

Wray Herbert reports from Anaheim, Calif., at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association

## Computing sex differences

If information is power and computers guarantee access to information, then today's schoolgirls are already on their way to future powerlessness, according to California researchers.

Stanford University psychologists Irene Miura and Robert D. Hess conducted three studies of computer use among school children, and found that girls begin falling behind at a very early age. A survey of 87 children (boys and girls from five to eight years old) showed that the owners of home computers were all boys; although this situation changed somewhat as the children moved into junior high school, boys still outnumbered girls by two-to-one. In addition, Miura and Hess found sex differences in the amount of time spent using home computers: in a typical family with a computer, boys spent two to three hours per day programming and playing games, the father used the computer routinely for business, and the mother didn't use it at all.

Miura and Hess also surveyed 23 computer camp directors, gathering information on over 5,000 campers. They found that girls made up 27 percent of enrollment in beginning and intermediate classes, a proportion that dropped to 14 percent in the more advanced classes and to 5 percent in the most advanced classes. Interestingly, the researchers note, female enrollment decreased as the cost of the camps increased — an indication that parents are more aggressive in encouraging their sons to master computing. But parents alone are not to blame. In their third study, Miura and Hess had children and adults rate 75 software titles according to whether they were of greater interest to boys or girls. Children and adults agreed that over one-third of the titles were of greater interest to boys, while only 5 percent were perceived as interesting to girls.

## Battered wives . . . and coeds

One popular notion about domestic violence is that battered wives and abusive husbands make up a subculture in which physical brutality is sanctioned by both partners. According to this view, battered women believe that they deserve the beatings they get. The results of recent research challenge this view and suggest, on the contrary, that beaten women and wife beaters think about domestic violence in very different ways.

Michele Bograd, a psychologist in Somerville, Mass., interviewed 15 abusive men and 15 battered women who had sought help at a social service agency. The subjects provided a total of 78 accounts of domestic violence (38 from women, 40 from men) and answered questions about the causes and nature of domestic violence. According to Bograd's analysis, both men and women believe that incidents of domestic violence are triggered by temporary factors — alcohol or job stress, for example — that cause the husband to be out of control; but women alone perceived their husbands as suffering from chronic emotional problems. As a result of these perceptions, men were rarely held responsible for their violence, but neither did women blame themselves for provoking the attacks. Men did blame the women; more than half of the men blamed their wives for not living up to their expectations. In addition, husbands tended to perceive the violence as a positive act, intended to facilitate communication or end an argument; women, in contrast, perceived beatings as coercive, hostile, and intended to cause injury.

In a separate study, psychologists Rosemarie Bogal-Albritten and Bill Albritten of Murray State University in Murray, Ky., found evidence of a new and unrecognized class of violence victims — college students. Based on a survey of students and university officials, the researchers say that one in five students has had a personal experience with premarital violence — an incidence very close to that of marital violence. And as with marital violence, victims often persist in their relationships, suggesting that the battered wife syndrome may exist on a continuum of violence that begins quite early.

## Plea for morality or just propaganda?

Expressing ethical qualms about the development of nuclear missiles and the deployment of antiballistic weapons in space (SN: 5/21/83, p. 327) is not restricted to scientists on this side of the Iron Curtain. *INTERNATIONAL NEWS*, a monthly journal of political analysis published in Moscow, contains an "Appeal to All Scientists of the World" by 244 leading Russian scientists and technologists in its May issue (an English version of which has just reached this country).

In it, the researchers castigate President Ronald Reagan's March 23 proposal to develop antiballistic weapons (SN: 4/2/83, p. 212). Like many of Reagan's domestic critics, they believe the proposal will promote the arms race. The Soviets claim that as scientists they know there is no such thing as an effective defensive device against ballistic missiles, "and their creation is virtually impossible." Moreover, they claim, "such 'defensive weapons' against the strategic weapons of the other . . . will invariably develop into the appearance of another element which would bolster the American 'first-strike' potential."

Among the appeal's sponsors are Nobel Prize winning laser physicist Nikolai Basov, biochemist Vladimir Engelgardt, automation engineer Vadim Trapeznikov, mathematician Nikolai Bogolyubov, astrophysicist Viktor Ambartsumyan and superheavy-element investigator Georgii Flerov.

## U.S. sued to halt Paraquat spraying

The recent U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) decision to begin aerial spraying of national forests with the highly toxic herbicide Paraquat (SN: 8/27/83, p. 136) — part of a marijuana eradication campaign — provoked three environmental groups to bring suit Sept. 1 against the United States. A temporary restraining order to halt spraying was granted by a U.S. District Court so that lawyers for the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, Friends of the Earth and National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NCAMP) could prepare for a formal hearing.

According to Sierra Club attorney Rick Middleton, DEA provided only one or two days notice to citizens in areas around the spraying and did not prepare an environmental-impact statement for each forest. In addition, charges Jay Feldman, NCAMP's national coordinator, "DEA has blatantly ignored the restrictions governing Paraquat's use as stipulated by the Environmental Protection Agency and the manufacturer."

Middleton says, "The federal government has a right to eradicate marijuana, but there is no reason to spray toxic chemicals in national forests. The government can and does remove these plants by hand, which is the most effective and least expensive means of removal." On Sept. 13, a U.S. District Court judge extended the ban, pending a hearing the week of Sept. 26. The environmentalists will attempt to extend the ban again through mid-October when the season's spraying was due to end.

The environmental groups did not address in their suit the human-health hazard (SN: 7/23/83, p. 55) of smoking marijuana contaminated with Paraquat.

## News updates

- A residential energy-consumption survey just reported by the Energy Department shows that in 1981, the most recent period analyzed, nearly half the nation's households turned down their thermostats — 21 percent of them by 6°F or more. With an average of 67°, Northeast homes had the lowest settings.
- Learning three giant-panda skins were recently offered for sale in Taiwan, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) has just asked China — the sole source of the remaining 1,000 wild pandas — to put the animal on CITES' appendix III list. That listing would force CITES' 81 member nations to ban trade in panda skins without China's approval.