THE RELATIONSHIP OF SELF-CONCEPT AND HUMOR PERCEPTION WITH SOCIAL PERCEPTION IN LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There has been increasing interest, in recent years, in the social perception of children who are diagnosed as having specific learning disabilities. Research has shown that skill in interpersonal perception is relevant to the counseling relationship. It has been well substantiated that it is important for the counselor to understand or correctly perceive the client (Benjamin, 1981; Goldstein, 1980; Pietrofesa, Leonard, & Van Hoose, 1978). In his research on emotion Izard (1971) discussed client-therapist interaction and the importance of accurate perception in this communication process. Taking his concept further, Izard (1971) looked at the significance of the way in which clients understand communication and social cues. Without adequate ability to process social interaction between self and the therapist, the therapeutic effect is impeded (Izard, 1971). Since learning disabled clients may have difficulties perceiving interpersonal communication accurately, therapists must be aware that such potential misperception could affect communication with learning disabled clients in the therapeutic process (Pearl & Cosden, 1982).

The client's perception of other persons is of interest to counselors beyond its impact on the therapeutic process. The client's interaction with persons in his or her living environment is of primary

concern when looking at presenting problems and therapeutic issues (Minuchin, 1974; Satir, 1967; Selman, 1977). The misperception of social cues leads to feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, timidity, and apprehension. This misperception also causes the other person to respond to the person who is misperceiving as someone who is different. Children who make social misperceptions often suffer social rejection (Fremont, Wallbrown, & Nelson, 1978). The ability to put patterns of meaning on experiences, particularly the meaning of the behavior of other persons, is necessary to personality functioning (Livesley & Bromley, 1973).

Further importance has been given to adequate skill in perceiving other persons when psychological diagnoses are considered. Inappropriate social behavior has been a major factor in the diagnosis of emotional disturbance. Social misperception can be mistaken for emotional disturbance (Fremont et al., 1978). This misdiagnosis can result in harmful labeling and inappropriate treatment.

It has long been known that individuals having specific learning disabilities exhibit a concomitant social deficit (Bruck & Hebert, 1982; Maheady & Maitland, 1982; Soenksen, Flagg, & Schmits, 1981). Although there is general agreement among professionals in the field of specific learning disabilities that this deficit of social perception exists, distinct manifestations are not well defined (Bruck & Hebert, 1982; Soenksen et al., 1981). Some research has shown that learning disabled individuals are less able than nonlearning disabled individuals to perceive human emotion and facial expression. They are also less able to interpret social situations and predict consequences (Maheady &

Maitland, 1982). Problems in peer interaction (Bruck & Herbert, 1982) and social communication (Soenksen et al., 1981) are other manifest issues of this population. These are nonacademic problems of a social, interpersonal and intrapersonal nature which are exacerbated in the learning disabled individual. These concerns, within the context of this population, have been virtually ignored by nonacademic counselors. The importance of research into the nonacademic issues and problems of the learning disabled population has often been pointed out (Bruck & Hebert, 1982; Maheady & Maitland, 1982; Smith, 1979; Soenksen et al., 1981), but seldom addressed beyond acknowledging the need to look at such problems. This study will attempt to address the need that exists within the counseling profession to specifically consider the learning disabled population.

Self-concept, a central personality factor, is often a problem area for the learning disabled person. Members of this population tend to be failure oriented (Baren, Liebl, & Smith, 1978) and lonely (Osmon & Blinder, 1982). They find it difficult to develop friendships (Osmon & Blinder, 1982) and are not able to accurately assess their own social status (Bruck & Hebert, 1982; Soenksen et al., 1981).

It is logical to assume that if a deficit exists in the social area of the personality, it would influence the self-concept. Perception of other persons and the use of social cues in interpersonal interaction has been shown to have an impact on self-concept (Bryan, 1977; Shelton, 1977; Soenksen et al., 1981). When an individual receives criticism and correction, because of making mistakes in receiving or interpreting cues about other persons in the environment it is hard to feel good

about himself or herself (Smith, 1979). Power and status which a person accrues within relationships are related to feelings of confidence, assertion and the ability to lead (Kemper, 1978). If an individual does not have a strong self-concept, he or she will likely be less effective in relationships.

Research has shown that the ability to understand and appreciate humor is another factor in social perception (McGhee, 1979; Whitt & Prentice, 1977; Zigler, Levine, & Gould, 1966a). Although it is informally acknowledged among persons familiar with learning disabilities that persons having specific learning disabilities often fail to perceive humor (Fremont et al., 1978; Pickering & Pickering, 1983), this contention has not been well researched. Previous research supports the contention that the learning disabled person has difficulties in social perception. It may be argued that the failure of learning disabled persons to perceive humor is related to their deficits in social perception.

In summary, professionals in the field of specific learning disabilities have contended a social deficit exists in this population (Bruck & Hebert, 1982; Maheady & Maitland, 1982; Soenksen et al., 1981). Other researchers have shown that the perception of and response to humor is an aspect of social interaction (McGhee, 1979; Whitt & Prentice, 1977; Zigler et al., 1966a). It has further been shown through research, that social perception is related to self-concept. In addition to the social deficit, it has been shown that children with specific learning disabilities have low self-concepts (Baren et al., 1978; Osmon & Blinder, 1982). It has been further theorized that this

population has a deficit in perceiving and/or understanding humor.

Statement of the Problem

This study was designed to investigate the social perception of children having specific learning disabilities (LD). The relationships among social perception, self-concept and the ability to perceive humor were investigated. Since humor depends, at least in part, on social perception (Chapman, 1976; McGhee & Chapman, 1980) and a common construct of the self-concept is also social perception (Bruck & Hebert, 1982; Soenksen et al., 1981), it was postulated that social perception is related to self-concept and perception of humor.

The specific question investigated in this study was whether self-concept and perception of humor of learning disabled children correlate with their social perception. The specific questions that were addressed herein were: Is social perception related to self-concept and perception of humor; and is it possible to predict the probability of subjects being diagnosed as having specific learning disabilities by their social perception, self-concept and perception of humor.

Significance of the Study

It was postulated that this study would contribute to the theoretical and research base of information on LD children. Personal characteristics such as self-concept and perception of humor are thought to contribute to the social perception of any child. If deficits in these characteristics are found to be a problem within the LD population, ways to remediate the deficits may be pursued by future research. To date there is a significant gap in the research on social perception of LD children. Given the importance of social perception in functioning

on the LD child's social and academic adjustment (Bryan, 1977; Bryan & Pflaum, 1978), this research represents an effort to partially fill this gap in our knowledge of LD children. Since the social perception of LD children could potentially affect their functioning in the client role, the findings of this study could be considered relevant to counselors who work with LD children.

Definition of Terms

Social Perception. Social perception is the way in which a person understands other people. It includes sensitivity to ideas, feelings and concepts people use which leads them to attach meaning to their behavior (Livesley & Bromley, 1973). For purposes of this study, social perception was operationally defined as the score received on the Inter-Person Perception Test (IPPT) (Heussenstamm & Hoepfner, 1969). High scores on the IPPT indicate the individual has a high level of social perception while low scores indicate relatively less effective ability to correctly perceive social cues.

Self-Concept. Self-concept is a complex and dynamic belief system about self that the individual holds to be true (Smith, Dokecki, & Davis, 1977). In this study self-concept was operationally defined as the total score received on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1984). High scores on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale indicate a positive self-concept and lower scores indicate a poorer self-concept.

Perception of Humor Self-Rated. Humor is thought to be a social phenomena which most often occurs when people are together. It is further believed that humor is a constructive binding force in human

interaction (Zigler, Levine, & Gould, 1966b). Perception of humor self-rated is operationally defined as the score obtained from the subject's rating of funniness of cartoons in the humor instrument which was developed by Pickering and Pickering (1983).

Perception of Humor Observer Rated. Perception of humor observer rated is the score obtained through the observer's rating of the subject's response to the humor instrument which was developed by Pickering and Pickering (1983).

Learning Disabled (LD). Learning disabled individuals are persons who exhibit deficits in academic performance and social interaction which are not due to intelligence level, physical handicaps or cultural factors (Osmon & Blinder, 1982; Soenksen et al., 1981). In this study the term LD refers to those subjects who have been identified by the public school system as having specific learning disabilities, according to the eligibility criteria set forth by the state department of education.

NonLearning Disabled (NONLD). The term NONLD refers to subjects in this study who have never been identified by the public school system as having specific learning disabilities or any other handicapping condition.

Group Membership. Group membership refers to whether a given subject was identified LD (as described above) or identified NONLD (as described above).

Research Hyphotheses

In order to carry out this study the following hypotheses were tested using an alpha level of .05.

1. There is a significant relationship between social perception and a linear combination of self-concept, group membership, and two measures of perception of humor (self-rated and observer rated) taken from form X of the humor instrument.

2. There is a significant relationship between social perception and a linear combination of self-concept, group membership, and two measures of perception of humor (self-rated and observer rated) taken from form Y of the humor instrument.

3. A child's performance on the variables of social perception, self-concept, perception of self-rated humor on instrument X and perception of humor observer rated on instrument X will predict whether the child belongs to the population designated LD or the population designated NONLD.

4. A child's performance on the variables of social perception, self-concept, perception of self-rated humor on instrument Y and perception of humor observer rated on instrument Y will predict whether the child belongs to the population designated LD or the population designated NONLD.

Assumptions

It was assumed for the purpose of this study that those students who were identified by the school as being learning disabled actually were learning disabled. This assumption was based on the fact that the school system used the federal guidelines for the selection of children with specific learning disabilities as the basis for their identification of such students for instructional purposes.

The norms for the IPPT were not developed using either

sixth-graders or LD children. It was assumed that the IPPT measured the social perception of sixth-graders and LD children.

The humor instrument was normed on sixth-grade children and on LD children, however, the construct of perception of humor is elusive and fluid. It was assumed that the humor instrument (Pickering & Pickering, 1983) measured the perception of humor.

A further assumption which was made in this study was that there was a consistency in the characteristics of subjects within group membership i.e., that LD subjects would perceive social situations and humor in a similar way and had comparable self-concepts. A concurrent assumption was that NONLD subjects also perceived social situations and humor in a similar manner and had self-concepts which were similar to each other.

Limitations

Present knowledge and the ability of experts in the field of learning disabilities often cannot accurately identify the LD population. The study of learning disabilities is a relatively new field and there is much controversy surrounding the issue of which personal characteristics are important in this identification process. Controversy also surrounds how those characteristics are thought to be manifested within an individual. Due to the level of disagreement on these factors this study was confined to one school district in order to maintain consistency in the LD population. Because of this limit the data gathered can only be interpreted within the confines of that geographic location. Even though there were both urban and rural schools within the sample used there were no large cities from which to

draw subjects. Interpretation of the findings must also be limited to the northeastern region of the United States because cultural differences influence social interactions and other factors in this study.

Since the population for this study was limited to one school district the number of LD students from which subjects could be drawn was small. This affected the sample size and ultimately this factor severely limited the number of subjects in the study. This small sample size influenced the power of the statistical analysis in such a way that it increased the likelihood of finding no difference, even if such a difference should exist.

The measurement of perception of humor was found to be an elusive factor in this study. Even though prior research has studied humor within various populations and from perspectives such as comprehension, social utility, frequency of use and interaction process there are no standardized instruments available to measure it. The instrument that was used in this study was developed by other researchers and used to study LD and NONLD subjects response to humor. However, it was found to have low reliability and thus limited the probability of finding a difference in the population should such a difference actually exist.

The fact that the cartoons used in the instrument had been published in children's books and periodicals was the basis for concluding that they were indeed humorous. The decision to publish a cartoon is an arbitrary one and does not guarantee that it is funny. Although the selection of the final ten cartoons in construction of the instrument was from a larger pool and depended on agreement among

adult raters, there was still no reliable method used to guarantee that the cartoons did indeed elicit humor.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In reviewing the literature related to learning disabilities it appears that a major problem which is encountered by the population is difficulty in social interaction. This deficit of functioning has been related to impaired ability to perceive interpersonal cues, which is a deficiency in social perception. One result of a social deficit is the development of feelings of inadequacy in the self. Repeated incidents of misperception and the consequential feelings of inadequacy lead to a lowered self-concept.

Research on the perception of humor shows that it is related to social perception, which in turn is related to the self-concept. The following review will present findings about deficits of social perception and low self-concepts in persons having specific learning disabilities. Findings relating social perception to self-concept and humor to social perception are reported. This is followed by a review of the need to investigate the social perception of persons diagnosed as having specific learning disabilities.

Social Perception

There is an ongoing and changing pattern of social interaction between people. A study of the fundamental aspects of social relations by Kemper (1978) investigated the power and status which is attributed

to individuals within a given relationship. Among the factors he found to be relevant to this power and status were assertiveness and confidence. In this model the power can be given freely to another or it can be gained in a coercive way. An important implication of this power-status model is that social relations can be seen in terms of these factors. Signals are sent by facial expressions and gestures, and a code exists by which individuals translate this behavior. According to Kemper (1978) power and status are inferred through the behavior which is aimed at the other person getting the point of the message which is being sent.

The way in which a person understands the behavior patterns of others is central to the functioning of personality. Livesley and Bromley (1973) have studied how people understand other people. They were concerned with the way in which human beings perceived the world in terms of their own behavior and the behavior of others. To study "person perception" Livelsey and Bromley (1973) used a mixed design. The between-subjects variables were age, gender and intelligence and the within-subjects variables were age, gender and like/dislike of a stimulus person. The study used subjects between the ages of 7 and 15 years. Results of this study indicated that similarity to self has an effect on the perception of others. It was further stated that the way in which a child perceives himself or herself affects the perception and comprehension of others. In considering the consequences of interpersonal perception Livesley and Bromley (1973) found that the sensitivity to ideas, feelings and concepts people use leads one to attach meaning to their behavior. The way in which children perceive

social cues affects their impressions of others. These impressions impact not only on the immediate social interactions, but also influence long term strategies of adjustment and interpersonal relating.

In a study of affective sensitivity the ability to detect and conceptualize the feelings of others was found to be important (Carlozzi, Gaa, & Liberman, 1983). It was argued that recognition and identification of another person's affective state and being able to communicate that understanding has an impact on interpersonal effectiveness.

Sequences of behavior are used in a rule-governed framework (Hogan, 1975). Those persons judged to be more perceptive of others were found to be socially aware of a wide range of interpersonal cues sent by those others and aware of their own part in the interaction. A Q-sort was used by Hogan (1975) to assess these characteristics of the empathic person. A further finding of this study was that socially perceptive persons are aware of the rules which govern sequences of behavior, but they are not bound by stereotypes or overly concerned with convention.

Some studies of social perception have been concerned with the developmental process involved. Social perception in children develops in stages. Selman (1977) shows how the stages of social perspective-taking are related to interpersonal functioning and an ability to reciprocate the taking of another's viewpoint. In this descriptive study which looks at the perspective-taking ability of children, it was concluded that children who are not interpreting social stimuli in the same way that their peers do have difficulty relating to those peers.

A social comprehension index was developed by Feshbach and Roe (1968) to study empathy in 6 and 7 year old children. This study looked at social comprehension through the use of slide sequences which portrayed children in affective situations. The subjects were questioned about the slides to assess their understanding of the feeling depicted. Feshbach and Roe (1968) found that the similarity of the stimulus person to the subject, affected the perception of the subject. They theorized that similarity among children fosters group identity and self-image.

In work by Cooney (1977), intervention of social-cognitive development of children was explored. This work considered the social feedback system and the problems of children who are unaware of how their actions affect others. When feedback is inconsistent children have a difficult time trying to understand it. The intervention Cooney (1977) used with second and third grade students was to create situations to give feedback which allowed for indecision, so that the reasoning ability in response to the situation increased.

Social Perception and Self-Concept

Self-concept is a complex and dynamic belief system about self that the individual holds to be true (Smith et al., 1977). This study by Smith et al. (1977) examined mainstreamed children and several reference groups, to see which of the several reference groups that were available to them were actually used. The choice of reference group was then investigated to understand its impact on self-concept. "Self-appraisal" depends on the frame of social comparison used and the availability of an appropriate reference group which is thought to

impact on the self-concept. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was used to measure the self-concept of the subjects. Smith et al. (1977) found that the mainstreamed children's self-concept was higher than the self-concepts of children who remained in the LD classroom full time.

