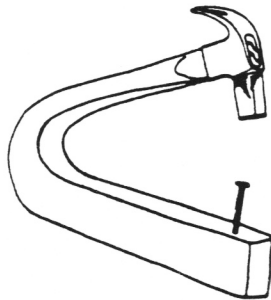


AN
EXPERIMENT

TO EXAMINE AND

REDUCE ↓



SELF-PUNISHMENT

BY

GEORGE M. PRINCE

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APRIL ~~18~~ 20

November 1987

Reducing Self-Punishment

What is Self-Punishment?

We define it as any action a person takes that diminishes or puts down, or denigrates in any way the person herself or himself. She may do it with words said silently to herself or sometimes out loud; with tonals (even silent speech can be vicious in tone); or with non-verbal actions--a shake of the head, a grimace.

Where does the habit of self-punishment originate?

Children are masters at jumping to conclusions. When they are learning, which is always, whatever data they get is formed into a temporary explanation. They keep that explanation until more data comes in and then they modify as necessary. If the further data supports their temporary explanation, or hypothesis, they solidify it.

They are operating examples of the scientific method. The difference is that they generally do not actively seek corroborating data, though they are available if it comes in.

Many years ago there appeared in Atlantic Magazine an article titled Lady Montegreens. It described a phenomenon of childhood that we have all enjoyed. It is the child's practice of hearing a statement and making his or her own sense of it. Lady Montegreen comes from stories of knights and battles. Whenever a knight was sore wounded, they "laid him on the green". The young listener formed an hypothesis about what was being said. It did not make perfect sense in context, but it had some internal cohesiveness.

We have made a small collection of Lady Montegreens:

In a warm house on the hay= In a one horse open sleigh

Maggie Scuse= May I be excused (from the table)

East side giffs= these thy gifts (from Grace)

It's a marigold=it's a miracle

Drunk store= drug store

Boobies= bouys

Painting doughnuts=children explaining to sitter that Mom is 'paying condolences'

As a child grows from infancy they develop formidable skill at reading and interpreting and connecting everything a parent is saying, feeling, and even thinking. It is uncanny. But when we consider that from the child's point of view, his or her very life depends upon the parent, it becomes more understandable that so much of the child's energy is focussed on 'reading' the parent.

There is a therapeutic 'law' known as requisite variety. This law holds that in any system the component that is most flexible will have the most control. Infants and young children are great examples of this. When he or she feels a need she will try different maneuvers until the need is met. Her repertoire is, of course, limited, but what she can accomplish with charm, anger, howling, and her many, many non-verbals is impressive.

She becomes hypersensitive to a parent's words, tones, and non-verbals. And she interprets them with the best hypotheses she is able to form.

We believe that most children interpret the corrections they are given as mild (or not so mild) punishment for mistakes they have made. The hypothesis they form is "I should not make any mistakes". This hypothesis gains strength over several years as parents, peers, and teachers consistently punish any deviations from perfection. The grown-up understands that mistakes are a normal part of learning, and even though the correction strategy is inefficient and even destructive, we have developed no substitute for it. In consequence, most of us internalize the norm of punishing any action or thought that fails to come up to our standard: perfection.

Our conviction about the necessity to be perfect develops slowly and even though it is quite unrealistic, it is constantly reinforced until it is integrated as an almost automatic reaction, first toward ourselves, and next toward anyone who deviates from our standards of perfection in thought and deed.

The Phenomenon of Self-Punishment

Self-punishment is such an integral part of everyday operations that we may not pay much attention to it. We would like you to spend the next hour or two examining this uniquely human trait.

Definition-any action, external or internal, that discounts one's self or puts one in a one-down position... any opposit of self-affirming.

Examples-

I spill some coffee. As I wipe up the spill I say to myself " That was clumsy".

I step off the curb without looking for cars and narrowly miss getting hit by one. I say to myself "That was stupid!"

I am about to introduce two people I know well. I forget the name of one. I give myself a rush of feeling of embarrassment. Later I review the incident a few times, each time saying "How could you do such a stupid thing! What will Harry think of me... I know he believes I am a jerk for forgetting his name."

I make a wrong turn on a throughway. The correction of this mistake takes a long time and all that time I give myself bad feelings and exhortations.

I strike the wrong key on the typewriter. I briefly screw up my face, shake my head at myself and send a shot of bad feeling to myself.

Some Phrases that Participants Tell Us They Use When Speaking To Themselves

You know better
Stupid!
You lousy bastard!
Your little sister could have figured that out.
Why did you do that!
That is a stupid idea.
Now what will they think?
That was really not cool.
Jerk!
Will I never learn?
Why do I always do that?
You don't deserve to live.
Grow up!
OK, stupid!
Not again!
You blew it.
I don't believe you!
You women!
Fool!

THE CULTURE IN MY HEAD

A person may be termed human in the measure to which he or she confirms him or herself and others...

after Martin Buber

("A society may be termed human in the measure to which its members confirm one another."

Martin Buber)

This do it yourself model of the two selves can easily
be cleaned up + printed on a heavier stock.
The attached self-which costs \$2.00 to make.

