

## REM sleep in hardened criminals

Criminal psychopaths, who tend to act impulsively and experience little remorse about their crimes, have consistently shown abnormally slow EEG readings. Some researchers have proposed that this is caused by a deficit in REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, but findings reported in the December PERCEPTUAL AND MOTOR SKILLS refute that theory. Roy D. Smalley and colleagues found no significant differences in REM patterns for psychopaths with normal waking EEG's, psychopaths with abnormal EEG's and nonpsychopaths with normal EEG's. The researchers suggest new approaches, such as computerized electrocortical recordings, to the study of EEG abnormalities in psychopaths.

## Caffeine and kids' behavior

Many children consume caffeine every day in the form of cola beverages and some other soft drinks. In fact, the amount of caffeine ingested by children is fairly close to the dose that causes central nervous system stimulation in adults. Does this constitute a health hazard to children, not to mention their elders? The evidence to date is inconclusive. Several studies have examined caffeine's effects on hyperactive children, but few have looked at its effects on normal youngsters. Researchers now have found previously unobserved short-term effects of caffeine among 19 boys from 8 to 13 years old. Robert N. Elkins and colleagues report the findings in the February AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY. The boys had no serious behavior or learning problems, and when given high doses of caffeine in soft drinks their attention increased on a performance test while, at the same time, they exhibited increased "jumpiness" and motor restlessness. This unexpected dichotomy has not been observed in previous studies using amphetamine with hyperactive and normal children. "The present finding," say the researchers, "suggests a dissociation between motor and cognitive systems." High doses of caffeine or of amphetamine may have similar effects on arousal but different effects on physical behavior. Low doses of caffeine used in the study had little or no effect on behavior, and the researchers plan to carry out a comparison of the relative sensitivity of children and adults to different doses of caffeine. They warn that acute effects may not generalize to chronic effects of caffeine.

## A critical look at DSM-III

The recently released third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III), the psychiatrist's standard reference for psychiatric diagnoses, is running into some professional criticism on several fronts, according to the Feb. 6 PSYCHIATRIC NEWS. James Strain, one of several speakers at a recent psychiatric conference, said that DSM-III does not adequately deal with somatoform disorders, those that have both medical and psychological factors. Strain says the manual defines what they are not, but fails to explicitly say what they are. He adds that diagnostic categories overlap and are hard to separate, leaving the guidelines little power to resolve diagnostic questions.

Psychoanalyst Stanley Grossman objected to the elimination of the category of neuroses, which he considers to be closely related to several somatoform disorders. He suggests the manual include descriptions of levels of psychological structure and functions along with symptom descriptions.

Other objections included: the need for a separate category of "psychogenic pain disorders" and a clearer, more thorough description of hypochondriasis. The psychiatrists acknowledge, though, that DSM-III is a step forward in the diagnosing of many psychiatric problems.

## Learning from local folk healers

The university-trained psychiatrist or psychologist is not always the main provider of mental health services, especially to poor ethnic groups with little access to institutional medicine. The role often is filled by folk healers who provide counseling and treatment to relieve a person of symptoms that may or may not have been diagnosed by staff at hospitals or community mental health centers. Researchers are now looking at ways to bridge the gap between folk and Western medicine. For five years Vivian Garrison and colleagues have gathered data and studied ways to develop cooperative efforts between folk healers and the "orthodox care system" for people receiving psychiatric care from both. The research, reported in the Feb. 6 ADAMHA NEWS, indicates that such a collaboration may be possible. The investigators identified 86 folk practitioners involved in "spiritual" or "occult" healing and counseling in Newark, N.J. The city is predominantly black, with smaller white and Hispanic populations. Videotapes of folk healing and lay psychotherapeutic sessions were made to illustrate how cultural factors such as the person's concept of the self, the world and belief in spirit control of the mind and body play an important part in mental health treatment. Psychics, astrologers, faith healers and spiritual advisors can be found in most communities, and different ethnic groups tend to utilize their own brands of folk healers.

The researchers, whose study was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, conclude that blanket policies aimed at involving folk practitioners with orthodox providers of mental health services would be inappropriate. Assessing the significance of folk beliefs and practices for various subgroups and individuals is complex and the work is in its early stages. Any cooperative ventures, for the time being, would be better approached on a case-by-case basis.

## The black and the white of adolescence

What do students think about school? A lot depends on their racial group, says a University of Florida sociologist. Sandra Damico asked eighth graders at three Florida schools to take photographs of their school, friends and teachers and to describe the pictures for an imaginary pen-pal who had never been to their community. She wanted to see if students identified as class clowns differed among themselves and their classmates in their visual perceptions of school. There were no differences for class clowns, but a clear contrast emerged between photographs taken by black and white students. White students took significantly more pictures that included the same sex, that did not show people, that were unposed, that showed humorous scenes and that used school buildings as a central theme. Black students took more pictures that used the opposite sex and both sexes, that were posed, that were taken outside school, that were of friends, that included couples hugging and kissing and that were of a teacher or group of teachers outside of class. The reasons for these differences are not clearly understood, but says Damico, "it looks like the adolescence and social worlds of black and white students are quite different." Black students did not poke fun at school in any of their pictures, and Damico says this indicates that they view it as an alien institution holding little interest for them.

Overall, the important things about school as expressed by students were social relationships, not academic programs. The researcher adds that teachers rarely use students' social and peer structures to reinforce desired behaviors; usually such structures are ignored. Damico suggests that student photographs of school life could be used to evaluate the progress of racial integration. Her study was presented in Washington at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association.