

PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACTS

Psychology, Mass Communication Media and the Public Mind. EUGENE E. LEVITT, Indiana University Medical Center.—Despite its newness as a scientific discipline, professional psychology has a great deal to offer to the public which could be of value. Much of this consists of information relative to many specific topics on which the public is either uninformed or misinformed. As nearly as we can tell, the public has shown great interest in matters psychological and appears receptive to information. Many surveys show that the public is generally either ignorant or misinformed about these matters. There seem to be two reasons for this. Psychology as a profession has largely neglected the area of public information. We have not seen it as part of our professional occupation to communicate with the lay public. This does not seem to reflect a broad reluctance on our part to speak up, although we acknowledge that it is frequently difficult to present our findings without dangerous oversimplification. Rather, it is that we sit in our offices waiting for the public to come to us and ask. Too often, this does not happen, in most instances because the public does not seem to know whom to ask. What has happened is that unqualified, irresponsible, opportunistic, and sometimes downright dishonest and unethical individuals have pre-empted the role of the legitimate psychologist in presenting psychological material to the public. The result has been a poisonous spawn of misinformation and misconception which is potentially harmful to the public. The mass media of communication—newspapers, TV, radio and magazines—have played a key role in the transmission of this information to the public. This has been in part because the leaders of the mass media, like other laymen, simply do not know who is a reputable psychologist and who is not. But it also appears that the media have been selfishly materialistic. The argument has been that the public wants the information and so it must be given to them, regardless of who gives it. The mass media apparently see themselves as reflecting public interest but not as responsible molders of it. Any potential solution presents a complex problem with many critical aspects.

Children's Concepts of God. OLIVER E. GRAEBNER, Valparaiso University.—In 1954 the author undertook a study of the concepts of God in children for the Lutheran Education Association of Chicago. The study was an attempt to ascertain what ideas children have about God and how these ideas are related to personal factors such as home background, religious experience, age, maturity, and intelligence.

The basis for proceeding with this study was the assumption that children have ideas about God, ideas which reflect the culture milieu, and

that these concepts can be expressed by the child verbally, pictorially, musically, artistically, or by combination of several of the above.

The author rejected the forms of investigation used by Patton, Harms and McDowell in their respective studies of children's concepts of God because their fixed terminology and frame of reference hindered the free response on the part of the child. For this study a projective technique with pictures and questions was used. A series of thirty-eight original non-religious pictures were drawn portraying incidents common to American life. The drawings depicted situations related to attributes of God, situations in life which would involve God's help, knowledge, or regard for men. Combined with the pictures were questions giving the child an opportunity to relate God to the situation and thus disclose for the examiner some of his concepts of God with a minimum of direction by the examiner or restriction of the subject.

This is a pilot study and the report deals only with the preliminary phases of the project. Conclusions are as follows: 1) Through the question-picture technique the examiner learns how children in the age group 5 to 13 years think about some aspects of God and God-man relationships. 2) Children of all ages affiliated with an established church or church-related school reflect general acceptance of attributes to be accorded God. 3) Their reasoning varied from literal acceptance of a religious reference to logical deduction. 4) There was a surprising uniformity of responses. 5) Older and more intelligent children replied much the same as younger and less intelligent children. Limitations of the study are recognized.

Panel Discussion: Religion and Mental Health. CHARLES G. MATTHEWS, Fort Wayne State School.—Panel discussions titled "Religion and Mental Health" suggest the further title, "Religion, Scientific Psychology and Mental Health." The present paper was concerned with some implications of this latter title. A fundamental shift in attitude towards mental health from a judgment regarding the presence or absence of neurotic and psychotic symptomatology to a concern with broader issues of self-actualization, life goals, and what Sullivan called "difficulties in living" has blurred the roles, responsibilities and respective areas of competency of the clergyman and the behavioral scientist. A brief historical survey was made of an agreement-disagreement gradient between the two disciplines in their assessment of their joint object of concern—human behavior—and several positive and negative consequences of a rapprochement between humanistic religion and humanistic psychology were considered. The premise that the goals of either religious affiliation or psychological counseling are necessarily anxiety reducing ones was also explored, as was the question of the therapist's values, or presumed lack of them, in psychotherapy. A plea was made for mutual tolerance and patience with what seems to be increasing uncertainty regarding our definitions of man, and of the attributes and classes of behavior we want to label as human.