



SELF-TORTURE

This little girl is biting her lips. Such mild forms of self-hurting are common to many adults. They may start when a restless child is confined during convalescence or punishment. Sometimes they grow to abnormal extremes.

PSYCHOLOGY

Self-Torture, Normal in Children, May Become Habit

Confinement of Restless Youngsters in Convalescence May Start Nail Biting or Other Nervous Tricks

LITTLE Johnny was complaining about a sore thumb.

"It hurts every time I pinch it!"

"Then why do you keep on pinching it?" asked Mother.

Johnny didn't know why, but a psychologist could tell him that he was just following out a natural craving all humans seem to have for punishment and suffering.

A great deal of the pain and anguish that men and women must endure during their lives is self-inflicted. Extremes of self-torture are seen among the mentally ill, but in its milder forms nearly everyone is a victim—or a culprit.

Do you think you are immune? Well, don't be too sure. Just look over this list of ways of self-punishment and see

whether you are not among the guilty concerning some of them.

Biting the lips. Biting the nails or the skin fold around them. Rubbing an injured place. Pulling at the hair. Picking or rubbing rough or raised places on the skin, sores, or skin eruptions. Working with the tongue on a loose or aching tooth. Banging your fist or even your head. Working when you are tired. Destroying on impulse your treasured possessions.

A search into the reasons underlying these and the many other forms of mild self-torture has just been published in this country by the scientific publication *Genetic Psychology Monographs*. (Feb. 1937). The study was made in Poland by Dr. Casimir Dabrowski, of

the Department of Public Health, Warsaw, who was Polish Research Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation at Harvard a few years ago. His report has been translated by Dr. William Thau.

Children are chief offenders among the hurters of self. It often seems to frantic mothers that their small sons are bent on self-destruction. Dr. Dabrowski finds there is really something to the idea. At least children will deliberately hurt themselves from sheer joy in the interesting results—the thrill of the sensation or the rumpus it stirs up.

Nervousness Possible Cause

Much of the self-punishment is due to nervousness or hyper-excitability, Dr. Dabrowski says. Just watch a nervous man who is engrossed in reading or in thought over a problem, particularly a problem which is unpleasant. See him fidget. He may wind his watch chain around his finger so tightly it creases the flesh. If he is old-fashioned enough to have a long mustache he may chew or pull on the ends of it. Perhaps that is why the modern young man clips his so close. But for him are left the eyebrows to pluck, ear lobes to pull. He may scratch his head or face. He may tear paper, possibly important papers. He may scribble over a favorite book. Or whittle initials in his desk.

These little tricks represent a sort of overflowing of muscular energy during the time when the individual is compelling himself to sit still and work. Children and young people have more urge for activity than do adults. For that reason, this sort of restless, useless activity is more common among the youngsters.

May Become Habit

Once started, such things become a compelling habit in much the same way that smoking and drinking may. The origin of the nervous habits may often be traced to a period of convalescence when the child is restless and needs activity yet must remain confined to bed.

Get him out of bed as soon as you can, is Dr. Dabrowski's prescription. And while he is there, try to find useful activity for his hands that will busy them and yet not tire him unduly.

Grief or humiliation may cause a person to torture himself, Dr. Dabrowski points out. Somehow mental anguish is alleviated by the pricks of physical pain. Since before the memory of man, those who were in grief have fasted, thrown their bodies on the hard ground, beat

upon their breasts and, figuratively or literally, put ashes upon their heads.

What is crying but a form of self-torture and self-mutilation?

"Rebound" Marriage

A "marriage on the rebound" of a person who has been jilted may be a mental parallel of such physical self-punishment in grief. Dr. Dabrowski tells of an 18-year-old girl who found that the boy she loved had deceived her. Within a few hours after hearing this, she gave herself to the least acceptable and even physically repulsive of her suitors in a sort of self-revenge.

Dramatization and a need for the spotlight may be another explanation for self-torturers.

Here is the usual motive behind the child who puts on temper tantrums. When a youngster chooses a public place or an embarrassing moment to throw himself on the floor, kick and scream, or hold his breath until he becomes actually blue in the face, his eyes pop out and his life seems in danger, you may suspect a desire for the spotlight. He may have a feeling of inferiority and takes this way to gain attention.

