

behavioral sciences

Gathered last week from the meeting of the American Sociological Association in Washington, D.C.

PERSONALITY

Post-modern man

Much research in recent years has aimed at defining the personality traits typical of societies that achieve economic and political modernization. But some of these modern traits—such as emphasis on planning and organizing, and faith in science and technology—are being rejected in modernized societies by an increasingly visible underground personality that values spontaneity and mysticism.

Dr. Vytautas Kavolis of Dickinson College hypothesizes that elements of both modern and underground personalities are present throughout the modernizing process. He suggests that persons who are either upwardly or downwardly mobile would tend to accept modernizing values, because they would have something to gain from modernization, while the securely established and the hopelessly excluded would more often become underground personalities.

A predominantly underground personality may contain modernistic elements, Dr. Kavolis maintains. What is more, he defines a post-modern personality that contains both sides of many of the conflicting values of modernism and the underground.

But a post-modern person is evolving, Dr. Kavolis says, who seeks ways to synthesize and relate the opposing views of modernity and the underground.

EDUCATION

Catholics shift emphasis

The function of Catholic education appears to be shifting away from religious indoctrination and toward a more secular emphasis on occupational preparation, report Drs. Benjamin Hodgkins and James Morrison of Florida State University, after a survey of 1,212 Catholic primary and secondary schools. They say this is partly because parents see the ability to function in a technological-industrial society as increasingly important for their children's well-being.

The researchers identify three main socio-cultural factors associated with the shift in emphasis: the assimilation of Catholic ethnic minorities into the mainstream of American life, the incorporation of large numbers of Catholics into the middle class and the de-emphasis of religion in modern American society.

METHODOLOGY

Sociological simulations

The traditional research approaches of sociology have been the use of tightly controlled experiments and the study of natural groups in the field. Dr. Clovis Shepard of the University of Cincinnati says that simulation games open another methodological approach to studying sociological processes.

Survey research and computer technology, says Dr. Shepard, have made it possible to simulate a variety of social situations through use of videotape, computer

terminals and visual displays of information.

But Dr. Shepard believes that too much emphasis has been focused on studying personality in present game simulations. He sees the need for a shift to the study of roles, status, definitions of situations and the effect of social and cultural traditions.

CRIMINOLOGY

Punishment as a deterrent

In 1843 Jeremy Bentham hypothesized that swift, severe and certain punishment will cause a man to avoid criminal behavior. The debate over that question has continued up to the present, fueled most recently by questions over the effectiveness of capital punishment.

Sociologists armed with computers have tried to bring some statistical evidence to bear on the question, but the results have been inconclusive.

The latest study by Drs. Theodore G. Chiricos and Gordon P. Waldo of Florida State University, has come up with equally disappointing results: "Conclusive support for deterrence theory has not been found in this research," they say.

The researchers used data from the Uniform Crime Reports and the National Prisoner Statistics to compare the frequency of crime with the number of prisoners and the length of prison terms imposed; such data gave indications of the certainty and severity of punishment. But the relationships were not there.

The researchers conclude that available statistics do not make practical an analysis of the question on a macroscopic level, and that researchers should follow a number of individual cases through the criminal justice system to assess the impact of punishment on behavior.

COMMUNICATIONS

Producers and ideology

TV producers, as Vice President Agnew pointed out in attacking news programs, have a major influence on what gets onto the screen.

Interviews with 59 television producers, reports Dr. Muriel Cantor of the American University in Washington, D.C., show that most of them are predominantly liberal and usually vote Democratic in both state and national elections.

Dr. Cantor divides producers into three basic categories: those who look on TV as a stepping-stone to a movie career, the old-line producers who are interested only in whether a show attracts a large audience and sells advertising, and the writer-producer, who goes into producing primarily so that he can have control over his material.

The writer-producers, says Dr. Cantor, are more likely than the other two groups to be for racial integration, against war, and for psychiatry and mental health. In addition, unlike the other two types, they believe that television dramatic films should express their personal values and ideology. They see television "as a medium to present views and to change the social scene."