SUCCESES AND FAILURES OF EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

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It is customary to claim for psychology that, while it has a long history as a branch of philosophy, it can be excused for a considerable degree of immaturity because of its youth as a branch of experimental science. As the decades go by this excuse becomes less and less convincing. There are several very active and successful sciences, as physical chemistry and bacteriology, which are really younger than experimental psychology. If these sciences have made more rapid progress than psychology, the reason may be that they are working with phenomena that lie further from everyday experience, so that their discoveries are more striking. Other reasons can be suggested.

Possibly psychology has undertaken a harder job, a more complicated problem to unravel—or possibly psychologists have not been making good use of their time. At any rate psychology should be able by now to point to substantial achievements won by use of experimental methods, along with probably a number of failures which may be quite instructive in themselves. It would be too much to attempt here and now to answer the question, how much has been achieved by experimental psychology in the half century or more of its existence. We can only touch a few high (and low) spots in the hope of conveying some idea of the progress of psychology as it appears to those who are actively interested in pushing it forward.

1 Annual Sigma Xi address, Indiana University, March 13, 1941.