EXPERIMENTAL SELF

FEELS

SEES THE FUN IN THINGS
TAKES RISKS
BREAKS RULES
LIKES SURPRISES
OPEN TO ANYTHING
MAKES IMPOSSIBLE WISHES
DOES NOT MIND BEING WRONG
DOES NOT MIND BEING CONFUSED

GUESSES

CURIOUS

PLAYS

IMPETUOUS
MAKES CONNECTIONS
RECOGNIZES PATTERNS

IN TOUCH WITH UNCONSCIOUS

CAN "TOUCH" TOTAL EXPERIENCE

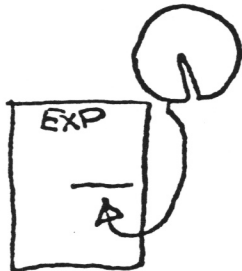
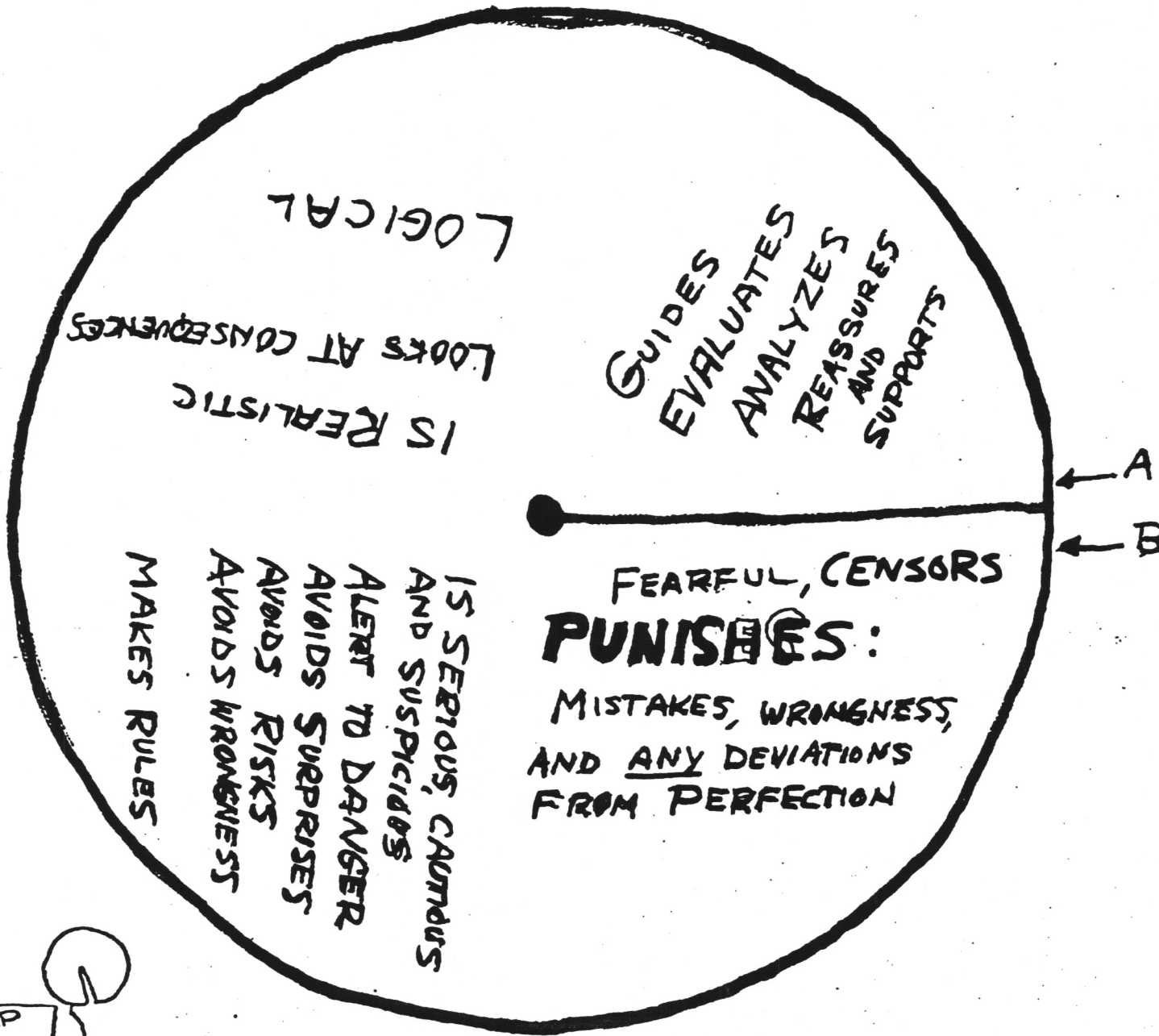
SPECULATES

