

## **My Nail-biting Challenge**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a three-week journey of gathering personal data about my nail-biting challenge. It borrows the idea from the “*Dear data Project*” by Georgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec to frame a personal experience with nail-biting as a habit for the past years as an adult. Personal stories and encounters are drawn to convey content and underlying perspectives from a body of literature in the psychology, psychiatry, and behavioral health studies. Data are collected around three questions: When do I bite, why do I bite, and how does nail-biting make me feel? Tables, images, and data visualization are used to understand the situation. The use of zentagles and elements of art were adopted since this is a technique in art that puts one in a mode of relaxation. In this sense, the data created the opportunity for me to address and explore the habit of nail-biting and its underlying causes as experienced.

### **Introduction**

Nail-biting is a difficult habit to overcome or treat (Tanaka et al., 2008). How do I know this? I was a victim of this habit and still am. I struggle with nail-biting or what other experts call onychophagia. Onychophagia is a common oral habit, observed in both children and adults. Statistics from Wechsler (1931) indicate that 43% of children bite their nails during the puberty ages, 25% of college students are nail-biters (Coleman and McCalley, 1948) and 10% of adults bite their nails (Pennington, 1945). Nail-biting dates back into ancient Greece when the famous philosopher Fleece Thess was addicted to nibbling. Currently, about 20% of adults admit to munching on their nails. Scientists have sought the cause of the behavior for centuries and plenty of theories have been rejected. Sigmund Freud, for example, argued that “excessive nursing as a baby makes people become orally receptive”, meaning they love putting things in their mouth. Those theories were disproved, paving way for the belief that nail-biting was a form of self-harm. However, many people derive pleasure from biting their nails so that theory was also abandoned. The problem I wish to assert is the difficulty in refraining from biting my nails, as this has been an expense and discomfort among friends and family members. Although research has been conducted on nail-biting (Deardoff et al., 1974; Schwartzman, 1939; Tanaka et al., 2008; Wechsler, 1931), and its causes among children and adults (Ballinger, 1970; Birch, 1955; Pennington, 1945), little is known about its management practices and remedies.

According to Tanaka et al. (2008), the causes of nail-biting include “anxiety, stress, loneliness, imitation of other family members, heredity, inactivity, transference from a thumb-sucking habit, and poorly manicured nails” (p. 305). The current hypothesis is we bite our nails to even ourselves emotionally, we bite our nails to stimulate ourselves when we are bored, but we also bite our nails to calm ourselves down when we are stressed out. This sounds a lot like how people use nicotine, as a study conducted by the University of Montreal and Quebec shows. When I

am relaxed, I do not feel compelled to participate in the behavior but if I am tipped by the way, concentrating, bored, or stressed, into the mouth I go. This study intends to explore my nail-biting challenges and difficulties.

The purpose of this research is to explore the causes of my nail-biting experience and habit. The study aimed at gathering personal data on my nail-biting to figure out the reasons why I bite my fingernails. The data collection on my nail-biting challenge lasted for three weeks. Data were collected in a qualitative manner and represented in a visual way at the end of every week using zentangles, elements, and principles of design to artistically represent data collected. A Zentangle is a method of drawing that offers one an opportunity to relax, focus, and expand one's imagination and creativity, increase awareness, and help to respond confidently to the unexpected. This art also leads an individual to a discovery of fun and healing in creative expression. In my choice of elements, I chose dots, different lines, shapes and colours to communicate emotions, and with the idea of "colour symbolism" in mind to make meaningful connections as I engaged with the data collected. This paper presents the data as recorded and represented in a visual way, with an interpretation of the data analyzed, and reflections about my participation and learning as a collaborative researcher.

The study seeks to address the following questions:

1. When do I bite my fingernails?
2. Why do I bite my fingernails?
3. How does nail-biting make me feel?

### **A Written Explanation and Interpretation of the Data**

WEEK 1 DATA: When I bite my fingernails

Data were collected for the first week with the focus on tracking which time of the day I bite the most and why I bite during those times. The data obtained are displayed below in Table 1a. From Sunday through to Saturday data on my nail biting were collected from morning through to the night. I drew a table and indicated with different font colours the times I did not bite my fingernails. These periods were shown in green font with the words "No biting" and the reason why I did not bite. In addition, I indicated with a wine colour when I bit and with a red colour when biting was intense or strong at a specific time of the day. Moreover, for the time of day that I bit, I also recorded times I felt the urge to bite but, due to circumstances of either place or people around, I could not bite. I indicated this with a blue colour, but highlighted it with yellow to signify "caution" at that time of the day.

