

## †Reading about.

### Depression — Clinical Aspects

by E. S. Paykel

'Include suggestions for reading which you consider to be important, memorable, relevant, unusual, informative—or whatever', said the Book Review Editor, his own wording meeting several of these criteria. The informative literature on depression is vast, so that a comprehensive review is not to be considered. I present here an arbitrary selection of what has seemed personally useful or memorable, with a bias, for maximum information value, from each reference, to books and review articles. Apologies for the many fine works of equal quality which have been left out.

Inevitably, much of what seems relevant is also recent. Not so Aubrey Lewis's triad in the *Journal of Mental Science* in the 1930s (Lewis, 1934a, 1934b, 1936). They form a model for the scholastic dissertation: historical review, study of current features, and follow-up study. Read today, they move at a slow and detailed pace, conveying the encyclopaedic breadth, though not the underlying warmth, of their author. Their dispassionate attention to observed facts stands out in the polemical debates on depressive classification of their era. They still remain a landmark in detailed clinical documentation from an age which depended on description rather than rating scales and statistical analyses. The case reports, omitted for reasons of space from the reports in *Inquiries in Psychiatry* provided enough material for at least two statistical studies more than thirty years later. The severe disorders which they describe have become increasingly uncommon with the advent of ECT and antidepressant drugs.

Depression has provided a much trampled arena for the internecine combats of psychiatry over classification, the nature of disease, and the importance of constitution and environment in causation. Kendell's monograph (1968) provides an elegant experimental study and a lucid historical review. His recent review (Kendell, 1976) makes an equally clear, modest and sceptical survey of the situation ten years later on.

† An occasional feature in the Book Section where contributors give their personal choice of important, memorable or informative literature.

I am a classifier and I enjoy the works of those who find this exercise worthwhile. Lewis took the unitary view that depression, in spite of its diversity, represented a single underlying disorder. Kendell found that the differences could best be organized as a continuous psychotic-neurotic dimension, with occasional pure and polar types, more common mixed cases, and no clear boundary. The Newcastle school, led by Roth, believe that fairly clear separations between diagnostic types can be achieved. A neat model for such a research study was presented in four consecutive research papers on the relationship between anxiety states and depressive illness in the August 1972 issue of the *British Journal of Psychiatry* (Roth *et al*; Gurney *et al*; Kerr *et al*; Schapira *et al*, 1972). The two disorders were found to be associated with different clinical features, previous histories, personalities; opposite factor loadings on a bipolar factor; a bimodal distribution on a discriminant function score; and different outcomes on follow-up.

A pathfinding classic, concerned with a different classification, was that of Perris (1966). Building on the earlier work of Leonhard, his study was the first published in English to draw attention to differences between bipolar and unipolar affective psychoses, particularly regarding family history, personality, and prognosis. The importance of the differentiation will ensure a long future of obligatory quotation in further studies and reviews.

He who would study aetiology of depression must be prepared at some stage to integrate the psychological, the biological and the social. Akiskal and McKinney (1975) reviewed in outline a large amount of clinical, animal and other experimental work. They described ten possible models which have been proposed, ranging over the psychoanalytical, behavioural, existential, biological and sociological. They attempted to reconcile these in a comprehensive view. The word depression covers a wide spectrum of phenomena, from a severe clinical illness to a normal and universal mood. The continuities between the normal mood and the pathological state seem greater than the differences, and inevitably issues arise as to a functional advantage

which has fostered the evolutionary survival of the normal mood.

Psychoanalytic theories, now ageing and out of the limelight, have been formative and persisting major influences on almost all the other viewpoints. Mendelson's book, now in its second edition (1974), provides a clear, critical, witty and beautifully written account. Broad enough to encompass sympathetically non-psychodynamic work from Kraepelin to Winokur and Schildkraut, it surveys in considerable detail psychoanalytic writing on depression from Abraham in 1911 to the 1970s. It moves gradually from a clear account for the novice to a scholarly and talmudic critique for the experts. Non-experts like myself, seeking superficial enlightenment, can equally gain from it, and from Gaylin's (1968) compilation of key writings with brief introduction. Otherwise the psychodynamic literature on depression is scattered and not easy to come by. On a key issue in the psychodynamic literature, bereavement, Parkes' (1976) comprehensive and invaluable book manages to adopt an empirical approach, free of undue theoretical constraint.

Questions about meaning and the relationship with normality are also raised by studies of life events. The studies of George Brown and his colleagues have already become well known and deservedly widely quoted (Brown and Harris, 1978). Seventeen per cent of women in the community showed psychiatric disorder, most of it depression, and for 8 per cent onset was in the last year. Prevalence was higher in working class than middle class women. Depression was highly related to threatening life events, modified by four vulnerability factors: early loss, not working outside the home, absence of a confidant, presence of several children. Psychotic depressives experienced early loss by death, neurotic depressives by separation. You can argue with some of the findings, (some would say that a condition with such high prevalence is sub-clinical: I find the differentiation of classificatory subtypes by nature of loss particularly hard to accept intuitively), but their general trend makes sound common and clinical sense. A challenging blurb has prejudiced the medical mind against a sociological classic which is remarkably clinical in orientation, by a statement suggesting that the increased rate in the working class women constitutes a major social injustice. This is an oversimplification carefully avoided within the text.

It is on the biological front that the pace of advance in the last twenty years has been most dramatic. For the first time the understanding of a functional mental illness in terms of the neuro-physiological mechanisms underlying it appears

almost within reach. Lack of grounds for objectivity and appropriate modesty have discouraged mention of the work of myself and colleagues in any area. However, too many of the published books on biological aspects of depression are accounts of personal research and of hobby-horses ridden at symposia. If you want a recent attempt to review the psychopharmacological front, both in basic studies of the physiology of affect, and in treatment applications, try Paykel and Coppen (1978). It stands or falls, not on its editors, but on its contributors, and you must judge it for yourself.

Is there a short general book suitable for the harassed membership candidate, and the more diligent student of medicine, psychology or social work? None of the general works on depression seem to me ideal. Flach and Draghi (1975) provide a large multi-authored set of reviews, definitely American in viewpoint. For a shorter work, I prefer Mendel's (1970) concise and easily readable account, since he thinks more like a British psychiatrist, but Beck's (1973) abridgement of the review chapters from his earlier book contains a widespread, though less selective, literature survey. Lucky the University of Pennsylvania to have both these authors, as well as Mendelson.

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