

PSYCHOLOGY

Freud's Theories Tested

The scientific method of proof through experimentation may at last show that Freudian theory, long accepted as truth by psychoanalysts, is also fact—By Patricia McBroom

➤ A VANGUARD of psychologists is turning an experimental spotlight on Freudian theory. The goal is to prove what long have been accepted as working principles on the analyst's couch.

Dr. Irving Sarnoff of New York University told a New York Academy of Sciences meeting that the majority of psychoanalysts have been too well satisfied with Freud's doctrine to submit it to controlled tests. Consequently the deep, obscure motivations and unconscious promptings of the human mind remain a matter of theory.

It is the job of research psychologists to apply the scientific method to Freud, he said.

Dr. Sarnoff, a psychologist, is testing the Freudian theory that some people have an unconscious impulse toward failure. They are persons capable of succeeding who, when they approach success, begin to undermine themselves and bring on ultimate failure.

Freud believed that unconscious guilt was at the bottom of the desire to fail. To test the theory, Dr. Sarnoff will manipulate and measure his subjects' degree of guilt and anxiety.

In previous experiments described in his book *Personality Dynamics and Development* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc.), Dr. Sar-

noff has not always found his results correlating with Freudian theory. However, this may be due to a failure on his part, he said.

"We are flying blind empirically," he told SCIENCE SERVICE. "We are at such a beginning level, we do not even know what kind of methods to use in approaching the problem."

Within the vast complex of psychoanalytical theory, Dr. Sarnoff has chosen to experiment with the concepts of castration anxiety and fear of death; anxiety, fear and social affiliation; and reaction formation and cynicism, among others.

He found that the castration theory according to Freud did indeed show up in empirical tests. Persons with a high degree of castration anxiety felt an increased fear of death when their sexual emotions had been aroused. To elicit sexual feelings on two levels—high and low—Dr. Sarnoff had eight photographs held before his subjects' eyes—four of nude females and four of high fashion models. The fashion models brought no change in emotions. But sexual feeling aroused by pictures of nude women were accompanied by death fears in those men who feared castration.

However, Dr. Sarnoff stated that one test does not prove a theory.

Taking his own profession to task, Dr. Sarnoff warned that unless psychologists strive to illuminate these complex areas of human behavior, they may be doomed to being a bunch of technicians, laboriously compiling charts that they have neither the wit nor the verve to interpret.

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Collegians Threaten Suicide Most Often

➤ SUICIDE is a greater threat to college students than to any other population group in the United States.

Although the number of collegians who kill themselves is actually low, suicide ranks second as a cause of death in this group as a whole.

Dr. Stanley F. Yolles, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, revealed nationwide statistics at a Symposium on Suicide at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Among teen-agers 15 to 19, suicide is the third-ranking cause of death. "It is therefore obvious that an effective national suicide prevention program must be extremely sensitive to the needs of young people in adjusting to the stresses of adult living," Dr. Yolles said.

An upsurge of professional awareness regarding suicide in this country has resulted in the establishment of a Center for Suicide Prevention. Connected to the Institute, the Center will operate in five basic areas: research and consultation, training for personnel dealing with potential suicidal individuals, organization of local services, liaison between already existing programs, and promotion of research at the state level.

Not all suicides are reported as such, Dr. Yolles said. A common reluctance to admit suicide means actual occurrence is probably twice the reported figure of 20,000 a year.

"Suicide has spread throughout the 20th century" and appears to be increasing, at least among the young, Dr. Yolles reported.

Overall United States rate is 11 suicides per 100,000 persons. Far more men than women commit suicide except in the Far West, where not only more women kill themselves, but the national rate hits its highest peak.

Surprisingly, metropolitan areas are slightly lower in suicides than less urban regions, except, again, in the West.

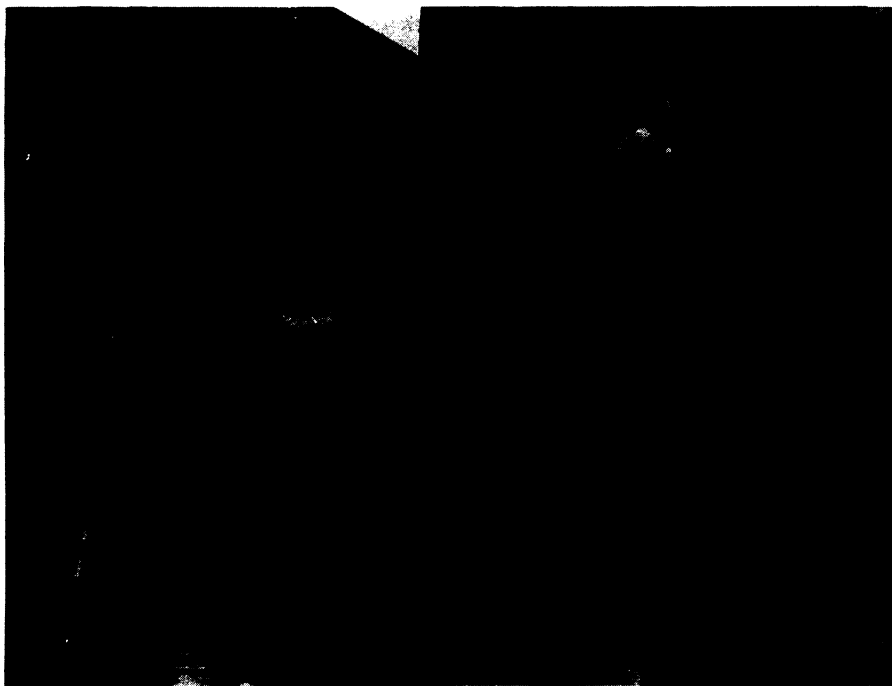
The rate for whites is twice that of non-whites.

Suicide is avoidable without exception according to all modern theories, Dr. Yolles noted.

"There is no conceivable human situation which is unendurable or hopeless enough to drive a healthy man to death—neither mental anguish, nor concentration camp torture, nor pregnancy out of wedlock, nor bankruptcy."

Self destruction is rarely the result of genuine mental illness, but comes from long-standing neurotic problems, whose fatal outcome can be prevented. Suicidal patients do not choose to be ill, Dr. Yolles said, and they can be treated.

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General Electric

TESTING METAL STRENGTH—Temperatures up to 4,500 degrees F., more than 1,800 degrees above the melting point of steel, are used in testing the strength of space age metals made at General Electric Co.'s refractory metals plant in Cleveland. Being readied for a test here is a recently developed refractory metal alloy, GE-125, containing 75% tungsten and 25% rhenium.