Smith (1979) explores the effects of social perception on status in learning disabled children. Her theoretical work discusses social problems of this population and their impact on self-concept. She feels that the socially misperceptive child lacks power and is often corrected and criticized. Instead of using this correction as feedback to adjust the social perceptions, learning disabled children feel "picked on." This leads them to the conclusion that they have something "wrong" with themselves.

The ability to accurately perceive social interaction is related to noticing cues sent by another individual and interpreting this social stimuli. Fremont et al. (1978) have considered the plight of children who have trouble noticing cues and interpreting them. The consequences of this poor social perception is the development of a sense of worthlessness, feelings of inadequacy and apprehension related to social interaction. It is recommended by Fremont et al. (1978) that counselors who have contact with children who misperceive social stimuli need to consider its effect on the self-concept. This child should be helped to work through the negative feelings of rejection, despair, hurt, anger and helplessness which are a result of the interpersonal failures.

The need for speakers to adapt communication style to perceived or actual needs of listeners was analyzed by Soenksen et al. (1981). This

study investigated the social interaction variable of language in 11 year old learning disabled children. Conversations were audio-recorded and analyzed according to sociolinguistic rules. The learning disabled children were found to be less able to modify their own language production to accomodate the situation and listener than the non learning disabled children. This investigation into the way learning disabled students communicate, concluded that they were less accurate than "normal" children in their assessment of their own social status and had lower self-concepts.

Constant failure and frustration were found by Abrams (1980) to lead to feelings of inferiority which affected interpersonal relationships. Strong feelings of defectiveness and inadequacy depletes the "self-system" which affects perception of others. This study of the emotional aspects of learning disorders concluded that ego development was the underlying factor in the emotional make-up of learning disabled children.

A sociometric scale developed for their study, was used by Bryan and Bryan (1978) to investigate the social status of learning disabled children. It was administered to fourth and fifth grade students. Through the observation of social interaction patterns it was shown that children with learning disabilities were more frequently rejected by their peers. Verbal communication to and from learning disabled children differed quantitatively and qualitatively from communication to and from nonhandicapped children. As a result of these two sources of data Bryan and Bryan (1978) concluded that it is through interaction with others that the self-concept is formed and continuous social

failures lead to exclusion of the person with inadequate social skills. Thus learning disabled children often experience unsatisfying, stressful interpersonal relationships.

Another study by Bryan (1977) employed an audio-video technique to study comprehension of nonverbal communication in third graders. The inference drawn from this study was that sensitivity to nonverbal cues plays an important role in the accruing of social status. The improper use or interpretation of such cues has a negative effect upon the interaction which leads to an impact on self-concept.

Social Perception and Humor

Philosophers have speculated about humor and its place in human interaction for many centuries. It has only been recently however, that it has become the topic of serious systematic investigation (McGhee, 1971a).

The learning disabled child may miss the point of jokes, take the meaning too literally or fail to comprehend nuances in complex situations (Fremont et al., 1978). These are all perceptual functions which are necessary to understanding humor. Although Fremont et al. (1978) acknowledge these deficits, and several limited studies have looked at learning disabled children's perception of humor (Pickering, & Pickering, 1983; McMahon-Klosterman, 1984) it is not well researched. A review of the literature on humor research indicated however, that humor and social perception are related.

Fine (1983) approached the topic of humor from a sociological perspective. He looked at various roles such as the fool, the clown and the comedian in the context of social interaction patterns. His

work found that humor is a socially situated interpersonal behavior. Fine (1983) found that humor is responsive to situational context and normative properties as well as to more general circumstances.

Much of what has been written on the effect of humor on social interaction and of social interaction on humor has been addressed in the discussion sections of published research and as part of hypotheses for further study. The researchers have postulated that humor is a constructive, binding and enhancing force in human interaction (Zigler, et al., 1966b). It is generally thought that humor is primarily a social phenomena, and it has been shown that most humor and laughter occurs when people are together (McGhee, 1971b).

In one study done in the 1930's, of a total of 223 observed situations of laughter, only 14 of them occured when the person was alone (Chapman, 1983). Humor promotes intimacy and is related to distances between people. It has been theorized that humor may be thus related because it is a socially acceptable way to deal with arrousal (Chapman, 1976). A number of studies of humor have shown a strong link to communication (Chapman, Smith, & Foot, 1980) and group cohesion (Fine, 1983). Humor, a sometimes elusive element, is related to self-concept. Children with good self-concepts interact with others more frequently in ways that involve humor than those who have poor self-concepts (McGhee, 1979).

Social Perception and Learning Disabilities

The central focus of this study is the social perception of learning disabled children. Fremont et al. (1978) have studied "social misperception" and see it as possibly the most debilitating learning

problem of all. They show that it is important for counselors to be aware of this misperception. If problems encountered by learning disabled children are not correctly diagnosed it is possible for children, who merely have a perceptual problem, to be labeled as emotionally disturbed. Their paper considers the ability to immediately identify and recognize meaning in the behavior of others. The ability to give significance to this behavior is important and learning disabled children seem to be weak in these skills. Misperception leads to heightened frustration and lowered self-concepts. These children may tell an off-color joke in the wrong company and miss the point of verbal jokes completely. The lack of perceiving cues is combined with the lack of insight which is necessary to alter behavior. Fremont et al. (1978) suggest several remediation processes. The counselor must help the child understand what his or her own behavior is and investigate how it affects his or her relations with others. Encouragement and coaching in more appropriate behavior and dealing with feelings are also important.

Soap opera vignettes were used to assess interpersonal interactions in learning disabled sixth, seventh and eighth grade students (Pearl & Cosden, 1982). This study found that the learning disabled students were consistently less accurate than nondisabled peers in understanding the social interactions depicted. This study raised the question of whether the social problems encountered by the learning disabled were related to an inability to discriminate informative cues. If cues were perceived, the problem may have been in making inferences from those cues. The third possibility hypothesized was that the children may

have picked up the cues and made inferences from them but the inferences were incorrect. The Test of Social Inference was used to compare social-perceptual abilities in the learning disabled population and the nonlearning disabled population. Children age 7 through 11 years were tested in a matched subjects design. Results showed that learning disabled children were consistently less socially perceptive on this measure.

Role taking skills were assessed in another study which investigated learning disabled students' peer-interaction patterns (Bruck & Hebert, 1982). Short stories and props were used as stimuli and subjects were asked to predict another person's feelings. The subjects were learning disabled and non learning disabled students between the ages of 7 and 10 years. It was found that all subjects understood the tasks involved but the learning disabled group performed more poorly. The results were assessed for gender and hyperactivity and these variables did not show a significance.

Bryan and Pflaum (1978) studied the interpersonal communication skills of learning disabled fourth and fifth grade students. They were placed in interaction situations with same age peers and with kindergarten children. Their interactions were videotaped. The tapes were later analyzed according to linguistic structure and cognitive analysis of task. A linguistic difference was found between the learning disabled and non learning disabled subjects. It was conclucted that the study supports the idea that learning disability is a disorder in understanding or using language.

Summary

Social perception has been shown to be a critical element of interpersonal relating. It influences power and status in relationships and affects how an individual gives meaning to the behavior of others. Social perception is central to personality functioning and affects the way individuals feel about themselves.

Research shows that children having specific learning disabilities, have a low self-concept and a deficit in social perception. LD children exhibit social misperception which elicits feedback from others resulting in the self-appraisal that something is "wrong" with themselves. The self-concept is formed through interaction with others and social failures lead to exclusion of the LD child which leads to a lower self-concept.

Another aspect of social perception is the perception of humor. Humor is an interpersonal behavior which affects the quality of social interactions. Children with good self-concepts use more humor in their interaction with others than do children with poor self-concepts. Based upon this review an investigation of the relationship of social perception to self-concept and the perception of humor in LD children seemed warranted.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter includes a presentation and description of the procedures and methods used in this study. Descriptions of the instruments are given and their construction is explained. The method of selecting subjects is specified and methods of data collection and analysis are detailed.

Subject Selection

The sample for this study was drawn from a pool of volunteers made up of sixth-grade school students, in a northeastern United States public school system, in the spring of 1985. Sixth-graders were chosen as subjects for this study because of their perceptions of humor are more stable than at earlier grade levels (McGhee, 1979) and much of the research on students diagnosed as having specific learning disabilities is on the pre high school age group (Kavale & Nye, 1981). The school district which was chosen contained schools in both urban and rural areas and children from high, moderate and low socioeconomic levels.

There are many problems and a long history of conflict by professionals about defining those individuals who have specific learning disabilities (Kavale & Nye, 1981). It was determined that sampling from a population which was previously identified, for instructional purposes, as having specific learning disabilities would contain less bias than

testing and selection solely for purposes of this study. Every child who was a sixth-grade student and identified by the school as having specific learning disabilities (LD) was asked to participate in the study. This was done through a letter of explanation and a form giving permission to participate in the study (see Appendix A) which were sent to the parent or guardian of each child by the school principal. A letter from the school principal was sent to the parents or guardians to authenticate the study. There were eight separate schools that participated in the study. All of the LD children who were given permission to participate in the study were selected for the LD sample and were designated the LD Group. There were 38 subjects in this group, 33 males and 5 females.

To ensure anonymity for the subjects, the principal of each of the schools matched the child in the LD Group with a classmate. The groups were matched on the variables of intelligence quotient (IQ), socioeconomic level, age, race and gender. Matching on these variables is consistent with previous research on social perception (Bryan 1977; Bryan & Bryan, 1978; Fremont et al., 1978), self-concept (Mayer, 1965) and humor (Zigler et al., 1966a). The Cognitive Abilities Test was administered to all sixth-grade students in the school district in the spring of 1985. Results of that testing were used to obtain IQ scores for the subjects in this study. These scores were matched within eight points. Socioeconomic level was determined through the following procedure: Those children who qualified for the school lunch subsidy program were classified as low socioeconomic level; those children whose family income was at least $50,000 annually were

designated as belonging to the high socioeconomic level; the remaining children were classified as belonging to the middle socioeconomic level. The children were matched on age within one month and the ages ranged from 11 years, 5 months to 13 years, 3 months. Permission was obtained for these matched students to participate in the study using the same letters and permission forms that were used with the LD sample. The matched students were the non learning disabled sample (NONLD) and were designated as the NONLD Group. There were a total of 76 subjects in the study. The LD Group contained 38 subjects and the NONLD Group contained 38 subjects. Each group contained 5 females and 33 males.

Dependent Variables

In accord with the major concern of this study the dependent variable of social perception was chosen. This variable was defined as the score received on the Inter-Person Perception Test (IPPT) (Heussenstamm & Hoepfner, 1969).

Independent Variables

For the purposes of this study four independent variables were chosen. The variable of self-concept was operationally defined as the total score received on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1984). The score received on a humor instrument developed by Pickering & Pickering (1983) and based on the Children's Mirth Response Test (CMRT) (Zigler et al., 1966a) was used as the operational definition of humor perception. This humor instrument yields two scores. One is obtained by a self-rating and the second is obtained by an observer rating. The score on the self-rating on the

humor instrument was the second independent variable. The third independent variable was the score of the observer rating on the humor instrument. Group membership (LD or NONLD) was the fourth independent variable.

Instrumentation

Inter-Person Perception Test

The Inter-Person Perception Test (IPPT) form AC, was designed by Heussenstamm & Hoepfner (1969) to assess interpersonal perception. It is a measure of judging emotions from facial expressions (Loevinger, 1978). The instrument consists of 40 items which were taken from an original item pool of 224 items in the pilot test. Each item consists of five pictures. The first picture is of a child expressing some feeling or thought and the remaining four are of a similar child who is expressing different thoughts or emotions in each frame. The two children in each item are matched on gender and racial-ethnic characteristics. To complete an item in the test the thought or emotion displayed in the first frame of the item is matched by selecting one of the remaining four frames which most closely displays the same thought or emotion. Alternatives for each item were distributed to yield a "chance-like" distribution of correct choices. As stimulus for the test between 60 and 200 photographs were taken of each subject with a rapid-action still camera. The children photographed were selected to control for age, race and gender.

The IPPT is based on O'Sullivan's test called FACES (Loevinger, 1978), which was based on Thorndike's hypothesis of "social intelligence." It used photographs from 1935 which are now inappropriate because they

are dated. Further, O'Sullivan's test photographs did not use children or control for minority groups (Heussenstamm & Hoepfner, 1969).

Examinees are given a test booklet containing the stimulus items and a separate answer sheet on which to make their selections. The test is timed at 15 minutes and does not require the examinee to do any reading. Scoring is done manually through the use of a stencil. The total number of correct answers results in a raw score which is then converted to centile norms.

Norms. Normative data was collected on the IPPT children's form based on 1,056 college students. Norms based on children are not available at the present time. The test authors acknowledge this weakness and state that they hope to collect this data as permitted by circumstances.

Reliability. The authors theorize that through the selection of subjects who serve as stimulus for the test there are eight subtests of five items each. The subtests consist of matching four racial-ethnic groups, Caucasian-American, Black-American, Mexican-American and Oriental-American, with the male and female genders. Item selection within each group of photographs were dependent on difficulty level which ranged from .4 to .7 difficulty. Each of the subtests has approximately equal means, standard deviations and a 5-item internal-consistency reliability (alpha coefficient) of .35.

A test-retest reliability study of the IPPT was done by the researcher for the purpose of obtaining further information about the reliability of this instrument. Ten non handicapped classmates of the subjects in this study were randomly selected as subjects in the reliability study. Permission to participate in the study was obtained

from their parents and the subjects were given the IPPT test under the same conditions as were used in the larger study. Ten days later those subjects were given the IPPT again. A Spearman rho was used to measure the correlation of this IPPT test-retest procedure. The obtained coefficient was .88.

Validity. Test construction validity has been concerned with the IPPT's relationship to race-ethnicity, gender, age and, on the adult form, area of academic study. In the normative group of 1,056 college students there was no systematic mean difference for like-race or like-gender. It was concluded that subjects were not more likely to be accurate in their selection of a correct alternative due to that item picturing a stimulus individual of the same gender or racial-ethnic background as the examinee.

Theory in the areas of counseling and clinical psychology (Collins, 1977; Feshbach, 1975; Hogan, 1975; Izard, 1971; Livesley & Bromley, 1973; Selman, 1977; Shantz, 1975), developmental psychology (Collins, 1977; Feshbach & Roe, 1968; Selman, 1971; Shantz, 1975), and education (Gerber & Zinkgraf, 1982; Maheady & Maitland, 1982; Shelton, 1977) indicates a need to examine the variables related to social perception. Studies have been done in the fields of counseling and clinical psychology (Carlozzi et al., 1983; Feshbach, 1975; Izard, 1971), developmental psychology (Chandler, 1973; Feshbach & Feshbach, 1969; Selman, 1971) and education (Enright & Lapsley, 1980; Maheady & Maitland, 1982; Pearl & Cosden, 1982) which support this premise. The fact that well normed and validated instruments to measure social perception are not currently available does not invalidate the need for research

in the area of children's social perception (Collins, 1977; Hogan, 1975; Iannotti, 1975; Shantz, 1975). It is appropriate to use the IPPT to measure social perception because it is well constructed (Loevinger, 1978) and consistent with the theory of social perception as it has been presented in current research (Bruno, 1981; Enright & Lapsley, 1980; Feshbach, 1975; Iannotti, 1975).

Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was designed by Piers (Piers & Harris, 1984) to measure children's self-concept. It was used in this study to measure subjects' self-concepts and was administered as standardized. The instrument consists of 80 items which are written as simple declarative statements with a required reading level of third grade. Each item may be answered as either yes, if the item is true for the respondent, or no, if the item is false for the respondent. Items were selected from an original pool of 164 statements which reflect concerns that children have about themselves. Half of the items had negative content to reduce acquiescence. Items are scored in the direction of high (adequate) self-concept using a key.

Norms. Normative data was collected on four third-grade classes and four tenth-grade classes in a large school system. The sample was chosen from different schools to get a representative cross section of socioeconomic levels. At the tenth-grade level slow, average and bright classes were used. Scoring of the normative sample showed no significant sex differences.