Meaning of the Colours Used in Recording the Data

The days of the week and the time of day were all written in black because I wanted some form of uniformity in my colour coding, and not to throw colours around randomly. The "reason title" was in purple for all the days and times but the actual write-up for a reason was in black. The reason for choosing the various colours was because of what these colours connote in colour symbolism. For example, the colour green used to

indicate when I did not bite my nails indicates growth, wellness, and fruitfulness among other things. Red signifies danger, energy, strength, power, determination, passion, and desire. Red is a very emotionally intense colour. It enhances human metabolism, increases respiration rate, and increases blood pressure. This colour was used to indicate when I was biting very intensely while concentrating on my academic work, reading, or watching my favorite TV programs, especially when they were intriguing and engaging. The wine colour or burgundy used in writing when I bit my fingernail is traditionally the central symbol for transformation. This colour was therefore used to signify my transition from no biting from the morning through to the afternoon; and then evening biting that transformed into an intense action during the night (this may need to be referenced because colour symbolism is not commonly known among the general population).

Furthermore, the description “no biting but felt the urge to bite”, which is written in blue and highlighted by the yellow, signifies caution for me. The blue font symbolizes truth, loyalty, confidence, wisdom, and faith. Blue is considered beneficial to mind and body. Nail-biting is also connected to the mind and the body, and blue slows human metabolism and produces a calming effect. Blue is also strongly associated with tranquility, calmness, and sincerity, so I used the blue to remind me to keep my cool and calmness even though I had the urge to bite. The yellow colour, as we all know, is the colour of sunshine, hope, and happiness; although it has conflicting associations. On one hand, yellow stands for freshness, positivity, clarity, remembrance, loyalty, optimism among many others, but on the other it represents cowardice and deceit. But in this context of nail-biting, I chose yellow for remembrance or caution to keep me in check because I am at a place where I cannot afford people around me noticing that I bite my fingernails.

**Week 1: Table 1a: When I bite my fingernails**

<b>DAYS</b>	<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>	<b>Evening</b>	<b>Night</b>
<b>Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> Oct.</b>	No biting	No biting	Yes biting	Yes biting strongly
<b>Monday 30<sup>th</sup> Oct.</b>	No biting	No biting	Yes biting	Yes biting
<b>Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> Oct.</b>	No biting	No biting	Yes biting	No biting
<b>Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> Nov.</b>	No biting but felt the urge	No biting	Yes biting	No biting
<b>Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov.</b>	No biting	No biting	No biting	No biting
<b>Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov.</b>	No biting	No biting	Yes biting strongly	Yes biting Strongly
<b>Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> Nov.</b>	No biting	No biting	No biting	No biting

## Why I bite my fingernails

This section of the paper explains why during certain days and times I bite and other times I did not. The reasons why I could not bite in the mornings and the afternoons, according to the records, were because on these times I was usually on the move or busy moving out of the house. That is either going to school, work, church, or a meeting on campus or possibly still at a public space. There were other times in the morning and afternoons when I did not bite, but the reasons were quite unusual, and this was recorded on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November to the 4<sup>th</sup> of November in the mornings, as shown below in this section. Under normal circumstances, as I have learnt about myself and nail-biting, I would bite when I am thinking, relaxing, or reading, and when working on assignments but within these times from the data, I did not bite. This confirms what Wechsler (1931) says, that when the individual is well rested, biting is at the minimum. Additionally, I noticed that in moments where my hands were engaged, I did not bite, especially when I was typing, cooking, or scrubbing, unless I stopped or got stuck during typing or reading.

From the data, I learned that I usually bite in the evenings with less intensity compared to the nights, when all was quiet, and I was busy into my nocturnal habits of learning and working. This was all because my busy day had ended, and I was in my comfort zone and could reflect and think through my day and the assignments to accomplish. However, there were some instances when I did not bite in the evenings and at night. The reasons recorded were because I was busily cooking for the week or at work, with a few different reasons at night such as relaxing, meditating, and reading. During these times of readings, it was not reading related to academic work but rather reading about books that inspire and put me in a mood of reflexivity. Also, moments where biting was intense or strong, were moments when I was engaged in an academic work that involved deep thinking and formal writing.

