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Adult Adjustment of Foster Children  
of Alcoholic and Psychotic Parentage  
and the Influence of the Foster Home

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with a chapter on sibling adjustment  
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## Introduction

**T**HE PROBLEM of the relative influence of heredity and environment on the course and outcome of human lives is, in its implications not only for all of our social institutions but also for our beliefs, one of the most fundamental that confronts us. Because of its importance, it is not surprising that many of the earlier studies, especially those which purported to give dogmatic and simple answers, were accepted at face value in spite of their naïveté. But studies in this field have become less naïve as the techniques of the biological and social sciences have become more exact, and it is now abundantly clear that there is no simple or single answer.

In the case of certain physical characteristics, such as eye color, the hereditary mechanisms are fairly well understood. But where traits of character or personality are in question the situation is immediately complicated by the undoubted fact that environment also affects the final result. Thus there arises the difficult problem of separating either quantitatively or qualitatively the relative influence of heredity and of environment. Since in our culture the usual situation is that a child is brought up by his own parents, various techniques of statistical analysis have been applied in an effort to assess the relative effects of the two, but these have not proved very satisfactory. Examination of the varying degrees of resemblance in certain characteristics between identical twins, fraternal twins and siblings has been a fruitful attack upon the problem, but has left many questions unanswered.

A further obvious approach has been to study children brought up by others than their own parents, and a number of such studies have been reported. These, however, have usually been limited to study of the inheritance of particular abilities, especially general intelligence.

But what society is most concerned with is the general adjustment of its members to the group, and intelligence is only one factor in this. It is rather more important to know whether children of unadjusted parents need also be unadjusted, either in the ways in which their parents manifested their difficulties or in other ways. Such major maladjustments as alcoholism,\* criminality, psychosis and sex deviance are matters of prime importance, and establishment of the hereditary or non-

\*The word "alcoholism" will be used in the present work to mean inebriety (excessive drinking) or alcohol addiction (compulsive drinking), and not in the sense of a disease due to alcohol.