INTUITIVE

IMAGINES

USES SEEMING IRRELEVANCE

SAFEKEEPING SELF



CUT ALONG HEAVY LINES

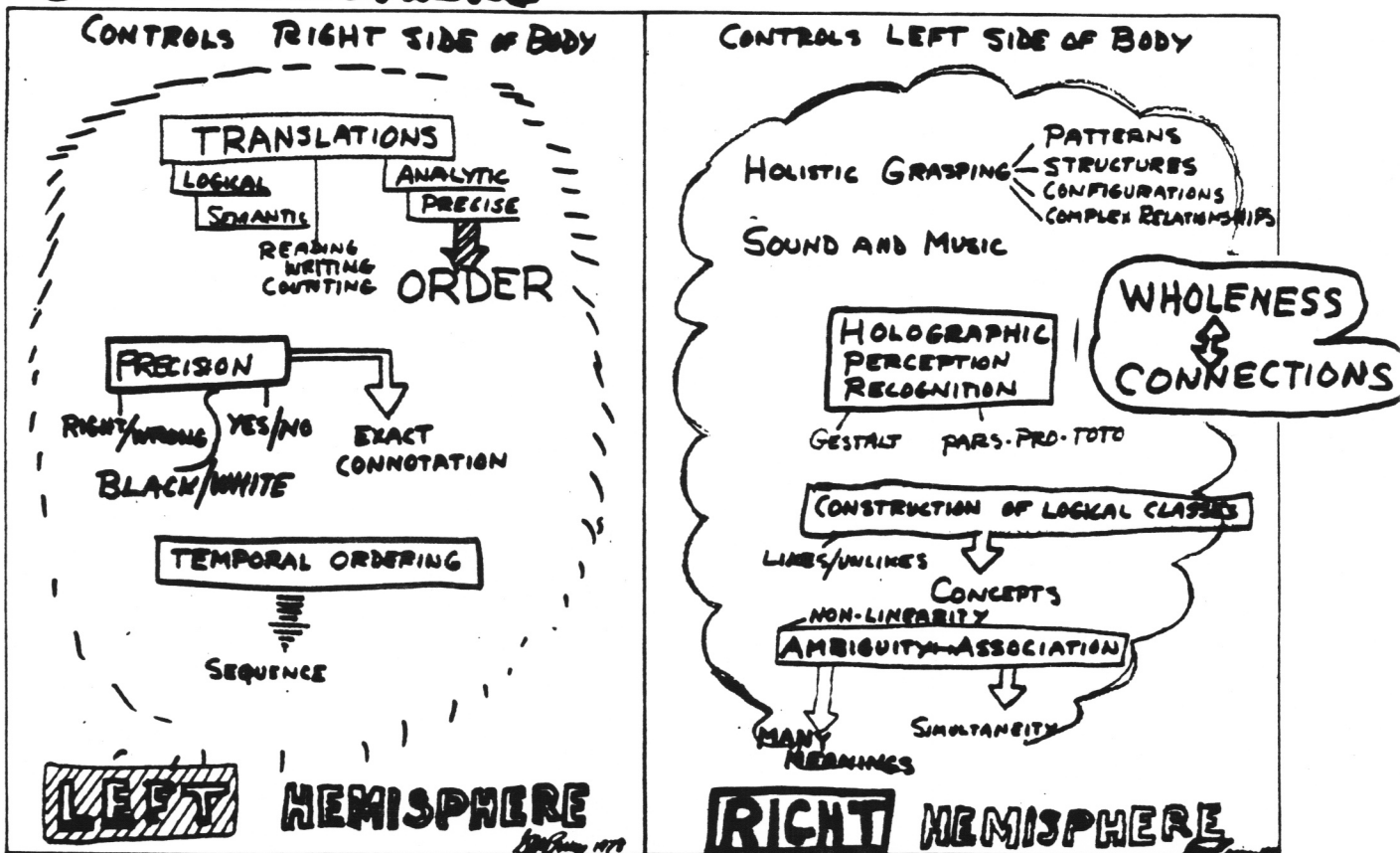
THEN SLIP THIS WHEEL INTO SLOT
IN EXPERIMENTAL SELF.

PUT PIN THROUGH CENTER + PUT
PAPER CLIP AT A + B.

THE TWO SELVES: PHYSIOLOGICAL DIVISION.

I want to call particular attention to the functions of LEFT hemisphere--the boss hemisphere. You will see that it insists on order...precision...and exactness. Its notion of these qualities is DEMANDING... it is intolerant of any deviation because of the norms each of us has built into it from childhood.

BOSS HEMISPHERE



NORMS OFTEN OBSERVED IN:

