

Conceptions of depression: a Hawaiian perspective

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Depression's central defining characteristic (i.e. dysphoria or sadness) has different meanings in some non-western societies. The variations in the perception of affective tones may be reflected in the language of the culture, in that one language may have a wide vocabulary of words describing different shades of a particular affect, another language may have only a few. Tan (1977) reported that this is the case for some of the Malayo-Polynesian societies and some of the islands of the South Pacific. Tan noted that the Malayan language has no less than a dozen words describing affect which range from anxiety and fear through various states of depression, by contrast, in the Chinese language there are relatively fewer descriptive term.¹

The dilemma faced by the cross-cultural evaluation of depression seems to be that the concept of depression is expressed linguistically in widely varying.^{2,3,4} For example, the Ifaluk people of the Pacific are known to have at least seven different terms that describe two clusters of depression while the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea have at least nine words that describe sadness.^{5,6} Moreover, Tanaka-Matsumi and Marsella (1976) found that word association patterns between "depression" and the Japanese term "yuutsu" differed considerably for Japanese nationals and two Japanese-American subsamples.⁷ Thus, cross-cultural research has supporting evidence to suggest that variations in cultural expression and language may in part determine reliable and valid measurement of self-reported depression.

Cultural sensitivity in the measurement of depression among Native Hawaiians particularly important given the emotional effects of socio-economic losses including disintegration of the Hawaiian culture, the diffusion of Hawaiian

identity, dislocation from the *aina* (land) and dissolution of the Hawaiian language.^{8,9,10} In addition, these losses are a result of forces of a majority culture outside Native Hawaiians' control.^{11,12,13} Supporting theories posit that depression arises from a disruption of these types of response-reinforcement relationships.¹⁴ This premise suggests that cultural losses can be seen as losses of important sources of reinforcement especially if beyond one's control (Seligman, 1974; Seligman, 1981) as major contributory causal factors that determine the outcome of depressive phenomenology.^{15,16,17,18} Research by Berry et al. (1987) and Berry and Kim (1986) provides supporting evidence that native peoples indeed may be psychologically distressed due to acculturative factors that are beyond their control.^{19,20} Their research included broad comparative studies of acculturative stress among various Canadian sub-groups; Korean immigrants, Vietnamese refugees, foreign student sojourners, Canadian ethnic groups, and Native Canadian Indians. Subjects were assessed for various levels of psychological distress as measured by the Cornell Medical Index: psychosomatic health problems, anxiety, and depression. Also, an attitudinal scale of modes of acculturation developed by the authors was administered. Results

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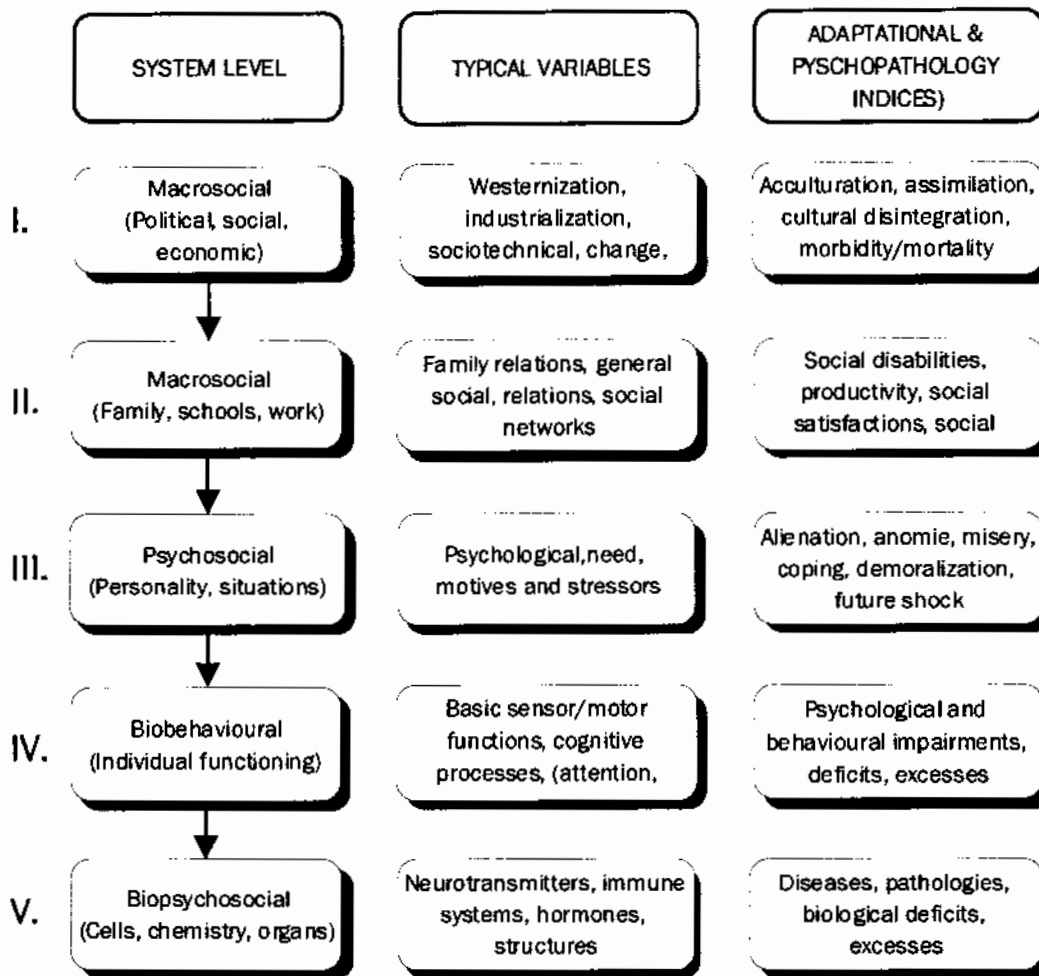
from both studies showed that native peoples and refugees reported relatively higher levels of acculturative stress compared to immigrants and Canadian ethnic groups.

