Government agencies and other statistics-gathering organizations use the term head of household to refer to the person who contributes more than half of the necessary support of the family members (other than the spouse); in common usage, the head of household is the person who provides primary financial support for the family.

For children living with their father only:
- Median family income was $23,155 (1994).
- Percent that were classified as poor: 26%.
- Six out of ten lived with at least one sibling.
- Percent of fathers with high school diplomas: 76%.
- Percent of fathers with a bachelor’s degree or more: 12%.
- Percent with a father who was working: 79%.
- Five out of 10 lived in rental housing.

For children living with both parents:
- Median family income was $46,195 (1994).
- Percent that were classified as poor: 11%.
- More than eight out of ten lived with at least one sibling.
- Percent with at least one parent with a high school diploma: 86%.
- Percent with at least one parent with a bachelor’s degree or more: 29%.
- Percent with at least one parent working: 85%.
- Less than 3 out of 10 lived in rental housing.

Fantasy

A set of mental images that generally have no basis in reality.

A fantasy is inspired by imagination characterized by mental images that do not necessarily have any relationship to reality. In psychoanalysis, fantasy is regarded as a defense mechanism. For example, after being reprimanded by a supervisor, a worker may fantasize about taking over the company and firing the supervisor. Similarly, a child may fantasize about running away from home in retaliation against her parents for punishing her.

Vivid fantasies are often a part of childhood, diminishing as a child grows older. In the majority of individuals, fantasy is not a cause for concern; as long as the fantasizer is aware that the fantasy is not real, the formation of these mental images may be considered normal. When the line between fantasy and reality becomes blurred, however, it is possible that some form of mental illness is present. When the individual regards his fantasy as reality, it has become an hallucination. In such situations, the hallucination may be a symptom of schizophrenia, and professional evaluation by a psychologist or psychiatrist is required.

Further Reading


Fear

An intense emotional state caused by specific external stimuli and associated with avoidance, self defense, and escape.
Fear is one of the primary emotions, together with joy, anger, and grief. Fear generally refers to feelings elicited by tangible, realistic dangers, as opposed to anxiety, which often arises out of proportion to the actual threat or danger involved. Fear may be provoked by exposure to traumatic situations, observations of other people exhibiting fear, or the receipt of frightening information. Repeated or prolonged exposure to fear can lead to disorders such as combat fatigue, which is characterized by long-term anxiety and other emotional disturbances.

Fear is accompanied by a series of physiological changes produced by the autonomic nervous system and adrenal glands, including increased heart rate, rapid breathing, tenseness or trembling of muscles, increased sweating, and dryness of the mouth. Blood is diverted from other parts of the body to the areas where energy is most needed, either to run from danger or to forcibly protect oneself, a reaction known as the “fight or flight” response. This sudden diversion of excess blood from the cerebral cortex of the brain may also cause fainting, which in animals may actually serve an adaptive function to protect them from predators. In the 1880s, William James concluded that the physiological changes associated with fear actually constitute the emotion itself (e.g., “we are afraid because we tremble”), a view that has been challenged by cognitive psychologists since the 1950s.

Fears first appear in human infants at about seven months of age. Young children generally have more fears than older persons and their fears are experienced more intensely. Within families, studies have shown that middle children as a group experience fewer fears than older or younger siblings. Researchers have disagreed about the extent to which fear is innate or learned, with behaviorists arguing that it is largely learned. Animals have been conditioned to fear previously neutral stimuli through various methods including association, the exposure to paired neutral and fear-producing stimuli to the point where the neutral stimuli become associated with fear, even when presented alone. Certain innate fears such as fear of loud noises, pain, and injury appear to be universal. Species-specific innate fears have also been documented, including a fear of hawk-like shapes in certain animals and a fear of snakes in humans and other primates.

When a person confronts real dangers, fear can be an important means of self-preservation. However, many people are plagued by chronic and unrealistic fears, including phobias and obsessions, that cause much unnecessary distress and can severely reduce their ability to function normally in society. While it is possible to reduce pathological fears through drug treatment, the results are temporary and drugs do not address the root cause of the problem. Mental health professionals offer various types of psychological treatment that either attempt to deal with the underlying cause of the fear through a psychodynamic approach or address the fear directly through behavioral therapy. Behavioral techniques include desensitization (gradually increasing exposure to the feared object), flooding (sudden, intensive exposure to the feared object or stimulus), and modeling (observing another person being exposed to the feared object without being harmed).

Further Reading

Gustav Theodor Fechner
1801-1887
German experimental psychologist who founded psychophysics and formulated Fechner’s law, a landmark in the emergence of psychology as an experimental science.

Gustav Theodor Fechner was born on April 19, 1801, at Gross-Särchen, Lower Lusatia. He earned his degree in biological science in 1822 at the University of Leipzig and taught there until his death on Nov. 18, 1887. Having developed an interest in mathematics and physics, he was appointed professor of physics in 1834.

About 1839 Fechner had a breakdown, having injured his eyes while experimenting on afterimages by gazing at the sun. His response was to isolate himself from the world for three years. During this period there was an increase in his interest in philosophy. Fechner believed that everything is endowed with a soul; nothing is without a material basis; mind and matter are the same essence, but seen from different sides. Moreover, he believed that, by means of psychophysical experiments in psychology, the foregoing assertions were demonstrated and proved. He authored many books and monographs on such diverse subjects as medicine, esthetics, and experimental psychology, affixing the pseudonym Dr. Mises to some of them.

The ultimate philosophic problem which concerned Fechner, and to which his psychophysics was a solution, was the perennial mind-body problem. His solution has been called the identity hypothesis: mind and body are not regarded as a real dualism, but are different sides of...