



# The Tender Cut: Inside the Hidden World of Self-Injury

*Patricia A. Adler, Peter Adler*

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Cutting, burning, branding, and bone-breaking are all types of self-injury, or the deliberate, non-suicidal destruction of one's own body tissue, a practice that emerged from obscurity in the 1990s and spread dramatically as a typical behavior among adolescents. Long considered a suicidal gesture, *The Tender Cut* argues instead that self-injury is often a coping mechanism, a form of teenage angst, an expression of group membership, and a type of rebellion, converting unbearable emotional pain into manageable physical pain. Based on the largest, qualitative, non-clinical population of self-injurers ever gathered, noted ethnographers Patricia and Peter Adler draw on 150 interviews with self-injurers from all over the world, along with 30,000-40,000 internet posts in chat rooms and communiqués. Their 10-year longitudinal research follows the practice of self-injury from its early days when people engaged in it alone and did not know others, to the present, where a subculture has formed via cyberspace that shares similar norms, values, lore, vocabulary, and interests. An important portrait of a troubling behavior, *The Tender Cut* illuminates the meaning of self-injury in the 21st century, its effects on current and former users, and its future as a practice for self-discovery or a cry for help.

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