

PSYCHIATRY

# Suicide Is a Disease

## It May Even Be Chronic When Individuals Let Their Hate Turn Inward and Constantly Punish Themselves

By MARJORIE VAN DE WATER

**D**URING the last 24 minutes somewhere in the United States a man has killed himself.

Suicide daily brings sorrow into the world. Sorrow and perplexity, too, for despite the fact that self-destruction is so common it is very little understood. Every one of us would like to know what we could do to save these lives tragically wasted, but very few know how to go about preventing or relieving the depression that leads to self-murder.

Searching into the minds of many would-be suicides, Dr. Karl A. Menninger, founder of a clinic for nervous and mental diseases, has learned surprising things that may in future aid physicians and friends in preventing men from killing themselves.

### Suicide by Inches

Suicide is a disease, Dr. Menninger says in his book, "Man Against Himself." (Harcourt, Brace and Company). It is a disease which afflicts many persons who never actually die of it.

"Chronic suicide," Dr. Menninger calls this ailment which is endured by many of our neighbors.

The alcohol addict who throws away job, friends, reputation, health and even family because of a compulsive need to get drunk is actually engaging in a lingering, extremely painful suicide, Dr. Menninger declares.

The neurotic patient who loses the use of parts of her body without organic cause is also killing herself by little bits.

The criminal who is extremely audacious and yet incomprehensibly stupid is actually, perhaps unconsciously, inviting capture and punishment. He returns to jail or prison again and again because the crime itself and the lack of caution in concealment are the result of a similar compulsion to injure not only others but himself. Normal criminals there may be, Dr. Menninger says, who do not have this reckless suicidal attitude, but they are the ones who manage to continue their depredations because they stay within the letter of the law or because they are not betrayed by "acci-

dental" little acts of apparent stupidity or carelessness that bring them before the bar of justice.

Sometimes men kill themselves only in their thoughts. Such persons are familiar to physicians who treat mental disease, for they are usually insane. In their delusions, they may believe themselves to be dead or they may think only that parts of their bodies are useless or gone. Often it is the eyes; the victim of this sort of suicide will be convinced that he is blind, he insists that he has no eyes at all.

Sometimes men torture themselves. You have probably seen your friends grow angry and destroy part of their belongings or clothing in the height of their rage. The abnormal go further; they may literally tear out hair, kick or gouge themselves. As the normal man may bring down his fist so hard that he bruises his knuckles, so the abnormal may more deliberately cut or crush his hand.

More subtle is the action of a man who repeatedly gets himself into accidents. He falls off a ladder, he drives into a telegraph pole, he gets his hand caught in industrial machinery, or jaywalks in front of an oncoming automobile.

### Poor Accident Risks

"Hard-Luck Champions" is the name given these men popularly. Insurance men call them the "accident prone"; they regard them as poor risks for accident policies for it is recognized that such persons are much more likely than other men to fall into new accidents in the future.

Relatives and friends, without saying so, may incline to the opinion that there is something wayward in such "carelessness," or they may blame it on a "jinx." The jinx, according to Dr. Menninger, is the suicide disease. Without being conscious of the fact, some men really want to get into accidents because in this way they punish themselves while at the same time they become the center of attention, get their names in the newspapers, receive flowers and sympathy and perhaps damages or insurance.

More than 16,000 pedestrians walk to their death each year, statistics of the National Safety Council indicate.

"We are sure that some of these 16,000 deaths were the fault of the victim," comments Dr. Menninger, "and my endeavor is to show that frequently this cannot be explained away by such a word as 'carelessness.' After all, to be careless with one's own life is in itself a symptom and from my point of view a symptom directly related to the self-destruction impulse."

The impulse is less readily detected in the person who submits or insists on periodic surgical operations. Like the neurotic patient, he can produce symptoms that are real enough, yet they may be induced or aggravated by himself.

### Self-Mutilations

Less hazardous, but just as significant of inner tensions, are the various habits of self-injury and self-mutilation in trivial ways—hair pulling and chewing, nail biting, lip biting, head and skin scratching and the picking at and aggravating of skin eruptions and wounds.

Sometimes, customs of partial self-destruction have become socially acceptable. The daily ritual of shaving, clung to by modern males in the face of annoyance, pain, and the sacrifice of his distinctively masculine beard, is such a generally approved practice of self-punishment, according to Dr. Menninger. He points to many primitive customs having to do with cutting the hair and shaving the head, the American Indian regard for the scalplock, and the abnormality of certain individuals who steal hair as indicating that this custom has its origin in what he calls "focal suicide."

The tortures that women, and men too, suffer at the hands of the manicurist are another example of socially approved partial self-destruction. In this case what is given up is a weapon, and one suspects that the social arbiters who started the custom of nail trimming may have had good reason for so doing. Plucking eyebrows is even more painful but less socially useful.

