

MORAL MASOCHISM

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Moral Masochism: A Review of the Literature

In recent years, the topic of moral masochism has gained increasing attention in the literature. Moral masochism, also referred to as "self-defeating behavior" (Gilligan, 1983; Kenrick & Sheets, 1995) is defined as the process of individuals actively engaging in activities that are detrimental to their own well-being and that of their social environment (Kenrick & Sheets, 1995). This behavior can be a result of a variety of internal and external factors, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, or stress. In this article, we review the literature on moral masochism, with an emphasis on its causes and consequences.

Theories of Moral Masochism

Several theories have been proposed to explain the causes of moral masochism. First, the psychodynamic theory of moral masochism (Freud, 1924) suggests that it is an unconscious attempt to resolve inner conflicts, such as guilt or shame, by punishing oneself for perceived wrongs. Second, the cognitive-behavioral theory (Beck, 1976; Ellis, 1962) suggests that it is the result of learned patterns of maladaptive thoughts and behaviors, which can lead to feelings of guilt and self-blame. Finally, the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) suggests that moral masochism is rooted in the process of social modeling, whereby individuals learn to engage in self-defeating behavior by observing others.

Consequences of Moral Masochism

Moral masochism can have a variety of negative consequences for both the individual and their social environment. For example, it has been linked to decreased psychological and physical well-being (Gilligan, 1983), increased levels of depression and anxiety (Kenrick & Sheets, 1995), and an overall decrease in quality of life (Kurland & Schatzberg, 1997). In addition, it can lead to interpersonal difficulties, such as strained relationships with family and friends (Kurland & Schatzberg, 1997). Finally, it has been linked to an increased risk of suicide (Kurland & Schatzberg, 1997).

Conclusion

This review of the literature has highlighted the prevalence of moral masochism and its potential for causing significant psychological and interpersonal issues. It is important to note, however, that there is still much to be learned about the causes and consequences of this behavior. Further research is needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms and to develop effective interventions for individuals engaging in moral masochism.

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