

## SUGGESTIBILITY AND NARCOSIS—A REJOINER

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In a recent issue of the *Psychological Bulletin* appeared a review of "The present status of psychotherapeutic counseling" by W. U. Snyder (2). This review contains a critical evaluation of a paper by Eysenck and Rees (1) dealing with "States of heightened suggestibility: narcosis." As this review may seriously mislead readers unacquainted with the original article, it seemed appropriate to discuss briefly the factual inaccuracies contained in Snyder's paper. His review reads as follows:

Eysenck and Rees . . . performed experiments which appeared to show that suggestibility of subjects is not greatly affected by the use of barbiturate drugs or nitrous oxide inhalation. The task suggested to the subjects was the squeezing of a bulb while listening to a gramophone suggestion that they do so. These authors conclude that neurotic individuals are more suggestible than normals, but absolutely no criteria of neuroticism were given and the total of neurotic and normal patients was only 30.

The statements contained in this extract may be treated seriatim.

1. "The total number of neurotic and normal patients was only 30." In actual fact there were 50 patients altogether; these were all neurotics. No normal patients were tested. These facts are made perfectly plain in the original paper. The imputation that the results do not prove what we claim they prove because of the small number of subjects is incorrect; tests of significance were carried out and showed a  $P < .001$ .

2. "Suggestibility . . . is not greatly affected by the use of (narcotics)." In actual fact, our conclusions read: "Suggestible patients become more suggestible after injection of sodium amytal in subanaesthetic doses." "Suggestible patients become more suggestible after inhalation of nitrous oxide in subanaesthetic doses." "Non-suggestible patients remain non-suggestible after the administration of these two narcotics." Snyder's summary on this point is definitely misleading, and does not deal at all with our main point.

3. "These authors conclude that neurotic individuals are more suggestible than normals, but absolutely no criteria of neuroticism were given." Nowhere in the article do we conclude that neurotic individuals are more suggestible than normals, consequently it is difficult to see what criteria Snyder would like to see, or in what connection. All our patients were neurotic in the sense of being referred to Mill Hill Emergency Hospital with the notation "Neurosis." While thus there is no at-

tempt whatever in our paper to deduce the relationship between neurosis and suggestibility, reference is made to the fact that in other work (summarized recently in the writer's book *Dimensions of Personality*) a very close connection was found. Full criteria for presence or absence of neuroticism were given both in the article quoted in our paper, and in the book, which is primarily concerned with the isolation and measurement of this personality variable.

A great responsibility rests on those who abstract parts of the scientific literature. Many readers depend on the accuracy of their reporting, and the fairness of their summaries. Snyder's report and summary fall short of any reasonable standard of accuracy. Little value can attach to conclusions reached on the basis of such cursory reading

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. EYSENCK, H. J., & REES, W. L. States of heightened suggestibility: narcosis. *J. ment. Sci.*, 1945, 91, 301-310.
2. SNYDER, W. U. The present status of psychotherapeutic counseling. *Psychol. Bull.*, 1947, 44, 297-386.