SELF - DOUBTING LEARNERS

SUSPICIOUS - SCEPTICAL

WANT PRECISE, STEP BY STEP
INSTRUCTION

DO NOT JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS

DO NOT MAKE CONNECTIONS TO OWN
EXPERIENCE UNTIL THEY ARE
CERTAINIMMEDIATELY FRUSTRATED BY
CONFUSION

CONTINUALLY EVALUATE

GUARDED VS. OPEN MINDED

HAVE AN ALL OR NOTHING POSTURE

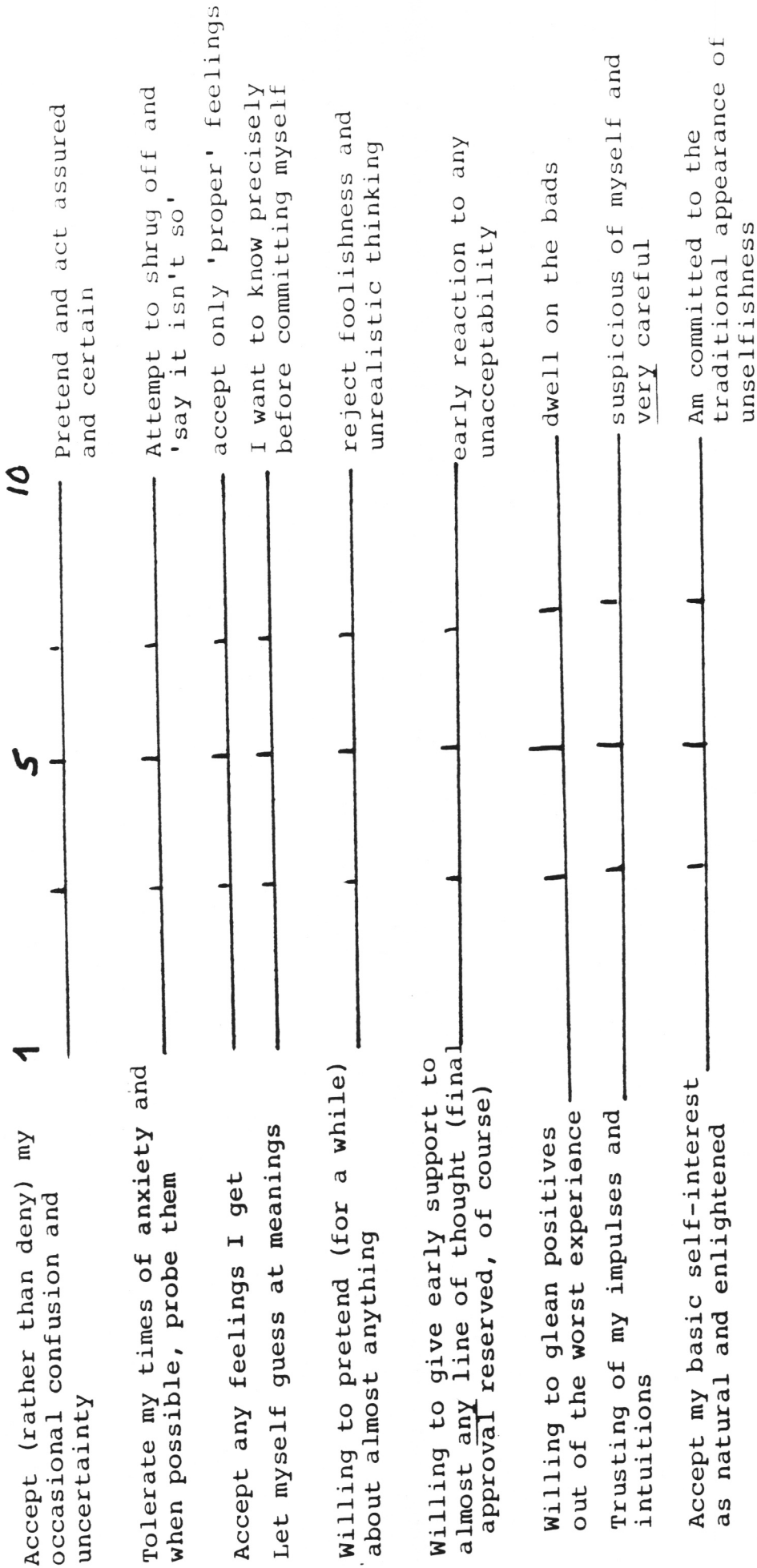
PUT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR
LEARNING ON SOMEONE ELSE ("YOU
MAKE IT CLEAR AND EASY AND MAYBE
THEN I WILL LEARN")AVOID MISTAKES AND ANY RISK OF
ONESELF - AFFIRMING LEARNERS(OPEN) READY TO IMMEDIATELY
EXPERIMENTRESERVE JUDGEMENT UNTIL THEY
EXPERIENCEJUMP TO CONCLUSIONS (FORM
TENTATIVE HYPOTHESIS) MAKE
MISTAKESMAKE MANY CONNECTIONS - SOME
"OFF THE POINT"

CAN TOLERATE AND USE CONFUSION

TAKE ALL AND DISCARD THAT WHICH
THEY CANNOT MAKE USEFUL TO THEMARE (TAKE RESPONSIBILITY) FULL
PARTNERS IN THE LEARNINGOSCILLATES FROM APPROXIMATE
GUESSING TO LOGICAL PRECISION

SOME CLUES TO HELP YOU MAKE YOUR INTERNAL NORMS MORE EXPLICIT

	1	5	10	
Optimistic				Pessimistic
Observe my actions sympathetically				critically
Focus on my good intentions				on bad results
Jump to favorable conclusions <small>about myself</small>				unfavorable
Open to consider all my thoughts and impulses				skip over 'bads'
Listen to myself				operate on 'automatic and shoulds'
Deal with myself as an equal to others				deal as inferior or or superior
Assume I can do it (whatever <u>it is</u>)				doubtful or assume I can not
Take <u>explicit</u> pleasure and satisfaction from even my small accomplishments				take them for granted



EXCERPTS FROM 'MINDSPRING!'

A friendly analysis of Self-punishment.

Some benefits I get from self-punish

It will help me change my behavior. ^{really} everyone believes that se

ment will help avoid the mistake th time. The more intense the pu.

the more likely it will not happen

It focusses my attention on my sho ^{shortcomings} ngs. The punishment assures that I

will not simply ignore a flaw or it in my behavior. To avoid future punish-

ment, I will do something about ^{overcoming.}

^{the shortcoming}

Gives me feedback on how I am doing. Related to focussing, and this has the connotation of helping me to evaluate my-hour-by-hour performance. With this feedback, I can determine how well I am doing compared to how well I might or should do.

It is payment for the mistake. Many of us believe that the punishment is a just retribution that makes up for the mistake, or at least demonstrates that I do not approve of what I have done.

It suggests that I am a better person than my action demonstrates. If I show that I disapprove of what I have done, I may avoid the censure of an observer.

It is a motivator. Many of us have a deep down belief that without punishment we would stop getting out of bed in the morning and in general become self-indulgent slobs.

It is the basis of self-discipline. Related to motivation is the belief that punishment, or fear of it is what makes self-discipline work.

It preempts punishment by others. If I promptly punish myself, it will make it unnecessary for others to punish me.

It keeps things in balance. This is rather mystical and it was mentioned often enough so it needs to be included. I believe that I must have a balance between good feelings and bad. If things get too good, then I am inviting a disaster. By giving myself a steady stream of small punishments, I protect myself against a large punishment.

