

ideas, the author considers the theories of many scientific disciplines, ranging from mathematics, physics and cybernetics, through neurophysiology and the psychology of language, to sociology and epistemology. The reader in search of new sidelights on psychotherapy will be rewarded by this book and enjoy the author's gift of finding epigrammatic expressions for many of his views.

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Conceptions of Perceptual Defence. The British Journal of Psychology Monograph Supplements, XXXV. By WILLIAM P. BROWN. London: Cambridge University Press, 1961. Pp. 107. Price 25s.

This monograph reviews the literature from 1947 to 1959 on experiments which have sought to show the relationship between the emotional disturbance produced by a stimulus and its threshold for recognition. The commonest, but not the only, estimate of the emotionality of stimuli, when these have been words, has been the reaction-time in a word-association test; the commonest method of estimating the threshold has been tachistoscopic, exposure-time being increased until the criterion of recognition has been reached. As emotionality increases, the threshold might remain the same, or become longer (i.e., higher) or short (i.e., lower). Psychologists have taken special interest in findings that the threshold tends to be higher for stimuli of greater emotionality, and, to account for them, have referred to the conception of perceptual defence, a process akin to repression. Yet there is at least as good evidence of a tendency for the threshold to be lower for these stimuli, because of perceptual sensitization.

The core of the monograph is the author's advocacy of the hypothesis that the relationship is not linear, but has the shape of an inverted U, the threshold at first rising, with increase in stimulus emotionality, then reaching a peak, and subsequently falling. He also examines the several theories which have been advanced to account for experimental results, and elaborates on a Hullian type of S-R behaviour theory. Hitherto, the "hypothesis" theory of Bruner and Postman has been regarded as the most effective.

The test is a revision of, presumably, a part of a Ph.D. thesis and shows several stigmata of its origin: the conscientious inclusion of the trivial, the officious disinterment of investigations better forgotten, the scrupulousness in being fair, the eschewing of speculation, and the need to keep close to the topic and to make explicit each elementary step in the argument. Nevertheless it serves its purpose, and will be of help to those interested in work in the area, which is of some importance.

The reviewer is not impressed by the criticisms made of the "hypothesis" theory, and remains unconvinced that the shape of the relationship is an inverted U. It has sometimes been supposed, admittedly on not fully satisfactory grounds, that it is an uninverted U when the emotionality rises to the intensity commonly observed in clinical work. In most of the experiments discussed in the monograph, the level of emotionality is very much lower. In the author's experiments, for instance, the subjects were male and female arts students taking a course in psychology, and the stimuli were relatively familiar six-letter words. These were divided into four classes according to the reaction-times observed in each subject in the first session. In the second session they were exposed tachistoscopically, and the threshold was determined. The inverted U relationship was shown most clearly in a sub-group of girls with relatively low scores on the MPI Neuroticism scale, and also relatively low scores on the MPI Extraversion scale. The threshold was at a peak for words in the second class of emotionality, and was lower for those in the third class, and lower still for those in the fourth class. Before accepting that the relationship is N-shaped, however, it would be as well to consider whether there were not two or more processes at work, whose effects might be separated by refinements in experimental method.

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Freud's Concept of Repression and Defence, its Theoretical and Observational Language.

By PETER MADISON. University of Minnesota Press, 1961. Pp. 296. Price 38s.

This volume by an Associate Professor of Psychology at Princeton, who also runs the student counselling service, serves a useful purpose. The author found that his