

PHARMACOLOGY

Brain Wash Drug Effects

► SUCCESS OR failure of brain washing by means of drugs will depend on the personality of the individual as well as on the drug used. It might take a different drug to brain wash a well balanced person than one with shaky personality.

Failure to recognize that a drug acts differently on different persons, according to differences in personality make-up, may be why some American physicians and psychiatrists have been inclined to discount reports that the Communists used this or that drug in their brain washing activities on prisoners.

The importance of these differences in drug response, in connection with narcotic drug addiction and control, treatment of mental and other diseases, and in bearing on the brain washing problem, is stressed by Drs. John M. von Felsinger, Louis Lasagna and Henry K. Beecher of Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (March 26).

The "impressive reputation" of opium drugs as dangerous because of the feeling of well-being they may induce seems largely based on the writings and experiences of celebrated literary figures such as De Quincey, Coleridge, Baudelaire and Cocteau, the Boston doctors state.

Many agents, such as antihistamines, and large doses of aspirin and coffee, are reported as producing this feeling of well-being in addicts, they point out.

In normal persons, they find, the opium drugs such as morphine and heroin produce unpleasant feelings, rather than the happy feeling they are generally supposed to bring on.

Among their 20 volunteers in the study, the seven who got happy feelings from heroin or morphine or both were immature, impulsive and self-centered. They had unrealistic goals and ambitions and were the most hostile and anxious of the whole group.

In these persons an unpleasant reaction

soon followed a pleasant one induced by a drug. This, the scientists report, is because the false feeling produced by the drug is a threat to the personality's shaky balance and results in "fear or panic."

Amphetamine, popularly known as an ingredient of "pep pills," has been reported one of the drugs used in brain washing by the Communists. The poorly adjusted person would, according to the Boston studies, react with a good feeling at first, followed by the shaky, panicky feeling. A well adjusted person, on the other hand, might find this drug stimulating, but might be upset by the sleeping pill barbiturates because such a person finds them "confusing." The poorly adjusted person finds them pleasant because they bring an intermission from tension.

The Boston doctors think the effects of drugs that act on the brain and central nervous system should be considered in connection with the state of those parts of the body, as reflected in the personality, just as the effects of a heart drug are considered in relation to the state of the heart, or of a kidney drug in relation to the state of the kidneys.

Science News Letter, April 9, 1955

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