

Joel Greenberg reports from New York at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association

## The legacy of battered children

Incest, child prostitution and pornography all tend to go hand-in-misguided-hand, it was noted repeatedly at the APA meeting. But there is a common starting point in many such cases: child abuse. According to the latest (1977) figures, 14,473 children (and more than 46,000 women) received help for family physical abuse in 163 programs around the country.

The reasons for abuse are many; they revolve around the batterer's (usually the father) displaced anger and frequently his own experience as a battered child. The child-victim, in turn, develops his or her own set emotional and sexual problems.

Among the researchers trying to learn more about the causes of spouse and child abuse, Lenore E. Walker of the Battered Women Research Center at Colorado Women's College reports on a study of 106 battered women at the center. Six-hour interviews with each of the women revealed that batterers are more likely than either non-batterers or their siblings to have suffered battering and other physical abuse when they were children. It was also found, in general, that the battering parent is more likely to use physical force of various kinds against children to get what he or she wants.

"Children of violence show effects in the overall socialization process as well as in observable psychopathology," Walker says. "The areas that seem most likely to be affected are affectional relationships, anger, sexuality, stress coping techniques and communication problems." In addition, she notes, more than half the families referred for incest problems to a Denver program also had husband-wife abuse incidents.

## Sweet victory for TV ads

Food advertising during children's television programming is a hot topic politically as well as nutritionally. Though there is evidence that TV ads do influence a child's eating habits, just how much influence such ads exert has yet to be determined. Many studies in this area have used the child's own report of what he or she eats to measure the impact of TV ads.

Now, however, researchers at the University of Montana report they have measured actual food preference and consumption among 47 four- and five-year-olds before and after different types of TV food advertisements. First, the youngsters were exposed to various samples of low-nutrition foods (corn chips, cookies, sweet cereals, cola and other sweetened drinks) and high-nutrition foods (cheese, carrots, grapes, apples, milk and orange juice) for an eight-minute period. Their food consumption was measured and food preferences and other information obtained in interviews.

One week later, the children underwent the same procedure, but first were shown 12 minutes of children's programming that included a half-dozen commercials that were for low-nutrition foods, high-nutrition foods or toys (a control group). The results indicate that food preference and consumption were significantly influenced by commercials for the low-nutrition foods, but not by ads for high-nutrition foods. "Children exposed to advertising for Hersheys and Fritos significantly increased their consumption of those foods while those who saw ads for milk, grapes and cheese did not exhibit significant increases," reports the team, headed by psychologist D. Balfour Jeffrey. The children also remembered the low-nutrition commercials better than other commercials.

The results, they say, suggest not only that commercials do in fact influence the eating habits of children but that advertisers of healthful foods should popularize their commercials, much like low-nutritional ads, "to use many of the techniques which the modeling literature has proven to be successful — multiple models, peer groups, catchy songs, enhanced screen action, etc."

## The longevity of macho man

Men's reputation as the more violent, or at least the more belligerent, of the two sexes seems not to have suffered unduly in the last few years, despite what behavioral scientists commonly refer to as "the changing sex roles." Two studies presented at the APA meeting — where the theme revolved around various types of differences between the sexes — suggest that males and females exhibit their anger in different ways and under different circumstances.

In one study, Don Fitz of the University of Missouri at St. Louis examined the recent experiences of 337 persons with four types of anger: silent, spoken, screaming and physical violence. He reports that "public anger [including violence] occurred predominantly with male opponents. . . . This is consistent with the stereotype that women should avoid public anger." Men's "silent anger," however, was usually with a "female opponent" and usually at the workplace.

The workplace was also found to be the only location where women were more likely to get angry at other women, rather than at men. The home was cited most often as the site for screaming and violence. Interestingly, home was the location *least* likely to result in a relationship ending — except in the case of silent anger.

In a separate study, Fitz found that "males more quickly escalated their aggression [in response] to provocative behavior by an opponent"; this is "consistent with many studies showing greater hostility by males," he says. But Fitz also found that this escalation occurs regardless of whether the opponent is a male or female, suggesting "that chivalry is dead or dying both for those with progressive and traditional attitudes toward women."

## Riches of embarrassment

How do you feel when you see an unfunny comedian slowly "die" before a large audience; or a dramatic actor forget his lines? It has long been assumed that the perpetrator of such travesties suffers more embarrassment than any unfortunate onlookers. But a recent study by Rowland S. Miller of Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Tex., suggests that audience members may be just as embarrassed, if not more so.

Miller divided 84 male and female college students into "actors" and "observers." Each actor performed an embarrassing task — such as dancing to recorded music or singing the "Star Spangled Banner" — and was observed from an adjoining room equipped with a one-way mirror and headphones. Certain observers, asked to concentrate on the actors' feelings, were then tested through various questionnaires, rating scales and an electronic device to measure skin potential.

Across the battery of measures, these "empathetic observers" displayed their own high level of embarrassment, which correlated with their changes in skin potential. "It is doubtful that these observers felt that the others' [actors'] actions reflected on them," says Miller. "In short, their reported embarrassment appears to be empathetic embarrassment."

## Psychology students and the couch

Sexual contact between psychologists and patients has been reported recently (SN: 11/5/77, p. 293). Now an APA national survey report reveals that one-fourth of all women who had recently completed their doctoral work in psychology had engaged in sexual activities with at least one teacher or supervisor. The study "reveals a sexual bias," conclude the surveyors. "Men tend to engage in this sort of sexual contact as therapists, teachers, supervisors and administrators, while women participate as patients and students."