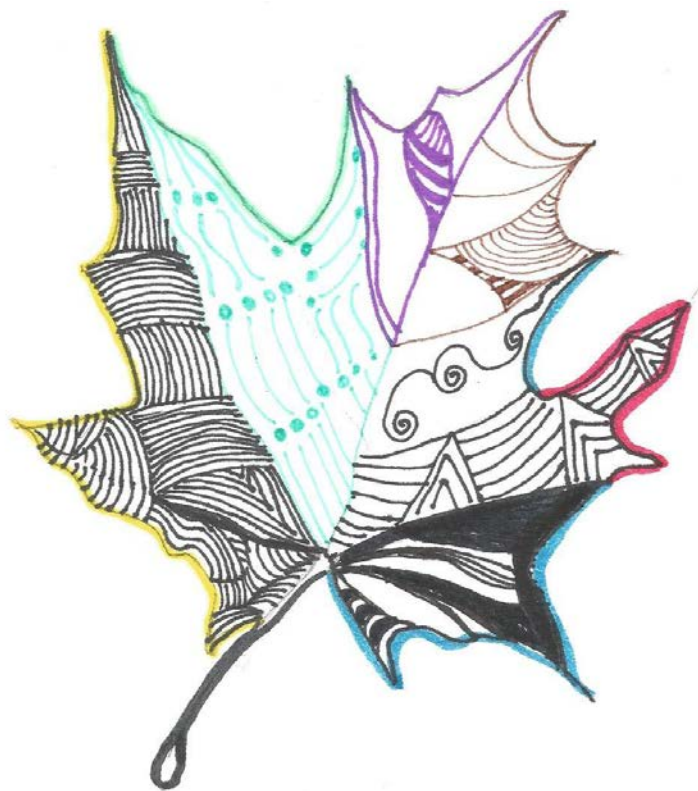
### Week 1

**Table 1b: Reasons for biting and not biting my fingernails**

<b>DAYS</b>	<b>Morning Reason</b>	<b>Afternoon Reason</b>	<b>Evening Reason</b>	<b>Night Reason</b>
<b>Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> Oct.</b>	I had to attend church, so I couldn't bite because I was busy preparing.	At work from 12:30 to 5:30pm	I was tired, so I was relaxing, watching series and I was into it so I bit my nails.	I was reading qualitative handouts, deep concentration and thinking of what to write on about qualitative research for the week
<b>Monday 30<sup>th</sup> Oct.</b>	I couldn't bite because I was in a public space with children. My hands were busy engaging with them.	I was still with the children, taking care of them till 3:30pm.	I had come home and was in severe menstrual pains, so I went to relax so that I could sleep the pain away so i did not bite my nails.	I woke up at 12 midnight and continued reading qualitative notes.

<b>Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> Oct.</b>	Watched my favorite series on YouTube at home without biting but usually I do. Why?	I couldn't bite because I was at work and busy.	Bit my index finger nail while watching one of my favorite series because it was getting so interesting. 7:16 But while on the phone I bit my right ring finger and left thumb whilst reading about my dear data	Busy wrapping up on autoethnography writing so my hand was busily typing
<b>Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> Nov.</b>	Class in the morning, stayed in class till 12:30 even though I felt the urge to.	Was in my GAship class from 1:00 to 5:30pm	I was back to my office relaxing and thinking of what to write for my qualitative chapter, presentation and I began to panic and strongly felt nervous, so I began biting	Got home at 10:30pm from school. Washed and went to relax on my bed with a children's reading book without biting.
<b>Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov.</b>	Woke up thinking about my weekly writing as I was reading and got an idea of what I wanted to write about, so I went to type.	I was at work and busy	I was busily thinking through the abstract for my coming presentation. I was so much involved, and biting was so strong on my left middle and ring fingers as well as my right ring and middle fingers as I typed my ideas.	Was busily working and biting was intense because I was highly concentrating.
<b>Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov.</b>	Was working on my assignment.	I had to a class to attend	Busily cooking for the week.	Relaxing and meditating
<b>Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> Nov.</b>	Relaxing and reading	At work	At work	Relaxing and reading

**Visual Representation of Week One Data**



WEEK 1 — When I bite my fingernails.

Sunday Evening to Night

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Monday

Tuesday

Intense biting

When biting was not intense/strong

When there were no biting through out the morning, afternoon and night only in the evening.

