

behavioral sciences

PSYCHIATRY

Introduction of telepsychiatry

A television system designed for providing psychiatric therapy has been developed between the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and the Bedford Veteran's Administration Hospital 18 miles away. Dr. Thomas Dwyer, a psychiatrist who is the project coordinator, refers to the psychiatric television system as interactive TV.

Television cameras with large monitors are placed in both hospitals so that the psychiatrist and patient can view and talk with one another. Both cameras are remotely controlled from Boston so the psychiatrist can either diminish the size of his image or zoom in on the patient.

The system will make psychiatric help more accessible to the VA patients because of the time saved in travel. The system is also being used to provide speech therapy to VA patients who need it but do not have a speech therapist available at their hospital.

The system is an outgrowth of the two-year-old tele-diagnostic unit that connects Massachusetts General and Logan Airport.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Game simulation

Simulation games place subjects in learning situations that prepare them for participation in real events and more meaningful discussions of the subject simulated. Dr. Michael Inbar of the Center for the Study of Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins studied 256 young people who had participated in game simulations of a community's response to a natural disaster.

Before participating in the game, only 31 percent of the subjects felt that they would know what to do if there were a catastrophe in the community. Following participation the percentage rose to 47 percent. Prior to the game 41 percent felt that community preparedness can improve the chance of limiting the damages caused by a catastrophe. The figure rose to 67 percent after simulation.

Dr. Inbar says in the spring *JOURNAL OF APPLIED BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE* that in the course of learning by simulated experience abstract concepts such as organization, cooperation and preparedness take on new, concrete meaning.

PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

Drugs and learning

A stimulant increased learning performance of 12 emotionally disturbed, underachieving boys, while a tranquilizer decreased it, report Dr. Robert Sprague, Dr. John Werry and Kenneth Barnes of the University of Illinois. They studied the side effects of the stimulant methylphenidate and the tranquilizer thioridazine on the boys' learning, reaction time and activity level.

The researchers report in the July *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ORTHOPSYCHIATRY* that methylphenidate improved learning performance in a number of laboratory learning tasks while thioridazine decreased learning performance. The improved performance with methylphenidate also re-

sulted in reduced activity, particularly hyperactivity. The researchers suggest that methylphenidate increases attention and hence causes improved performance.

Classroom observers also corroborate the laboratory learning findings. Methylphenidate increased attention to school work and resulted in improved behavior as rated by the teacher. Social interactions also increased.

COMMUNICATIONS

Social class and mass media

People with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, a study of mass communications media indicates. And the resultant gap in knowledge among social classes is increasing rather than decreasing, report Drs. P. J. Tichenor, George Donohue and Clarice Olien of the University of Minnesota. The relationship applies primarily to public affairs and science news.

The researchers analyzed data from four types of research—news diffusion studies, time trends, a newspaper strike study and interviews. For example, belief that man would reach the moon rose from under 20 percent in 1949 to over 80 percent in 1965 among college-educated persons; this belief grew to only 38 percent during the same period among the grade-school educated.

The researchers suggest in the summer *PUBLIC OPINION QUARTERLY* that the prospects for closing knowledge gaps in broad areas of science and public affairs through printed mass media appear dismal. This is particularly the case since these types of information are conveyed primarily through print. They indicate that to the extent more highly educated persons are in the vanguard of social and technological changes, their high rate of knowledge acquisition may be a primary factor in maintaining and increasing their present social status.

COMPUTERS

Data bank research

Data banks, which collect large amounts of information for unspecified research, offer social scientists the chance to do more sophisticated research more economically, says Dr. Lyle Schoenfeldt of the American Institutes for Research in Palo Alto, Calif., in the July *AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST*.

An example is the Project TALENT Data Bank in Palo Alto, which contains data gathered in 1960 on 440,000 high school students. The nationally representative data include a two-day battery of tests including 60 ability tests, about 400 items of personal history, family background and educational and career plans. Various follow-up studies have been done on these subjects. A researcher who wishes to study career development or marital adjustment no longer has to wait a lengthy period to find his results. He can use variations of data already collected.

Another bank is at Williams College, where the Roper Center has collected data for nearly 8,000 public opinion surveys from 44 countries, dating from 1936.

Dr. Schoenfeldt believes more researchers should be aware of the data available to them in such data banks.

august 1, 1970

103