

Thumbs up for Little Albert...

I enjoyed the 'Foundations of sand?' article in the September issue. It's a fabulous exposé of some of our most cherished studies. As someone who is very interested in the historical development of psychological ideas, I loved this contribution.

Readers might also be interested in a section at the end of the original article concerning the Little Albert study (see tinyurl.com/yymwpt). In 'Incidental Observations', the authors describe how Little Albert often didn't cry straightaway when the loud clang was made behind

him – he sucked his thumb. It was only when they stopped him from sucking his thumb that they got the response they wanted!

Tim Carey
Centre for Applied Psychology
University of Canberra

...thumbs down for the Hawthorne effect

We read with interest Christian Jarrett's 'Foundations of sand?' feature (September 2008). Unfortunately, Dr Jarrett has created a set of new myths in the boxed text titled 'The Hawthorne effect'.

In the first instance, referring to an analysis of the Hawthorne studies, Jarrett states: 'One study involved female factory workers witnessing the lights be refitted with ostensibly superior bulbs, which were in fact identical, and those women then showing improved performance.'

I think this stems from Roethlisberger and Dickson's 1939 book *Management and the Worker: An Account of a Research Program Conducted by the Western Electric Company, Hawthorne Works, Chicago*, but those authors copied it word for word from a 1930 document, 'Development of the illumination study and their relationship to other research projects', by Max Howarth of the Hawthorne Works. Seventeen years after the publication of *Management and the Worker* Dickson, seeking the true story behind this claim, contacted the original 1926 experimenter, identified by Howarth as Homer Hibarger. Hibarger replied on 6 July 1956, stating:

When Mr Snow was to leave on his summer vacation I was assigned to keep the production records of the coil winders who were being used in the illumination study. Some time later, I've forgotten how much later, I decided to try an experiment of my own. Accordingly I had the electrician come into the coil winding test room with a number of light bulbs. [This Mr Snow would do when he changed the intensities.] However, when the

operators left this Saturday, of course they saw the electrician and his light bulbs. I told him I had changed my mind and would leave the light bulbs as they were.

The following week I heard all

original output charts of the 1926 summer study are preserved at Cornell University. On these charts there is one possible combination of dates that could confirm Hibarger's story. On Saturday 17 July 1926, coil output was 12.4 coils an hour. On

Monday 19 July 1926, coil output was 12.2 coils an hour. The decline in output could be the effect of the headache reported by the operator (and possibly others) from what she thought were brighter lamps.

Dr Jarrett also said there were ventilation studies during the Hawthorne tests. This is untrue. Temperature and humidity records were maintained, but no extensive ventilation studies were conducted, except a brief study of air movement in relation to illumination in 1925.

Finally, Jarrett repeats a fallacy drawn from the Chiesa and Hobbs article cited, by reporting that the

term 'Hawthorne effect' was coined in a 1953 chapter by John P. French. French, in fact, used this term at least three years earlier in his paper 'Field experiments: Changing group productivity' in James G. Miller's edited collection *Experiments in social process: A symposium on social psychology*.

Again, we found Dr Jarrett's article to be of interest and simply wish to join him in dispelling the myths of psychology.

Charles D. Wraga
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York
Arthur G. Bedeian
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

How many psychology experiments are about changing light bulbs?

sorts of comments about the 'changed' lights, but one comment I got by asking one operator, 'How about the lights?' she replied, 'Oh, they're too glary. I've had a headache ever since Monday.' So much for the changed and unchanged light bulbs.

A copy of Hibarger's letter to Dickson is reproduced in the first undesignated 'Facts and Fallacies of Hawthorne: A Historical Study of the Origins, Procedures and Results of the Hawthorne Illumination Tests and Their Influence on the Hawthorne Studies' (Garland Publishing, 1986). In his letter Hibarger says nothing about improved operator performance. Copies of the