Validity. Validity was established for the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale through correlation with other scales using the

Pearson r. Mayer (1965) reported that there was a .68 correlation with Lipsitt Children's Self-Concept Scale. A negative correlation with two scales, the Health Problems measure and Big Problems on SRA Junior Inventory, were found by S.H. Cox (cited in Heussenstamm & Hoepfner, 1969). Results showed a Pearson r of -.48 and -.64 respectively. In another study correlations of .43 and .31 on the Social Effective Behavior measure were found while the Superego Strength had correlations of .40 and .42 (Cox, cited by Heussenstamm & Hoepfner, 1969). These studies all showed significance at or above an alpha level of .01.

Reliability. Internal consistency of the test was evaluated using the Kuder Richardson Formula 20. Coefficients obtained after grouping the subjects according to grade and gender ranged from .88 to .93. Split-half reliability was computed by dividing the scale into two equal halves and correlating the scores for each half using the Spearman-Brown formula which resulted in an overall reliability coefficient of .91. A test-retest coefficient was calculated using fourth and sixth-graders. The retest was administered after an interval of six months and yielded a consistency coefficient of .92. A reliability study of a group of learning disabled students, ages 6 to 12 years yielded an alpha coefficient of .89 for internal consistency reliability.

Humor Instrument

The humor instrument used in this study was designed by Pickering & Pickering (1983) to assess perception of humor. It was constructed using the same method as Shultz (1972) used in researching children's humor. Shultz's instrument is an adaptation of the Children's Mirth

Response Test (CMRT) which was developed by Zigler et al. (1966a).

The humor instrument developed by Pickering and Pickering (1983) was used in this study to measure the perception of humor of the LD subjects and the perception of humor of the NONLD subjects. This instrument consists of two forms X and Y. Form X and form Y each contain the same 10 cartoons. There are two versions of each cartoon and only a single version of each cartoon appears within a form. One version consists of the original cartoons as they appeared in published children's books and periodicals. The alternate version consists of 10 cartoons in which the element of humor or incongruity is removed. Pickering and Pickering (1983) state that a subject must be aware of an inconsistency with some previous knowledge and understanding for a humor response to occur. This is supported by research done by McGhee (1971a) and Shultz (1972). The instrument developed by Pickering and Pickering (1983), was constructed with cartoons containing incongruity and cartoons with the incongruity removed in order to control for a subject's tendency to answer in a particular direction, i.e. funny or not funny, for reasons other than the humor contained in the item. The original ten cartoons were analyzed by three adult raters for the critical incongruity. A consensus among all the raters was necessary for an element to be considered a critical incongruity. The incongruity in each cartoon was removed by an artist to produce the ten alternate cartoons (see Appendix B). The cartoons were randomly divided into two packets consisting of five cartoons from each version for a total of ten cartoons in each form, (see Appendix C). Each cartoon item measured 6 by 6 inches. Each item was mounted on light weight

cardboard which measured 11 inches across the width and 8½ inches high.

A five-point mirth response rating scale which Schultz (1972) adapted from Zigler et al. (1966a) was used by Pickering and Pickering (1983) to measure subjects' responses to the cartoons (see Appendix D):

1) Negative response (e.g., grimace)
2) No response (e.g., blank face)
3) Inhibited (e.g., half or slight smile)
4) Full smile
5) Laugh out loud

This rating scale was used by a rater to measure the subject's humor responses to the stimulus cartoons. This score which was obtained by the rater was the measure of the independent variable perception of humor observer rated. The same rating scale was used by the subject as a self-report of perceived funniness of each cartoon. This score was the measure of the independent variable perception of humor self-rated.

In addition to Pickering and Pickering (1983) and Shultz (1972) other researchers have used this scale which was originally developed by Zigler et al. (1966a) to look at humor from the perspective of cognitive process and comprehension of humor (Whitt & Prentice, 1977) and to investigate humor and its relation to conceptual tempo (Brodzinsky, 1975). The scales were also adapted for use in judging the appreciation of verbal jokes (Shultz & Horibe, 1974).

The Pickering and Pickering (1983) humor instrument was designed to investigate the perception of humor in learning disabled children. Pickering and Pickering (1983) conducted a pilot study using ten eight year old and ten twelve year old boys. This study involved a process

of ranking the funniness of cartoons chosen for the study. Those cartoons ranked as the funniest by the pilot group were the ones used in constructing the humor instrument. The procedure for calculating the reliability of the humor instrument developed by Pickering and Pickering (1983) was the same as that used for establishing reliability of the CMRT (Zigler et al., 1966a). Two experimenters administered the humor instrument to separate samples of eight children. While one of the experimenters tested a child the second sat about 15 feet away and independently scored the child on the five-point mirth response rating scale. The interrater reliability of the scoring on the facial mirth response was .95.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher did a reliability study of the Pickering and Pickering (1983) humor instrument, to further assess reliability of the instrument. The same ten subjects who were selected for the test-retest reliability study of the IPPT were used in a test-retest reliability study of the humor instrument. This test-retest of the self-report rating scale of the humor instrument had a correlation of .71 using Spearman rho. A further study correlated subjects' responses with the score of the rater. These two humor scores correlated .89 using Spearman rho.

Three assistants were selected to administer the Pickering and Pickering (1983) humor instrument in this study. To control for experimenter bias the assistants (raters) were naive to the study and to the LD population. There were two female raters and one male rater. Two of the raters were Ph.D. level psychology students who were currently serving as interns in a local community mental health agency.

The third rater was a psychology student at a local state university who was currently in the last year of her degree program. The raters were trained by the researcher to administer the instrument. The researcher explained the administration of the instrument to each rater individually. The researcher then administered the humor instrument to the rater, after which the rater administered the humor instrument to the researcher. The three raters then administered the humor instrument to each of the other raters. Following this period of training, the raters administered the humor instrument to 15 sixth-grade students. Each rater administered the instrument to five subjects. Each rater also independently scored five subjects on the rating scale while another rater was administering the humor instrument. Following the procedure developed by Zigler et al. (1966a) and used by Pickering and Pickering (1983), the independent raters sat approximately 15 feet away from the test administrator. By using this procedure each rater rated a subject ten times for a total of 30 scores for the 15 test administrations. A study of the interrater reliability was done to assess the variability from one rater to another. A correlation of .86 interrater reliability was calculated using the Spearman rho.

The humor instrument used in this study was administered in the same manner as Pickering and Pickering (1983) used which was the same way Zigler et al. (1966a) administered theirs. This procedure consists of the rater sitting across a table from the subject and the subject was instructed that he/she will be seeing several cartoons and asked to report how funny each cartoon is. The subject is then shown the rating scale (see Appendix D) which is explained in the following way. "Let's

pretend I showed you a cartoon you thought was so funny it would make you laugh out loud. Point to the face that would tell me you would feel like laughing." If the subject fails to point to number five the rater explains that five is the correct answer because the mouth is open like its laughing out loud. If the child indicates the correct choice he/she is reinforced by the rater saying "that's right." The child is then asked for a response to each of the other four faces on the rating scale in the following order number 1, number 2, number 3 and number 4. For response number 1 the subject is asked to point out "which face would show that you think the cartoon is awful." For response number 2 the subject is asked "what if you didn't think it was awful but it wasn't funny either." For response number 3 the subject is asked "show me which face you would use to tell me that the cartoon makes you smile just a little bit." For response number 4 the subject is asked "now tell me which face shows that you feel like smiling a whole lot but it is not a laughing out loud cartoon." If the subject fails to respond correctly to any item the rater explains the correct response. If the subject responds correctly to an item the response is reinforced. After the subject understood how to use the rating scale the rater showed him/her the cartoons from either form X or form Y, one cartoon at a time. Half of the subjects in each group were randomly assigned form X and half were randomly assigned form Y. Those cartoons which contained reading were read by the rater to the child while the cartoon was being presented. The rater rated and recorded the subject's mirth response for each cartoon on a rating sheet (see Appendix E). This was the observer rating. The subject was then asked to report how

funny the cartoon was. The subject's response was recorded on the same sheet and this was the self-rating. The next cartoon was then presented.

Scoring of the humor instrument was done in the following manner. The rating values given to the original five cartoons (in the form used for a given administration) were added together yielding a positive humor response. The rating values given to the five altered versions of the cartoons were added together to yield a mistaken humor response. The mistaken humor response was then subtracted from the positive humor response to yield a perception of humor score.

A further study was done to determine the internal consistency of the test items. This correlation of each item with the total score for the form (X and Y) and group membership, was used to identify items which correlated lowest with the total score. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to calculate the simple r between each item and the total. Those items which had the lowest correlations were eliminated. This item analysis resulted in the following:

1. Form X rated by the subject to yield the self-rated perception of humor score. Using items X-1, X-2, X-3, X-6, X-7, X-8, X-9 and X-10 this instrument of eight items had a reliability coefficient of .69.

2. Form X rated by the rater to yield the observer rated perception of humor score. Using items X-1, X-2, X-3, X-4, X-6, X-7, X-8, X-9, X-10 this instrument of nine items had a reliability coefficient of .65.

3. Form Y rated by the subject to yield the self-rated perception

of humor score. Using items Y-1, Y-2, Y-4 and Y-8 this instrument of four items had a reliability coefficient of .63.

4. Form Y rated by the rater to yield the observer rated perception of humor score. Using items Y-1, Y-3, Y-4, Y-5, Y-6, Y-7, Y-8, Y-9 and Y-10 this instrument of nine items had a reliability coefficient of .63.

Due to the varying number of items in each of the four ways that scores were obtained from the humor instrument mean scores were used as the obtained scores for the perception of humor instead of the total score as described earlier.

Procedures

Data was collected in the spring of 1985, during regular school hours, at the school the subjects attended. The researcher administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and the Inter-Person Perception Test, to the subjects, in a regular classroom setting, which was free from distractions. Standardized procedures outlined in the test manuals for administering these instruments were used. To avoid the possibility of a confound due to reading level the Piers-Harris was read to all subjects. The humor instrument was administered by raters (described earlier in the instrumentation section) who were trained to administer it in a standardized manner. The persons administering the humor instrument were blind to the variables of interest in this study and to the composition and special characteristics of the sample groups.

Analysis of Data

Two multiple regression analyses were used to examine the

relationships between the four independent variables (self-concept, group membership and two measures of perception of humor) and the dependent variable (social perception). One multiple regression was used to analyze the data collected from the group which was given form X of the humor instrument. The second was employed to analyze responses from the group which was given form Y of the humor instrument.

Two further investigations used discriminant analyses to evaluate the extent to which it is possible to discriminate between populations of LD and NONLD students. One discriminant analysis examined the prediction of group membership (LD or NONLD) using the scores on the variables of social perception, self-concept and perception of humor for those subjects who were administered form X of the humor instrument. The second discriminant analysis investigated ability to predict group membership (LD or NONLD) of those subjects who were administered form Y of the humor instrument.

Summary

Subjects in this study were 38 sixth-grade students having specific learning disabilities and 38 peers who were matched to the learning disabled group on the variables of IQ, age, socioeconomic level, race and gender. The subjects attended school in the same northeastern school district. Procedures for administration of the instruments and collection of data were discussed. The instruments used in this study were the Inter-Person Perception Test, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, and a humor instrument. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and the Inter-Person Perception Test were group administered. The humor instrument was administered to the subjects

individually by trained raters. Two multiple regressions and two discriminant analyses were the statistical procedures used to evaluate the data.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the social perception of children who were identified as having specific learning disabilities through an investigation of the variables of social perception, self-concept and perception of humor. This chapter provides a description of the analysis of the statistical data and the results which were found.

Statistical Analysis of the Data

The dependent variable of social perception was investigated through the use of two multiple regression analyses. One multiple regression examined the significance of the relationship between social perception and the independent variables in the LD Group and the NONLD Group using form X of the humor instrument. The independent variables used in this multiple regression were self-concept, perception of humor self-rated, perception of humor observer rated and the interactions of group membership with self-concept, group membership with perception of humor self-rated and group membership with perception of humor observer rated. The first research hypothesis for this investigation was:

> There is a significant relationship between social perception and a linear combination of self-concept, group membership and two measures of perception of humor (self-rated and observer

rated) taken from form X of the humor instrument.

A stepwise multiple regression was attempted but none of the variables entered as a significant predictor of social perception for those subjects administered form X of the humor instrument. Table 1 lists the correlation matrix of correlation coefficients for the variables of interest in form X of the humor instrument.

Table 1

Correlation Matrix for Social Perception, Self-Concept, Perception of Humor (Self-Rated and Observer Rated) as Measured by Form X, and Group Membership

(N=38)

	Social Perception	Self Concept	Self Rated Humor	Observer Rated Humor	Group
Social Perception	--	.004	-.135	.050	.276
Self Concept	--	--	.306	.204	-.076
Self Rated Humor	--	--	--	*.378	-.005
Observer Rated Humor	--	--	--	--	-.160
Group	--	--	--	--	--

*$p < .05$

Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations for the dependent variable of social perception and the independent variables of self-concept, perception of humor self-rated and perception of humor observer rated which were obtained from LD and NONLD subjects who were administered form X of the humor instrument.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and Sample Size for the LD and NONLD Groups Using Form X of the Humor Instrument

Variable	Group	N	$\overline{X}$	S
Social Perception	LD	19	18.8	3.0
	NONLD	19	20.6	3.4
Self-Concept	LD	19	61.2	6.3
	NONLD	19	59.5	9.7
Self-Rated Humor	LD	19	24.2	6.2
	NONLD	19	24.1	4.5
Observer Rated Humor	LD	19	24.5	3.8
	NONLD	19	26.1	6.0

No significant ($p > .05$) relationship was found between social perception and the independent variables of self-concept, perception of humor self-rated, perception of humor observer rated and the interactions of group membership with self-concept, group membership with perception of humor self-rated and group membership with perception of humor observer rated. These results did not support the first hypothesis.

The second multiple regression was used to examine the significance of the relationship between social perception and the independent variables measured in the LD group and in the NONLD group using form Y of the humor instrument. The independent variables used in this procedure were self-concept, perception of humor self-rated, perception of humor observer rated and the interactions of group membership with self-concept, group membership with perception of humor self-rated and perception of humor observer rated. The second research hypothesis for this investigation was;

> There is a significant relationship between social perception and a linear combination of self-concept, group membership and two measures of humor (self-rated and observer rated) taken from form Y of the humor instrument.

A stepwise multiple regression was attempted but none of the variables entered as a significant predictor of social perception for subjects administered form Y of the humor instrument. Table 3 lists the correlation matrix of correlation coefficients for the variables of interest in form Y of the humor instrument.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix for Social Perception, Self-Concept, Perception of Humor (Self-Rated and Observer Rated) as Measured by Form Y and Group Membership

(N=38)

	Social Perception	Self Concept	Self Rated Humor	Observer Rated Humor	Group
Social Perception	--	.083	-.009	.046	.160
Self Concept	--	--	-.108	-.027	.116
Self Rated Humor	--	--	--	*.531	-.235
Observer Rated Humor	--	--	--	--	-.038
Group	--	--	--	--	--

*$p < .05$

Table 4 contains the means and standard deviations for the dependent variable of social perception and the independent variables of self-concept, perception of humor self-rated and perception of humor observer rated which were obtained from LD and NONLD subjects who were administered form Y of the humor instrument.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations and Sample Size for the LD and NONLD Groups Using Form Y of the Humor Instrument

Variable	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S
Social Perception	LD	19	19.7	2.4
	NONLD	19	20.6	2.9
Self-Concept	LD	19	56.7	10.7
	NONLD	19	58.9	8.8
Self-Rated Humor	LD	19	12.3	3.2
	NONLD	19	10.9	2.3
Observer Rated Humor	LD	19	28.8	5.0
	NONLD	19	28.4	5.0

No significant ($p > .05$) relationship was found between social perception and the independent variables of self-concept, perception of humor self-rated, perception of humor observer rated and the interactions of group membership with self-concept, group membership with perception of humor self-rated and perception of humor observer rated. This procedure yielded results which did not support the second hypothesis.

A discriminant analysis was used to investigate the third hypothesis:

> A child's performance on the variables of social perception, self-concept, perception of self-rated humor on instrument X and perception of humor observer rated on instrument X will predict whether the child belongs to the population designated LD or the population designated NONLD.

