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## A Case of Possible Psychological Regression in the Cat

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A very interesting case of apparent psychological regression in the domestic cat was recently observed by the writer. An owner of cats for over twenty years, I have never before witnessed the present phenomenon.

*Behavior Manifestations.*—A female cat (of no particular sort) about a year old, experiencing first pregnancy, was living at my home in company with her mother, a six-weeks-old half-brother (still nursing the parent), a litter-brother, and an unrelated young male. During mid-afternoon of May 28, 1952, the subject became much disturbed, and mewed vigorously for admission to the house. There was uterine bleeding and generalized body trembling.

Upon admission to the house, the animal's behavior was indecisive; she finally went to a closet where she had usually napped. In a few minutes she came out again, and wanted to go outdoors. There she wandered about aimlessly until I shut her up in an outdoor workroom. This produced distress accompanied by manic<sup>2</sup> behavior until I released her, whereupon she sought entrance into the house again. This general routine was repeated twice. There was continuous trembling, confusion of expression and behavior, and constant mewing. The cat was finally ejected from the house and left to her own devices in the back yard.

About 9 p.m. there was a disturbance in the back yard.

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<sup>2</sup>The cat jumped about upon the screen door, mewing violently, and in other ways exhibited very great mental disturbance.

Investigation disclosed three kittens, all dead, in wide distribution over the yard: one in a lawn chair and the others scattered about the yard—this could have been the result of their being carried by the other cats in the yard. The new mother ignored her dead kittens completely, but showed eagerness for petting and for food. Entrance into the house and feeding did not produce complete satisfaction; aimless wandering and confusion continued. The animal was finally ejected.

The next morning we found the new mother in company with her own mother's 6-weeks-old kitten, *both nursing the common parent*. The behavior-disturbance was gone, and the characteristic nursing motions of paws were in evidence. The common parent accepted the nursing of the full-grown cat. Removal of the subject from her mother produced distress; food was refused and fear-symptoms appeared. Return to the parent relieved distress, and nursing was resumed. Complete association with the parent was maintained during the rest of the day, at least it so appeared at every time of observation.

Thirty-six hours after the onset of trauma, readjustment to the pre-delivery conditions was complete, and no further aberrations have appeared. It is notable, however, that the subject now received the playful advances of the 6-weeks-old kitten with eagerness, while during pregnancy she had shown open hostility to the younger animal.

*History and Remarks.*—The subject had been a very precocious kitten, exhibiting responsive behavior, play, and coördination much earlier than her litter-mates. Physical development had been normal; the animal had been worm-free, or at least not subject to convulsive fits. When the subject had reached an age of six months, overt "neurotic" symptoms appeared; she showed generalized tremor when disturbed, and irrational fear at slight stimulation. There was marked reluctance to going outdoors, toilet habits reverted to kittenhood. No explanation of this nervousness is available. After about a month these overt symptoms disappeared. I know of no physical trauma which could explain this early disorder.

The immediate prenatal disorganization and the accompanying distress during delivery were abnormal. There

appeared to be ineffective instinctive patterning for dealing with the situation; on the other hand, there was a marked desire for relief and protective aid. During the delivery crisis there was complete disintegration of organized behavior. The result was a return to the infantile pattern, made possible by the presence of a female parent who was still nursing a later offspring.

From this case it appears that a highly intelligent cat, lacking adequate instinctive [or endocrinal?] structuring and training, can in a crisis revert to infantile behavior as a method of restoring psychological equilibrium. Such an adjustment would be similar to the psychotic regression exhibited by some human beings under extreme conditions of frustration. Future partus-behavior of the subject will be observed and recorded. If such behavior as described above is a second time observed, it would be well to attempt (by endocrinal experiments or at least by autopsy) to ascertain whether some gonadic rather than a purely psychological explanation is the more adequate.

## Note

A CASE OF MONOZYGOTIC TWINNING IN THE SPINY DOGFISH, *Squalus acanthias*.—In a gravid female shark obtained off the coast of Maine in 1950, there was found a pair of "pups" attached to the same yolk sac. The specimen was preserved. Both pups are female, and each is about 125 mm. long. Each has a yolk stalk attaching to a common yolk sac, as in the figure. There is no external sign of separation of the yolk sac into two parts. One of the pups appears slightly thicker-bodied than the other; but this may be due to the intra-uterine position and space they occupied in the mother, when first preserved. Superficially the pattern of spots on the dorsum appears identical in the two specimens.—*Joseph P. Harris, Jr.*

