

repeatedly bite themselves, or pull their own hair out. Serious self-mutilation may occur. Some of these responses are given in stressful situations, but many of them are simply reactions to boredom. When there is no variability in the environment the exploratory urge stagnates.

Simply by looking at an isolated animal performing one of these stereotypes it is impossible to know for certain what is causing the behaviour. It may be boredom, or it may be stress. If it is stress it may be the result of the immediate environmental situation, or it may be a long-term phenomenon stemming from an abnormal upbringing: A few simple experiments can give us the answer. When a strange object is placed in the cage, if the stereotypes disappear and exploration begins, then they were obviously being caused by boredom. If the stereotypes increase, however, then they were being caused by stress. If they persist after the introduction of other members of the same species, producing a normal social environment, then the individual with the stereotypes has almost certainly had an abnormally isolated infancy.

All these zoo peculiarities can be seen in our own species (perhaps because we have designed our zoos so much like our cities). They should be a lesson to us, reminding us of the enormous importance of achieving a good balance between our neophobic and neophilic tendencies. If we do not have this, we cannot function properly. Our nervous systems will do the best they can for us, but the results will always be a travesty of our true behavioural potentials.