A child's performance on social perception, self-concept and the two

measures of humor (self-rated and observer rated) did not predict whether the child belonged to the LD or NONLD population. The first discriminant analysis yielded results which did not support the third hypothesis of this study. A second discriminant analysis was used to investigate the fourth hypothesis:

> A child's performance on the variables of social perception, self-concept, perception of self-rated humor on instrument Y and perception of humor observer rated on instrument Y will predict whether the child belongs to the population designated LD or the population designated NONLD.

A child's performance on social perception, self-concept and the two measures of humor (self-rated and observer rated) did not predict whether the child belonged to the LD or NONLD population. The second discriminant analysis yielded results which did not support the fourth hypothesis of this study.

Summary

Hypotheses for this study stated that there would be a relationship between social perception and the linear combination of self-concept and two measures of perception of humor (self-rated and observer rated) in children designated as LD and in children designated NONLD. In this study self-concept and perception of humor (self-rated and observer rated) did not predict the social perception of children. Two additional hypotheses stated that a child's social perception, self-concept, the perception of humor self-rated and perception of humor observer rated would predict whether that child belonged to the LD or NONLD group. Results of these analyses also failed to support

these hypotheses.

Data collected in this study to examine social perception (using the IPPT) and the independent variables of self-concept (using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale) and humor, self-rated and observer rated (using the Pickering and Pickering (1983) humor instrument), did not support the contention that the variables of self-concept, perception of humor self-rated and perception of humor observer rated could predict social perception. Data did not support the argument that performance on a social perception instrument would predict whether a subject belongs to the LD or NONLD population.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine social perception in children. It was designed to predict whether a child belongs to a population which has been identified as having specific learning disabilities (LD) or to a population of children who have never been diagnosed as having specific learning disabilities or any other handicapping condition (NONLD). The study investigated social perception through its relationship to the perception of humor and self-concept in these children.

Subjects in this study were 76 sixth-grade students who attended school in a northeastern United States public school district which contained both urban and rural schools. Of the 76 subjects there were 38 who had been identified by the school district as having specific learning disabilities. This group was designated the LD Group. The five females and 33 males in the LD Group were matched with subjects in the NONLD Group on the variables of age, gender, IQ and socioeconomic level.

The data consisted of the subjects' scores on the Inter-Person Perception Test, subjects' scores on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, the scores obtained from subjects' self rating

of items on a humor instrument which was developed by Pickering and Pickering (1983), and scores on the Pickering and Pickering (1983) humor instrument which were obtained through an observer's rating of the subject's response.

The hypotheses stated that there would be a significant relationship between the dependent variable of social perception and the linear combination of the independent variables of self-concept, perception of humor self-rated, perception of humor observer rated and group membership. Multiple regression analyses were used to determine whether these relationships did exist. One multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data from the subjects who responded to humor instrument Form X. The other was used to analyze data from subjects who were administered Form Y of the humor instrument.

The multiple regression analyses revealed that social perception is not related to self-concept, group membership and the perception of humor, as measured by the instruments used for data collection in this study. The use of two discriminant analyses to investigate group membership failed to predict whether a subject belonged to the LD or NONLD population using the variables of social perception, self-concept, perception of humor self-rated and perception of humor observer rated.

Conclusions

Results of this study failed to show that social perception is related to self-concept, perception of humor and group membership (LD and NONLD) in sixth-grade children. Earlier studies indicate that

children identified as having specific learning disabilities are less accurate than other children in assessing social situations (Fremont et al., 1978). Other research found children, identified as having specific learning disabilities, having trouble interpreting social cues (Bryan, 1977). Research on humor shows that it is a social phenomena (McGhee et al., 1966a) and studies focusing on children's self-concepts (Smith, 1979; Fremont et al., 1978) indicated that social perception and self-concept are related. The results of this earlier research were not supported by findings in this study.

Reasons that this study may have failed to support earlier findings include the use of poorly standardized instruments, problems in identifying the LD population, the small number of subjects used in the study and subject reaction to a testing situation. Although the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale is well researched and standardized the other instruments employed had less reliability and validity. The Inter-Person Perception Test (IPPT) is a published instrument which has not been widely used in research. A serious problem of this instrument is that it does not include norms for children. To alleviate this problem a test-retest reliability study was done by the researcher using randomly selected peers of the subjects selected for the main study.

Another grave problem with instrumentation was with the humor instrument. It was postulated that an instrument previously developed to measure humor would be more reliable than one developed solely for this study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher did a reliability study of the humor instrument to further assess its

reliability. In a test-retest the instrument had a correlation of .71 using a Spearman rho. The self-rated and observer rated scores correlated .89 using a Spearman rho. Although these correlations show reliability the analysis of individual test items did not. When the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze individual items it was found that some items needed to be eliminated because of low internal consistency.

Even though accepted criteria were followed to determine the child's eligibility for identification as LD in the school system the LD population is not easily identified. Problems inherent in diagnosing an individual include factors which mask actual learning disabilities, such as intelligence and coping skills. Further, it is possible for individuals to be identified as LD when the actual deficit may be in an area of functioning such as emotional problems or cultural deprivation. This contamination of the LD population contributes to difficulty in assessing characteristics like social perception and perception of humor.

In order to carry out this study the subjects were given information which could have made them more vigilant in their responses. For example when responding to the humor instrument they were asked to tell how funny something was. In their natural environment subjects would not be alerted in this way and therefore may respond differently.

The measurement of perception of humor was found to be an elusive factor in this study. Even though prior research has studied humor within various populations and from perspectives such as comprehension, social utility, frequency of use and interaction process there are no

standardized instruments available to measure it. The instrument that was used in this study was developed by other researchers and used to study LD and NONLD subjects response to humor. However, it was found to have low reliability and thus limited the probability of finding a difference in the population should such a difference actually exist.

The fact that the cartoons used in the instrument had been published in children's books and periodicals was the basis for concluding that they were indeed humorous. The decision to publish a cartoon is an arbitrary one and does not guarantee that it is funny. Although the selection of the final ten cartoons in construction of the instrument was from a larger pool and depended on agreement among adult raters, there was still no reliable method used to guarantee that the cartoons did indeed elicit humor in children.

Little research has been done in the area of social perception of the LD population. It is conceivable that other factors, as yet unknown, are stimulating the hypotheses of experts that LD individuals are deficit in social perception. Therefore the possibility that there really is no difference in the social perception of LD and NONLD individuals must be considered.

Recommendations

1. The possibility exists that even though no relationship was found between the dependent variable of social perception and the independent variables of self-concept, perception of humor self-rated and perception of humor observer rated, the individual variables may be relevant in understanding the LD population. An example of this is seen in research which has shown that self-concept is negatively

correlated with learning disabilities. It is recommended that further research be planned which investigates the variables independently.

2. The instrument used to measure perception of humor has low reliability and may not be adequate in measuring humor. It is recommended that more reliable methods of assessing humor be developed. Due to the fact that what is perceived as humorous is in a state of constant flux, the development of an instrument which can be easily updated is advisable.

3. The number of subjects available in this study was insufficient to provide the statistical power needed to detect small differences in populations. Future studies need to take into account the problems inherent in drawing adequate numbers of subjects from the LD population. Research designs which require small numbers of subjects may be helpful in this regard. Such studies could be conducted as single subject designs and in depth case study. Another possibility would be the use of fewer variables. This would require fewer subjects to get adequate power. The studies could then be repeated to obtain greater reliability of findings.

4. Present knowledge about characteristics of the population identified as learning disabled is fraught with contradictions. In this study a preidentified group of LD children was used to obtain subjects. In the future, criteria used by researchers to identify specific areas of handicap in the LD subjects may allow information on sub-groups within the LD population to be studied.

5. This study used intrusive means in order to collect data on social perception, self-concept and perception of humor. This

intrusion alerted subjects and could have influenced their responses. It is recommended that further research attempt to assess social perception, self-concept and perception of humor in a natural setting where more natural social responses may be elicited. One way this may be done is by using subjects in a private school setting. Such subjects could be observed by staff members during academic, work and social periods. Another possibility would be the training of selected teacher's aids to collect data about specific variables, over a period of time using rating scales.

6. The subjects for this study were drawn from a restricted age range. Research has shown that response to humor varies with age. It is recommended that studies of humor be attempted with other age groups.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION FORM AND LETTERS

OF EXPLANATION

I give my permission for my child _____, _____
(child's name) (school)
to participate in the study which looks at social perception. I understand that my child will fill out the Pier's Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, will take the Inter-Person Perception Test and will respond to a series of 10 cartoons.

I further understand that my child's confidentiality will be protected. He/she will be identified to the researcher only by his/her initials and a school identification number. The scores that my child receives on the tests will not be shared with the teachers or school administrators.

_____ _____
(Signature of Parent/Guardian) (Date)

Dear Parent:

A psychology intern working at the community mental health agency is conducting an important research study about the way children perceive social situations. She has discussed her proposal with the elementary administrators and with the superintendent of schools. All were impressed with her work and granted her permission to proceed.

The accompanying letter describes the study and the involvement of children in the process. Please read it carefully and note that confidentiality will be carefully protected and that the amount of time the researcher will spend with a child will be minimal.

I ask that you give this request serious consideration and give permission for your child to be involved in this study. Education has been reaping the benefits of research that has been increasing in quality. I believe that this study will significantly add to that body of knowledge.

Sincerely,

Principal

Dear Parent,

I work at the local community mental health service as a Psychology Intern. I am working on my Ph.D. and as part of this degree I am doing some research. I am asking for your help with this study which is about the way children perceive social situations.

I chose this study because some children I work with have difficulty with social interactions. To help these children, it is important to learn more about the way children look at themselves and others. This study will examine factors affecting social relationships or learning disabled and non learning disabled children.

If you give your permission, this is what it will mean for you and your child:

1) Your child's confidentiality and privacy is protected in two different ways:

a) I will only know your child's initials and a school identification number.

b) The scores your child receives will not be shared with any teacher or school administrator. Instead, I will talk to the teachers and administrators about the general results of the study after all the children are tested.

2) Your child will take three tests:

a) Pier's Harris Self Concept Scale
This test has short statements which your child answers by circling yes or no. It will take 15 minutes.

b) Inter-Person Perception Test
Your child selects a picture to match another picture. It takes from 10 to 15 minutes.

c) Humor Perception Test
Your child looks at 10 cartoons and tells how funny each one is. It takes 15 minutes.

3) If you would like, I will be happy to meet with you to discuss the results of the study and answer any questions you might have. I will contact you about this after I have tested your child. Written copies of the results of this study will be provided upon request.

4) All testing will take place in your child's school during the regular school day. Total testing time will not exceed 45 minutes.

Thank you for your time. I hope you feel this study is worthwhile and allow your child to be in it. If you do, please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school in the self-addressed envelope. If you have any questions relative to this study, please call your child's building administrator or classroom teacher. Your prompt reply is greatly appreciated.

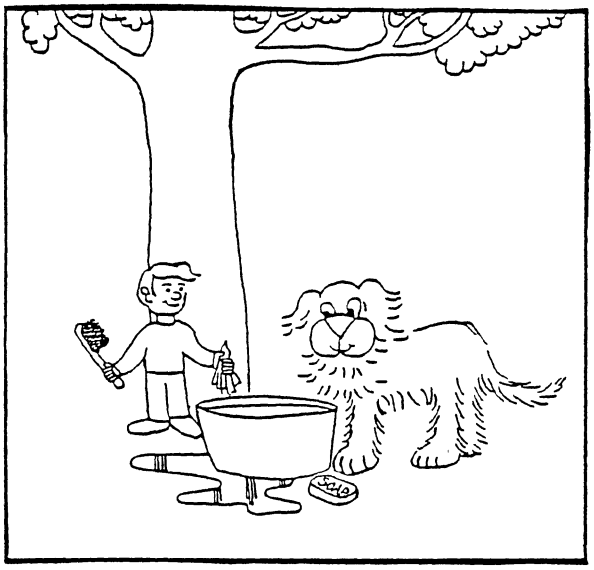
Sincerely,

APPENDIX B

INCONGRUITY REMOVED

CARTOON SAMPLE

Original Cartoon

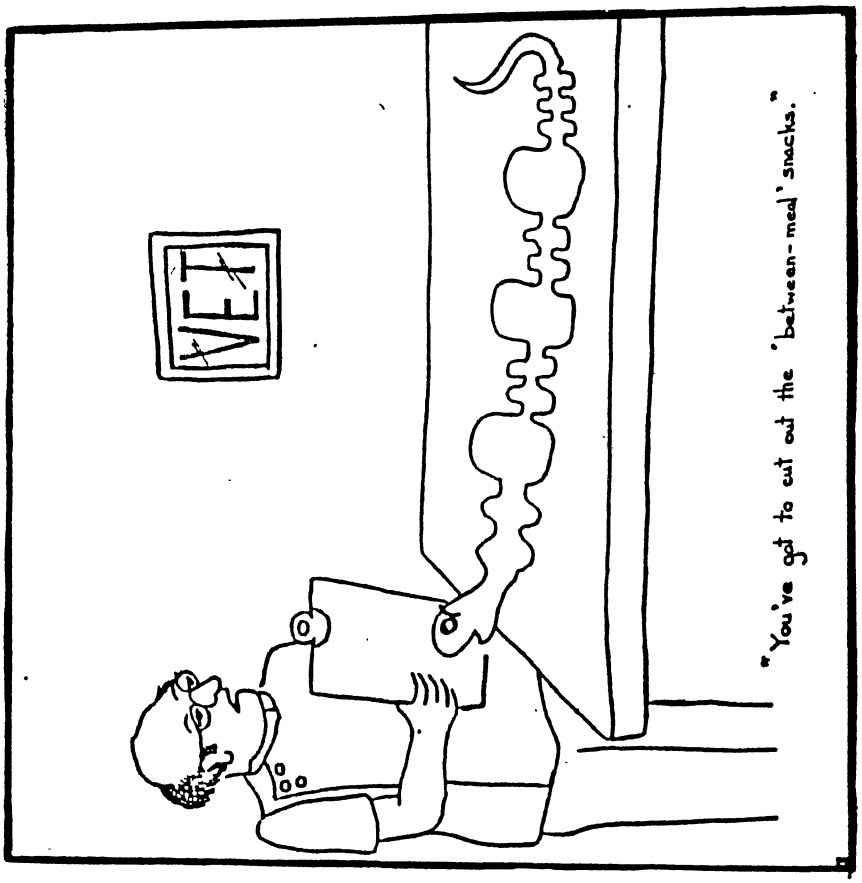


Incongruity Removed Cartoon

APPENDIX C

HUMOR INSTRUMENT

FORMS X AND Y



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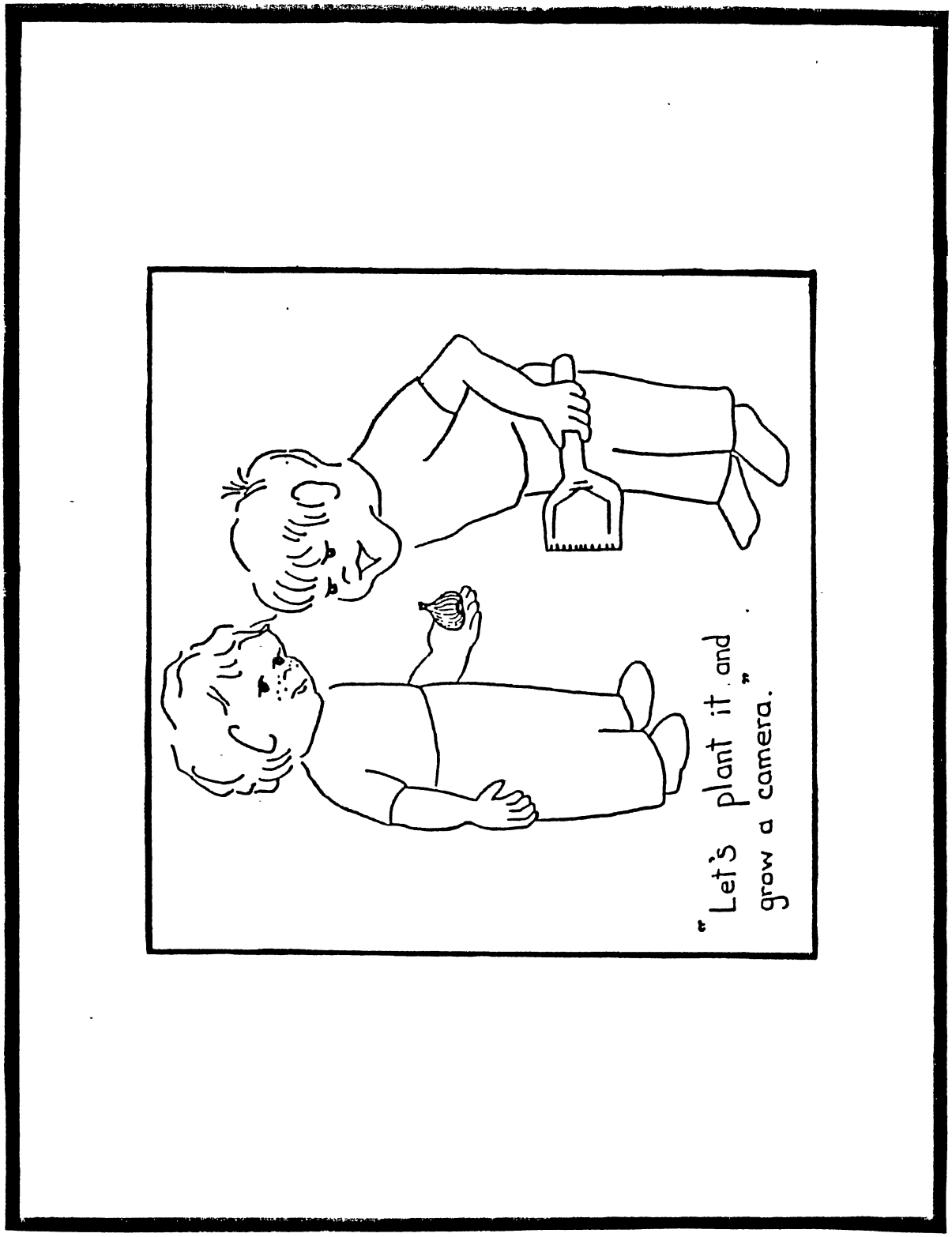