They concluded that native Canadian Indians who tended to reject assimilation towards the host society, refuse to accept the dominant culture, and who are also attendant to cultural loss reported higher levels of distress compared to others who adopted a more integrative or bicultural attitude.

Investigations like these contribute to the knowledge base of the effects of acculturation on psychological well being. Native Hawaiians may have developed a relatively high prevalence of characteristics of a clinical and sub-clinical depressive syndrome due to the extent of cultural losses experienced that resembles the kind of acculturative stress experienced by the native peoples of Canada. In order to study this proposed phenomenon, it is necessary to determine: 1) How does one measure depression in an indigenous group? 2) What are the etiological factors? and 3) What are the treatment and prevention implications? This

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Fig. 1. Hierarchy of systems in human adaptation and psychopathology, Marsella (1987)



paper focuses on the conceptualization of depression within Native Hawaiian language which is critical to studying etiology, treatment, and prevention.

Increasing evidence has questioned the universality of the concept of depression as defined within the Western biomedical tradition.^{21,22,23} Marsella (1987)²⁴ presents a hierarchy of systems in human adaptation and psychopathology (see Figure 1) as evidence that depression - as conceptualized by western models^{15,17,25} is not necessarily a universal phenomenon. Marsella's model proposes that variables used to explain depressive disorders exist in interdependent hierarchical levels. It has been noted that the concept of major depression has no linguistic equivalence, let alone conceptual analog, in certain non-Western cultures. This does not mean that depression is nonexistent in such cultures, but rather that the identifying cues, meaning, and behavioral response may be assigned differently. Therefore, not only may distinct cultural interpretations of depression differ from western conceptions but the etiology and symptomatic behaviors may be different. Such an approach may have crucial cultural-specific treatment implications.

Anthropological research conducted during the late 1960s and early 1970s provides a valuable portrait of the Hawaiian's view of illness that may be relevant to the measurement of depression and its association to cultural patterns.^{26,27} Howard (1974) concluded that Native Hawaiians are oriented towards a supernatural understanding of the world and of their experiences, including illnesses that depict the Hawaiian's close affection or bonding with significant others, land, and spiritual entities.²⁶ Firth (1940) described the Hawaiian's world as personified by their relationship to supernatural gods, the environment, and their interaction with others of the community.²⁸ This concept is often referred to as *Lokahi*, or unity, balance, and or harmony.^{29,30,31} Handy, Puku'i, and Livermore (1924) state that the most important part of the Hawaiian therapeutics was that "the conditions of the physical could not be separated from that of the psychological."³² This view is consistent with a study by Gallimore, Boggs, & Jordan (1974) in which Native Hawaiians were found to be high in external control versus internal control.²⁷ This suggests that Hawaiians tend to view events as beyond the control of the individual versus a belief by individuals that they can influence what happens to them. Such an orientation towards external control reflects

