

Are You Just a Bag of Chemicals?

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Well, yes. You do have a soul and a conscience, but they might be controlled with chemicals and electricity too. When we went to medical school, the final, God's word on a lot of things was that your mother had twisted your psyche and made you gay, or an alcoholic, or a drug addict, or a compulsive whatever. If you were a Don Juan or a nymphomaniac, she must have planted the seed of your self-destruction. Even bed-wetters had been programmed to hate their mothers and were, therefore, "taking a leak on her."

Everything was based on some psychiatric tilt that could be cured with the appropriate -- albeit prolonged -- psychotherapy. (Some honest doctor pointed out that if you were not too sick when you went into psychotherapy, you had a better chance of getting well.) Then at the psychiatrists' bidding, we sent these problem cases of drug dependency, psychoses, alcoholism, and sexual and social deviancy for treatment. Nothing happened. Sometimes it was helpful for the patients to talk to someone who did not laugh at their feelings nor was critical of their lifestyle. The best response was that the patient felt better for being an oddball.

Then two things happened at the same time. These therapists found that what they had promised was not true, and clever biochemical research into the workings of the brain indicated that some of us are pushed into things because we have genetic/neurotransmitter imbalances. Even Freud had suggested that schizophrenia would someday be shown to be a chemical problem and was not due to a "bad" mother.

The most helpful finding was the identification of receptor sites on most of the cells. Breast cells have receptor sites for estrogen; we can see that working in our growing daughters. Cells have sites for insulin so we have energy; if the sites don't work, mature-onset diabetes appears. Receptor sites for our own morphine-like endorphins have been found all over the brain, or else we would be in constant pain night and day. Norman Cousins has shown us that laughter or vitamin C will reduce pain and reduce the impact of a stressful disease; both those healing modalities produce endorphins, and we feel better. Some of us are addicted to laughter. I love to laugh. I feel good. I can put my face into a Cheshire-cat grin and feel good.

I just checked this book out from the medical school library: *Neurotransmitters and Drugs*, by Z. Kruk and C. Pycoc, University Press, Baltimore 1983. "Endorphins have been found in the pituitary gland and in the adrenal medulla. It is suggested that they may have a role in modulating pain during stress responses." During stress when ACTH and catecholamines are being released, endorphins are released also. These endorphins have potent analgesic actions. The authors are suggesting that there is a mechanism here to explain addictions to excitement. It would help to explain the "adrenalin junkie." The compulsive gambler has to gamble because it is exciting and kills the pain. He does not have to win; that is not the point. The point is the excitement. Sexual conquests, mountain climbing, and stealing things, all fit with these stimulus seekers.

They finish up with: "A chemically mediated reward system would fit the observation on the development of withdrawal symptoms." They were careful to say that there was some "implication" that this phenomenon might help to explain the dependence on food, drugs, excitement, sex, people, music, and life.

What to do to help these people? I'll let you know when I get off my coffee addiction.

AUGUST 1990