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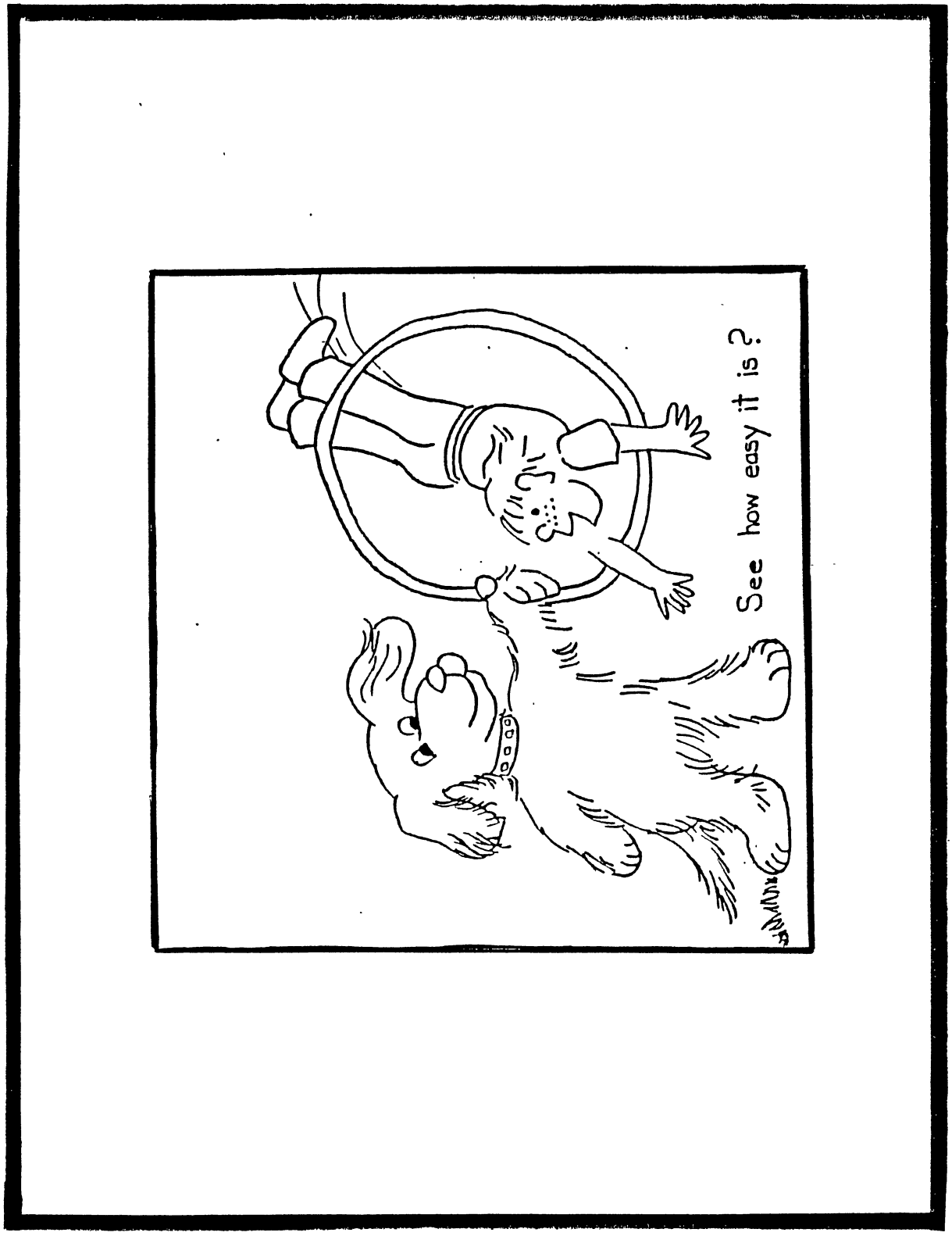

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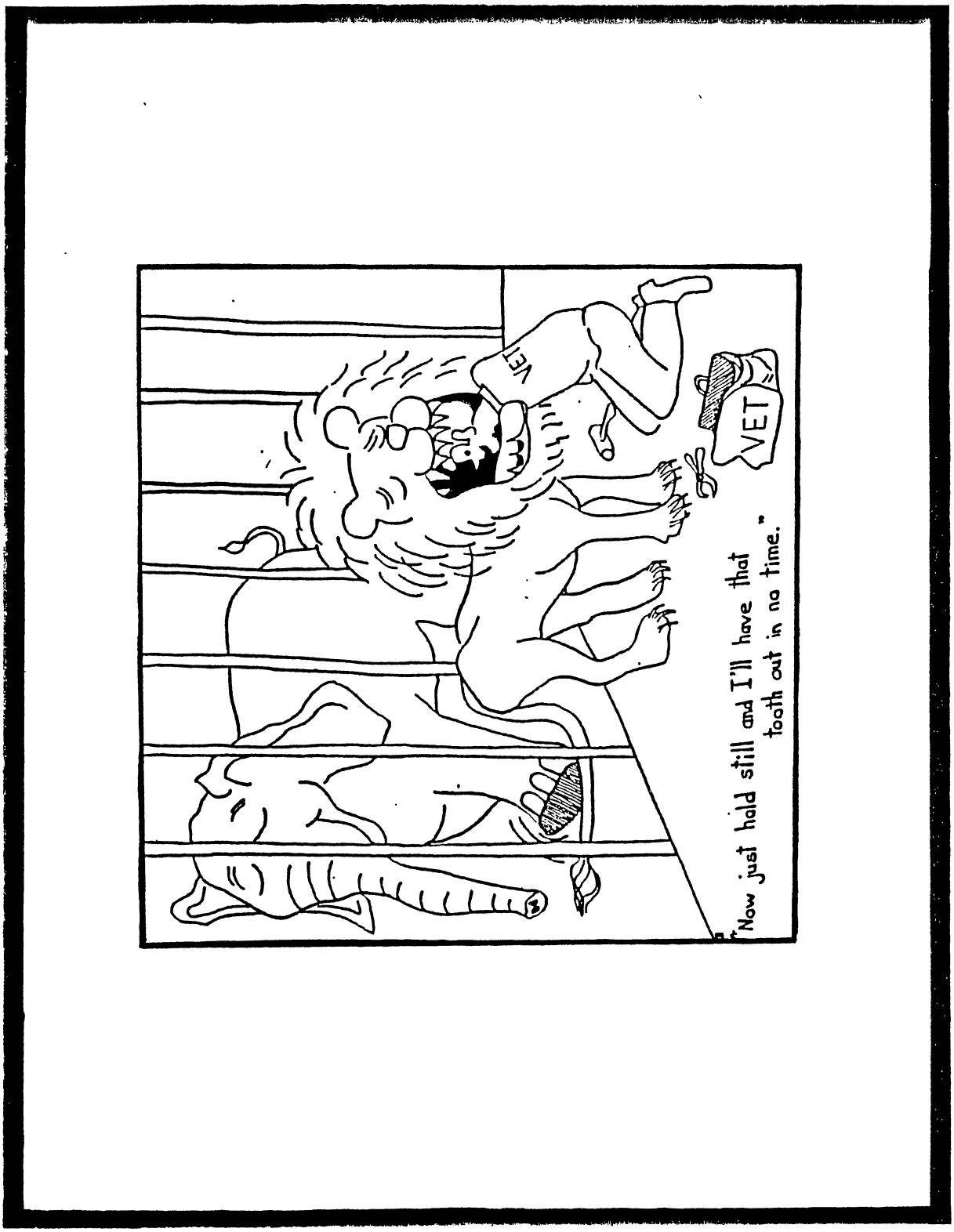

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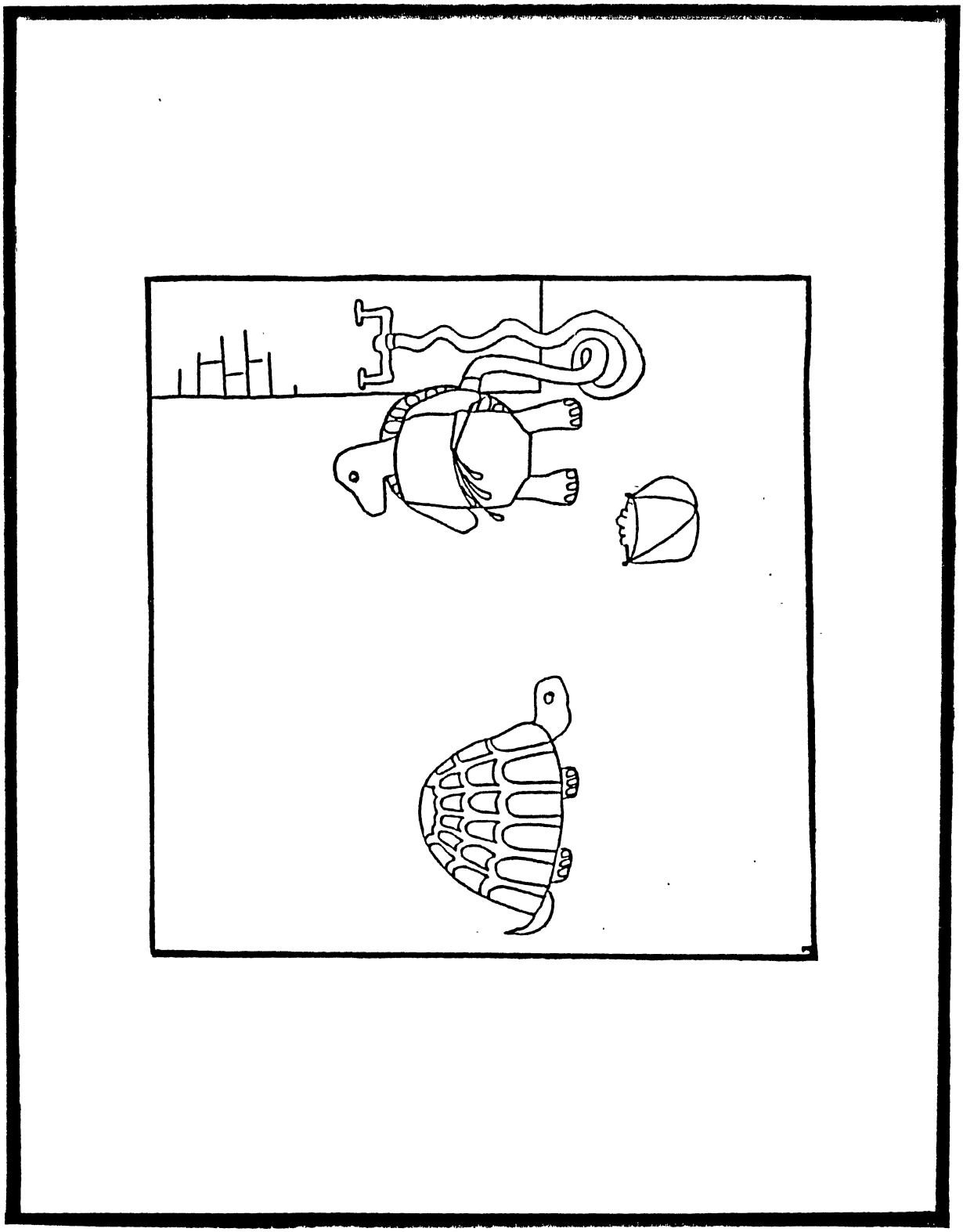

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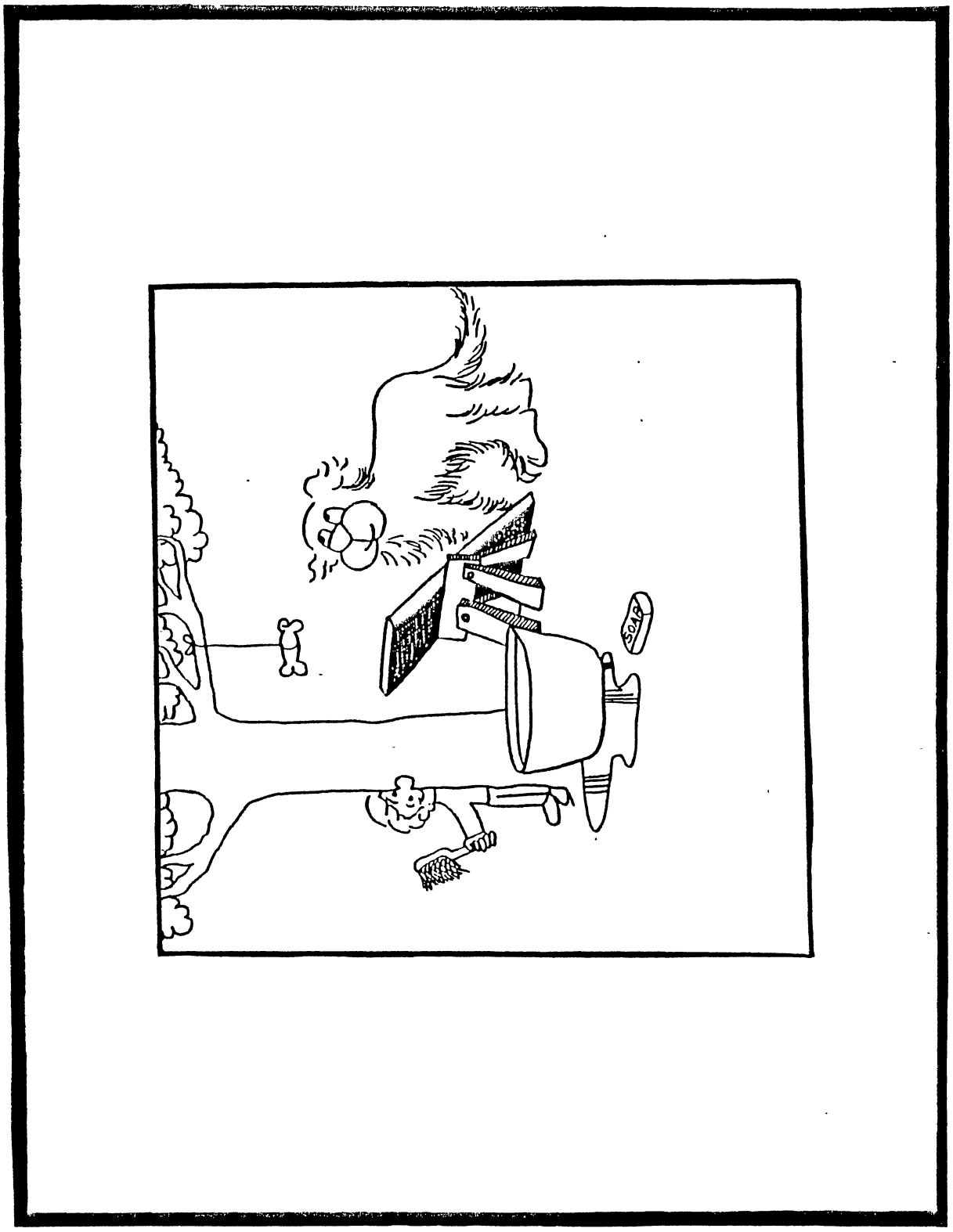

