

behavioral sciences

Gathered at the convention of the American Psychological Association last week in Washington, D.C.

SEX RESEARCH

Anxiety influences offspring's sex

Two researchers at Iowa State University have found evidence to support the notion that parental stress or anxiety can affect the sex ratio of offspring.

Dr. Donald H. Schuster and Locky Schuster have previously found that a standard personality test could successfully predict families with the majority of boys versus those with the majority of girls.

Their thesis does not contradict the basic idea that the male Y-chromosome from the sperm determines a male offspring; they have, however, observed that the female parent can influence whether a male-producing (XY) or female-producing (XX) sperm fertilizes the ovum.

The researchers believe that the male parent under mild stress will produce predominately female, XX sperm. If not stressed, he will produce both male and female sperm in about equal numbers.

The female parent under mild stress has a vaginal environment favorable to the male, XY sperm.

The researchers are now developing a psychological test primarily to measure parental anxiety.

BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Retardates as behavioral therapists

With the use of reinforcement therapy, retardates have been taught to function relatively independently in tutoring and helping younger retardates who have severe mental and physical disabilities.

Tutors trained by more experienced tutors were selected on the basis of understandable speech and the ability to follow simple directions. They also had to have enough motor skill to feed and control active youngsters.

Their rewards included praise, money and permission to take coffee breaks with the research staff.

The younger groups they worked with improved significantly; task-oriented responses began to replace bizarre behavior.

The program has proven therapeutic for the tutors as well. Growth was seen in critical social behavior: feelings of responsibility, self-esteem and the improvement in caretaking skills.

Barbara A. Henker of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Carol K. Whalen of Fairview State Hospital, Costa Mesa, Calif., report the successful results of this pyramid therapy for the hospitalized retarded.

PERSONALITY

Eye motion yields clues

Eye movement, associated with anxiety and attention, but unrelated to the visual functions, may be an observable mechanism for psychotherapists, says Dr. Merle E. Day of the Veterans Administration Hospital, Downey, Ill.

Individuals can be classified as right or left eye movers according to the direction their eyes drift when in reflective thought or self-expression.

Clinical observations suggest that the right-mover is more apt to have emphysema, duodenal ulcer and hypotension, whereas the left-mover tends toward asthma, gastric ulcer and hypertension.

The right-mover reports more panicky and widely scattered anxiety than the left-mover. He is also more concerned about doing rather than feeling.

Dr. Day has found that complementary relationships of right and left movers facilitate the formation of close relationships. Pairs of close friends, married couples and homosexual couples are almost always composed of a left- and a right-eye mover, he says.

SUICIDE

Environment important

Two researchers from Albert Einstein College of Medicine believe that more attention should be paid to familial and environmental factors when dealing with a suicidal patient.

Drs. Milton Rosenbaum and Joseph Richman interviewed 35 suicidal patients and their families at Jacobi Hospital, Bronx, N.Y. Responses of both indicated a mutual feeling of discontent between the patient and his family.

Many of the interviews showed the suicidal person to be the recipient of a considerable degree of aggression from others while not being permitted or able to respond.

Death wishes aimed at the patient were expressed frequently, both jokingly and seriously.

"The hostility toward the patient, the death wishes, the impossibility of finding any other solution and finally the suicidal attempts, are all part of one syndrome, as it were," the researchers explain, "occurring in a context of high tension and the presence of problems insoluble for everyone involved, not only the suicidal person."

EDUCATION

Results from improved environment

Inner city ghetto children placed in affluent suburban schools have improved, a partial report compiled after the first two years of an experiment shows.

The project involved 266 randomly selected children from the ghetto in Hartford, Conn., placed in schools with predominantly white, affluent children. The test group was then compared with 305 control students who remained in ghetto schools.

Academic tests, teacher reports, behavioral reports and interviews show that the experimental children improved over the control students in verbal ease, perceptual and motor skills, ability to see or express verbal relationships and to categorize verbal concepts and increased expressiveness.

These results, say Drs. Aline M. Mahan of the Central Connecticut State College and Thomas W. Mahan of the University of Hartford, point up the strength of environmental and peer-group influence on the learning process.

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