When there were no biting through out the morning, afternoon and night only in the evening. \*But felt the urge in the morning.

No biting the entire day.

Biting was strong in the evening of the night.

No biting the entire day.

Zentangle on a leaf: The leaf being a symbolic emblem or object to my fingernails as something that grows and are bitten off or falls just like a leaf.

### The finger I bite the most

In week two, the focus of my data gathering was to track and collect data on the finger that I might bite the most within a day, and why that finger consistently finds its way to my mouth when I am fully engaged, relaxed, or reading. From the table I created to record this data, I decided to use the “check mark” sign or the “tick” sign anytime I put any of my fingers in my mouth, whether it is the right little finger or the left middle finger, etc. These fingers were observed as I went about my day to day activities from Sunday to Saturday. All ten fingers were included in this data collection. They include: the little fingers, the ring fingers, the middle fingers, the index fingers, and the thumbs. The data showed that the two index fingers were the ones that are mostly bitten when relaxing, reading, or when highly engaged in an activity. They were the fingers that got

the most ticked strokes with the sum of ten strokes and six strokes respectively. These were followed by the right and left little fingers with five and four strokes to its credit.

The left middle finger and the right ring finger recorded four strokes each while the left ring finger, right middle finger, and the left and right thumbs recorded the least bites with zero to three strokes. Therefore, from the data collected, it can be deduced that the two index fingers are the most bitten fingers within the week, with the two thumbs appearing as the least bitten fingers within the week. Also, the index finger appearing to be the most bitten finger makes sense, in that it is termed the “thinking finger”. Anytime I am busily involved in reading and writing, it is the most convenient finger that easily reaches my mouth, or when obtaining an insight into an academic paper, or watching a TV program. On the contrary, the two thumbs appearing as the least bitten fingers are also not surprising because of their location and size. If I am to compare both sets of fingers for comfortability and easy flow of fingers, the index fingers have more advantage over the thumbs and they come in handy. However, the irony is that they are closely related, but separated with a large gap. This could also be a reason why the index fingers easily find their way in my mouth.

Even though the little fingers recorded average strokes of four and five respectively, they could also be the next possible fingers to be bitten next to the index fingers because their location, as well as their size and the ease with which it comes in handy when I am engaged in my activities. That notwithstanding, there is no literature to back these findings and discoveries. I believe that these findings are leading me as a researcher into self-discovery about nail-biting. The natural fingers are also structured and sized in the way they are by nature to ease and enhance human comfortability, and not necessarily nail-biting. I think that the structure of the fingers, too, aids in nail-biting in that it is convenient for nail-biters such as me to resort to nail-biting instead of any part of the hand.