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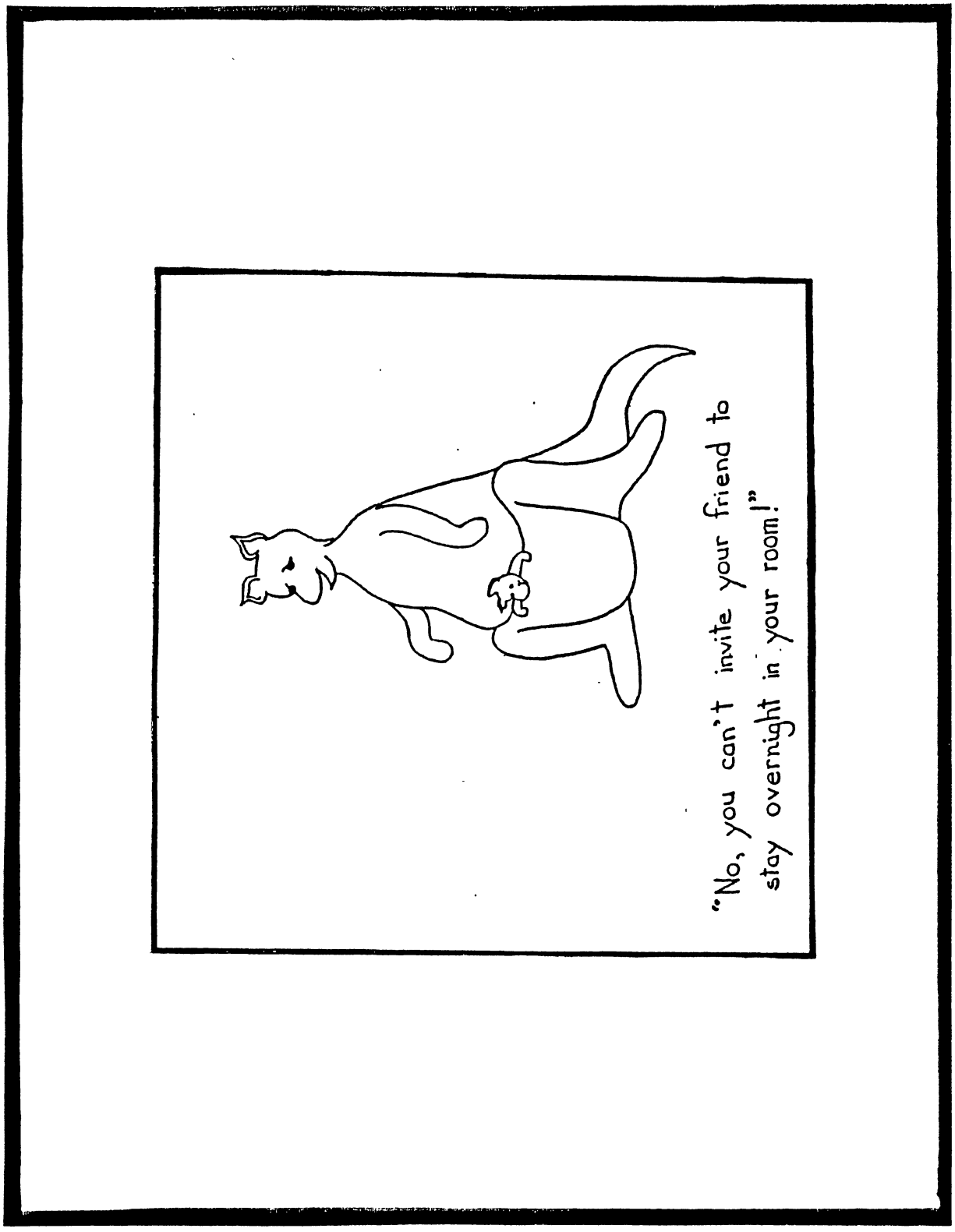

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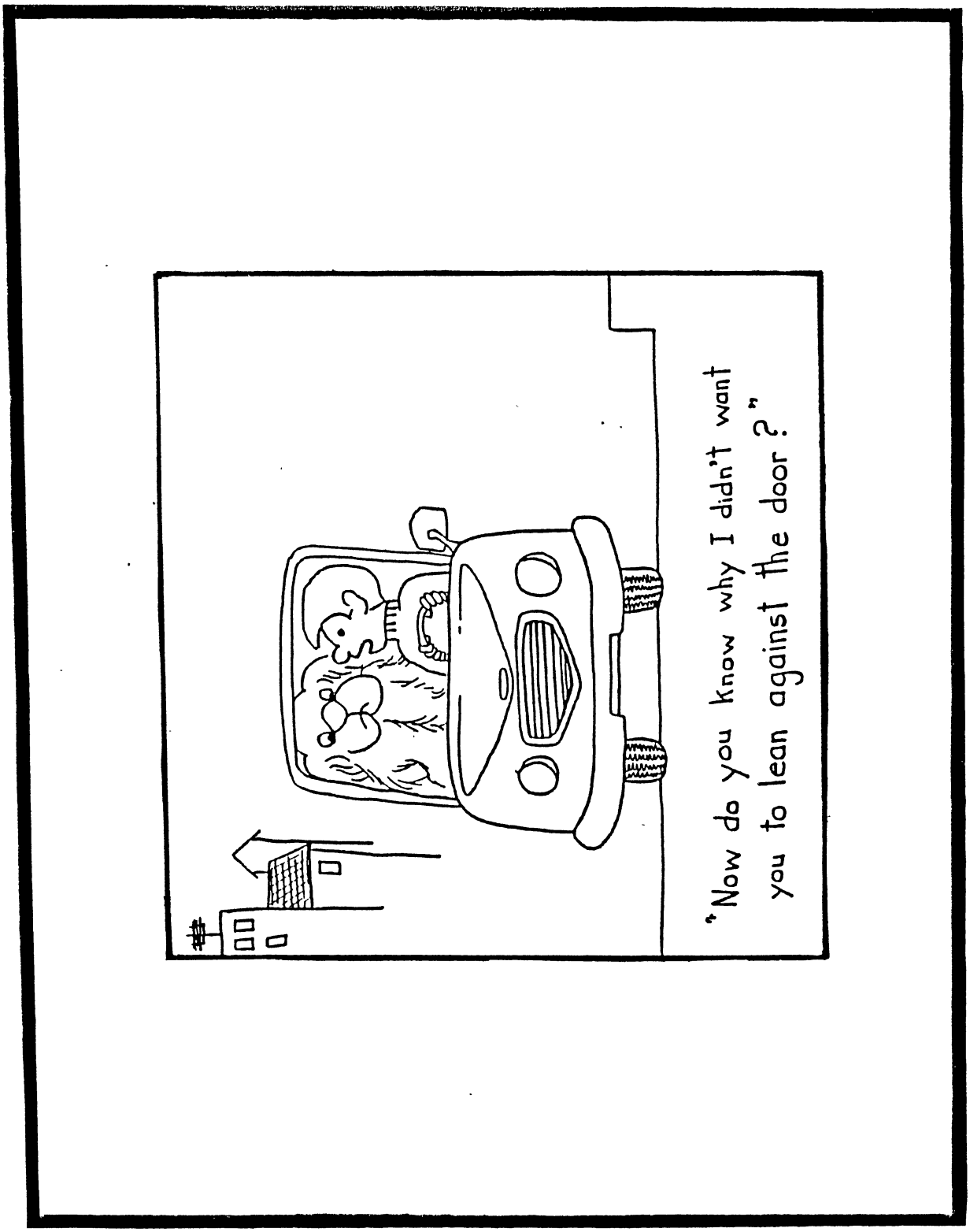

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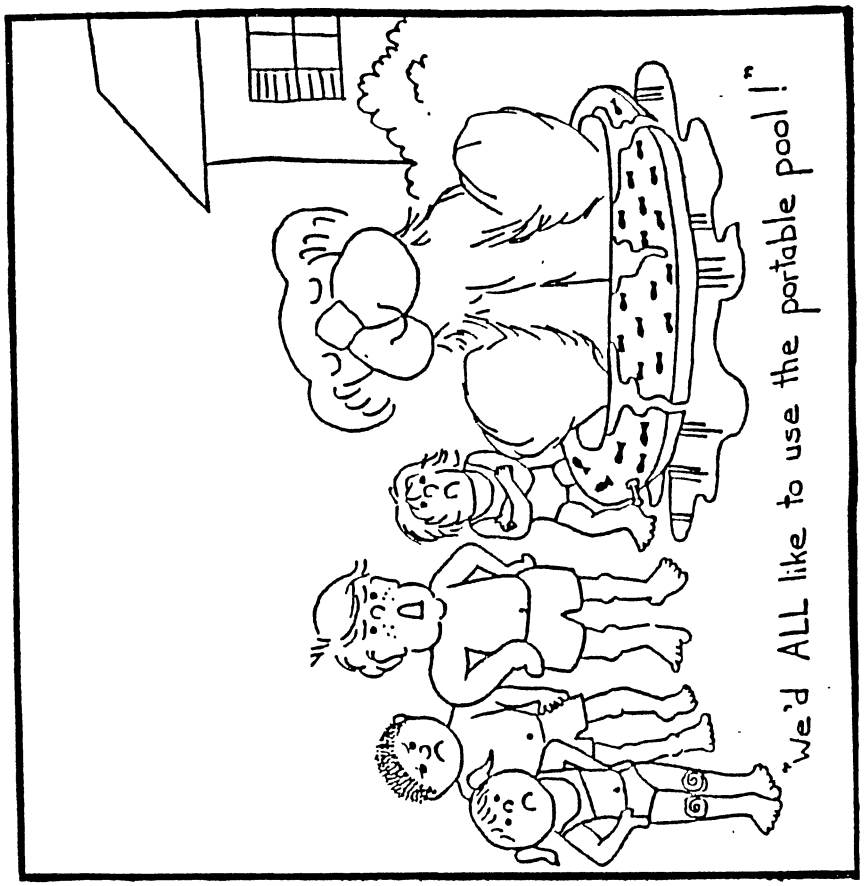

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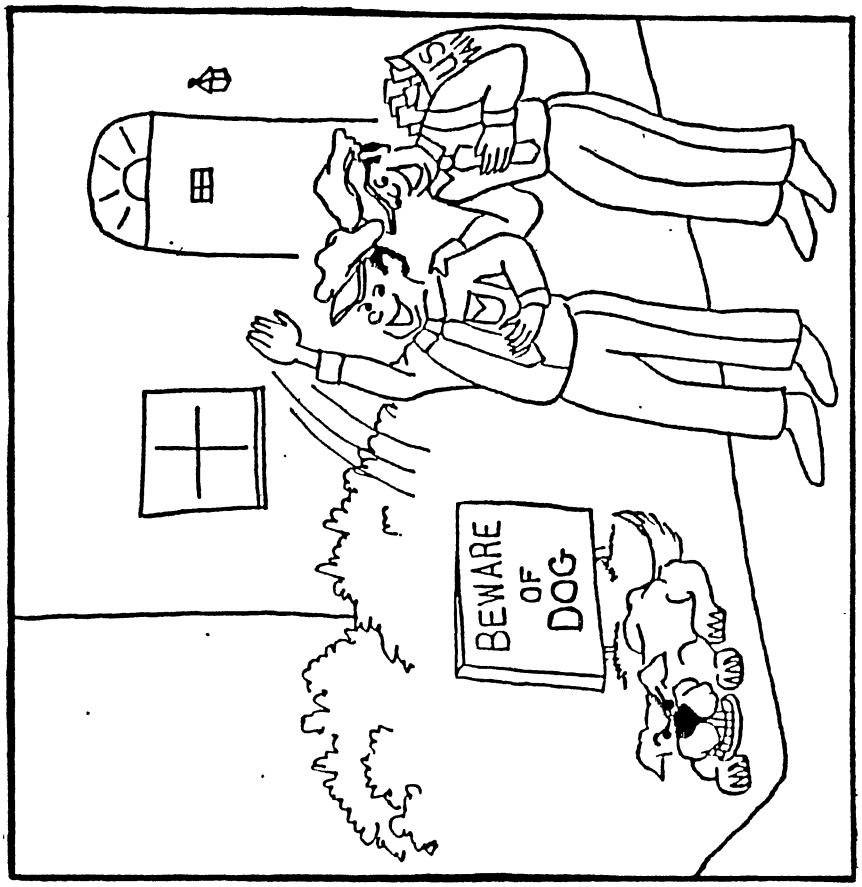

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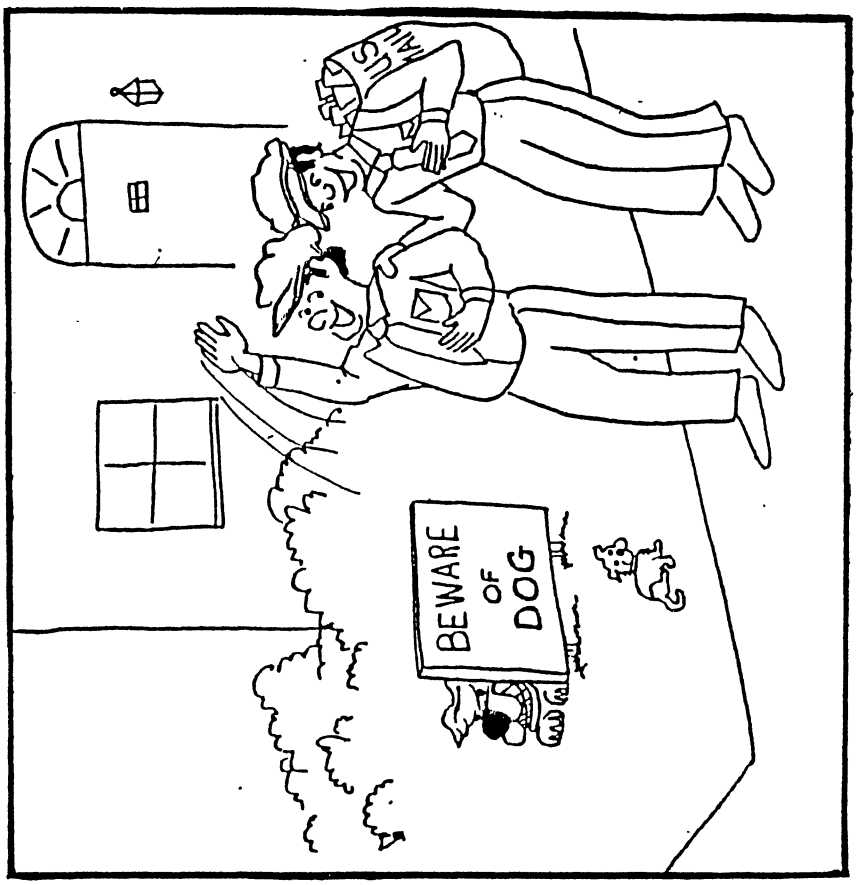

