

From our reporter at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Chicago

Hypnotism and eidetic imagery

Would you like to have a photographic memory? Perhaps you used to. Perhaps you can regain it. A person with a photographic memory, or eidetic imagery, is able to briefly examine a visual stimulus, such as a picture or design, and later project an exact duplication of it onto a blank surface. Sophisticated and stringent testing procedures suggest that 8 to 20 percent of all children may have eidetic imagery. Very few, however, retain the ability, and the phenomenon is almost nonexistent among adults. Neil S. Walker of Western Illinois University has used the fact that only children have eidetic imagery as a basis for testing the validity of hypnotic age regression. In other words, if people can actually regress to their childhood, then some of them should be able to demonstrate eidetic imagery ability while regressed. The test should be reliable because eidetic imagery is thought to be nonfakable.

Random-dot stereograms are used to test for the eidetic ability. Each stereogram set consists of two separate patterns. Each pattern is made up of 10,000 dots arranged in a formless array. When two complimentary patterns are superimposed, a meaningful image is seen. A person with a photographic memory can look at one pattern, then at the other and come up with the total picture.

The subjects in Walker's experiment were 20 college students who were highly susceptible to hypnosis. They were shown the stereograms while under three conditions: normal waking, neutral hypnosis and hypnotic age regression to the age of seven. Two of the subjects seemed to have eidetic imagery ability while regressed, suggesting that they had actually reverted to a more primitive system of information processing. These findings, although still preliminary and unreplicated, suggest that hypnotic age regression is a valid phenomenon and that some adults may be able to revive eidetic imagery through hypnotism.

Premenstrual intelligence

During the week before her period, a woman may experience mood changes and suffer depression and anxiety. It has been suggested that this premenstrual mood might seriously affect a woman's intellectual abilities. Sharon Golub of the College of New Rochelle administered a variety of tests to 50 middle-aged mothers during their premenstrual period. The women reported that they were more anxious and depressed than normal and that they were experiencing difficulty concentrating and working efficiently. Their test performance, however, showed no signs that they were in any way intellectually handicapped prior to menstruation.

Sedatives on the brain

Drug abuse has been blamed for many things, and one of the most serious charges has been brain damage. During the past few years, for instance, both LSD and marijuana were linked to brain damage. In both cases, however, the charges were not supported by subsequent work. Only alcohol use has been consistently associated with cerebral dysfunction. Now, researchers at the University of California at San Diego School of Medicine in La Jolla report that chronic sedative use, as well as the heavy use of four or more psychoactive drugs, in combination might result in brain damage.

Igor Grant and Lewis L. Judd studied 66 "polydrug" abusers and subjected them to comprehensive neuropsychological evaluations and EEG's, after a three-week drying out period. All subjects were heavy drug users—daily experience with a sub-

stance for one year or more. The most frequent substances (79 percent of the group) were drugs of the sedative-hypnotic class, which includes barbiturates and nonbarbiturate hypnotics. More than half of the subjects also reported heavy and prolonged use of three or more drugs. Neuropsychological tests indicated that 45 percent of the drug users were mildly to moderately impaired. The EEG's of 43 percent of the subjects were abnormal in various ways.

Because the subjects were not examined before the onset of drug use, the researchers warn that "extensive generalizations regarding the relationship between heavy drug use and cerebral deficits should be avoided and can only be implied." Nevertheless, they say, "the neuropsychopharmacological similarity of the sedative drugs to alcohol, coupled with the finding of similar cerebral deficits suggests that the question of long-term neurotoxicity of sedatives demands active exploration."

The unwanted child

Abortion was legalized in Czechoslovakia in 1957 and is available on demand through the 12th week of pregnancy. It is denied only for medical reasons or if the woman has had another abortion during the preceding 12 months. In many cases, the denial will be reconsidered and the abortion approved. Cases in which abortion is not granted, however, offer researchers a chance to study truly unwanted children. Henry P. David of the Transnational Family Institute in Bethesda, Md., and members of the Prague Public Health Service have collected data on a group of 233 children born of mothers twice denied abortion for the same pregnancy.

The children were first seen at approximately nine years of age and have been under observation for more than two years. As expected, the researchers found that compulsory child bearing can have unfavorable consequences for the subsequent life of the child. Compared with a similar group of control children, the unwanted children had a higher incidence of illness and hospitalization, despite the same biological start in life. They had slightly poorer school marks and performance, despite the same level of intelligence. They showed signs of poor social adjustment and were often described as "bad tempered" and "naughty." The study will continue, to see if these problems become worse during adolescence. But it already seems obvious, say the researchers, that "the child of a mother denied abortion is born into a potentially handicapping situation."

Group polarization on juries

The risky-shift phenomenon predicts that groups will be more risk-prone than the average individual. David G. Meyers of Hope College in Holland, Mich., has reported that groups do not always move toward risk. Instead, he says, group discussion tends to produce polarization in the direction of the group's initial stance (SN: 6/28/75, p. 414). Working with Martin F. Kaplan of Northern Illinois University, Meyers now reports on how group-induced polarization might affect jury decisions.

Subjects were asked to respond to eight hypothetical traffic cases that varied in implication of guilt (high or low). They then discussed half of the cases (two high and two low guilt) and responded again to all eight cases. Group polarization was evident. After discussing low-guilt cases, subjects were more extreme in their judgments of innocence and more lenient in recommended punishment. After discussing high-guilt cases, they tended to shift toward harsher judgments of guilt and punishment. Similar shifts were not observed for the cases that were not discussed.