

PSYCHOLOGY

"Saucers" Explained

MOST otherwise unexplained "flying saucers" are probably "afterimages," a peculiarity of perception well known to psychologists. Dr. Richard P. Youtz of Barnard College, New York City, reported to the Eastern Psychological Association meeting in New York.

You see an afterimage when you look at a bright object such as the sun or a photographic flash bulb and then stare at a bright plain field such as the empty sky or a blank wall. Sometimes the afterimage is the same color as the original object but sometimes it is a complementary color. Sometimes you see just one and sometimes a number of them.

Thus when a photographer takes pictures with flash bulbs you may afterwards see a flock of bulbs floating or dancing around in front of you and the bulbs may be bright yellow or dark purple. The color may change as you look at them.

You can help yourself to see the afterimage if you blink your eyes at a rate of about three times a second, Dr. Youtz told the psychologists.

The descriptions of "flying saucers" received from eyewitnesses could describe afterimages equally well. The "saucers" are of different size—sometimes small as a plate and sometimes large as a city block. The size of the afterimage also differs according to whether you see it nearby or far away. If you see an afterimage on the wall of your room, it will appear larger than if you see it on a cloud at 15,000 feet altitude.

The "saucers" may move at excessive speeds (but noiselessly). An afterimage seen on a cloud at 15,000 feet altitude seems to move with your eyes and thus appears to be faster than a jet plane.

The "saucer" often vanishes "mysteriously" after two or three minutes. So do afterimages.

The "saucers" may be of different colors and sometimes change color as do afterimages. The "saucer" has been reported to flash in the sun and flip around. The afterimage does this when you blink your eyes. "Saucers" are sometimes seen flying in formation. After bright flashes you can see images of several flash bulbs in a cluster.

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Sex Knowledge in Men

HOW MUCH a young man knows about sex and the "facts of life" is related to his intelligence but not to his marital status, sexual adjustment or his age, Drs. Leo Shatin and J. Alfred Southworth of the Albany Veterans Hospital and Albany Medical College reported at the meeting.

The young men studied by the psychologists were all patients in the psychiatry service of a general hospital. The average age was 33 years.

They were selected for study because sexual maladjustment is sometimes a symptom of mental illness and may aggravate or contribute to that illness.

The majority of the patients (85.7%) judged their own personal sexual adjustment to be satisfactory or better. Their therapists, however, judged 73% to be unsatisfactory or worse in sexual adjustment.

Science News Letter, April 30, 1960

Scientists and Poets

SCIENTISTS and poets mostly come from upper social classes but novelists may come from the upper or the lower classes.

This was found when psychologists made a study of the occupations of the fathers of major scientific and literary figures. The study was reported to the Eastern Psychological Association in New York by Drs. Stanley Coopersmith, Charles Church and Joseph Markowitz of Wesleyan University.

The individuals were selected for study on the basis of awards they received and evaluation by an expert.

Science News Letter, April 30, 1960

Aged Like Children

IF SOMEONE ASKS you to name the color in which a word is printed, it will take you longer to respond if the color is green and the word is "red"—longer than if you were giving the color of a blob of green ink.

The interference of the meaning of the printed word is great for an eight-year-old child. It decreases as you grow older until old age when it increases again.

This change with maturity and old age was reported at the meeting by Drs. Peter E. Comalli, Jr., Seymour Wapner, and Heinz Werner of Clark University, Worcester, Mass.

These findings, based on tests of 158 individuals aged from eight to 80, show the similarity of behavior of young children and old people, the psychologists reported to the meeting.

Science News Letter, April 30, 1960



ALTITUDE CHAMBER—Dr. Norman Lee Barr, of Republic Aviation Corporation, shows mice being tested under conditions at 50,000 feet. The chamber, a duplicate of one being built for humans, measures heartbeat, respiration and pulse as the "altitude" increases. From sea level to over 50,000 feet takes about a day of simulated space travel.

MEDICINE

Trachoma Vaccine Effective

A NEWLY developed vaccine against trachoma appears to be safe and effective, U.S. Navy researchers report.

More than 450 persons have been given the vaccine without any serious reactions. It has produced significant immunity in both monkeys and humans. The team that developed the vaccine is stationed at the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 2, Taipei, on the Island of Formosa. Their report appears in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 172:1577, 1960.

More than 400,000,000 persons are afflicted with this world-wide blinding disease. Now, this preliminary study of the effectiveness of the vaccine provides "some reasons for optimism," according to the team.

They were able to develop a vaccine that produced in humans an antibody response equivalent to that produced by natural trachoma infection. Presently, a field study to determine the vaccine's ability to prevent trachoma in uninfected children of families

in which trachoma is prevalent has been started in a rural district on the west coast of Formosa. The team is also studying the effect of the vaccine on child victims of the disease.

There has been some evidence that the vaccine has curative possibilities also. Six blind persons were voluntarily infected with one of five trachoma viruses isolated on Formosa. They were then treated with vaccine injections. While far from conclusive, the results suggest that the vaccine has had a favorable influence on the course of the infections.

The trachoma virus was first reported isolated in Peking in 1957. The highly contagious disease, once an almost universal affliction, is still widespread in China, Egypt, India and other eastern countries.

The researchers are Drs. J. Thomas Grayston, San-Pin Wang, Yen-Fei Yang and Paul B. Johnston and Robert L. Woolridge.

Science News Letter, April 30, 1960