## WEEK TWO

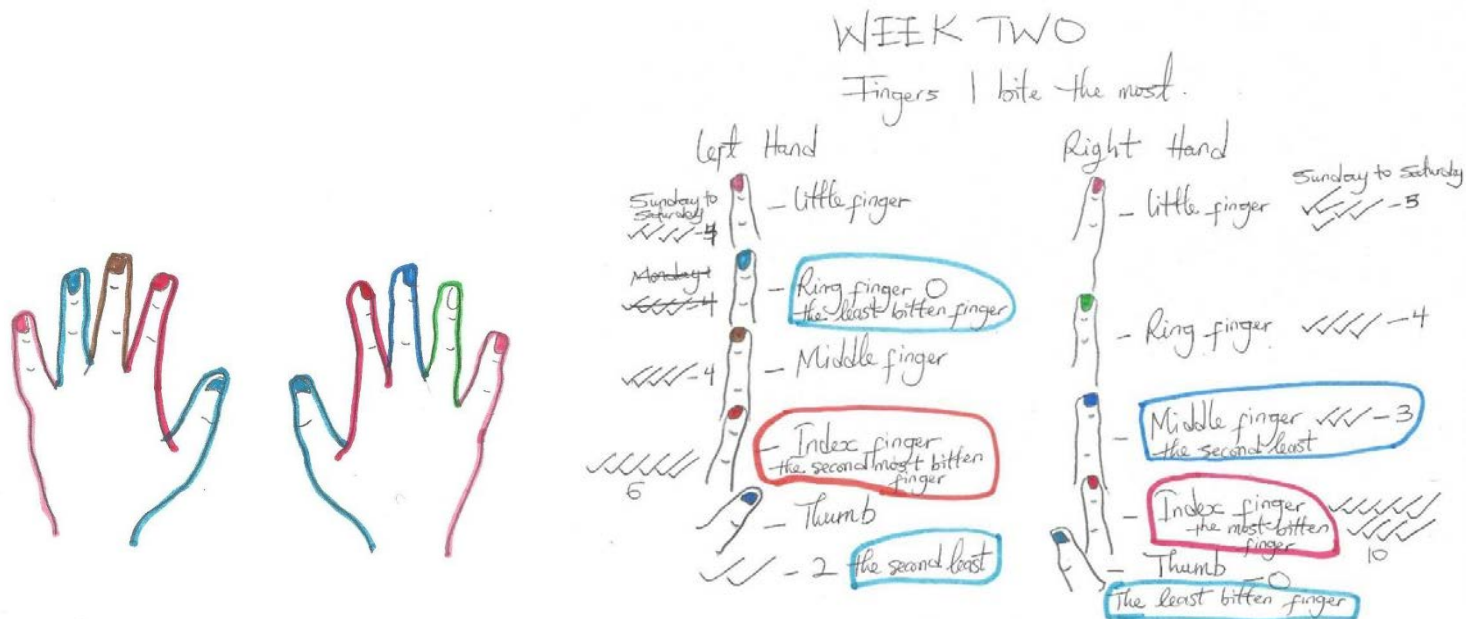
### Which finger(s) I bite the most

DAYS	Little Finger	Ring Finger	Middle Finger	Index finger	Thumb
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> Dec	R & L			R & L	
Monday 7 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Even though it was small, I was happy and was playing with it, but I ended up biting it out.			R	L thumb because I was down with sickness (cold, cough and headache) and was taking it slowly (intense)
Tuesday 8 <sup>th</sup> Dec				R	
Wednesday		R		R	

9 <sup>th</sup> Dec					
Thursday 10 <sup>th</sup> Dec	R little finger intense (even as I type this) L finger just a bite		R middle F <b>R middle finger</b>	L&R index F (intense) whilst reading for driving test	L thumb & flesh(intense)
Friday 11 <sup>th</sup> Dec	R little F L little F	R ring F	L middle F R middle F	R index F	
Saturday 12 <sup>th</sup> Dec	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 2: The fingers I bite the most

Visual Representation of Week Two Data



The most bitten fingers are the index fingers.  
The natural fingers and its structure aid in nail-biting.



### The spaces I found myself biting

On week two I found the need to record the places where I find myself biting or not biting, and where biting was at its minimum. These spaces included: home, church, school, and work. From the data, anytime I was in a public space biting was on the low. I interpret this as I would rarely bite in public because I become conscious of my surroundings. However, when I am home alone in the evenings and at night, biting is on the high. At school, biting is usually on the low side, but when I am in my office and engaging in planning and thinking, occasionally I bite. When it comes to the workplace, biting is always at the low because my hands are consistently engaged in serving and taking care of people, so I do not get the opportunity to bite my fingernails.

These data gathered show that when I am in a public space, I am conscious of the surroundings and the people around so there is no urge to bite. In my comfort zone, which is at home, biting is always high as indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Spaces for biting**

Days	Places	Variations in nail biting
Sunday	Church	No biting
Monday	Home	High biting: When alone in the evening through to the night
Tuesday	School	Medium when at the office
Wednesday	School	Medium biting
Thursday	School	Medium biting
Friday	Home	High biting
Saturday	Work	No biting

### WEEK THREE DATA: How I feel when I bite my fingernails

Ever since I can remember, I have been a compulsive nail-biter. In fact, I'm nipping at my cuticles as I write this paper. People always ask me: "What are you so nervous about?" The answer is it is not just about nerves; I bite my nails even when I'm lounging on the couch watching TV or thinking deeply into my academic writing or an assignment. Apparently, I do it because I want to get things done and off my plate. Scientists at the University of Montreal published a study in March 2015 in an issue of the *Journal of Behaviour Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry* that suggests that perfectionism might be at the root of body-focused, compulsive habits like nail-biting and hair-twisting. For the study, researchers worked with 48 participants, half of whom regularly engaged in these types of behaviors. The other participants who did not have these habits acted as a control group. The participants were asked questions about the extent to which they experienced emotions like boredom, anger,

guilt, irritability, and anxiety. Then, each participant was exposed to situations designed to provoke specific feelings, like relaxation, stress, frustration, and boredom. Those with the compulsive habits said they had a stronger urge to chew their nails, for example, when they were prohibited from completing work in a timely manner and when they felt bored after being left in a room alone for six minutes.

