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Sociologist Warns That 'Big-Brotherism' Is Coming

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In a benevolent, scientific disguise, the age of big-brotherism is fast approaching with possibly disastrous consequences only dimly recognized by researchers and the public, a mental health meeting here was told today.

Apparently in the interests of social welfare and scientific knowledge, "an ugly alliance may be developing between legal-electronic surveillance, scientific research and Government dossiers," according to Dr. Orville G. Brim Jr., a prominent sociologist who is president of the Russell Sage Foundation of New York.

Dr. Brim participated in one of several sessions on surveillance, testing and the right of privacy that were held today during the American Orthopsychiatric Association's 43d annual meeting.

At the various sessions, behavioral scientists from different fields agreed independently that the growth of psychological tests, personality questionnaires, electronic surveillance and social research presented

dangers that fell into these categories:

The control of an individual's future by the existence of a "government dossier bank" that would contain test and questionnaire results, possibly erroneous personal references and out of date health, police and welfare records.

The emotional damage that might be done by forcing an individual to reveal or to learn things about himself that he would rather keep hidden.

The distortion of values among a whole generation of scientists who pride themselves on using deceit in experiments with human beings who are considered merely experimental objects.

The creation of a central agency that would pool all the public records on each citizen

—Dr. Brim dubbed it the "government dossier bank"—may be only two years away, he said. A Government commission recently recommended the formation of a data pool, which would be operated either by a separate agency or the Bureau of the Census.

"There is no doubt that we can run the society better with

this information," Dr. Brim said, "but doing this must be in conflict with all our fears of having privacy invaded."

Alan F. Westin, a professor of law at Columbia University, predicted even greater growth for "surveillance technology." In addition to wiretapping and closed-circuit television, he mentioned personality testing, "truth serums," brain wave analysis, voice recording and the increasing exchange of information between public agencies.

The existence of a "dossier bank" could unfairly affect a person's life chances, several speakers noted, both because an individual changes throughout his life and because the original material might be faulty.

A professor of law in the audience at one session recalls the hundreds of detailed questionnaires he had been asked to fill out on former students.

"My verdict on the emotional adjustment of a student I saw only in class may affect him for the rest of his life," he said. "It's damned unfair."

Dr. Brim noted a contradic-

tion in the attitudes of research scientists.

"The very same psychologists who say we should withhold testing information from a client for fear of shaming him are the same ones who are engaged in the most deceitful research and are not studying the consequences," he said.

Dr. Brim and Dr. Westin agreed that the best method of controlling surveillance and testing would be not to ban it entirely, but to decide carefully on the basis of each case. A rule of thumb, Dr. Brim said, would be whether the invasion of privacy is unreasonable on the part of the invader or intolerable for the subject.

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