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More on the "I": Lesch - Nyhan Disease and Choice

These last few weeks of class we have been discussing the role of the "I" function in terms of sight, dreaming and choice. Many interesting points were raised about why the "I" function exists and what its role is in controlling behavior and regulating choice. My last paper touched on some of these ideas when looking at obsessive compulsive disorder and the role of the "I" (5). I would like to return to some of these ideas with the more [extreme](#) and complex example of the self mutilation experienced by [sufferers](#) of Lesch - Nyhan disease.

In one class meeting discussing sleep, a student jokingly discounted the theory that one sleeps when bored by saying that if people could choose to sleep they wouldn't because it is a waste of time so therefore sleep must be a necessary function outside the control of the "I". This statements helped me to clarify my own thoughts on the "I" function. There are many behaviors that are outside the control of the "I" because they are necessary functions such as sleep and breathing and heartbeat and digestion. It is true, as one member of class mentioned, that this is good because it does not "clutter" the brain nor does the "I" have to "waste" time regulating these things; but I think it is a larger matter

than that.

As a sociology major I am interested in the way people behave and interact in society. This class has also allowed me to see the way that people interact with themselves and their nervous systems as another sort of social activity. Many of our activities are regulated by society. From birth we internalize certain norms and values that tell us how to behave in certain situations. If these are broken we feel guilt or shame which manifest themselves through the nervous system with sweaty palms, increased heartbeat, depression, etc. So in a way our repose, even on the level of [neurons](#), is effected by our society. The "I" function plays a very important role in this because it can "tell" the self what is and is not appropriate and it can help to regulate behavior. So there is a strong connection between the "I" and the nervous system, but both have to have some autonomy. The nervous system has to be able to carry out necessary functions inspite of the "I" and the "I" also needs some autonomy from the nervous system.

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