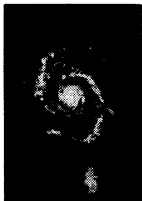





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PSYCHOLOGY

Expect to Feel Better And You Really Do

► THE MERE SIGHT of a hypodermic needle in your doctor's hand probably will not make you feel better—or worse. It has to be injected first.

Once injected, you probably will feel better—or worse, if you have been sufficiently conditioned to believe it will help or harm, even if the serum has no real medical effect. But should the doctor try to fool you too often with such a placebo, as these medicines with psychological rather than physiological effect are called, you probably will go to another physician.

An experiment conducted at the psychological laboratories at Harvard University on a rat showed that it failed to change its response when subjected to a "mock" injection. But it at least was initially fooled into depression after receiving a harmless solution by injection. It previously had received a genuinely suppressing drug.

However, if the placebo were tried too often after the depressing drug was given, the rat reverted to his normal response and showed no signs of depression.

Dr. R. J. Herrnstein, Harvard University professor, reporting the experiment in *Science*, 138:3541, 1962, said: "This placebo effect is based on the animal's experience and can be eliminated by withholding the drug."

• *Science News Letter*, 82:348 December 1, 1962

PSYCHOLOGY

Expect to Do Poorly? Discomfort With Success

► IF A PERSON expects to do something poorly and actually does it well, he is likely to attempt to change his performance record to fit his preconceived notion of how he would perform.

This was demonstrated by experiments undertaken by Drs. Elliot Aronson of the University of Minnesota and J. Merrill Carlsmith, then a National Science Foundation Fellow, while both were working at Harvard University.

Working with coeds, a few quick tests were administered on what was explained as a personality study. Some of the students were given false scores, which either confirmed or did not confirm their expectation of results. Then by suggesting that they retake the tests they were in effect surreptitiously allowed to change their responses.

The experimenters found that those who expected to perform poorly but did perform well on the tests changed more responses than those who expected to and did perform poorly. Results reported in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 65:178, 1962, were in accord with the idea of some psychological theorists that a person experiences discomfort when he holds two ideas that are psychologically inconsistent and will attempt to change one or both of the ideas to make for more consistency.

• *Science News Letter*, 82:348 December 1, 1962

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