

Social Sciences Notes

PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

Ceramic Powder Controls Mania

A white powder used in glazing ceramic pots apparently controls a serious mental disease—manic-depressive psychosis.

The therapeutic effects of lithium carbonate were outlined last week by a scientist at the National Institute of Mental Health.

Dr. William E. Bunney said the inexpensive powder checks intense manic excitement, but its role in depressive episodes is still questionable.

Manic-depressive psychosis is one of two major mental illnesses; it plays an important role in the 25,000 yearly U.S. suicides. The other illness is schizophrenia.

European scientists have been experimenting with lithium carbonate in the psychosis for about 15 years. Despite evidence it was effective, research in the United States lagged until a couple of years ago when Dr. Bunney began his research.

He reported that within 24 hours after a patient is taken off the powder, mania returns. If work on the depressive phase bears out European research, lithium will become an important weapon against the disease, he said.

He cautioned, however, that the drug must be used with care. An overdose may have serious side effects. But in normal doses, lithium is apparently free of side effects.

Lithium also promises to aid in mapping the biochemistry underlying manic-depressive psychosis.

WELFARE

Legal Aid New Welfare Job

Legal aid is becoming a recognized public welfare service, according to U.S. Commissioner of Welfare, Dr. Ellen Winston.

"Legal services are coming to be recognized as a right, and therefore should be available to those assisted by public welfare programs," she said at an administrative meeting in Washington, D.C.

States wishing to set up demonstration projects in legal aid can get Federal funding. Sussex County in Delaware and Nassau County in New York have already done so. Arkansas has submitted an application and Colorado and New Jersey are interested.

"In our complex, law-based society, it is as important to assure that legal needs will be met when they occur as it is to assure that financial, health, educational and other essential needs will be met," said Dr. Winston.

The poverty program also includes legal services and will give them increased emphasis next year.

PSYCHOBIOLOGY

Sexual Codes May Coexist

Instructions for both male and female sexual activity are written in the infant brain, a Princeton University biologist has theorized.

Hormones acting at birth then erase one or the other code depending on the animal's genetic sex, according to Dr. Robert D. Lisk.

Dr. Lisk bases his theory on the fact that with a hormone treatment, he elicited both male and female

acts in three neuterized rats. It was the first time hormones had stimulated male action in rats castrated from birth, much less bisexual behavior.

Previously, only female behavior could be stimulated in neuterized rats, regardless of original sex, leading scientists to believe the female condition is the neutral or basic condition. Male secretion at birth supposedly wrote out the male code and overpowered an inborn female response.

Dr. Lisk now challenges this theory, holding that both codes coexist at birth. If so, he should be able to elicit male behavior in neuterized female rats. His preliminary trials indicate this may be the case, reported Dr. Lisk in the current *ANATOMICAL RECORD*.

The work has implications for studies of homosexuality. Biologically, there could be a malfunction of the erasure process.

ALCOHOLISM

Alcoholism Treatments Misdirected

Hospitals and clinics treating alcoholics can fairly well blame themselves for their failures, an authority on alcoholism charged at a recent symposium in Baltimore.

Most treatment efforts aim at a skidrow stereotype with the limited goal of obtaining abstinence, said Dr. Morris E. Chafetz, director of the Acute Psychiatric Service and Alcohol Clinic of Massachusetts General Hospital.

"Abstinence for me is meaningless," said Dr. Chafetz, whose program focuses on treating the total person, not just his drinking.

He said in most instances the drinker must fit a skidrow stereotype before he is helped.

"At Massachusetts General," said Dr. Chafetz, "highly able young doctors will not give a diagnosis of alcoholism if they have a physical disability to fasten on, or if the patient is married, or has a good job, or fits the drinking pattern of the doctor."

EDUCATION

Bussing Reports Good

Two experiments in bussing school children from slums to suburbs have been successful, according to preliminary reports from Hartford, Conn., and Berkeley, Calif.

A poll of attitudes in Berkeley revealed that 65 percent of the suburban mothers thought the experiment was "good." Some 82 percent of them said their children had formed new interracial friendships. Among mothers of the bussed children—230 Negro students—91 percent liked the experiment. Almost all the children, white and Negro, reported positive attitudes.

In Hartford, 255 city pupils have been sent out to five suburbs. Their average daily attendance exceeds 90 percent, higher than the usual rate in slum schools. No data on the students' academic progress is yet available, but the children are reportedly well-received.

According to *EDUCATION U.S.A.*, a weekly report of the National Education Association, school officials in both cities believe the experiments prove that inner city children can not only compete, but can contribute to the white suburban classroom.