But if, instead of having your nails trimmed in proper style at the beauty parlor, you gnaw them off yourself because of a powerful inner urgency, you show that "tooth and claw" are not be-

ing used in the way that nature intended.

It is hate that makes men punish and kill themselves, Dr. Menninger has found. Love never destroyed life. Yet in every person with suicidal tendency a conflict is going on between the dark forces of hate and destruction and the other powerful forces that make man want to build, create and love. It is the constructive force that prevents the success of suicide attempts.

These constructive and destructive forces are present in every man, just as they are in the physical world.

"To create and to destroy, to build up and to tear down, these are the anabolism and katabolism of the personality, no less than of the cells and the corpuscles—the two directions in which the same energies exert themselves," Dr. Menninger said.

These forces, as the personality develops in childhood, are directed outward. The individual invests, as Dr. Menninger puts it, certain parcels of hate and love in other persons or in the places and objects around him.

### Fight Themselves

But suppose the individual fails to mature in this respect. Then these forces turn in on the self.

"Instead of fighting their enemies," Dr. Menninger says, "such persons fight (destroy) themselves; instead of loving friends or music or the building of a house, such persons love only themselves."

"But no one evolved so completely as to be entirely free from self-destructive tendencies: indeed, the phenomena of life, the behavior peculiar to different individuals, may be said to express the resultant of these conflicting factors. A sort of equilibrium, oftentimes very unstable, is achieved and maintained until disturbed by new developments in the environment which causes a re-arrangement with perhaps a quite different outcome."

When a person becomes so self-centered that all his love is focused on himself and all of his hate turns inward then he is in a bad way. Conflict results. If self-love, triumphs, then we see the self-indulgent egotist. If hate triumphs, then we have the person who unwillingly tortures himself to no purpose, who makes a martyr of himself by work or meaningless sacrifice so that he and all around him are miserable, and who may in the end destroy himself.

Ingrowing hatred may begin in early childhood. Many a man and many a

woman, Dr. Menninger points out, goes through all of life taking out on others or on himself the grudge he has against life—a grudge perhaps founded on abuse or neglect in his childhood.

Never was a child spoiled by too much love, declares Dr. Menninger. When indulgent parents spoil a child, it is because the indulgence is not a sign of warm parental love but a thin veil for an antagonistic attitude that may range from annoyance to actual hatred. The unwanted child can look intuitively through the disguise and knows that he is rejected. Usually such parents vacillate between excessive indulgence serving as salve to their consciences and cruel punishment or neglect.

### Shun Human Contacts

Sometimes the harsh treatment from a loved one comes later in life and outside the home. In either case, the child withdraws like a sensitive plant from human contacts. He is afraid to trust or love anyone. Instead he hates. And if he is a "good" child or a timid one he hates not others but himself.

Gradually the life of such a person is narrowed. He offends others so often that he has no friends. Men and women avoid him. He has no interests, pets, or hobbies on which he can lavish affection or zeal. At last, nothing in life is worth while to him. He is poor company for himself, yet cannot go outside his own narrow confines.

The first step in building up the mental health of such a person, Dr. Menninger says, is to induce him to transfer some of his emotion to outside objects. Easiest, perhaps, to achieve is a transfer of hatred.

When, in the mental hospital, the suicidal patient begins to swear at the doctors and explode in temper at the nurses, it is regarded as a good sign.

The next step is to suggest delicately more suitable objects for hatred. Goodness knows man has enough enemies to serve such a purpose. From insidious germs to the terrible forces of storm and flood, man has much to fight. Chopping wood, or weeding in the garden are excellent ways of working off destructive impulses. Think of the destructive energy that might be consumed in exterminating ragweed! Equally efficacious are football, any sort of competitive athletics, chess, politics, business and even watching the fights of others.

Inanimate objects may serve as a means for venting spite. Says Dr. Menninger:

"It is certainly more desirable for a



### PARTIAL SELF-DESTRUCTION

*Nail and lip biting are another and milder form of suicide disease. The child, in such cases, may be taking out on herself the irritation and nervous tension built up by adults for whom she has such love or respect that she cannot "sass" them back.*

man to pound a punching bag or walk miles in pursuit of a golf ball than to exert the same energy in attacking the reputation of his neighbor, the peace of mind of his wife, or the functioning of his own heart.

"Still better, of course, so far as secondary and material benefits are concerned, would be the application of this aggressive energy to the problems of the field, the forum, and the factory. Indeed, probably all work represents in large measure this 'sublimation' of aggressions, aggressions directed against what Ernest Southard called 'The Kingdom of Evils'; ignorance, crime, vice, disease, poverty—and let us add ugliness, and even aggressiveness itself."

