



Women Living With Self-Injury

Jane Hyman

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They cut their arms and legs with knives and razors, scratch at their skin, burn, bruise, or stick themselves with cigarettes, hammers, pins and other objects, bang their heads and limbs, and break their own bones. Although women who live with self-injury have recently gained recognition in the media they have, as a result, become even more stigmatized. In this book, author Jane Wegscheider Hyman sheds light on this misunderstood condition. Fifteen women talk about their battle with self-injury and explain how and why they repeatedly and deliberately injure themselves. Most admit they do it because it makes them feel high or safe. They also describe living with ceaseless shame, secrecy, and fear of discovery that could make them unemployable and ostracized. Candidly discussing their attempted and successful recoveries, they reveal the impact living with self-injury has on their day-to-day lives, where they are competent workers, partners, friends, and mothers. Hear the voices of these women, as they speak to a public that generally sees self-injury as frightening, senseless, and repulsive.

Concealing any resulting scars or other signs of injury is crucial for them and partly dictates their daily routines, choice of clothes, and appropriate lies to excuse any traces of injury. For these productive women who work outside of the home and often raise children, hiding self-injury is of paramount importance during their workdays and in their relationships with partners, families, and friends. Hyman's approach is unique in that she not only talked to these women, but she really listened to their stories, something rare in the misunderstood realm of self-injury. Professionals, perplexed by self-injury, have not always tolerated its complexity. As a result those who injure themselves have remained shrouded in secrecy, isolation, and shame until now. This book offers compassion as well as encouragement for recovery, by making available the emotional experiences of sufferers in their own words. It is an important book for those who self-injure, their loved ones, anyone who knows of or suspects self-injury in a friend, and mental care professionals.

Author note: Jane Wegscheider Hyman, Ph.D., a researcher and writer on women's health, contributed to both "Ourselves", "Growing Older" and "The New Our Bodies, Ourselves".

She is author of two other books. Over the years, her interest has shifted from physical to mental health, partly through her own experiences with obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression, and partly because of her prior work on seasonal affective disorder, anorexia, and bulimia. During her graduate studies in psychology, she specialized in mental health problems that primarily afflicted women.

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