

PERSONALITY

Achievement and firstborns

Research on the effects of birth order usually concentrates on personality traits that may vary according to ordinal position. The general finding has been that the firstborn tends to gain greater eminence in school and later life.

Dr. Mary K. Rothbart of the University of Oregon reports in the February *JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY* on her attempts to observe the actual behavior of parents toward children of different birth order. Fifty-six 5-year-old boys and girls and their mothers were investigated by observing mother-child interactions in a laboratory setting. Half of the children had a same-sex sibling two years older, and half had a same-sex sibling two years younger.

No differences were found in the amount of time mothers spent interacting with their children, but the mothers tended to give more complex technical explanations to firstborn children. Greater pressure for achievement and greater anxious intrusiveness into performance of the firstborn were found, with these findings accentuated in the mother's behavior toward the first girl.

ALCOHOLISM

Accepted theories disproven

Widely held assumptions about alcoholism are contradicted in the current issue of the British quarterly *BEHAVIOR THERAPY* by Dr. Halmuth H. Schaefer, professor of clinical psychiatry, and his associates at Loma Linda University School of Medicine in California.

Their research indicates that alcoholism stems primarily from a conditioned response to anxiety, and therefore is not a physiological condition as many believe. Dr. Schaefer further observes that alcoholics are not weak-willed people who do not have the power to stop drinking, but are strong-willed people who are stubborn enough to do what they want.

Close to 1,000 patients have been successfully treated at Patton State Hospital where "real life" treatment techniques were used to recreate stress situations and environments and where volunteers learned to substitute different but effective behavior for drinking under those situations.

SOCIAL RESEARCH

Data collection by camera

An increasing number of programs are being funded and fielded in ghetto areas in an effort to provide a wide range of services to both black and white inner-city youths in connection with sexual attitudes and behavior. Despite increased efforts, little progress is being made in these areas.

Two researchers, Dr. Betty E. Cogswell, assistant professor of family medicine, and Mrs. Jane Schoultz, a research assistant, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, believe new techniques must be developed to replace the impersonal questionnaire.

Working with Planned Parenthood of Maryland in a group study of sex information sessions in low-income areas of Baltimore, the researchers developed two in-

novative strategies of data collection: a photographic essay portraying the development of a boy-girl relationship and a projective method utilizing a set of photographs to determine the personal values and attitudes of the individuals viewing them.

The photographic essay provided a highly successful means of data collection and the researchers plan to develop standardized and interpretive techniques for the projective tests.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Syntax and recall

A relationship between syntactic structure and reading exists, evidenced by the fact that syntactic structure facilitates recall in good readers.

These findings are reported by M. Sam Rabinovitch of McGill University and Rhona Weinstein of Yale University in the February 1971 *JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY*.

Fourth-grade children from three Montreal public schools were given reading tests and divided, by the results, into three groups. The first and third groups were designated, respectively, as good and poor readers. Each child then learned (with a tape recorder) four lists composed of nonsense elements and grammatical markers. Two of the lists were syntactically structured, the other two were unstructured. The structured lists were prepared by attaching meaningless stems to syntactic cues ("ly," "ed," "ing") at various positions in a sentence frame taken from a grade 3 reader. The unstructured lists were prepared by randomly rearranging the order of the items in each structured list. The good readers learned the structured lists more rapidly than the unstructured lists, and the poor readers learned both kinds of lists with equal difficulty. There was no difference between the readers' ability to retain the unstructured material. Hence, the researchers report, the difference in recall lies in the syntactic cues.

PSYCHOLOGY

A challenge to the lie detector

The validity of the practice of lie detection may be seriously challenged by the Stanislavsky Method of acting, reports Dr. Robert M. Stern, associate professor of psychology at Pennsylvania State University.

The polygraph, or lie detector, works in much the same manner as the device used by Dr. Stern to measure his subjects' galvanic skin response (GSR). The GSR is a change in the resistance offered by the skin to the flow of electricity between two electrodes attached to the person's hand, and is commonly used to measure anxiety or arousal.

In the method of acting developed by Stanislavsky, an actor learns to express the desired emotions by immersing himself in his own personal emotional memories.

Experimenting with 26 professional actors, 15 male and 11 female, ranging in age from 17 to 51, Dr. Stern discovered, as expected, that the method actors were able to display significantly greater voluntary control over their GSR than the nonmethod actors, who were found to have no better control than a random group of college students previously tested.