

BOOK REVIEWS

TRICHOTILLOMANIA, edited by Dan J. Stern M.B., Gary A. Christenson M.D., and Eric Hollander M.D. American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 1999. xviii + 344 pp. (hardcover).

This book offers a complete review of several aspects of the disorder Trichotillomania. The editors have brought together a group of experts from various backgrounds who collaboratively have unraveled the intricacies of the disorder across the life span. Since this book provides a reliable guide on how to approach this difficult to treat disorder, it would be useful for any clinician who is involved with direct patient care. In addition, it would be useful for researchers interested in Trichotillomania or in OCD spectrum disorders. Because much of the research focuses on young adults, it would be of limited use to mental health practitioners involved with providing care to the geriatric population.

The book consists of eleven chapters and most chapters are written by different authors but it reads as an integral whole. Each chapter includes suggestions for future directions for scientific inquiry and alternatives, which should prove valuable in developing useful knowledge about the disorder.

The Introduction cites good reasons for devoting a whole book on the subject matter and gives a clear idea about editor's aims and objectives. The first chapter offers a detailed description of history, phenomenology, and descriptive characteristics of the disorder. In addition, it critiques the current DSM IV diagnostic criteria and proposes suggestions for possible future revision. The first chapter makes the important distinction of automatic and focused hair pulling and its impact on the diagnosis. The second chapter focuses on the place of Trichotillomania in OCD spectrum disorders and non-OCD repetitive behaviors by reviewing and comparing the biological research findings in these disorders. The reader is informed and intrigued about overlaps among these disorders. Chapter three focuses on further biological understanding of the disorder by comparing Trichotillomania with animal models of dysfunctional repetitive grooming behaviors. It presents interesting data about positive treatment outcomes in animals with the pharmacological agents found helpful in humans. Chapter four focuses on pharmacotherapy of the disorder and provides a comprehensive overview of the various agents used and comparable efficacies. The chapter underscores the important issues regarding the treatment-resistant nature of the disorder, but also discusses the significant response to pharmacotherapy in a minority of patients. The chapter provides useful guidelines for pharmacotherapy of the disorder. Chapter five offers psychoanalytic perspectives on the disorder from a developmental, ego and drive theory perspectives. It attempts to explain the psychopathology of Trichotillomania by elaborating on the symbolic meaning of the harm in different stages of development. The chapter attempts to explain how hair, as the preferred anatomic site, could take on a special emotional significance for the child with resulting development of Trichotillomania—a neurotic symptom. The chapter illustrates application of the psychodynamic principles for the understanding and treatment of the disorder by the case vignette. Chapter six reviews the use of behavioral interventions for the treatment of the disorder and underscores the important fact that empirical documentation of some behavioral interventions is

lacking. Using two case vignettes, chapter seven reviews the use of hypnosis as an alternative treatment for the disorder and comments on its usefulness as an augmenting strategy. This chapter offers a general introduction to and information about the process of hypnosis while it underscores the fact that literature on use of hypnosis on Trichotillomania is limited and interpretation is confounded by multiple variables. Furthermore, it acknowledges that firm conclusions about effectiveness cannot be drawn. Chapter eight reviews hair pulling in children and adolescents. The writer distinguishes characteristics of benign type and chronic relapsing type and has made an attempt to define indicators of good vs. Bad prognosis. The chapter acknowledges the limitations and controversies surrounding the available data. Chapter nine presents an in depth review of overlaps and dissimilarities between Trichotillomania and OCD in several dimensions and makes an attempt to alert the reader to the important differences in the conceptualization of the two disorders. The chapter raises many questions of contribution of anxiety and depression to the similarity of the phenomenology of the two disorders. The chapter emphasizes the need for further research before Trichotillomania earns a membership in OCD spectrum disorders. Chapter ten reviews cognitive behavioral symptoms of the disorder and offers a manualized, standardized treatment package. The chapter outlines the principles of cognitive-behavioral treatment interventions and describes the usefulness and limitations of the treatment approach. Chapter eleven focuses on assessment of the disorder and introduces the reader to various structured instruments and rating scales that have been used thus far. It also underscores the importance of lack of universally accepted gold standard index and emphasizes the use of multiple outcome measure to afford the most reliable and valid assessment of the symptomatic picture.

While the book is brilliant, there are some limitations. For example it would have been more logical if Chapter ten (Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment) would have followed Chapter seven (psychosocial treatment). Similarly, Chapter nine could have followed Chapter one to maintain the continuity of the basic theme (i.e., phenomenology and biological correlates). A new chapter in the end with proposed guidelines for treatment of the disorder would be helpful for the reader.

With the exception of these minor concerns, this book provides a thorough first reference book for the clinician interested in how to approach this difficult to treat disorder in all three realms of the biopsychosocial model. Moreover, it offers a rich introduction for researchers interested in this disorder. Additionally, attention by the clinician to hair pulling would be of enormous value to the patient whose condition has often gone unrecognized.

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