Not everyone had all of these benefits assigned to self-punishment, and these were mentioned in one form or another often enough to make each an important factor in evaluating self-punishment. It is apparent that when we focus our attention on self-punishment, we find it an important factor in our operations. It does a lot of things that need doing.

Next I asked every person or group to look at the other side of self-punishment. Identify the possible damages to yourself.

Possible damage I might suffer from self-punishment

It reduces my self-esteem. As I examined the extent of it, I became aware that the steady stream of negative criticism within, strikes a blow at my own self regard. This idea has such important implications about competence and self-concept that I will discuss it in more detail when I have covered the other possible damages.

It makes me governed by the expectations of others. The standards that determine when I punish myself are set up by my understanding of what my parents and others expect of me. Since I am setting these up while too young to evaluate much, they tend to be over-strict and not necessarily appropriate for me at present. So, instead of dealing with me and what is real now, my self-punisher reacts to old standards other than ones I set up by myself with all the wisdom I can muster at my present stage of development.

It reduces my joie de vivre. In a simple weighing of 'ounces of bad feelings and ounces of good feelings', self-punishment weighs in heavy.

It slows my learning. Skinner, Lozanov, many others, and my own experience prove that I am an uptight, poor learner when someone is breathing down my neck ready to punish for the slightest mistake.

It creates a fear of newness. I am going to avoid situations where I cannot predict outcomes because in them I am more likely to make mistakes and get punished.

It positions me in a one-down, vulnerable place (like a child). It tends to make me, the punishee, feel more helpless than I really am.

I lose confidence in myself. It produces feelings of incompetence and low expectations of myself -- which can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It slows my understanding of something new. I do not leap to conclusions for fear of making mistakes (and getting the punishment that comes with that). In most thinking situations (as opposed to acting) the fast, efficient way to understand is to jump to a tentative conclusion and then transform or modify it as more data comes in. The slow way is to wait until all the information is in (if it ever comes) and then arrive at a conclusion or understanding.

It undermines initiative. To avoid the risk of punishment when I think for myself, I "wait for instructions". Or worse, pretend the situation is routine when it is not. Then I can always say, "I acted as I was supposed to."

It produces imbalance. Because most of us focus on avoiding mistakes and punishment, we become oriented toward dealing with the negatives in our enterprise. We do not remark accomplishments and keep focussed on them.

It creates poor self-discipline. Contrary to the accepted belief, self-discipline depends largely on self-regard. With high self-regard I have high expectations of myself and I will tend to live up to them. Self-punishment undermines this and leads to poorer self-discipline.

It causes a lack of wholeheartedness and commitment. Fear of punishment keeps me suspicious and cautious. I hold back until I am certain to be right, not wrong. Instead of jumping in and helping make something go before anyone can be sure, I hang back. I am a waiter-for-the-band-wagon.

It makes me avoid ambiguity. I avoid situations that are ambiguous, uncertain, or confusing, because in these situations I cannot be surely right. Ambiguity, uncertainty and confusion are the handmaidens of thinking to the right.

Distortion of reality. To avoid the punishment of being wrong, I may distort what happens to pretend I have not made a mistake.

Shifting responsibility to others. To escape self-punishment I look for scape-goats to blame for mistakes.

Avoid learning from experience. When an experience is unpleasant and involves self-punishment, I tend to spend as little time thinking about it as possible, and thus do not use it to learn.

Can make me sick. There is considerable evidence that I can, through diligent self-punishment, make myself sick.¹⁷

How can we get the benefits without the punishment?

Since self-punishment provides some important benefits, it is unreasonable to ask a person to simply stop punishing himself and do without. So I asked each experimenter to go through his or her list of benefits and problem solve on each one to see if s/he could invent a procedure that would give the benefit without the self-punishment. For example, it will help me change my behavior -- many experimenters decided that self-punishment was a rather inefficient way to change behavior. A more effective way is to examine the behavior I wish to change, decide on options, and resolve to use one of the options the next time the situation occurs. A case to illustrate is not remembering names when first introduced. It was my habitual behavior to be slightly flustered and paying attention to the person's looks and wondering what he might be thinking of me and simply not register his name. I would then punish myself for not knowing the person's name two minutes later.

As I examined my behavior I realized that the fluster, and the wondering about the impression I was making were in themselves a sort of punishment. I got bad feelings from them. I resolved to ignore how I was doing with the person and focus entirely on how he or she was doing with me. I would concentrate on "How does this name go with what I am feeling and seeing?".

This put the introducing situation in a new frame for me. I found that I was much more comfortable and most of the time I learn names and retain them.

November 1987--tale.2

Bill's Secrets

Many years ago I had a friend named Bill Ellerbroek who was a wise old doctor. Bill had retired and he lived in a tiny house at the end of a lane that led to the ocean near Gloucester. Whenever I had a problem I would walk over and talk with Bill. He was one of the great listeners of all time. He would lower his beetle-brows and look at me as though the most important words ever said were coming from my mouth.

I will never forget the way he would nod his shaggy head when I was through. He never asked questions then. He would nod as though in agreement and say, softly "That is a tough one, all right. I'll bet you feel as though you will have to really put out to solve this.?"

And as I agreed with him and talked about it I was always surprised to find that as I talked with him and as he nodded in approval, my thinking cleared and I was getting ideas about how to solve my problem. It was uncanny how powerful I would feel.

