

Conformity: Do We Need It? What Are The Threats It Poses?

By SUSAN SZEKELY

"The two things everyone seems to be against are sin and conformity—we're here today to discuss conformity."

So said Mrs. Nathan Kolins in introducing the panelists who discussed "The Well-Rounded Conformist" at yesterday's meeting of the Tucson Chapter of the Brandeis University National Woman's Committee.

Members of the panel included Dr. Lindsay E. Beaton, neuro-psychiatrist; Dr. Paul Allen, assistant dean, University of Arizona College of Education; Dr. Thomas Martin, dean, UA College of Engineering; and Dr. James McDonald, senior physicist, UA Institute of Atmospheric Physics.

Discussion centered around the need for conformity in our society as well as the threat it poses. Particular attention was focused on the nature of conformity as it relates to education.

Dr. Beaton opened the discussion by stating that "society has a certain need

for conformity to insure social cohesion. It is necessary that a society holds in common certain general ideas and principles," he continued. "However, conformity can also operate as a block to progress."

Dr. Beaton defined conformity as a quality of seeking simple answers to complex problems. "I believe that we live in a time of tremendous social anxiety," he stated. "At times of anxiety, people tend to regress. Children are the greatest conformists. One of the things we are seeing today is a regression to infantile conformity."

Dr. Martin continued the discussion with an analysis of conformity as it is found in his field, engineering. "Our present environment," said Dr. Martin, "is devoted to rapid change in science and engineering. A man in this field must be a revolutionary. However, it is demanded that in his social life he be a conformist."

"The implications of rapid change in science are profound," he continued. "The student must be given some kind of conformity—a stable method of approach to his subject. But at the same time, he must be taught to have a flexibility of viewpoints."

Dr. McDonald advanced another explanation of the conformist tendencies of our society as the result of an overemphasis on egalitarianism. "For some time," Dr. McDonald stated, "it was thought

that to single out the exceptional student was undemocratic."

"In science," he continued, "one sees that theories which because of their novelty look strange often prove themselves. The same thing happens in the sociological world. The ideas which are of importance and produce change always come from the non-conformists. Therefore, we can never disregard an idea simply on the basis of its non-conformity."

"Non-conformity is not bad per se; neither is it good per se. There are higher values by which it must be judged."

Dr. Martin advanced the idea that in education the student is "programmed." He is fed certain information and he learns through high school to "regurgitate this back." Then he comes to college and is expected to be able to synthesize information and ideas. He is expected to be creative.

In concurring, Dr. Allen added that our schools put too much emphasis on the student "being right." "He is not allowed to be wrong," said Dr. Allen, "so what he does is develop the

habit of saying only what he has been told and not exploring for himself."

Everyone has been filled with programs, Dr. Martin added, but we now have new problems that the programs are inadequate to cope with. Therefore we revert to over-simplified solutions to these problems."

"Conformity," continued Dr. Martin, "is dedication to the status quo. History shows that rigid conformity leads a society to self-destruction."

"When a society reveres conformity, people with different ideas and viewpoints become afraid to step out," said Dr. McDonald. "People are immobilized by the fear of being different and conformity becomes a real hazard."

"Our society is in danger of becoming paranoid in its emphasis on conformity to the extent of denying freedom of speech," stated Dr. Beaton. He concluded the panel discussion by expressing the opinion that our society "must extend the limits of what is considered normal and acceptable in order to release the spirit of creativity."

Mother-To-Be

Sleeveless Dress of textured cotton perri point



Daniels-Reed Troth Announced At Tea

Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Daniels, 1210 W. Hadley St., announce the engagement of their daughter Bebe Daniels to John I. Reed, son of

