

Book Review

The Creative Force: How Children Create Their Personalities

Betty Lou Bettner (2006), Media, PA: Connexions Press.

Reviewed by Jocelyne Leham

The Creative Force is a little book that packs a lot of punch. In 49 pages, author Betty Lou Bettner manages to demonstrate the Adlerian theory of how each of our individual personalities is uniquely created in the early formative years. She uses real-life examples to illustrate a variety of Adlerian concepts. Her literary style of using Socratic questioning throughout the book and providing a number of possible answers allows the reader to engage in the process. This style facilitates a deeper understanding of the concepts she is demonstrating.

Bettner begins with a brief review of the early developmental stages of childhood. She then introduces little Susie, a real life illustration of how personality is formed. Through subjective interpretation of what she sees, hears, and experiences in her world, Susie begins to design her personality within the context of her family. Bettner views the family as an improvisational drama such that “being born [into it] is like being placed on stage in the middle of the second act.” She explores the various aspects that influence the formation of Susie’s personality:

- how she chooses her role in the family to ensure that she belongs;
- how the atmosphere in the family plays a role;
- how parenting styles and the parental relationship influences her perceptions; and
- how family values are revealed by what is said and mostly by what is done.

From these influences Susie will decide what roles men and women play, and she may decide to accept or reject those values and beliefs. What qualities, traits, and roles Susie observes in her parents will influence what she concludes about men and women.

Bettner also demonstrates the influence of birth order as Susie welcomes her new siblings. Every child has a “creative force” and will strive to gain a sense of belonging and will find a unique role in the family. Susie will make meaning from these experiences to formulate conclusions about *what life is*, and about *who she is*. Adlerians believe that both nature and nurture play a role in the formation of personality by using the raw materials of genetics and environment in addition to the influences of education, experience, and organ inferiority. However, a child will always be the one to decide what to create with these influences. What is chosen will depend on the meaning given to experiences which influence the formation of beliefs. It also impacts behaviors, and results in a unique style of life.

The author states that according to Adlerian principles, all human beings must have the “Crucial Cs” in order to develop in an emotionally healthy way:

- to belong and *connect* with others;
- to be self-sufficient and *capable*;
- to *count* and to have a sense of belonging and significance; and finally,
- to have *courage*.

She stresses that the development of courage in children is essential so that they are willing to go forward, to not be afraid of making mistakes, and to see that they can handle the challenges of life. When these “Crucial Cs” are not provided, children often have feelings of isolation and inadequacy. They feel unnecessary and inferior which will lead to discouragement and the use of misbehavior to cope. Bettner provides two possible conclusions available to Susie to illustrate this. And finally, the book ends with a list of numerous open-ended questions for readers. This

allows readers to consider their own answers to these questions to gain insight into the conclusions they made in their early formative years.

Using Susie's real life example, Bettner effectively demonstrates Adlerian principles surrounding the impact of the "creative force" in the formation of individual personalities. In addition, her use of simple, yet clear and concise language makes this book accessible to all readers. The incorporation of Socratic questions along with a variety of possible answers facilitates not only an understanding of Adlerian concepts, but it also engages the reader in the actual process. Personally, I found this book to be very helpful in gaining further insight into my formative years and into the conclusions I made as a result. Professionally, I found this to be a useful tool in my counseling practice, especially the questions provided at the back of the book. They engage my clients to become more aware of the decisions they have made early in life and how these decisions impact their current life situations.

Jocelyne Leham is currently completing her Master's Degree in School and Counselling Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan. She has taken every opportunity to expand her knowledge and understanding of Adlerian theory through the various workshops and book studies organized by the SAS, and she is in the process of obtaining the SAS 100-hour certification. She believes that Adlerian principles are relevant to everyone, and she applies these in her own life as well as in her counselling practice.