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General Introduction

The elimination of bodily waste is a simple mammalian behavior with a multitude of meanings. It can mark territory, project anger, represent fear, initiate play, and even intensify sexual congress. It can also pose problems: Mammalian prey often meet an untimely demise when carnivorous predators track them by attending to the scent of their waste. Not surprisingly, the elimination of bodily waste of humans has generated the most meanings – almost bizarre in its range – and caused the most problems in the mammalian world. It extends from the psychosexual meanings supplied by Freud and his followers to the triad of characteristics (i.e., fire-setting, cruelty to animals, bedwetting) used historically (Hellman & Blackman, 1966) and spuriously (e.g., Slavkin & Shohov, 2004) to identify persons predisposed to violent crime. Human beings seem to enjoy generating complex meaning, even when the subject of their musings involves such simple substances as urine and feces. The range of problems created by the elimination of waste is also very broad, extending from health problems (e.g., infection, constipation, reflux) to social problems (e.g., rejection, ridicule) to family problems (e.g., abuse, neglect) to psychological problems (e.g., anxiety, depression).

As in so many other domains of human life, the scientific approach to the elimination of bodily waste by humans has dramatically simplified and reduced the meanings attributed to it and solved – or at least simplified – almost all the problems it can cause. This book focuses on two of the many problems, namely, childhood encopresis and enuresis. Although many persons have contributed in the past to the scientific progress made in the study of these conditions, each has a scientific patron saint, as it were. For enuresis, Herbert Mowrer was the first and the foremost early investigator to explore the utility of the so-called urine alarm in the treatment of nocturnal enuresis (Mowrer & Mowrer, 1938). For encopresis, Murray Davidson was the first and the foremost early investigator to explore the utility of stool softeners in the treatment of encopresis (Davidson, 1958). In so doing, both individuals inaugurated lines of investigation that gradually grew, elbowed out arcane, speculative and nonproductive perspectives on enuresis and encopresis, and eventually resulted in the empirically supported biobehavioral approaches to assessment and treatment used today.

In this book we cover each condition comprehensively in a specified sequence: multicomponent descriptions (e.g., definition, diagnosis, epidemiology, etc.), influential theories and models, major approaches to treatment, problems encountered carrying out treatments, and case vignettes. The book is divided into three sections: The first covers constipation and encopresis, the second nocturnal enuresis, and the third diurnal enuresis. The encopresis section also includes a discussion on toileting refusal. Consistent with the theme

of the series of which this book is a part, we will strongly emphasize and favor evidence-based perspectives on all aspects of both conditions, particularly treatment.