Children have been known to bring on nose bleeds, make themselves sick, and feign convulsions because they enjoy the excitement and commotion in the household which such behavior produces, Dr. Dabrowski found.

Asceticism

A higher motive for self-torture is found in asceticism which is known among all peoples, primitive and civilized. Certain forms of deprivation and self-sacrifice are essential to the building up of character and the manly virtues, is the belief underlying religious fasting, humiliations, prohibition of certain pleasures at certain times.

The Catholic girl who gives up candy during Lent, or the Methodist boy who refrains from card-playing or the Dunker who dons plain clothing is acting upon the same general motive as that activating the Hindu who lies on a bed of spikes.

Carried to extremes such forms of religious self-torture produce a sort of ecstasy that seems to lift the convert from the commonplaces of ordinary existence.

Michelangelo, Dostoyefsky, and Tolstoy are among a number of geniuses described by Dr. Dabrowski as practicing self-torture in connection with their art.

Michelangelo suffered an intense feeling of inferiority. He was not good looking. His body was poorly proportioned, and what facial beauty he might have had was destroyed by a broken nose. That to a person in whom love of the beautiful amounted to a passion, was tragedy. He abused his health and especially in his later years he endured hunger, terrible hours of work, and privation. And when he had finished a masterpiece he would ruthlessly destroy it unless it were taken from him by force.

Dostoyefsky's and Tolstoy's tales of suffering reflect the torture that they themselves endured in their pursuit of mental self-punishment.

Has Served Society

Thus, this universal craving for discomfort and pain, which seem so useless and harmful when it takes its ordinary outlets of nail biting and lip chewing may be turned to very noble purposes and serve society in outstanding ways.

"A feeling of inferiority may be an incentive to put forth one's best efforts, and perhaps no great accomplishment has ever been attained except under the spur of some such stimulus," said the psychiatrist Dr. C. Macfie Campbell, who is quoted by Dr. Dabrowski.

If you must suffer, let your suffering be to some good purpose, urges Dr. Dabrowski as the result of this study. "Severity to oneself should be accompanied by sensitivity to the sufferings of others," he says.

The forgetfulness of self that makes a man dive into icy waters to save a companion from drowning, that kept the commander of the Hindenburg persistently at his post until he was forcibly dragged out of the flaming wreckage, and that enabled other men to jump into that inferno for rescue work, is a result of training in submitting the natural instincts to authority of the intellect and moral principles in order to reach a high degree of self-control.

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PSYCHIATRY

Insulin Cuts Short Circuits In Brain of Mental Patient

INSULIN shock treatment is banishing hallucinations and clearing up befogged minds of mentally sick patients by isolating short circuits in the brain which are responsible for the mental confusion, Dr. Manfred Sakel, Viennese psychiatrist who discovered the new treatment, explained to members of the American Psychiatric Association meeting at Pittsburgh.

The particular mental disorder for which Dr. Sakel introduced insulin shock treatment is schizophrenia, also known as dementia precox. Psychiatrists estimate that 100,000 persons suffer from the disease in the United States alone.

The insulin shock treatment also works on narcotic addicts, aiding in the difficult process of weaning the addicts away from the drug they love. Instead of being morose and mentally disturbed after the drug is taken away they become extremely friendly and interested in the world around them. The new treatment was first discovered by accident during treatment of a drug addict who had diabetes. Insulin, a gland extract, has been the standard treatment for diabetes for over a decade.

Giving insulin, the diabetes remedy, to the schizophrenic patients in doses large enough to reduce the amount of blood sugar almost to the point of collapse, banishes the hallucinations and restores their sanity. Dr. Sakel reported that this treatment had succeeded in bringing 80 per cent. of the patients back to a normal mental state.

The mystery of how insulin shock treatment accomplishes this was explained by Dr. Sakel on the basis of a new theory of the cause of the disease.

Stimuli coming to the brain from sense organs, such as the eyes and ears, probably travel along pathways from one brain cell to another, Dr. Sakel suggested. Injury at any point may distort and confuse the pathways. Then the stimulus, coming from eye or ear or other sense organ, loses its way or is short-circuited.

When the stimulus comes in over the short circuit or false pathway, the brain's response may consequently be false. This would explain the hallucinations of the mental disease. A stimulus that should have come, say, over the pathways from the eye got short-circuited along the way