

NORMAL AND PATHOLOGICAL EMOTIONAL DISPOSITION – GENERAL ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK FOR THE PHENOMENON OF DEPRESSION

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Abstract: *Sadness is a negative, adaptive, functional emotion, frequently occurring in people’s lives, but entirely different from depression, from the qualitative and intensity point of view; depression is a negative, dysfunctional, disadaptive emotion.*

Keywords: *depression, sadness, emotion*

Rezumat: *Tristețea este o emoție negativă funcțională, adaptativă, frecvent întâlnită în viața oricui, însă complet diferită de depresie, din punct de vedere calitativ și al intensității; depresia este o emoție negativă disfuncțională, dezadaptativă.*

Cuvinte cheie: *depresie, tristețe, emoție*

INTRODUCTION

For most people, depression is mistaken for or considered synonymous to sadness, one of the emotions that each of us is familiar with from personal experience. The confusion between the two terms causes many people to label their sadness moments, experienced as a reaction to common events or to more or less important losses that daily life confronts us with as depression. Thus, depression is a frequently used word, but often enough abusively so. This confusion justifies the efforts made in order to clarify the distinction that must be held between the terms “depression” and “sadness”.

Sadness is part of the affective states present in the daily life of psychologically balanced people, representing the natural emotional reaction to the losses suffered at any level of our existence, although as Lazarus pointed out – few of us experience it immediately after a loss recording (for instance, after the death of the loved ones). Although this is not a generally-valid rule, the majority initially search for means to cancel what happened to them, calling on attitudes such as denial, protest, revolt, holding on hopes without any perspective of victory; all these strategies are meant to postpone the confrontation with a reality whose truculence is lived as excessive, impossible to bear in its plenitude, they need to fragment it in smaller ratios, causing pain and suffering even in these quantities, but at least bearable without the risk of overthrowing the psychological balance of the individual. Time gain, facilitated by these defence mechanisms, is used for preparing the adaptive resources of the person with a view to take into account the entire dimension of the loss endured. It is only then that sadness

truly takes hold of us and sets in for an undetermined period of time, when we can finally accept reality, at least for an important part of the loss suffered. These are valid in terms of a large and irreversible loss (death, separation, job loss after a lifetime dedication), which affects our existence in its whole, practically forcing us to reorganize our lives without counting on that person, or thing, we have awarded special significance to. Nevertheless, most losses we undergo are of more reduced magnitude, which allows us to react by sadness on the spot. We can become sad when we come across a minor failure, when missing out an opportunity we had relied on, but facts that could not have had an impact on our existence as a whole, such as witnessing the destruction of an object which was dear to us. We can however be sad when witnessing somebody’s trouble, when reading a novel or watching a film, when our favourite team losses or when something particular arouses feelings that we experienced a long time ago. Besides the spontaneous emergence, not preceded by a relatively long period of denial or revolt, these ordinary manifestations of sadness, although they can be lived at a higher intensity, they differ from the pain attached to the sufferance perceived as major, from the perspective of their duration. If the sadness that grips the individual who is left without something vital may last months or even years, the one caused by the daily events does not usually exceed a few hours. The psycho-evolutionary perspective on the effects suggest that emotions are lived as reactions to the modifications that go on within the person’s environment, sadness represents the answer given to the loss of a source of support, such as the beloved person or an opportunity.(4)

What we experience as satisfaction, sadness, worry, joy, anger, fear or regret (emotions, in a word) result from the unprecedented combination of the manner in which we think, the manner in which we act and the bio-physiological modifications that occur in our body when confronting with a life situation. Emotions thus represent variable dependences or labels we use to describe an array of changes occurring at several levels.(1) Within the process of the emergence of a new emotion, its intensity will be determined by the level of physiological activation and motor mobilization, while its quality (the fact that we name it fear and not sadness) results from the specificity of the cognitive components

involved (Singer and Schachter, 1962; David and colab., 2000).

Watson and Tellegen (6) concluded after a number of studies, that emotion has a particular structure that comprises two uncorrelated dimensions: positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions are indicated by the extent to which an individual experiences pleasure, content, while negative emotions are represented by the level of lack of pleasure experienced by the individual. Both positive and negative emotions can be functional or dysfunctional, otherwise said, they may contribute to the facilitation of goal completion or, on the contrary, their obstruction.

The predisposition to pathology is given by the patterns of absolute thinking regarding oneself, others and life. According to the theory of A. Ellis, (2) if a person has a pattern of absolute thinking, and life confirms these irrational expectations, the individual experiences positive emotions. If, however, the individual's expectations are invalidated by life conditions (which is even less probable, as these expectations are irrational), obstructive, negative emotions are developed, as well as dysfunctional emotions, such as depression. On the other hand, the presence of rational, flexible beliefs, like "I'd like things not to go this way, but it's not compulsory to have it happen just this way", even in the conditions of certain negative, antagonistic life circumstances, generate negative functional emotions, sthenic but adaptive and natural, such as sadness.

The element that truly distinguishes the negative dysfunctional emotions from the functional ones, herein depression, as dysfunctional negative emotion from sadness, as functional negative emotion, is the fact that the former constitutes a form of psychic disorder, and as such, it is recorded as a failure to adapt, from the part of the individual, generating in turn new manifestations of disadaptation, while the latter is a normal manifestation of the human psychic system, which serves as the most effective adaptation of the person. In conclusion, the thinking pattern, unique to each individual, is the one that will finally produce a functional negative emotion or, a dysfunctional one, thus pathological. Aaron Beck starts from the assumption that depressives have negatively biased self-patterns that filter the positive information to the benefit of the negative aspects.

Depressive states, although they may imply extremely intense, almost painful living of sadness are qualitatively different from sadness. According to DSM IV-R (2000), the individuals affected by depression feel sad and hopeless for weeks on end, most of the times losing interest in things that used to offer them pleasure and have trouble sleeping and eating; they also have difficulties in finding solutions to the problems they have, and sometimes they are unable to focus on the mere quotidian activities. As it results from this very definition, depression is a complex state and implies besides the affective component also physiological, cognitive and respectively behavioural modifications, which make the impact on the life of the individual be significantly

stronger.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Depression is a negative dysfunctional, disadaptive emotion considered as a failure of adaptation from the part of the individual.
2. Sadness is a negative functional, adaptive emotion, present in the life of any psychologically balanced person, distinct from depression.
3. Following the same negative life event, certain people experience depression and others sadness, the difference between the two being caused by the manner in which we think (thinking patterns).
4. The absolute thinking pattern predisposes to emotional pathology – for instance, depression.

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