

groups; the necessity to condense data and the utility of principal component analysis for that purpose; the power of the procedures to produce apparent clusters in homogeneous data; the resulting necessity for cautious conclusions, and further validation. In my own study the hierarchical nature of successive groupings strongly indicated that they were real rather than accidental. Mr. Everitt's approach to this problem (*Journal*, October 1971, 119, 399) of carrying out analyses by several different clustering methods is a valuable one, although the limited availability until recently of suitable programmes, and the enormous amount of computer time that they require, has put it out of the reach of most investigators.

It is important to note, however, that many similar criticisms can be levelled at factor analysis, which has also been used in studies of classification. For instance, many alternative methods of factor analysis have been described; criteria for rotations and deciding on the number of factors are arbitrary, and the choice of alternative solutions is highly dependent on subjective interpretation. Many of these multivariate procedures are better regarded as exploratory and hypothesis-generating, rather than hypothesis-testing. Moreover, factor analysis has a serious disadvantage in this context in that it is based on a model of orthogonal and continuous dimensions. An individual may score high or low on several factors simultaneously, a situation very different from that of membership in one of a set of mutually exclusive groups. I do not wish to decry the value of a continuum view of psychiatric classification in some circumstances, but it is still much more often a concept of diagnostic groups which underlies clinical thinking and research studies.

It would be a pity if the problems Mr. Everitt points out were allowed to obscure the considerable advantage cluster analytic techniques have over factor analysis in studies seeking diagnostic groupings, in that they are based on the appropriate model of discrete groups.

E. S. PAYKEL.

*St. George's Hospital, Clare House,
Blackshaw Road, London, S.W.17.*

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B. M. BARRACLOUGH.

*M.R.C. Clinical Psychiatry Unit,
Graylingwell Hospital,
Chichester, Sussex.*

DEAR SIR,

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