PSYCHOLOGY

Potential Suicides Spotted

➤ MANY lives may be saved by the discovery that a widely-used personality test can be used to reveal suicidal tendencies before an actual attempt is made to destroy life.

The potential suicide is likely to evade direct questions about his suicidal intentions, Drs. Werner Simon and William M. Hales, of Veterans Administration Hospital, St. Cloud, Minn., state in reporting their finding to the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY (Sept.). Less than one sixth of patients with suicidal tendencies said "no" when asked whether they usually feel that life is worth while.

They are, however, spotted by their "yes" answers to such indirect questions as the following:

I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be.

Criticism or scolding hurts me terribly.

I certainly feel useless at times.

I seldom worry about my health.

I am easily awakened by noise.

I work under a great deal of tension.

My hardest battles are with myself.

I frequently find myself worrying about something.

I have periods of such great restlessness that I cannot sit long in a chair.

I have several times given up doing a thing because I thought too little of my ability.

Because this test, known to professional people as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, is so widely used by psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, vocational counsellors and personnel workers, the investigators feel that previously unsuspected suicidal risks may be picked up in this manner.

Science News Letter, October 22, 1949

MEDICINE

New Radiation Hazard

➤ A NEW radiation hazard has been discovered accidentally by atomic energy project workers at the University of California Medical School in Los Angeles, Calif.

Scientists using electron microscopes to get more knowledge for fighting disease may be getting dangerously large doses of radiation, the California scientists found. A person working a full day at the instrument they studied would get several hundred times the biggest dose considered safe.

A portion of the electron beam of the microscope strikes various metal parts of the instrument, generating continuous X-rays. The operator of the microscope may be exposed to this X-radiation through the various viewing apertures.

Discovery of the danger was made by Drs. Louis B. Silverman, Sylvia B. Elliott and M. A. Greenfield in the course of a general radiation survey of the atomic energy project at the medical school here. Their detection instruments showed radiation well above background levels in the vicinity of the 50 kilovolt electron microscope. Further checking showed that the dosage of X-rays at the intermediate viewing port was 70 milliroentgens per hour, whereas the maximum radiation exposure permitted at the medical school's atomic energy project is only 50 milliroentgens per day.

When a one-quarter inch thick lead plug was placed in each viewing port, X-ray dosage from the ports was reduced to less than one milliroentgen per hour.

"The high dosage had been due," the scientists report in the journal, *SCIENCE* (Oct. 7), "to the accidental use of ordinary glass instead of lead glass in the assembly of this instrument by the manufacturer.

"It is suggested," they warn, "that electron microscopists survey the radiation from viewing ports to determine whether or not the X-ray intensity exceeds the accepted tolerance dosage."

Science News Letter, October 22, 1949

PSYCHOLOGY-ANTHROPOLOGY

Faulty Sex Relations Stem From Bottle Feeding Baby

➤ THE modern mother who gives her baby a lifeless, sexless bottle to suck instead of taking him to her own breast is laying the foundations for his later faulty sex relations in marriage.

This is pointed out by Dr. Margaret Mead, anthropologist of the American Museum of Natural History in a new book, MALE AND FEMALE (*Morrow*).

What the baby learns when his body is first laid against that of his mother is the physical forerunner of the sex relationship. The mother who "puts her baby on the bottle" is substituting a relationship between the child and an object, Dr. Mead points out.

We do not know, she says, at just what age the baby can distinguish the difference between a glass bottle with a rubber nipple, loose in space, from the breast which is part of the mother. But the mother knows the difference from the start and she makes it known to the child in her voice, in her hands, in the very tempo of her being. She is not giving the child herself; she is faithfully, efficiently providing the child with a bottle—an object.

Thus it is not surprising when the baby grows to manhood and thinks of his relationships with his wife in terms of automobiles, fur coats, or other gifts of lifeless objects.

Bottle-fed babies, both boys and girls, learn at the beginning of life that mother is there to put things into their mouths—bottles, spoons, crackers, teethers. Deep in the picture of the relationships between men and women comes this image of original satisfaction through having impersonal things put into the mouth.

"Later," writes Dr. Mead, "when the American soldier goes abroad, puzzled foreigners speculating on American morale will decide it is orange-juice or Coca-Cola or some other familiar item of American food or drink that is basically important."

Science News Letter, October 22, 1949

Words in Science— MYOPIA-HYPEROPIA

➤ THE defects in eyesight commonly known as nearsightedness and farsightedness are given names of Greek origin by your oculist.

Myopia is nearsightedness or shortsightedness. You say the word my-o-pea-ah with the accent on the o. It is due to too great refractive power of the lens of the eye so that rays from an object come to a focus before they reach the retina.

In hyperopia—pronounced high-per-o-pea-ah, stressing the o—the opposite condition exists so that the rays do not come to a focus by the time they reach the retina. This causes farsightedness.

Presbyopia, from Greek words which mean "old eyes," is a lack of accommodation from loss of elasticity of the lens, making it impossible to focus on objects close to the eyes. This affects people beyond the age of about forty.

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