From the data gathered for week three on how I feel when I bite my fingernails I recorded the following emotional experiences: peaceful, confused, relaxed, sad, angry, comfortable, irritable, distracted, disturbed, misunderstood, powerless, and ashamed. Among these emotional experiences, I categorized them into two parts which are: How I feel when I bite and when I am interrupted by someone while biting. I noticed from the data gathered that anytime I am alone I feel safe to bite while reading or watching TV and the feeling is peaceful, calm, and relaxed. But when I am in a space such as school, home, or work, and with other people around me, I feel the urge to bite. These were the emotions recorded in such instances: ashamed, irritable, anxious, disturbed, and confused. Moreover, there was something I did that also made me feel powerless over my nail-biting habit. This was sneaking into my room to bite when I realized there were people around me who are likely to interrupt my biting. In addition, there were times I felt I was being misunderstood or distracted unnecessarily by unsympathetic people around me yelling, "Can you put your finger down!" In these moments, I was engrossed with typing and thinking of my graduate work and may have paused for a second to nibble at my finger and think through what I have typed. I noticed that in those moments I felt distracted from what I was doing and fell into a mood of sadness and disappointment because my intention was not to bite but to think; but it was perceived differently by others.

Listening and empathizing with other nail-biters challenged and encouraged me to pursue this study because most people tend to judge us, and they do not consider the state in which we find ourselves. I then decided to search for ways to translate those feelings and reactions I received from people close to me when they see my finger close to my mouth. Dr. Kieron O' Connor (2015), in a press release, stated that they believe that individuals with these repetitive behaviors may be perfectionistic, meaning that they are unable to relax and to perform task at a "normal pace". They are therefore prone to frustration, impatience, and dissatisfaction when they do not reach their goals. She also added that nail-biters also experience greater levels of boredom. An example is how I set new goals for myself, like making sure all of my nails are the same length or eliminating any jagged cuticles. When the habits start to interfere with daily life, they can become habit disorders — for which, fortunately, there are treatments. According to O' Connor, there are two paths to choose from: a behavioral treatment that involves replacing the habit with a competing action, and a separate approach that focuses on the underlying factors that create tension. Maybe with all this information in mind, all of us pickers, twisters, and biters can remind ourselves that we do not need to mangle our new manicures just because we crave a task to complete.

In the case of patients who are over 18 years old, onychophagy tends to appear as part of an anxiety disorder, or because of a tic, hyperactivity, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Many people also relate nail biting to psychosomatic causes, meaning to cause harm, pain, or injury to themselves, etc. This may occur in violent families, children who were subjected to severe parenting styles, or to get others' attention. Emotional pressures such as shyness and low self-esteem, as well as the pain caused by divorce or the death of a loved one can cause people to bite their nails. However, this habit tends to disappear when the person feels more self-confident and starts to trust their environment again.

When faced with stressful situations, nervousness, distress, or personal discontent, I bite my nails to escape from that situation. This condition is not serious if it is recognized early on and treated properly. That is why experts point out that onychophagy is related to social problems, because children or adults first feel sad or depressed about something and isolate themselves from their peers while biting their nails, and this is usually seen with adults and children alike. This then becomes a vicious cycle because as their hands are all bitten up and do not look nice, the biters become even more introverted.

**WEEK THREE: How I feel when I bite and when I am interrupted**

DAYS					
Sunday 14 <sup>th</sup> Dec	At peace		Confused		Worried/
Monday 15 <sup>th</sup> Dec		Relaxed		Sad	
Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup> Dec		Comfortable			Distracted I might be reading intensively or into a movie.
Wednesday 17 <sup>th</sup> Dec		Calm			
Thursday 18 <sup>th</sup> Dec		Angry sometimes	Frustrated		Distracted,
Friday 19 <sup>th</sup> Dec		Disturbed because I might be concentrating or grasping an understanding of an event.		Misunderstood because I might not be biting only the finger at my mouth thinking	
Saturday 20 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Powerless, Because I don't seem to have control over it.				Ashamed, because sometimes I feel is too much, since I hide to bite or try to be alone so that incase I bite I won't be stopped or distracted by my husband.

