because you read about it in a book?"

Sixty-six per cent of the boys in public schools had been "aroused by illustrations in magazines." For Catholic schools the figure was 79 per cent.

Of the boys, 41 per cent answered "Yes" to the ques-

tion: "Did the reading of magazines ever give you the idea of doing bad things?" Among the girls, 21 per cent answered "Yes."

One of Sister Mary Corde's more interesting discoveries was that many books on the "required reading" lists of high schools have a sizeable "bad effect" on students —

ranging from a student's comment that "I developed some very nasty habits from Mr. Caulfield" (in "Catcher in the Rye") to "Books I was forced to read depressed me, even if they were good. Some made me never want to read again."

The nun observed that the percentage of good effects and bad effects reported for various books — particularly for "required reading" titles — suggests "young people are more right than we will admit when they say adults do not understand them."

For instance, 58 per cent of the students who had read "Forever Amber" said it had a good effect on them, even though the book was rated "unfit" by Sister Mary Corde's panel of judges. The same percentage reported that a "Gulliver's Travels" had a bad effect.

In her questionnaire, Sister Mary Corde had listed 18 various emotional and moral reactions (among them: "sad, joyful, pious, charitable, disgusted, wanting bad things, hating other people, sinful, patriotic, like petting") for the students to apply to various reading, but the extemporaneous responses of the students produced many surprisingly frank comments on the effects-of-teen-age-reading:

"Led me to excessive necking," said one girl of "Seventeen" magazine. "Started caring too much how I looked instead of how I acted."

"I sometimes find myself acting like Scarlett O'Hara (after reading "Gone with the Wind") in the fact that I have fits of temper, throw things and act like a regular tomboy."

The Bond books "made me more lenient towards those who were promiscuous," said one boy.

"I read about a fellow being torched and it made me feel like torching someone just for kicks." ("De Sade")

But the reaction of students is not limited to their thinking about doing something suggested in the reading, as evidenced from these replies:

"I attended a wild beer party after a report read in 'Life.' The article made it seem like a rebel act—really 'in' at the time."

"It told of young boys dragging their cars and ripping radio antennas off others so I did it too." ("Drag Strip")

"I was involved and almost in trouble because of the book." ("Peyton Place")

"I set up scenes so I could use lines like she did." ("Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?")

"In 'Cosmopolitan' once it gave tricks on being sexy, etc. I tried them."

"Built a zip gun."

Some interesting responses showed "good effects":

"Stopped an aggressive boy

because of an article I read on dating."

"One day I acted like Mr. Morley (of "Christmas Carol") who helped the poor. I saw a poor man and gave him 50 cents."

"I began to think about Christ and I began to pray more intimately to Him."

(after reading "The Robe")

A "Sherlock Holmes" book "made me want to develop my mind more."

Paul Gallico's "Snow Goose" "inspired me to visit an old lady. She lived alone in her house."

"I read the article entitled

'Sudden Death' in 'Reader's Digest.' It made me drive a lot slower that evening."

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Education

Campus ROTC Program Challenged

Milwaukee (NC)—If a university offers academic credit for ROTC courses, should it not balance the situation by doing the same for courses in peace or non-violence?

This, it seemed, was the essence of the protest march and dialogue staged by the Marquette Coalition for Peace on Marquette University's campus. The coalition is composed of representatives of the campus Students United for Racial Equality, Students for a Democratic Society, Students for a Political Alternative and Students for McCarthy.

The overall question posed is: "Does the presence of ROTC on campus signify institutional militarism, that is, an endorsement by the university of the science of 'the art of killing'?"

A flyer put out by the coalition asked, "Is ROTC MU's answer to Pope Paul's plea of 'war never again'?"

The coalition stated its position by sponsoring a "Vote for Peace" assembly in MU's ballroom at noon featuring Father James Groppi and three members of the "Milwaukee 14," the group of Vietnam war protesters awaiting trial for burning Selective Service files here Sept. 24.

Election day was chosen, according to a statement of policy issued by the coalition, because students "asked to kill are denied the opportunity to vote" because of age, and so will instead "vote with their feet."

The talks drew an overflow crowd in the ballroom. Father Groppi, stressing that he was speaking for himself, and not for St. Boniface parish or the black community, said he "questions America's involvement abroad, America's support of regimes that are dedicated to social injustice."

He said an institution such as Marquette should be "tied up with the real problems" of society, a system which is "racist." Churches, both black

and white, too long have been teaching people to "tolerate living in cesspools here and abroad because their reward will come in heaven."

"This is sheer nonsense, certainly not the message of Jesus Christ. The Christian message is to teach people to get involved in the changing of society," he said.

The protest rally was keynoteed by an assistant instructor in theology, Jack Cummins, who said a Catholic university should take the Gospel seriously.

A Christian within a system should be the most critical of the system, Cummins said. He said he feels Marquette has to speak out against social injustice like racism, the Vietnam war and nuclear stockpiling, "even at the risk of having to close its doors."

Robert Graf, one of the Milwaukee 14, referred to himself as a participant in "Milwaukee's Boston Tea Party." He said the action of the Milwaukee 14 in protesting war and of Father Groppi and the youth commandoes in civil

rights has been to wake up the people to the hidden violence in American institutions.

Graf said the ROTC program could be offered off campus or it could be a club dedicated to violence for self-defense, but "instead we have institutionalized it."

Another of the Milwaukee 14, Jerry Gardner, asked the audience to join in a peaceful walk to the tennis courts for an open forum dialogue. About 150 marched quietly to the courts and sat down on the cement.

Several ROTC men attending the forum entered into it. One commented: "You've been defining the art of military science as the art of learning to kill. Military science is knowing how to defend your rights—your right to sit here on these tennis courts! We're here to protect your rights."

Another uniformed ROTC student said: "As far as I am concerned it is necessary to have an effective standing official army for which we must have college trained officers. It's not the way we want it. But that's the way it is."



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