

# Psychology in Action

## The Fair—Experimental Psychology for High School Students

LUDY T. BENJAMIN, JR. *Nebraska Wesleyan University*  
CLIFFORD L. FAWL *Nebraska Wesleyan University*  
MARTY KLEIN *Nebraska Wesleyan University*

**ABSTRACT:** *The college psychology fair is discussed as a vehicle for providing the public with a view of experimental psychology. In the fair described, psychology students prepared a number of demonstrations and exhibits depicting most areas of psychology. The 1-day fair was held for high school students and their instructors. This kind of exhibit can be an important factor in balancing the nonexperimental nature of most high school psychology courses.*

We heartily endorse the recommendations of Perloff and Perloff (1977) regarding the use of the fair as a device through which psychologists can educate the public. Our discipline continues to be misunderstood and, perhaps more seriously, is all too often misrepresented. As faculty in an undergraduate psychology program, we talk with a number of entering students intent on majoring in psychology. In discussing their interests with them, it becomes readily apparent that their view of the nature of psychology is largely inaccurate, or at best one-sided. Even the advent of high school psychology courses has not remedied this situation. Indeed, we have the impression that the absence of a high school course would be preferable to the coverage of psychology as presented by many of the high school teachers inadequately trained in psychology. Support for that impression is provided by two recent studies involving large college classes in introductory psychology (Dambrot & Popplestone, 1975; Federici & Schuerger, 1976). Those authors found no relationship between enrollment in a high school psychology class and success in the introductory course in college.

Too many freshmen are dismayed to learn that psychology is not entirely hypnosis, ESP, and encounter groups. We are aware that the American Psychological Association has been involved in efforts to improve the quality of precollege instruction in psychology. To that end we would recommend the college psychology fair as a way to present the techniques of study employed by psychologists and the behavioral phenomena which psychologists study.

We are a small undergraduate college (1,100 students) and have a five-person psychology department. Our facilities are new and consist of 26 well-equipped laboratory rooms. In the fall semester of 1975, our department organized a one-day psychology fair for high school students and their instructors. Our psychology majors (approximately 70 students) prepared 22 demonstrations, which occupied the entire laboratory. These demonstrations included stereotaxic surgery in the rat brain; histological work; EEG recording in the sleep lab; several biofeedback demonstrations involving EEG, EMG, GSR, and skin temperature; operant demonstrations with pigeons and rats; perceptual displays on color perception, illusions, tachistoscopic stimuli, depth perception, and perceptual adaptation; concept formation; psychological testing; attitude measurement; group dynamics studies, and others. We matched our psychology students to the areas of their expertise. On the day of the fair we canceled psychology classes, conducting the demonstrations for two 3-hour sessions, one in the morning and a second in the afternoon.

Several months prior to the fair we mailed invitations to all high schools within reasonable driving distance of our campus. As a result, approximately 700 high school students and their instructors attended a portion of the day. The response was overwhelmingly positive. For many students it was their first exposure to psychology as an experimental discipline. Feedback from instructors indicated their wish for a repeat performance. There were other benefits we had not anticipated. For example, the event provided a common goal for our psychology majors and an *esprit de corps* among those students, which was a pleasure to witness.

Because it was so successful we established the fair as a biennial event and held a second fair in September

---

Requests for reprints should be sent to Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr., Department of Psychology, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, Nebraska 68504.

1977 which attracted more than 1,000 high school students. Of course, this kind of display is not a remedy for the problems in precollege psychology, but it can be an important supplement to those courses. Many high schools now have good facilities in biology, chemistry, and physics. Yet laboratory or experimental equipment at that level is essentially nonexistent in the area of psychology. We hope that through exposure to the fair, students may better understand psychology as an experimental discipline.

#### REFERENCES

- Dambrot, F., & Popplestone, J. High school psychology revisited: Student performance in a college-level psychology course. *Journal of School Psychology*, 1975, 13, 129-133.
- Federici, L., & Schuerger, J. High school psychology students versus non-high school psychology students in a college introductory class. *Teaching of Psychology*, 1976, 3, 172-174.
- Perloff, R., & Perloff, L. S. The fair—An opportunity for depicting psychology and for conducting behavioral research. *American Psychologist*, 1977, 32, 220-229.

### American Psychological Foundation Journal Subscription Grants

Funds are available from the American Psychological Foundation for APA journal subscription grants to postdoctoral foreign students trained in American and Canadian universities and now residing in their native lands. These grants, limited in number, are intended for centers that are interested in developing local research and scholarship but lack financial resources for such purposes. The subscription awards will cover the cost of approximately five APA journals. Applicants would choose any five from a complete list of APA journals.<sup>1</sup> Each grant will run for a 5-year period only.

Applications can be made by any foreign university, college, or research center in the form of a letter to Harry C. Triandis, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois 61820, USA, and should include assurances to the APF Committee (a) that the journals would be made available to undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty, (b) that the journals would be controlled by a librarian at an educational or research institution, and (c) that there is a need for outside assistance of this sort.

<sup>1</sup> *American Psychologist*; *Contemporary Psychology*; *Developmental Psychology*; *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*; *Journal of Applied Psychology*; *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology*; *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*; *Journal of Counseling Psychology*; *Journal of Educational Psychology*; *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*; *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*; *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*; *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Animal Behavior Processes*; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; *Psychological Abstracts*; *Psychological Bulletin*; and *Psychological Review*.