But diverting hate to outside objects is not enough. Another part of the suicide disease is the element of self-punishment—punishment for an inescapable sense of guilt. The best way to get rid of the feeling of guilt, conscious or unconscious, is by atonement, Dr. Menninger says. Friends and physicians of the suicidal patient should introduce to him methods of atonement that will be useful to society.

When he bangs his head against the wall, it may relieve his feelings, but it does no one else any good. If, however, he gives money to the hungry or for



### SUPERFICIAL SUICIDE

*Tattooing is a form of self-torture combined with a satisfaction of the desire to show off.*

scientific research or his time in the service of the community, his efforts are constructive.

Religion has its very definite therapeutic effect in this connection, Dr. Menninger indicates. For many people, the ritual of the confessional can serve to relieve the overburdened conscience.

Last, but not by any means least, it is necessary for the suicidal patient to build up his capacity for love.

"He who seeketh his own life shall lose it but whosoever loseth his life for my sake shall find it." These words of the Great Physician apply to the suicidal patient, Dr. Menninger said. He who would learn not to destroy his own life must give up some of his self-esteem and invest his love in others.

The making of friends is an art and should be cultivated. If the personality is too weak to cultivate human friendships, develop an interest in music, art, crafts, or some engrossing hobby.

Work, a splendid way of getting rid of hates, is also one of the best and most available means of developing the creative impulses. In social work, teaching, the ministry, medicine, and many another profession and business one may lose oneself in true creative endeavor to the endless benefit of mankind and the restoration of mental health.

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### ENGINEERING

# Few Simple Rules in Driving Greatly Increase Car Mileage

**W**HILE motor car manufacturers do everything possible to increase the gasoline mileage of their automobiles, the owner of the car, through proper driving, can also do plenty to decrease his gasoline consumption.

In a report presented to the Society of Automotive Engineers, W. E. Zierer and J. B. Macauley, Jr., of the Chrysler Corporation, cited a recent driving test in Detroit.

A ten-mile course was laid through the city and the same car was driven over the route in two ways. First it was pushed to make the trip as fast as possible while keeping within a 30-mile-an-hour speed limit. All gears were used and speed was the watchword. It took 39 minutes to make the trip and the gasoline consumption was 8.5 miles to the gallon.

Next the same car was taken over the route using best driving practices—such as coasting up to stoplights in neutral, starting in second, accelerating slowly, etc.—which would give economy. It took 44 minutes to make the same trip this way. The mileage was 17 miles to the gallon!

Thus, at a sacrifice of five minutes time, the gasoline economy was improved 100 per cent.

### Streamlining is Vain

Streamlining on cars, the engineers showed, was effective only at speeds too high to be used generally. By removable sections they completely streamlined a stock car and found that fuel economy was increased 56 per cent, at speeds of 80 miles an hour. But the gain was only 17 per cent. at 60 miles an hour.

This freak car had an additional, long tailpiece which gave it an overall length some 44 inches greater than normal. "This would be a sad tail indeed for traffic driving and parking," they add.

Thus while streamlining alone will not result in an improvement of existing tank mileage, it will have the result of permitting somewhat higher speed operation without seriously penalizing tank mileage.

Part of the owner's feeling about the mileage his car is yielding is mixed up

with psychology, they pointed out.

A motor car owner, they said, measures economy by the number of times he has to reach for his pocketbook. They cited one case where complaints against poor mileage on a certain make of car were reduced greatly when a larger gas tank was installed.

### New Engine Bearing

They are still in the laboratory and you can't buy one for any price, but automotive engineers are now studying a new type engine bearing for automobiles which will stand up after a test run equal to driving 30,000 miles at a speed of 80 miles an hour.

This pioneer, experimental bearing, whose composition is still undisclosed, was discussed by Arthur F. Underwood, mechanical engineer of the Research Laboratories Division of General Motors Corporation.

Tougher, longer-lasting and lower-priced bearings are continually sought, explained Mr. Underwood, because bearing loads are due to increase in the future. Higher octane fuels, supplying more power, and the advent of more Diesel engines are only two trends among many which are today stimulating research on bearings.

The ideal bearing, said Mr. Underwood, should have the following properties:

1. It should have the fatigue resistance of a copper-lead or silver bearing.
2. It should have the anti-friction benefits of a tin base babbitt bearing and the bond and mechanical strength of silver.
3. It should have the conformability, embeddability and corrosion resistance of babbitt metal.
4. It should have the low cost of copper and lead as against tin, cadmium, silver or indium.

### Sleeve Valve Engines

Despite its intensive production of orthodox airplane engines for its rearmament program, Great Britain is still continuing experimentation on the sleeve valve engine, which has attracted wide attention in civil and military aviation circles.