

Self-Experimentation And Its Role In Medical Research

2025-12-19

Table of contents

[A] PAPER for 2012 (Self-Experimentation and Its Role in Medical Research) by Allen B. Weisse as Weisse_SEAITRIMR_2012.

[R] Start 8:57 PM EST, 2025-12-19.

[T] Define experimentation and oncology.

[>] How common is this practice? Is it more common among certain nationalities? What have been the predominant medical fields in which self-experimentation has occurred? How dangerous an act has this proved to be? What have been the trends over time? What is the future likely to bring?

[R] Regarding the previous questions, my guess is that (1) mostly European or European-descended individuals self-experiment, (2) that the incidence of serious harm or death is less than maybe 25% probably less than 10% per experiment, (3) that people in the 21st century, proportionally speaking, self-experiment less often, despite the total number of self-experimenters (probably mostly biohackers) increasing, and that (4) the future may involve an increase in the incidence of self-experiment as resource-abundance and outlets (drugs and other substances) expand.

[Q] Why did the peak of self-experimentation occur in the first half of the 20th century?

[Q] What forms of self-experimentation exists (imagine a typology)?

[Q] What arguments exist for curtailing differentially self-experimentation?

[E] What was Walter Reed's Yellow Fever Commission in Cuba in 1900?

...plan to allow mosquitoes suspected of harboring the deadly disease to bite Commission members, thus to demonstrate the mode of transmission.

[Q] What percentage of self-experiments are registered somewhere? What percentage of self-experiments are group over individual efforts?

[T] Acquire a copy of the 2003 work by Arsen Fik, Self Experimenters: Sources for Study.

[Q] "I discarded the 49 examples antedating 1800 and divided, into 50-year time periods, the remaining 465 episodes that occurred over the next 2 centuries" Would any findings change if the author chose a 10 or 25 window instead of a 50 year window?

[Q] The six categories of self-experiment determined are "infectious disease (including vaccines), anesthesiology (general and local), physiology, pharmacology, radiology (including x-rays and other radiation sources), and oncology." How would more modern self-experiments fall into these categories? Are any categories now present, only in modernity? There are probably many more self-experiments that remain unrecorded formally. One example that comes to mind are people's attempts at inducing lucid dreams with light-flashes.

[T] Re-create figure 1 using Python.

[T] Re-create Table 1 as a line graph using Python.

[E] Which category of self-experimentation were most prevalent between 1800 and 1900?

Infectious diseases and vaccines.

[R] Of course it makes sense that only after a new technology is introduced can people begin to self-experiment using it. Less obvious is the notion that as a technology becomes better adopted by conventional outlets or institutions self-experimentation with these technologies seems to decrease.

[Q] “The nation most prominently represented was the United States (33% of the total), followed by Germany (15%), the United Kingdom (13%), Russia (11%), and France (8%), with lower representations among countries in the remaining 20%.” What are the population-proportions here? I recall that, in the 21st century, a number of European countries have very high ratios of researchers and or research papers and or citations per capita; perhaps the same holds true for self-experimentation.

[E] What are some famous examples of self-experimentation between 1800-2000?

These were Ramsay, who exposed himself to various gases to determine their anesthetic properties; Metchnikoff, who injected himself with blood containing relapsing fever spirochetes; Lawrence, who drank a solution containing radioactive sodium; de Hevesy, who drank a solution containing heavy water to monitor its elimination from the body; and Schweitzer, who submitted himself to an unproven yellow fever vaccine to determine any side effects.

[T] Define catheter, atrium, anachronistically.

[>] In Saul Benison’s oral-history memoir of the curmudgeonly Tom Rivers, a leading virologist at the Rockefeller Foundation from 1922 through 1955, I found the quotation I sought: “I know that if anyone ever came up to me and asked me to take an untried vaccine, I’d ask ‘Have you taken it?’ and, by God, if that person said ‘No,’ I’d tell him to go to hell.” To confirm the safety of their products, the developers of vaccines were expected to subject not only themselves to inoculation, but their immediate personal and professional families.

[>] Rivers⁵ has called this “gang or group research.” He goes on to say, “Great discoveries are not made by committees or groups of workers; they originate in the minds of single individuals . . . I know of no important discovery in medicine or biology in the last hundred years that evolved out of gang research. You can do a hell of a lot of scut work by gang research, but the ideas for discovery are still going to come from the ideas in one man’s mind. In other words, you can hire men but not ideas.”

[R] The previous quote reminds you of the counterarguments to the Ortega hypothesis.

[R] The author of this article does not seem to cover results from outside of academic publications or reports. Another survey of self-experimentation, with a typology for the level of formalization in self-experimentation, seems due. The biohacking community seems not much represented.

[T] Find and download any interesting publications citing this work on Google Scholar.

[R] “Perhaps as we progress into a new era of molecular biology, which is characterized by the development of increasingly complex methods of research, the need for self-experimentation will vanish.” In scientific pursuits, self-experimentation is present at both the level of the researcher and the level potential beneficiary (once a technology or procedure has been developed). Historically, self-experimentation seems to have occurred more at the formal level and (perhaps) now self-experimentation is occurring more at the latter level.

[R] End 22:10 PM EST, 2025-12-19 (with break).