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YOUNGSTOWN, O., OCTOBER 11, 1973 -- When a scientist conducts an experiment with animals, a desired response to certain signals (stimuli) brings rewards. The experiment has the appearance of a highly organized game, with levers being pressed, food pellets automatically dispensed and results tabulated with precision.

This game however, patterns new life for handicapped children who rely on the same psychological techniques and principals to have an illness recognized and treated.

Investigating these experimental techniques, their value and limitations, is the project of Dr. Stephen A. Graf, assistant professor of psychology at Youngstown State University. By analyzing various psychological conditioning techniques, Dr. Graf is examining how an organism (human and non-human), unable to communicate through normal channels, can make known its ability to function.

In one experiment being conducted, a subject (chipmunk) is rewarded when it makes desired responses to particular types of stimuli (slides of humans.) By counting correct responses, the degree of communication between subject and experimenters, (Dr. Graf and James R. Kinney, YSU senior), can be measured.

"The primary question is whether an organism can perform a specific task. If not, perhaps the testing technique is faulty and should be revised," noted Dr. Graf. He observed that awareness of testing limitations led scientists to devise tests which discriminate between mentally retarded children and auditorially deficient children, even when both groups outwardly exhibit the same characteristics.

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"In a concrete sense, we're looking at the problem of communication. One problem is that there is often a preconceived notion of what type response constitutes communication. In the field of mental retardation, for example, the question of whether the learning could have taken place given better techniques of teaching has long been neglected."

"There is also been a traditional tendency," asserted Dr. Graff, "to place a 'ceiling' on the potential of an individual, rather than to realize that the inability of the individual to perform a particular task may be a function of the way the task has been presented."

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