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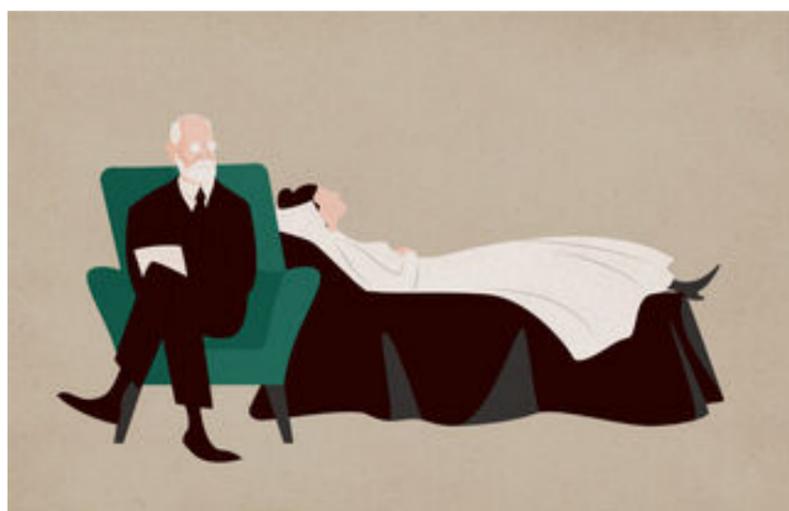
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Personality Quotient

PERSONALITY

Masochism Explained: The Self-Sabotaging Personality

Psychodynamic conceptualizations of masochism explain why people self-sabotage.

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Why do some people self-sabotage?

Psychodynamics can offer an answer.

Some individuals may unwittingly set themselves up for repeated failures in work and love relationships because of an unconscious (or implicit) need to punish oneself. For example, an individual may get themselves very close to a promotion at work but then blow it in a way that looked inevitable and seemingly planned.

The implicit need to punish oneself satisfies pervasive, extreme, oppressive feelings of guilt.

Guilt is the predominant feeling among what traditional psychoanalysis labeled “moral masochism” (as opposed to sexual masochism, the fetish). Another way of describing the pattern of unconsciously arranging to get close to success but ultimately not to make it is to say one is engaging in “self-sabotage.”

The self-sabotaging character has been labeled “masochistic” in psychoanalytic theory. Prior to describing the psychodynamic conceptualization of masochism further, it is necessary to point out that psychodynamic theory posits the existence of unconscious processing which can include motivation and emotions that we are unaware of.

The Freudian construct of moral masochism evolved into a conceptualization of a masochistic personality disorder (and its sub-clinical variant, masochistic personality style). The DSM-I and DSM-II included a diagnostic category for the masochistic personality. The DSM-III and DSM-III-R relabeled masochistic personality and included it as a personality disorder under the label “self-defeating personality disorder.”

However, from the DSM-IV to present, it has been omitted—putatively lost to the dustbin of psychiatric nosology, clinical psychology, and psychoanalytic theory. In an effort to save the construct of masochistic psychopathology, a systematic psychodynamic conceptualization is warranted.

A psychodynamic classification model of personality includes the following dimensions: predominant affect, motivation, interpersonal style, behavioral pattern, defense mechanism, and cognitive style.

Interpersonal Masochism: Submissiveness

A masochistic individual often stays in relationships that are “obviously destructive” possibly because of specific psychological dynamics. Specifically, the masochistic individual in an emotionally abusive relationship behaves submissively. Masochistic submissiveness, however, is a defense mechanism; specifically, it is a reaction

representation of a relationship or significant other person).

- **Defense Mechanism:** Reaction formation (submissiveness).
- **Cognition:** Self-criticism; self-attack.

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References

Asch, S. (1988) The analytic concepts of masochism: a reevaluation, in Masochism: Current Psychoanalytic Perspectives, edited by R. Glick and D. Meyers.



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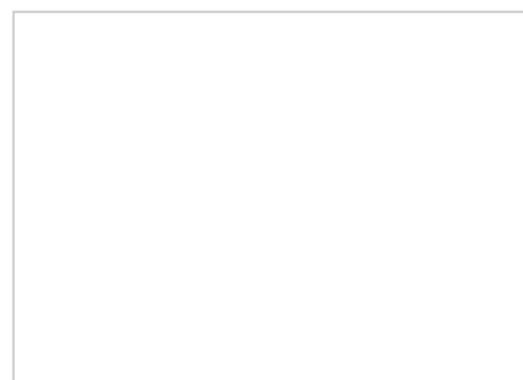
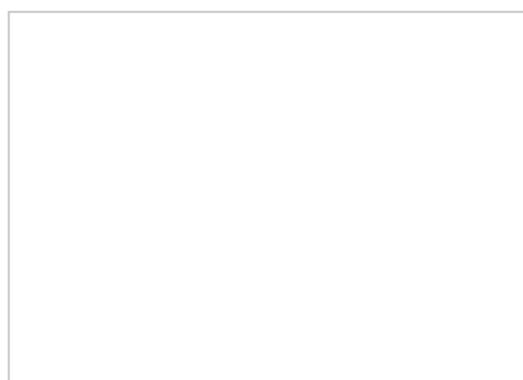
About the Author



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