One day we were talking about medicine and sickness and he said something I will always remember. He said "George, not many people know this, but sickness is a behavior. Sounds surprising, doesn't. Sickness is a behavior that is the result--the consequence--of a person's unhealthy interactions with himself. I know that sounds a little strange, and let me explore it with you."

This was a way that Bill had. He seldom explained anything, but he let me in as he was 'exploring' a thought. I was welcome to let him know what my thoughts were too. I said "Bill, I have believed that viruses and germs caused disease. It is hard for me to think that when I am sick, I am behaving in a way that makes me feel bad."

"George, you have hit on the very root of it. We do not like to think of ourselves as being responsible for our own sickness. It is easier to blame it on bugs. When you are aware that most of the sickness bugs are in us all the time and do not make us sick, then I need to think about it in a different way. Of course, some bugs come from outside--like yellow fever. Even then, when a number of people are exposed, not everyone is willing to behave like yellow fever."

"George, I believe something different is going on that is going to be hard for you to believe, and yet when you think about it, it is going to make sense to you, and you will never think about sickness in quite the same way. Sickness is what I call a 'getting even' behavior."

I laughed at that thought, and Bill joined in the laughter. "You are telling me, Bill, that when I behave sickness, I am

getting even?"

"Yes," Bill said, and now he was grinning at my expression of disbelief.

"Who am I getting even with, Bill?" I asked, "and what am I getting even for?"

"George, I want you to think for a minute. Think of a person who, several times a day, says to you 'Jerk' or 'stupid' or something worse whenever you make the slightest mistake. Who fits that description?"

I thought. It could not be my wife. She seldom says anything unkind...it isn't my daughter, who is very sweet and loving. She would never call me stupid...I thought, who do I see several times a day. It must be someone at work. Let's see...who does that to me? I thought of each of the people I work with, and none of them call me jerk or stupid--at least not to my face. AND SUDDENLY I KNEW. It was me. I regularly call myself stupid, jerk and some other unsayable epithets when I do something stupid. I looked at Bill. He was watching me attentively. I said "I guess I am the one, Bill. I do give myself a hard time sometimes---but what's this getting even about?"

"George, have you ever put someone down and then noticed that he or she put you down in return--almost as though they were getting even?"

"Yes, I have noticed that on occasion, but I can't imagine doing that to myself. After all, I have my best interests at heart."

"OK. I am convinced that you believe you always have your best interests at heart. It would not make sense for a person to get even with himself, would it?"

"Bill, I am thinking about it this way for the first time and there is something about this that feels strange and confusing and somehow...right. When I make a mistake I think that, in a way, I have let myself down and deserve to be called stupid. I always have assumed that since I am all of a piece that there was understanding inside me.

"What you are leading me to thinking is that when I punish myself there is a part of me that reacts to that as though it were an outsider punishing me...and my kneejerk reaction is to behave in a way to get even. It does not make sense, but behaving sick doesn't make sense either. I am going to have to rethink this when I am not feeling so confused."

"That is a good sound thing to do---spend some time rethinking. Please let me know where you come out, George."

I walked back down the lane hearing the boom of the ocean waves and smelling the sea in the air. I drew deep breaths and looked at the flowers and bushes that lined the lane. I was thankful that I did not need to think about what I had heard. It was all in my head, I would remember it, in fact I couldn't forget it.

++++++

A couple of weeks later, my daughter Victoria had a friend visiting. The friend, Ruth, was just 12 years old like Victoria. Unfortunately instead of a clear skin like Vicky's, Ruth suffered with a serious case of Acne. She was not aware of it, but she was about to teach me one of the most important lessons of my life.

When we sat down for dinner that first night, Ruth had some kind of ointment on her face. It looked quite unpleasant, but Mardi, my wife, sent me a cautioning look. I pretended not to notice Ruth's odd appearance. Vicky, being the forthright person she is, immediately said "Ruth apologizes for keeping her medicine on, but she can't afford a minute without it."

I immediately said it was perfectly all right, we understood. And Sally murmured her agreement. But Ruth felt she must explain. "I am sorry, but I look even worse without my cream."

As she spoke, Bill Ellerbroek's thoughtful face flashed into my mind. "It must be very difficult for you, Ruth." I said. Bill's words went through my head: sickness is a 'getting even' behavior. I wondered to myself 'is Acne a behavior?'

"It is awful, Mr. Prince. Every time I look in a mirror I get an awful feeling. You just don't know". She had tears in her voice.

Suddenly I knew what to do. "Ruth, I believe I know a doctor who can help you as no other doctor has been able to. This doctor is an old friend of mine and I will take you over to see him right after dinner...if you are willing to go."

++++++

As Ruth and I walked up the lane to Bill's, we could see the ocean waves rolling in to crash on the beach, and the muffled sound grew louder as we came near Bill's house. A fine spray almost like a private little fog leaped up from each wave as it curled into a breaker. Ruth shivered and reached for my hand and I realized how anxious she was.

Bill welcomed us warmly, his eyes never leaving Ruth as he made us comfortable in front of a small flickering fire that threw shadows on the ceiling. Bill pulled up a hassock so that he was sitting knee to knee with Ruth looking up at her. He reached for a box of Kleenex "Would you feel OK about wiping the cream off or would you like me to do it?"

"I will," Ruth said quickly, and she took some Kleenex and scrubbed.

3

"Ruth," said Bill gently, "how are you feeling right now?"
"I feel...ashamed to...to look so ugly" she said and tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Her shoulders drooped and she seemed helpless to even wipe her tears away.

