

## Findings



### Light dawns on the children

"Little boys think girls are sissies; little girls think boys are wonderful." Well, don't they? Thankfully, some new research implies that this piece of folklore is coming severely unstuck amongst today's children. The study was done by Dominic Abrams of the Social Psychology Research Unit, University of Kent.

Abrams gave questionnaires to 40 ten to eleven year olds, half boys and half girls, at a junior school in Canterbury. He asked them to rate various groups in terms of their tidiness, ability at sport and writing, friendliness, and the goodness (or badness) of their behaviour. (These characteristics were chosen since they were the ones the children used most often to describe one another.) They had to judge children of their own and opposite sex, their own and younger age, and their own and a different class in their year.

The boys and girls, as expected, rated their own sex as being pretty good in most respects. But—and here's the surprise—the boys rated the girls just as highly as they rated themselves, whereas the girls were clearly derogatory about the boys. (This was not a freak finding—a second experiment on another 40 children confirmed it.) So why the difference?

It is unlikely to be that the boys—secure in the knowledge that males are the dominant sex in British society—were being "fair and noble" and the girls weren't. The evidence for this is that the boys and girls were both derogatory about children younger than themselves (though hardly at all about those in a different class), the boys more so than the girls. So the boys were discriminating against *some* people.

Abrams thinks that the higher status of boys is now regarded by both sexes as less legitimate than they have seen it in the past. He says, "Boys are more conscious of the fact that it is 'wrong' to be sexist and this may have produced the remarkable positiveness towards girls which they expressed in my study."

If this explains the boys' favourable attitudes, what about those disparaging ones of the girls? Abrams suggests: "Girls, in contrast, were probably acting to redress the imbalance between males and females and they took the opportunity to be critical of their male peers."

If both boys and girls are becoming aware that the status imbalance between the sexes is not legitimate, perhaps the outlook for the future is really quite bright?

### Late in the day

If you are dissatisfied with your job, common sense suggests that you will turn up late and take time off more frequently. But the inaccuracy of this view of how attitudes determine our behaviour is illustrated by the research of Chris Clegg at Sheffield University (*Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol 68, No. 1, page 88).

The author used a questionnaire to measure the job satisfaction and commitment to work of 406 blue-collar employees in an engineering factory. Company records of the workers' timekeeping and absences were then analysed over a two-year period which began before the questionnaires were completed.

The results showed that job satisfaction and commitment were *related* to lateness and absence. But no evidence was found to suggest that attitudes to work actually *caused* this behaviour. The findings in fact implied the reverse—that lateness and absence could lead to job dissatisfaction and loss of commitment.

Why is common sense wrong in this case? Imagine you are late for work or absent with some reasonable excuse. When you do eventually show up the boss shouts at you, docks your pay and threatens you with redundancy. Is this likely to make you feel more content and committed to the job?



### Electoral clout

Now there is some support for Robert Lineberry's unnerving "underclass" theory—that the distribution of municipal services in major American conurbations is unfairly influenced by considerations of race, class and political power, especially support for the incumbent mayor (*Journal of Politics*, vol 45, No. 1, page 209).

Frederic Bolotin and David Cingranelli say that social scientists have been loathe to accept what all local councillors know: that it is possible to channel resources into certain areas by pulling strings in the right places. This, they say, is largely because

previous studies have made the mistake of comparing neighbourhoods which are strictly non-comparable. For example, business and residential districts are often lumped together, and in most studies no systematic attempt has been made to control for differences among neighbourhoods in terms of *need* for services.

The authors illustrate their argument using data from a study of police expenditure in 145 different precincts in Boston, Massachusetts. When the data were analysed in the same way as in previous studies, Lineberry's hypothesis was found wanting.

But when a measure of neighbourhood need was included and business/residential districts differentiated, the results were completely different: neighbourhoods with large black populations were found to be discriminated against in terms of level of service, while those which had strongly supported the mayor enjoyed a much higher level of service. Electoral clout, it seems, still works.

### Russian plots

Why do Russians go in for private gardening? It is not simply to fill up the larders, to get closer to mother earth, to train children in work habits, for leisure and rest—but to get more cash. Allotments and gardens have for a long time been healthy supporters of Soviet food supplies, but the government has always pretended that the state agricultural machines could produce enough food for the people. Today the drive is on to recruit more gardeners.

According to Tatyana Karakhanova and Vasilii Patrushev of the Institute of Sociological Research, about 10 per cent of all gardening is done by youngsters up to the age of 18 (*Sotsiologicheskije Issledovaniya*, 1983, No. 2, page 82). Some start as early as seven or eight years. As the urban population grows, so does the army of spare-time gardeners. More than 11.5 million people are now engaged in this activity.

In one area, Karakhanova and Patrushev found that when extra cash was stated as the main reason for gardening, the respondents spent more than nine hours a week on their plots—whereas the "gardening-for-pleasure" respondents spent much less time tilling the soil.

Inevitably, the new enthusiasm for "back to the land" is producing surplus produce. So the problem—now that the moral one of letting workers make profits has been overcome—is how to ensure that surpluses do not rot before they can be sold in the market. The planners are intending to spend more money on small machines, on packaging and preparation and on transport for small growers. According to the findings, 15-30 per cent of the produce obtained by home gardeners is wasted.

But lest the bureaucrats stop the promise of small-scale capitalism, Karakhanova and Patrushev warn that there must be no attempt to over-plan the new movement. Plans to charge rent for plots and to issue certificates for standardised crops prepared for marketing are *not* to be welcomed.