Table 3: Emotions and Feeling

### Visual Representation of Week Three Data



WEEK Three - Emotions/Feelings.

- 😊 - Happy/Comfortable \*\*
- ☹️ - Worried \*\*
- 😌 - Relaxed \*
- 😞 - Disappointed/Distracted \*
- 😁 - Peaceful \*
- 😞 - Sad \*
- 😵? - Confused \*
- 😡 - Angry \*
- 😡 - Frustrated \*
- 😞 - Misunderstood \*
- 😞 - Disturbed \*
- 😞 - Powerless \*
- 😌 - Calm \* \*

Circles of emotions on my nail-biting journey.

### A Reflection of my Nail-biting Data

Making meaning out of a data collection is not a lot of fun. It is relatively easy to collect the data, but what to do with the data and how to represent the data for your audience to understand is quite a challenge. Gathering data on my nail-biting was weird for others, and this made me feel weird as a human being to search for meaning on my nail-biting journey. Nail-biting is an automatic and unconscious habit that the nail-biter has no control over. This nervous habit is quite common and is related to a person's emotion. Some people keep up with this habit for their entire lives, whereas others fall into it whenever they feel stressed or anxious.

I am at a point that I should be biting intensively because I am nervous of approaching deadlines, and I have been so sick to the point that I cannot consistently sit to think and type out my data for the past month. Surprisingly, this is a time I am not biting, and my nails are growing longer and longer, which is an unusual experience based on all the findings and experiences of experts in the field of behavior and therapy. This is a self-discovery and another issue that can also be investigated, but it is not spurred by my calmness and making sure I have rested. Conversely, a nail biter with oral herpes can develop herpetic whitlow of the bitten finger, but I am at a point where all the whitlows are healed. A favorable aspect

of nail biting is that fingernail growth is not retarded; it increases nail growth by approximately 20%, perhaps because frequent manipulation of the nail stimulates the circulation to the germinal area in the nail root (Tanaka, et al., 2008), and this could also be the reason why my nails are growing at a faster rate now.

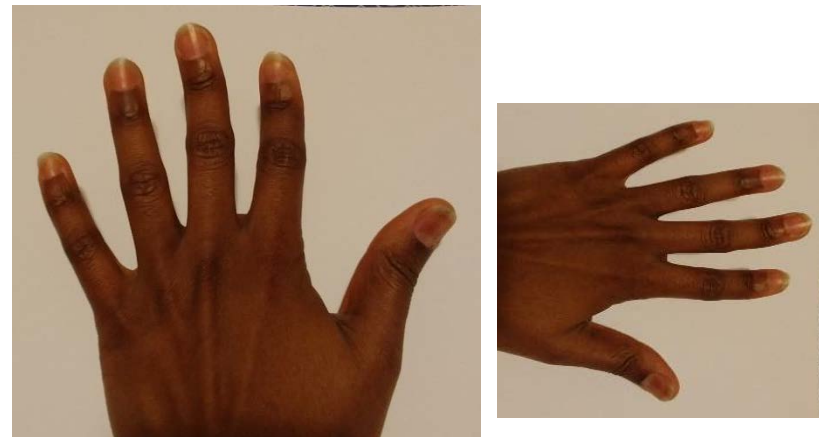
Through the journey of gathering, analyzing, and representing data, I have also learnt that representing data in a visual way comes with a lot of draft drawing before the final visual, which makes sense to the target audience one is aiming at. I ended up with series of rough sheets before finally arriving at my visuals. Georgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec, who are the authors for the “Dear Data Project” which inspired this kind of study, did acknowledge the challenge of representing data in a visual form for easy comprehension. However, nail-biting is more than just an aesthetic problem because it makes the person feel ashamed to shake hands with someone else or show their fingers, etc. This experience was noticed when I was collaborating with my partner on this project. According to experts in the field of psychiatry and behavior therapy, 50% of the population, mainly women, suffer from this problem of nail biting. It tends to occur between 10 and 18 years of age, and can last for the person’s entire life. Most people who attempt to stop biting their nails by applying topical solutions end up failing. I am a witness to this experience, having spent more than a year in manicure shops with the intention of curing myself from nail-biting. Someone might argue and ask why? This is because onychophagy is caused by anxiety, nervousness, depression, stress, boredom, personal problems, or sadness (Tanaka et al., 2008). Nervous or negative habits can start after a tiny, unnoticeable change in your day. Once people start adopting that new attitude, they end up practising their habit more often throughout the day. The main cause of nail biting is that people are not aware of what they are doing. They tend not to notice the activity until someone points it out, or until they inquire themselves. So, you could say that onychophagy is an automatic response to a problem, an escape, or a way to avoid or express feelings, etc. People who live around nail biters are also part of the problem. Why do I say that? This is because, although they may see nail biting as a problem in the beginning, they will soon start to see it as something normal, thus ignoring the activity. However, others tend to add to the frustrations of nail biters by shouting at them and acting as if it is something that the person can stop within a second or a day. They refuse to understand the dynamics of nail biting, and tend to behave as if the nail-biter does not care about her condition. Others misunderstand nail-biters because sometimes they find our fingers or hand placed on our lips unconsciously while thinking, or engaged in observation about something, or while reading. People, therefore, misconstrue and interrupt us in a way that gets the biter confused, distracted, annoyed, and angry.