Bill continued to look intently into her face. "Ruth, He said softly, "if your best friend were troubled and sad would you be stern and punish her for her trouble, or would you comfort and help her if you could?"

Ruth looked surprised. Her tears stopped and she straightened. "I would comfort and help her." She said strongly.

"I thought you looked like that kind of person." Said Bill. "Who is your best friend in all the world?"

Ruth hesitated, then said "Victoria Prince."

Bill said "I will bet she is a good friend, and I want you to think again of who ,in all the world is your best friend."

Ruth thought, and after a moment said questioningly "My mother?"

"Another wonderful friend who loves you, and I want you to think again of who is your best friend in all the world."

Ruth looked at Bill in a puzzled way, her head leaning slightly to her right. After a long pause she said tentatively "Me?"

Bill asked "Does that feel right to you?" There was a long silence. Finally, Ruth nodded and said "MHMMM" And looking at me he said "George, would you excuse us, please, I want to tell Ruth some secrets."

I left saying "Ruth, I will be sitting by the ocean. Don't hurry.

++++++

Two months later I was in Cambridge looking in the window of Brine's Sporting Goods when a voice behind me said "Mr. Prince! Do you know that you helped me practically save my life?"

I turned around and there was Ruth. She looked...how can I describe it? as though she had a one thousand watt light in her head---she glowed. Her skin was as clear and soft as a baby's ah...face. "Ruth, you look brand new and wonderful!"

She lit up even more and said happily "Thank you, Mr. P. I owe some of it to you, and some to Dr. Ellerbroek, and a lot to my best friend!"

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(11)

That night I drove to Gloucester and called on Bill. I told him that I really needed to know the secrets he had told Ruth. He laughed and said "I am writing about them, and you will have the first copy. I want you to feel free to tell anyone and everyone these secrets. They will probably remain secrets because few, if any will believe them!

LANGUAGE, THOUGHT, AND DISEASE by W. C. Ellerbroek M.D.

THE THEORY

Postulates

1. we will not use such words as physical, mental, organic, psychological to avoid verbally dissecting the human being.
2. We will try to see the person in his field situation, including his family and friends and his cumulative behavior and experiences.
- 3- We will be aware that he interacts with the whole world.
4. We will stay aware that our observations are subjective data.
5. We will note all the variables of which we know; we will also keep in mind that there are plenty of variables that we do not know of.
- 6 We will remember that the field includes the observer.
7. We will not fall into the trap of "fallacy of misplaced precision".
8. In this theory we will call each observation a variety of behavior eg illness will be called a behavior.

Hypotheses

1. A person can contact the reality inside and outside himself only through his perceptions. There is no way he can entirely verify these observations.
2. We cannot be sure these observations are right. Ambiguity can never be reduced to zero.
3. These perceptions produce a fantasy picture in the brain of what is going on. Fantasy is a better word than image because it has a connotation of error and spuriousness that is desirable.
4. The delusion of perception= a person looks at something and thinks he sees it. Actually, he only thinks he sees it.
5. The person has his own ideas of the way he thinks things are now; he also has ideas (constructs, fantasies) of how past, present, and future should be or should have been structured.
6. When the reality he perceives does not match his idea . . . , he wants it to change and match his idea of how it should be. When it does not do this, he becomes

FEELS

frustrated, irritated, angry, unhappy, depressed, or some other unpleasant emotion.

7. Every unpleasant emotion is linked with a thought or statement that is contrary to the observer's wanted reality.
8. These unpleasant emotional reactions are always harmful to the person; they cause unnecessary alterations from normal in various organs and systems. These then require correction. If there are many of these alterations and corrections, the corrective system may fail and disease behavior results.
9. Conversely, love, happiness, pleasure, and good feelings occur when the person notes that the reality he observes is matching his idea of what it should be.
10. Language, with its errors and distortions, leads to additional difficulty in perceiving reality accurately.
11. It is very easy to make statements that are contrary to reality. These repeat the harmful responses of the body and brain.
12. It may be that by learning to be more accurate in our observations of reality we can eliminate or reduce harmful behaviors.

It is easy to test the above hypotheses: Pretend for a moment that today your wife has torn off one of the garage doors; if you repeatedly say, in an appropriate tone, "She shouldn't have done that," you will become aware of increasing tension and anger. Conversely, if you then say, "Considering everything I know about my wife, and bearing in mind that there are many factors of which I am unaware, since the event has already occurred, it is obvious that today is the day that my wife should have torn off the garage door!" You will note a prompt decrease in gastric acidity, serum free fatty acids and cholesterol.

The first statement is contrary to reality; the second is in accord with reality. Nothing about this says that you should be pleased about the accident, do what ever is needed to prevent it happening again. The main consideration is to avoid behaviors that are harmful to self.

The experiment with patients suffering with acne

There were six therapeutic failures. These patients decline to change their life styles (of self-punishment). Thirty of the patients were judged 80% improved within eight weeks. At sixteen weeks, 17 patients were cured (had clear skin); the rest were improved from 80 to 90%.

This rate of cure and improvement is quite remarkable compared to patients getting orthodox treatment.

The therapeutic program

- Each patient was given a complete physical. During this time, and in following interviews, attention was drawn to harmful language habits, depressed postures, faces, voice tones, and sighing
- Skin creams and lotions were advised against; their use reinforces the mistaken idea that acne is a skin disorder, thus decreasing the attention paid to the behavioral aspects of the program.
- Diet was de-emphasized.
- Posture and facial expressions were emphasized.
- Patients were told that acne is related to feeling picked-on. Lesions will not develop without the picked on feeling.