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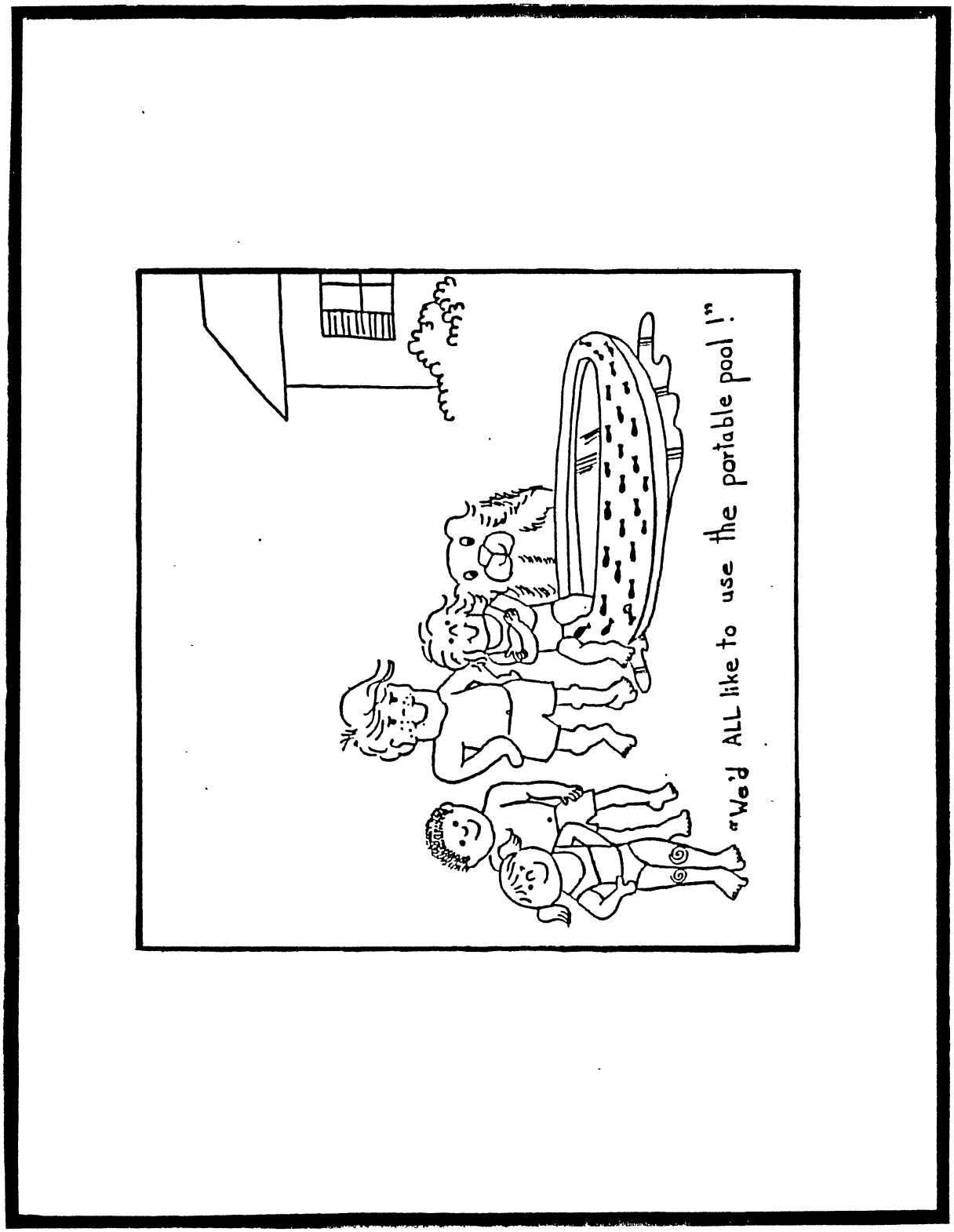

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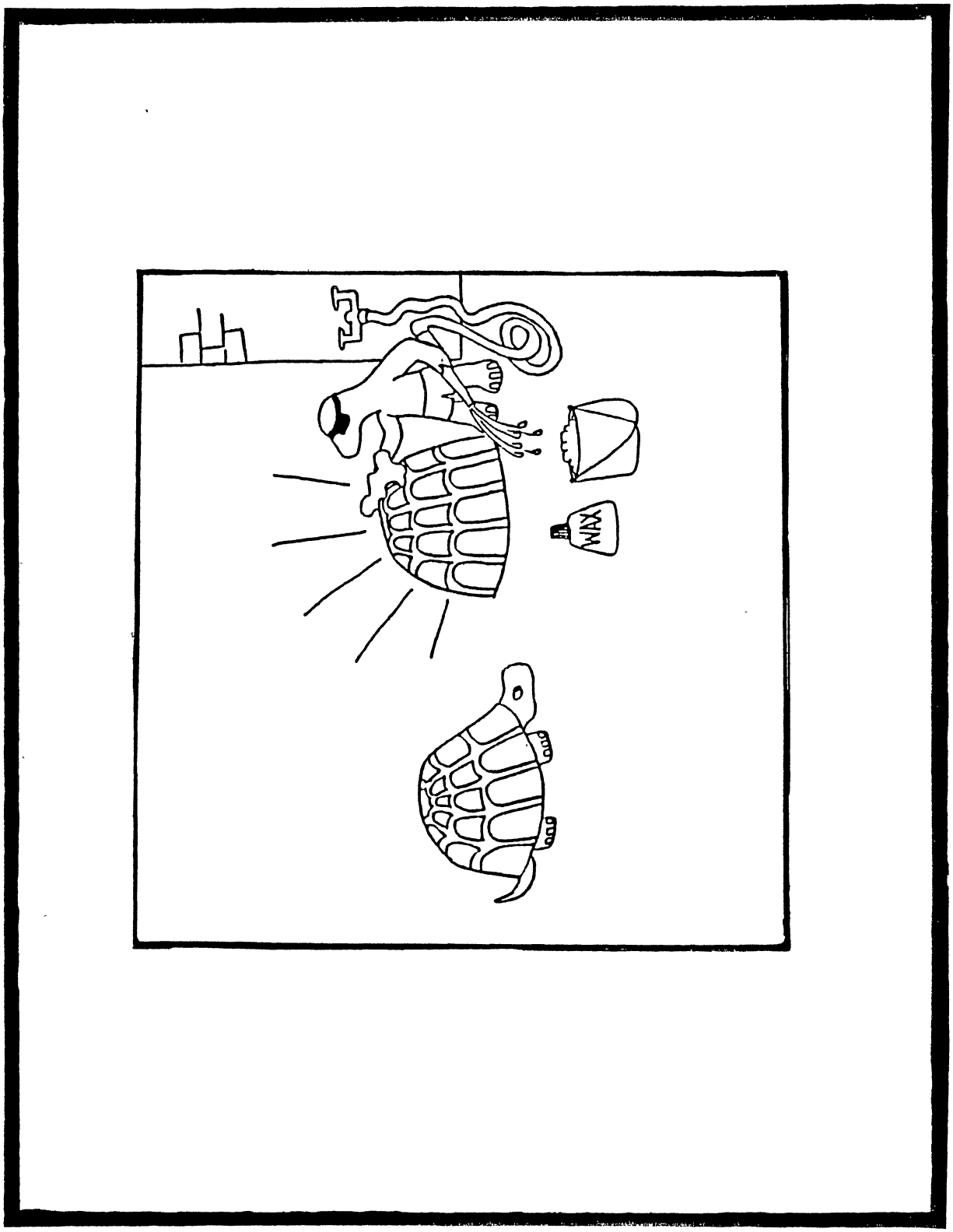

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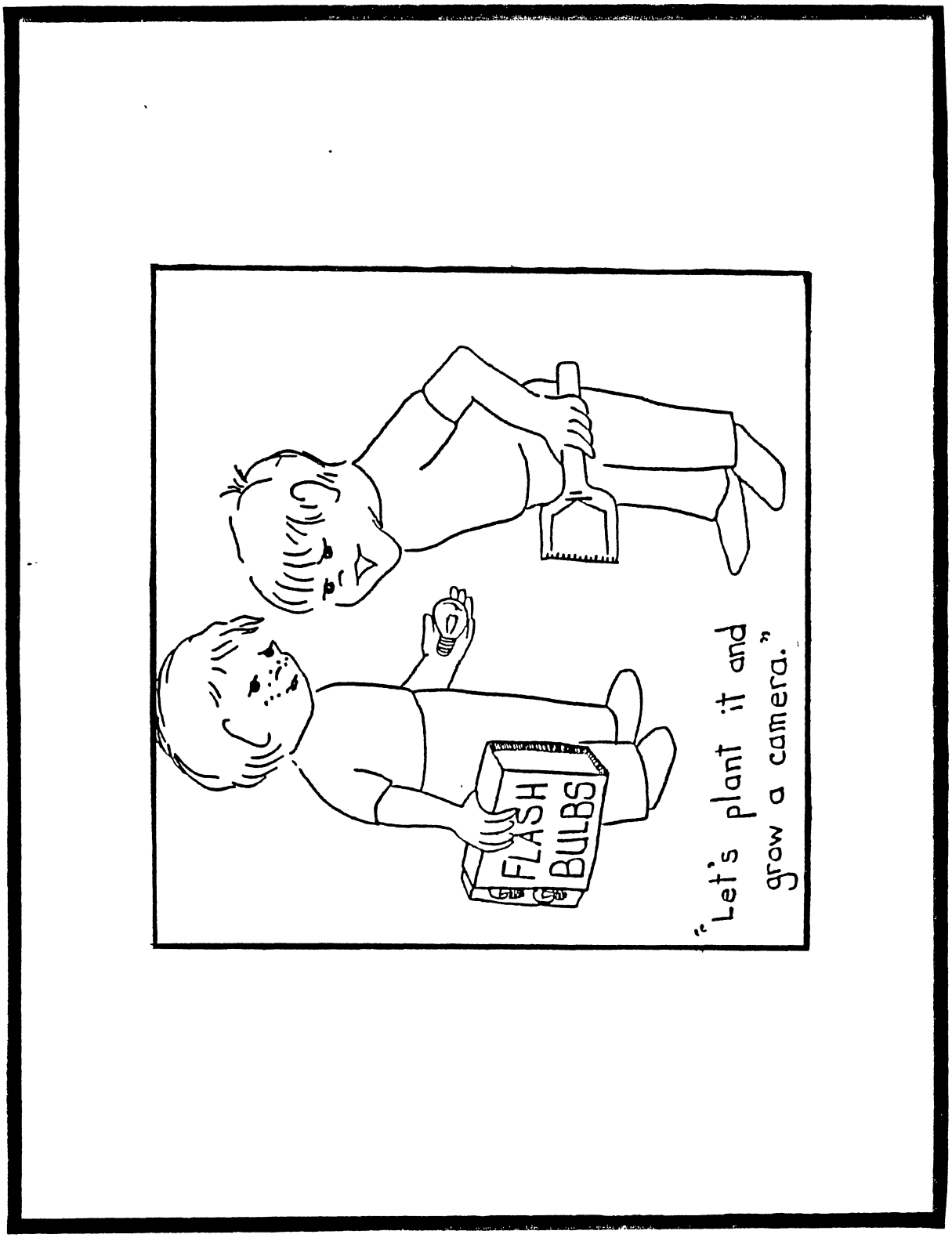

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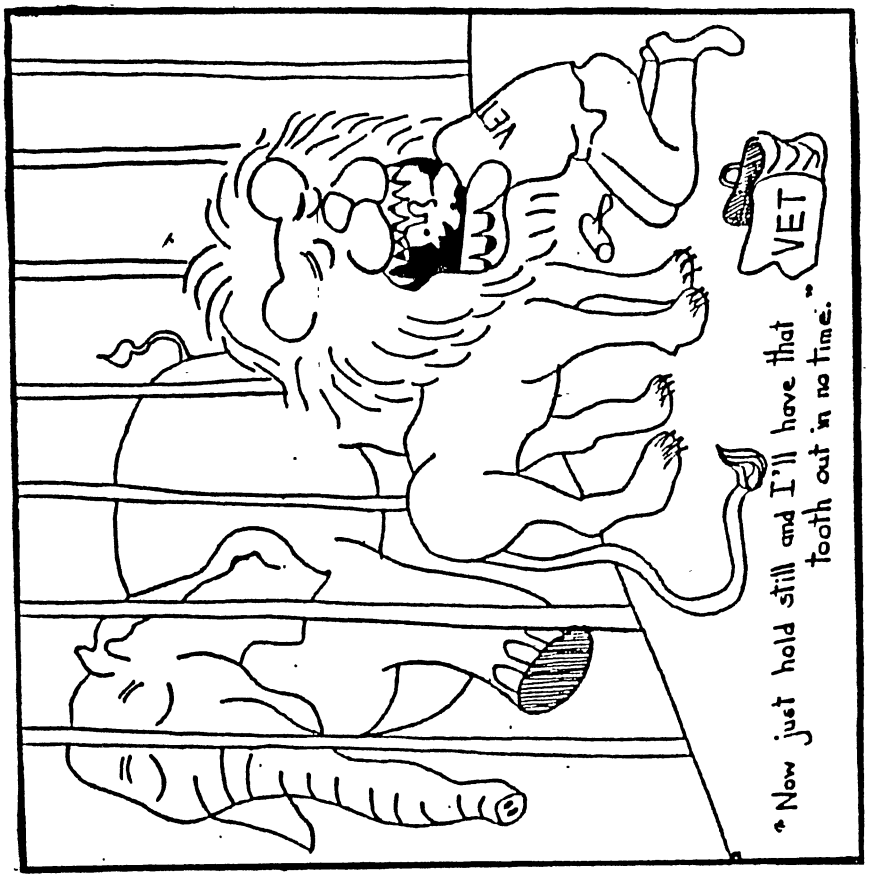

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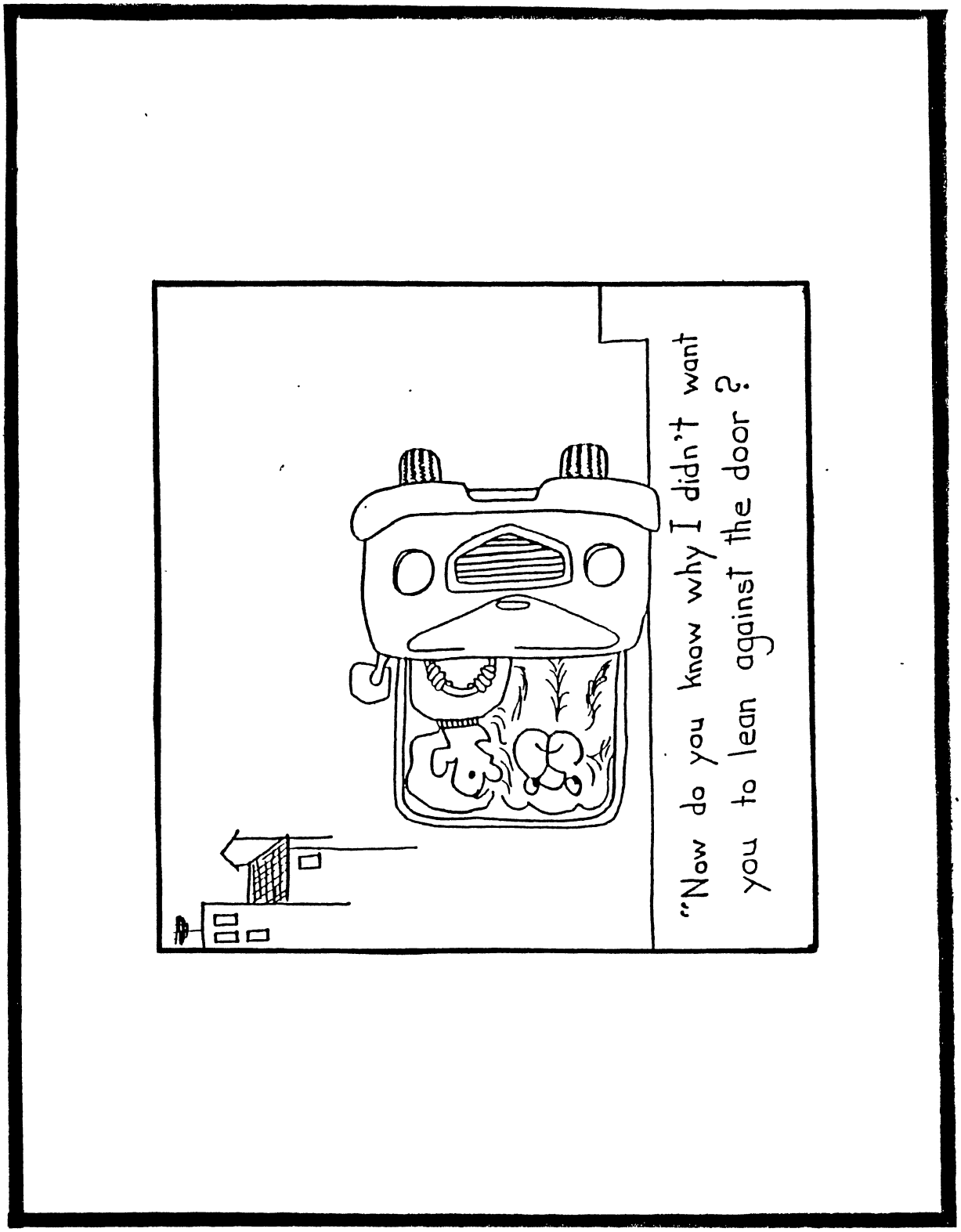