Contrary to common misconceptions about nail biting, Pennington (1945) and other psychologists have come up with a list of the main causes of nail biting which have already been mentioned above, but they link these causes to understanding one’s personality. This therefore makes the habit of nail-biting a way to stimulate the nervous system which can, for example, help one to stay awake. Perfectionism causes nail-biters to spend several hours each day looking at their hands and making sure their nails are perfect. If they find any imperfections, they automatically try to fix them. This is truly how I behave with my nails—always looking for straight fingernails and trying to fix anything sticking out or crooked edges.

**My Nails Before**



**My Nails After**



### **A reflection of my participation and learning as a collaborative researcher**

Participating in this project as a young researcher has opened my mind to the importance of having someone with whom you can easily share your academic struggles. In my collaboration with my colleague in this project I was inspired to discover why I bite so intensely when I am highly concentrating. Being a collaborative researcher was not only a source of inspiration, but also provided ideas and depth of meaning that might not have been found otherwise. Also, my partner coming from the counselling and art therapy background, was able to bring her expertise on board by drawing my mind to the fact that it could be linked to psychological problems I may not have taken notice of when growing up. With her experience as a counsellor and therapist, she offered professional assistance while we worked together.

On the other hand, I noticed that she was not so much able to open up to me about her project. I could understand this because it was personal and sensitive to her, and I respected that. I was able to contribute to her work by sharing my knowledge and ideas with her concerning how she could best represent such a complex topic on dreams visually to explain her data. This collaboration presented to me a different way of working

as a researcher because my partner was interested in my project since she had the same problem. We also shared a lot of similarities as she is involved in the arts and health. I learned that choosing the right partner for a research project goes a long way in determining the success of that project. Working with partners that have the same expectations and goals, or working with parties that don't have the right skills and resources to make the project work, affects productivity. I also learned that the right partner does not necessarily have to be like me, but must respect my way of thinking. There is no point in collaborating with partners who do not bring additional expertise and resources to the table. Although time was a major problem for us owing to our busy schedules as PhD students, we were able to meet five times and then resorted to emails and phone conversations on our dear data journey. This was equally helpful and added to our understanding of exploring data analysis on a lighter side of academia, but the overwhelming experience of collecting data and not knowing where to begin with and how to bring the meaning out of the data collected, caught up with us. At the end of the project, we were satisfied with our accomplishment on our dear data results.

## Conclusion

Onychophagia treatment should be directed at the causes of any precipitating stress punishment. Ridicule, nagging, and threats are not helpful and often replace the nail-biting habit with a more serious problem (Tanaka et al, 2008). A multidisciplinary approach should focus on efforts to build up the individual's self-confidence and self-esteem. Chronic nail-biting can produce small fractures at the edges of the incisors, and gingivitis might result from continued nail-biting. Nevertheless, the lack of scientific evidence in the literature, as well as personal observation, indicates that ordinary nail-biting has no serious effect on the dentition, even considering its duration, frequency, and intensity. Overcoming the habit of nail biting is directed to the individual biter involved in the habit, and the support system around that individual determines the success and treatment of nail biting. Even though there is limited literature on the remedies and treatment of nail-biting, I believe that the nail-biter is the best individual to discover a strategy to overcome such a habit with which comes with commitment and a lot of self-discipline.

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