



Cutting and the Pedagogy of Self-Disclosure

Jeffrey Berman

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Cutting, a form of self-mutilation, is a growing problem in the United States, especially among adolescent females. It is regarded as self-destructive behavior, yet paradoxically, people who cut themselves generally do not wish to die but to find relief from unbearable psychological pain.

Cutting and the Pedagogy of Self-Disclosure is the first book to explore how college students write about their experiences as cutters. The idea behind the book arose when Patricia Hatch Wallace, a high school English teacher, wrote a reader-response diary for a graduate course taught by Professor Jeffrey Berman in which she revealed for the first time that she had cut herself twenty years earlier. At Berman's suggestion, Wallace wrote her Master's thesis on cutting. Not long after she finished her thesis, two students in Berman's expository writing course revealed their own experiences as cutters. Their disclosures encouraged several students in another writing class to share their own cutting stories with classmates. Realizing that so many students were writing about the same phenomenon, Berman and Wallace decided to write a book about a subject that is rarely discussed inside or outside the classroom.

In Part 1, Wallace discusses clinical and theoretical aspects of cutting and then applies these insights to several memoirs and novels, including Susanna Kaysen's Girl, Interrupted, Caroline Kettlewell's Skin Game, and Patricia McCormick's Cut. The motivation behind Wallace's research was the desire to learn more about herself, and she reads these stories through her own experience as a cutter. In Part 2, Berman focuses on the pedagogical dynamics of cutting: how undergraduate students write about cutting, how their writings affect classmates and teachers, and how students who cut themselves can educate everyone in the classroom about a problem that has personal, psychological, cultural, and educational significance.



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