1. At each interview a statement like the following was included:

Since acne is related to feeling picked-on, it is important to stop picking on yourself. Instead of punishing yourself for the way you look in the mirror, learn to say, "That big pimple should be just exactly where it is." or "My face should look this way."

2. The patients were advised to watch for itching as an indicator of irrational thinking (irrational = observing that something is not the way it should be and getting bad feelings from that):

Every time you itch, it is a clue to you that you that immediately before the itch (or bad feeling) you have had an irrational or erroneous thought. You can use the itch (or the bad feeling) as a valuable tool in spotting unhappy thoughts.

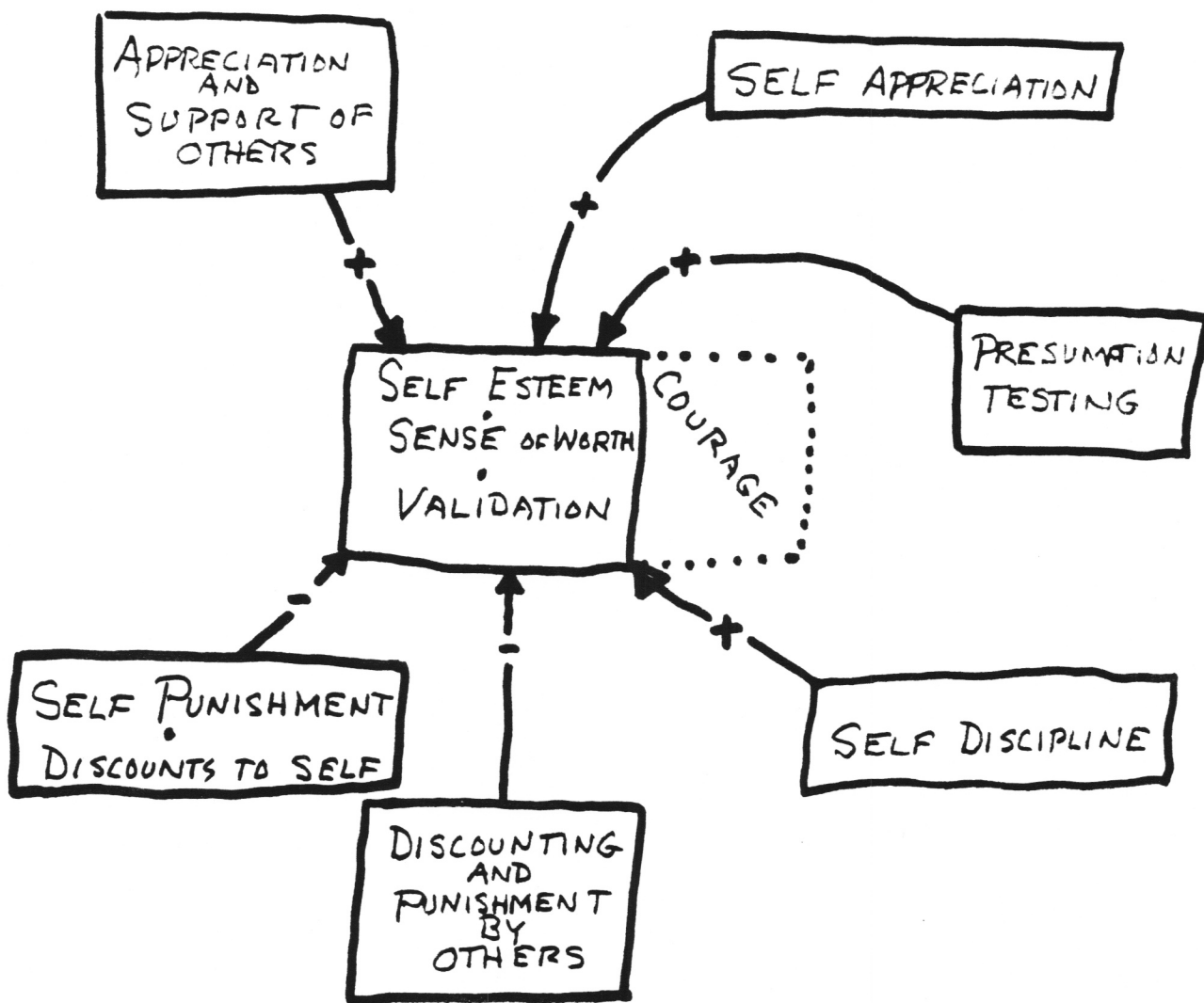
3. An attempt was made to teach the patient to avoid the feedback from words with negative connotations

not using them. Instead of saying "I am feeling miserable" use something like "I certainly do not feel as chipper as I'd like to."

4. Patients were told that no human being can perform any act without wanting to. They were asked not to use the following words when referring to themselves: should, must, have to, ought to, got to, and willpower. Each of these words implies that they are somehow being forced to do something when actually they themselves choose to do whatever it is they are doing. They were advised to use the phrase "I want to..." instead of "I've got to..."

The Self System

Below is a model of the self system. It is useful in making us aware of some of the influences affecting our feelings of well-being. With this information available to us, each of use can take steps to reduce the negative and increase the positive influences.



A PROCEDURE FOR ADDRESSING SELF-PUNISHMENT

POLICY: no self-punishment / no punishment

WARNING SIGNAL: Bad feeling / depression

PROCEDURE:

