# Behavior

## When imagination turns ugly

For more than a century, mental health workers around the world have noted that some people experience feelings of unbearable ugliness due to an imagined physical defect. They may complain constantly of thinning hair, a monstrous nose, "devious-looking" eyebrows, or an odd-shaped face.

The first systematic study of this condition, officially dubbed "body dysmorphic disorder," uncovers considerable distress and anxiety among sufferers, who often avoid work or social activities because of embarrassment over their appearance. A link may exist between imagined ugliness and obsessive-compulsive disorder or mood disorders, such as severe depression, assert psychiatrist Katherine A. Phillips of McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass., and her colleagues.

The researchers interviewed 17 men and 13 women treated for body dysmorphic disorder either at McLean Hospital or by private psychiatrists.

Participants cited an average of four, and as many as 13 different bodily preoccupations during their lives, compared with one or two mentioned in most published case reports. Symptoms usually appeared first around age 15, Phillips' team reports in the February AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY.

A large majority of volunteers checked their appearance in mirrors and other reflecting surfaces for at least four hours daily and attempted to hide their imagined defects when in public. Twelve had thought about or attempted suicide because of distress over their appearance. Only two acknowledged that their concerns involved imaginary defects.

Symptoms of imagined ugliness often eased for those taking either of two antidepressant drugs that boost the amount of the chemical messenger serotonin available to brain cells: clomipramine, which often diminishes the urges and rituals of obsessive-compulsive disorder, and fluoxetine (Prozac). All participants suffered from at least one other psychiatric disorder, most commonly severe depression, manic depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or social phobia (an intense fear of public scrutiny).

Before receiving psychiatric help, 22 volunteers sought plastic surgery, dental work, or special skin treatments. Bodily preoccupations generally increased among the eight who actually underwent these treatments.

## Post-traumatic stress and insanity

Clinicians and lawyers have expressed fears over the past decade that many criminal defendants might improperly claim that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rendered them insane and not accountable for their behavior. But the largest study of the insanity defense to date indicates that insanity pleas rarely involve people diagnosed with PTSD.

Paul S. Appelbaum, a psychiatrist at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester, and his co-workers collected data on all insanity pleas entered in 49 counties in eight states between 1980 and 1986. States included California, New York, Ohio, and Georgia. PTSD, which encompasses a range of symptoms caused by exposure to severe stress, entered the manual of psychiatric diagnoses in 1980.

Of 8,163 defendants pleading not guilty by reason of insanity, only 28 had a diagnosis of PTSD, the researchers assert in the February AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY. Defendants with and without PTSD had been arrested and hospitalized for psychiatric conditions about the same number of times, they note. Those with PTSD did not commit an excess of violent crimes, and they were not more successful with insanity pleas than defendants citing other psychiatric disorders.

It remains unclear how often defendants employ PTSD in other ways, the researchers note, such as using it to argue for "diminished capacity" or as a defense in civil court cases.

# Biology

## Parkinson's petrels: Diving for dinner


Pitman

A clumsy seabird called the Parkinson's petrel can't compete with its more agile peers that catch leaping fish in mid-air. Rather than starve, this petrel has developed an unusual foraging strategy, one that involves a close relationship with two rare species of dolphins.

In the most recent issue of THE CONDOR (vol. 94, no. 4), Robert L. Pitman and Lisa T. Ballance of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, Calif., describe the petrel's tactic of diving for its dinner.

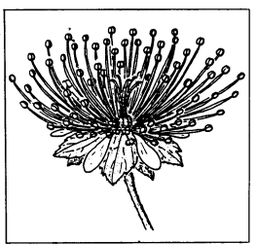
These seabirds breed on two islands off the coast of northern New Zealand during the summer and spend their winters in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. During 28 research cruises, Pitman and his colleagues discovered that Parkinson's petrels regularly associate with two rare marine mammals: false killer whales and melon-headed whales. (Because of their large size, these mammals are referred to as "whales" even though they are actually dolphins, Pitman says.)

The Parkinson's petrel preferentially follows herds of false killer and melon-headed whales. Once these dolphins catch a squid or some other large prey, the petrels dive into the water searching for scraps, Pitman says.

That's an unusual strategy for a seabird, comments marine biologist David Ainley of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory in Stinson Beach, Calif. Most seabirds follow schools of fast-swimming tunas that drive fish to the ocean surface, he notes.

## Intriguing new rose species discovered

For years, botanists Dean W. Taylor and Glenn L. Clifton had conjectured that the limestone cliffs near Redding, Calif., might shelter some interesting flora. Their hunch panned out in May 1992, when they discovered a puzzling shrub growing at the base of a north-facing slope.


Missouri Botanical Garden

They took the mystery plant to James R. Shevock of the California Academy of Sciences and Barbara Ertter of the University of California, Berkeley. To their surprise, the shrub turned out to be a new species of *Neviusia,* a genus in the rose family. Previously, botanists had noted a single species of *Neviusia,* which grows in the Southeast and is most commonly called "Alabama snow-wreath."

The team named the new species *Neviusia cliftonii* and gave it the common name "Shasta snow-wreath." Like the other *Neviusia,* the California flower has a showy ball of white stamens that looks something like a bursting star, Ertter says. However, the Shasta snow-wreath has a few petals at its base, whereas the Alabama flower has none.

Shevock, Ertter, and Taylor announced the discovery and described the new rose in the most recent issue of *Novon* (vol. 2, no. 4), a journal published by the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis.

Initially, the team believed the plant represented an Alabama snow-wreath that had taken root in the West. However, a detailed examination of the plant, as well as the discovery of two more wild populations the following month, confirmed that it was indeed a distinct, new species of *Neviusia,* Taylor says. Taylor, along with Clifton, works as a botanist at the Santa Cruz-based botany consulting firm Biosystems Analysis, Inc.