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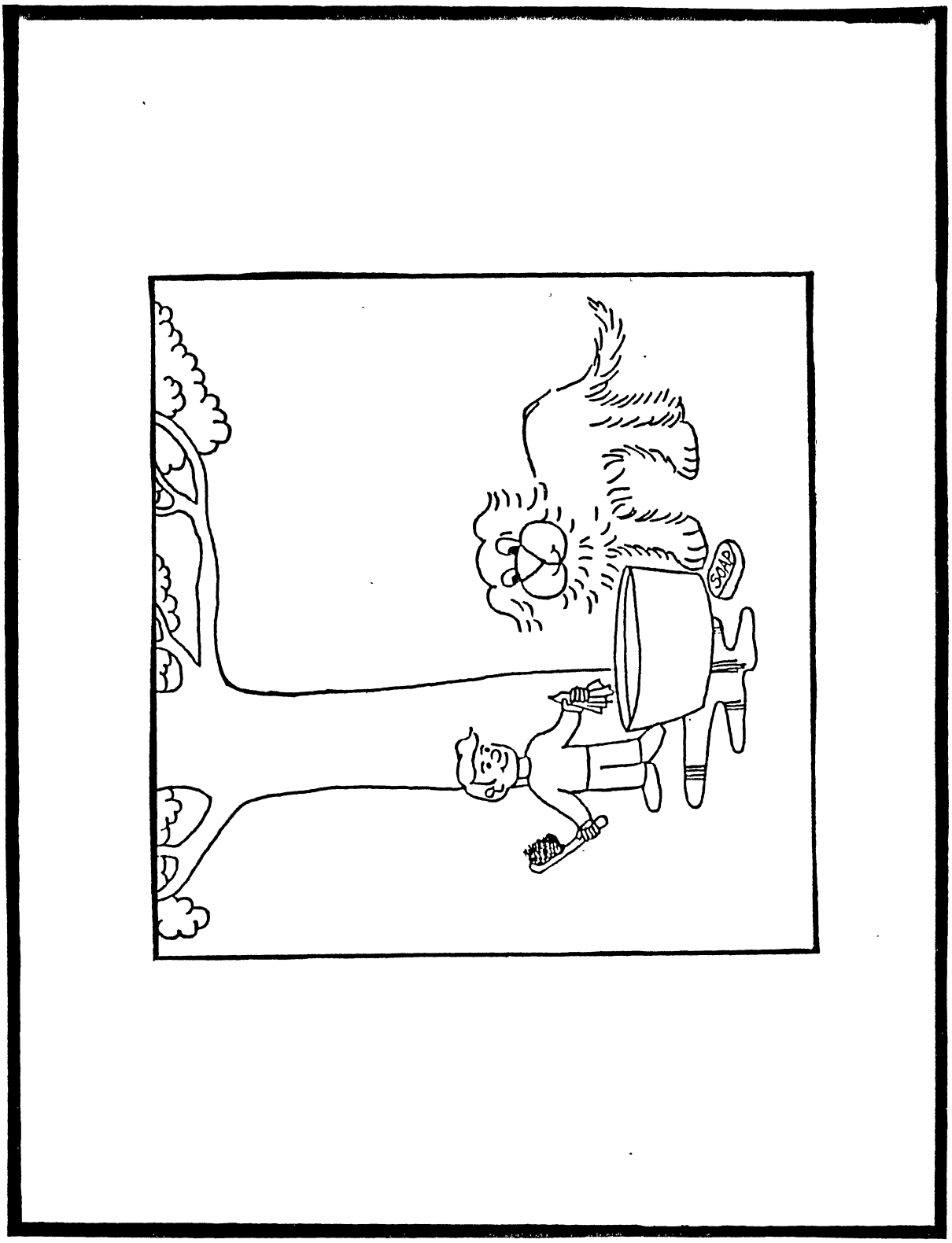

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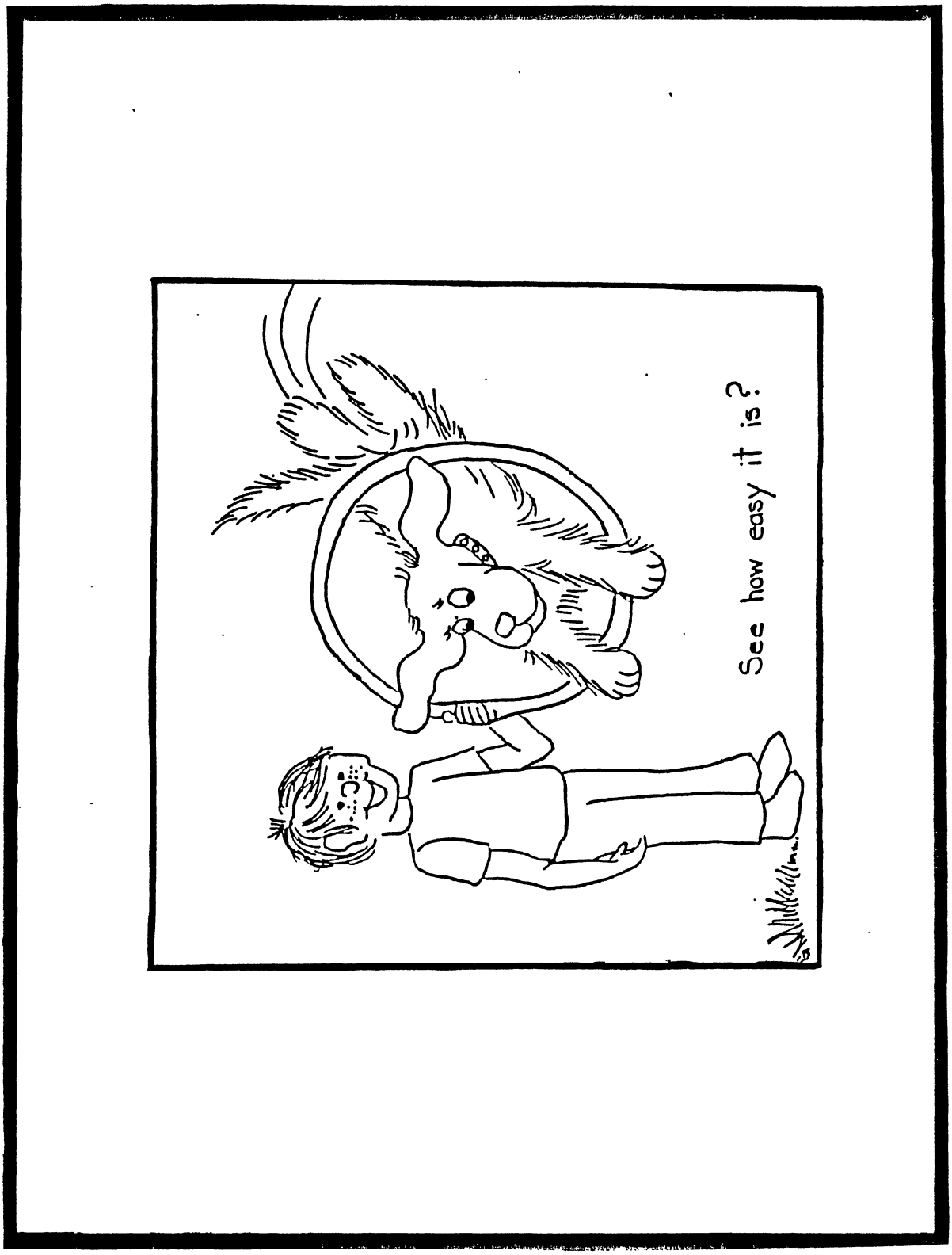

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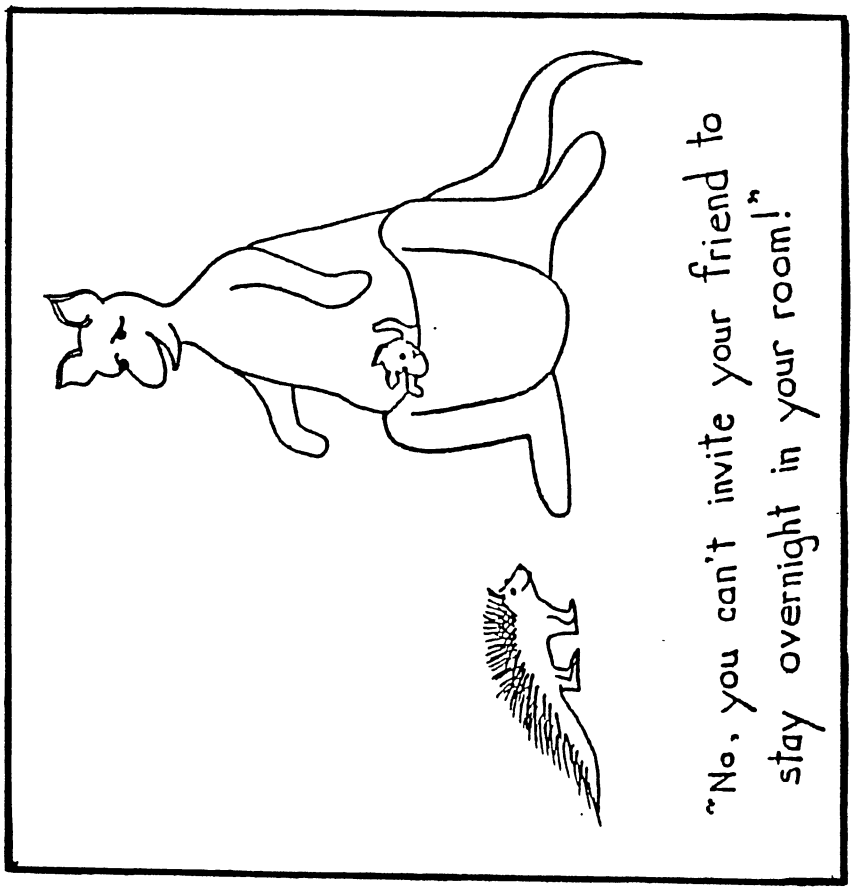

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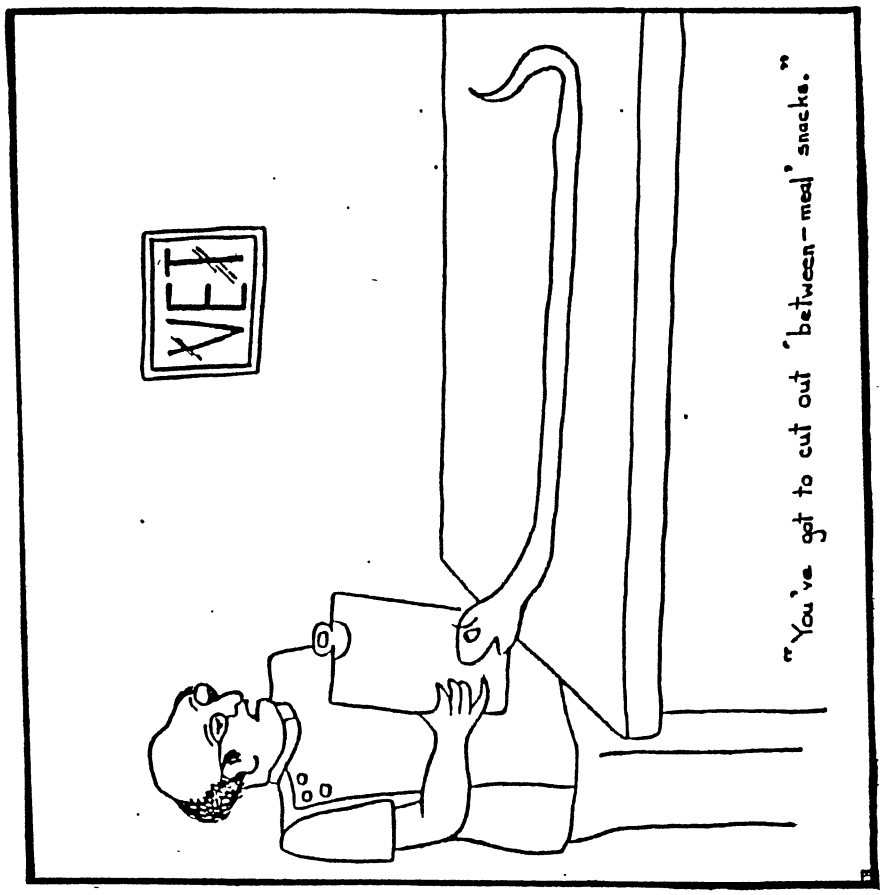
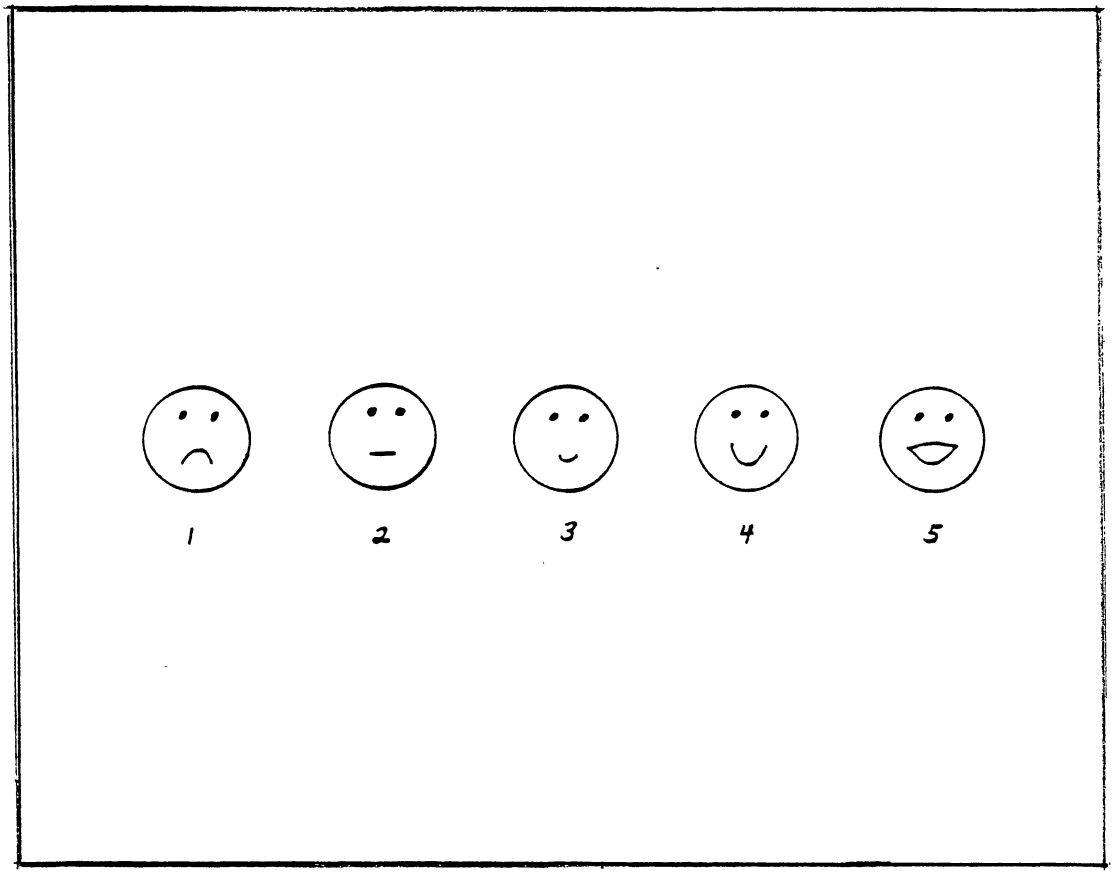


FORM Y, CARTOON #10 ALTERNATE VERSION

APPENDIX D

RATING SCALE



Rating Scale

APPENDIX E

RATING SHEET