

ADVANCES IN INTERPERSONAL APPROACHES

The Interactional Nature of Depression

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SOCIOPHYSIOLOGY AND DEPRESSION

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SOCIOPHYSIOLOGY

Psychiatry and related clinical sciences lack a basic science of the type that underlies other medical specialties (Gardner, 1997). Such a framework would allow an understanding of the conditions treated by clinicians as variations of normal physiological and biochemical operations just as congestive heart failure is understood in terms of a pathogenetic story concerning the cardiovascular system (heart muscle falters causing blood flow backup). Knowledge of the normal cardiovascular system and its operations informs treatment of this mechanism pharmacologically (digitalis preparations) and by counsel (bed rest and low-salt diet). In parallel, we propose that knowledge of normal systems and their operations would inform the treatment and counseling of depression. In this chapter, we hope to formulate this framework with respect to the normal communicative processes basic to depression and to describe how the condition is a variant of normal sociophysiological operations. We suggest that this framework will provide guidance for the best counsel and pharmacological treatment of this serious malady, which is diagnosed more than any other psychiatric condition.

Sociophysiological theory assumes that psychiatric disorders are path-

ological variants of the motivation, emotions, and conflict involved in normal communicational processes. Interpersonal processes thereby are functions of the brain's normal operation; when they transpire aberrantly, pathology may result (Gardner, 1996). Correction may result after amelioration from interpersonal means. People who panic frequently become calm when someone else is around. Reaction patterns seem to have evolved to serve adaptive purposes, but they may be wrongly deployed by threshold effects, environmental circumstances, timing, and other factors. Dunbar (1996) noted that people are highly social and that this tendency correlates with the enlarged size of the human brain. Therefore, fear responses—an ancient form of reaction pattern—may persist, but more recently evolved features unique to humans modulate them. The point is that across-species comparisons in behavioral, genomic, and neural mechanisms are part of a sociophysiological approach, but contrasts are an equally integral component. Another human means of reducing fear stems from the use of medication. The role of medical doctor, with the availability of scientifically based drugs, is unique to the human species.

The eventual complete description of the pathological sociophysiology of depression will entail detailed expositions of how neurotransmitters and cell and brain systems operate in the normal states and aberrantly when pathological; we are concerned in this chapter with postulated brain modules that mediate individual motives and group effects, only touching on other levels of analysis. A basic tenet of sociophysiology holds psychopathological states to be exaggerations or inappropriate deployments of behavioral modules encoded in the nervous system as normal adaptive features. We propose that a normal module underlying depression and dysthymic disorder is one of *subordination*. One of us has labeled the correlated organismic state *in-group omega psalic*, wherein *psalic* is an acronym for *propensity state antedating language in communication* (Gardner, 1988). This term refers to the communicational state associated with being the lowest ranking animal in a grouping.

INVOLUNTARY SUBORDINATE STRATEGY

The Strategy

At the right time and place, and under the right circumstances, subordination represents a highly adaptive approach to solving problems of survival for oneself and one's offspring. One survives now to compete at a later time under better circumstances. Game theorists label as *strategy* behavioral sequences that imply the possibility of particular outcomes (Maynard Smith, 1982). In the presently described work, the intent to seem defered represents a strategy. Deployment of such strategies results in