

Textbooks: Not just for your syllabus anymore

March 01, 2006

While the idea of a “favorite textbook” may be an oxymoron for students, a good one can affect more than just a grade.

Spurred by a *New York Times* writer who claimed that no one remembered a favorite text or curriculum, John Kihlstrom (University of California, Berkeley) set about exploring the favorite textbooks of today’s psychologists.

Kihlstrom, an APS Fellow and Charter Member, conducted an informal poll of the members of three psychological societies: the Society of Experimental Psychologists, the Society for a Science of Clinical Psychology, and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

The respondents mentioned over 130 books, and several were resounding favorites. Among them were:

- *Social Psychology*
Roger Brown
- *Cognitive Psychology*
Ulric Neisser
- *The Social Animal*
Elliot Aronson

Perhaps most striking among Kihlstrom’s impromptu data are respondents’ stories of why they love the books they do. Many retraced their first steps into the field, citing the books or classes which sparked their curiosity about scientifically studying the mind and human behavior. Kihlstrom wrote in an e-mail, “The really interesting part, the part worth preserving and disseminating, was the narrative that accompanied people’s nominations. That gives us some insight into how the respondents became psychologists, and how they became the psychologists they are.”

Kihlstrom’s lists, including the personal accounts, are available at <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~kihlstrm/GreatBooks.htm>. Kihlstrom makes further recommendations at the Berkeley Book List, where university faculty share publications based on topical interest across a range of subjects. See <http://books.berkeley.edu/2003/psychology.shtml>.

Do you have a favorite textbook?

Share the title and why it had such an impact on you with other readers at apsobserver@psychologicalscience.org. A selection of responses will be published in a future *Observer*.