a sense of powerlessness, a feeling among Native Hawaiians possibly explained in part by historical and contemporary social factors attributed to the acculturative change and subsequent cultural loss and or disintegration. Powerlessness, therefore, may be one aspect of the depressive syndrome among Native Hawaiians. This pattern is similar to Seligman's learned helplessness theory that proposes external factors beyond the control of the individual that significantly influences the chronicity of depression.^{17,33} This type of cognitive diathesis is known as a depressive attributional style. Furthermore, others have asserted that an attributional style is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause of depression, but acts as a contributory cause or a risk factor as a determinant of depressive pathology.^{34,35} Henceforth, powerlessness, hopelessness and helplessness are seen as proximal antecedent causes of a subset of depressive states that may be relevant to Native Hawaiians.

There are several different terms for sadness or depression in the Hawaiian vocabulary. They range from explicit descriptions of dysphoric states to mythological metaphors.

Ancient Hawaiians were familiar with and conceptualized their own understanding of mood states. For example, Puku'i, Haertig, & Lee (1972) report:

*"We know Hawaiians of the past recognized the depressed person. He was loha, drooping or wilting, as a branch hangs low, beaten down, as by rain."*³⁶

Kaumaha is the most widely used expression meaning heavy as in weight or heaviness but is figuratively expressed to mean sad or depressed.^{11,13,37} Puku'i, Haertig, & Lee (1972) explain that kaumaha, as an abstract idea, is derived from the literal connotation that grief is a heavy weight followed by relief.³⁶ An extension of kaumaha referring to a greater severity of affect is kaumaha lua and or kaumaha loa, meaning very heavily laden, bearing a heavy load or extremely sad. This term is metaphorically associated when one's affect is seen as immersed or saturated so deeply as if one was drenched with water³⁷ (Puku'i & Elbert, 1986).

Lu'ulu'u refers to one's physical affect as being bent or bowed down, as with weight, sorrow, or trouble. This term is also identified with depression often describing states of pain, sorrow, sadness, bereavement, depression, or over laden. A mythical aphorism of this phrase often said by ancient Hawaiians is "Lu'ulu'u Hanalei i ka ua nui, kaumaha i ka noe o Alaka'i" or literally meaning that Hanalei is downcast with great rains, heavy with mists of Alaka'i. This proverb is often mentioned in situations of lament or dirges to describe the extreme weight of grief.³⁷ A taxonomy of

lesser words are also used to depict varying states of depression. For example, 'Aoa is a term used to describe the bark or howl of a dog but is also referred to one's wail of distress to depict sadness. Niniu depicts a state of confusion or incoherent thought, as in blurred vision, literally meaning to spin, worry, or to be sad or dizzy. Close in enunciation to niniu is niuaua. Niuaua, also associated with states of dizziness or confusion depicts a psychotic form of sadness. Maloa is term that is rarely used but depicts sadness as moping over one's woes. Along with kaumaha and lu'ulu'u, the terms mentioned above also support the notion of sadness and or depression in general.

While the DSM-IV categorizes types of depressive states, it also distinguishes states of grief or mourning from affective disorders.³⁸ Although western classification of these two affective states appear dissimilar, they are not for Native Hawaiians. According to the Hawaiian language, grief or mourning states seem to be interrelated with a diagnosis of depression. For example, na'au'auwa (literally "grief within the very bowels") was used in situa-

tions of death, especially of an ali'i (ruler or aristocrat). During states of na'au'auwa, grief was expressed in extreme and violent manifestations called manewanewa. Such acts included knocking out teeth, gashing the head or even scarring the body.³⁶ Such behavior is similar to those of self-injurious and suicidal symptoms of depression noted in the DSM-IV.³⁸

A further analysis of the Hawaiian language with reference to depression supports the notion of subtypes of affective states. The onset of these states appear to be precipitated by specific events that are situational-contextual. These forms of depression are contingent upon the type of stressful event such as interpersonal relationships with significant others, religious aspects of sorcery, and psychosocial connection with the land. For example, 'eha is another graded term for depression severity. It is defined as hurt or to be hurt (as in pain), painful or to cause suffering. 'Eha is a form of affect often associated with love or the break up of a relationship. An expression associated with 'eha is "He 'eha konikoni i ka pu'uwai", literally meaning that the heart throbs with agony (of love). Like kaumaha lua and kaumaha loa are extensions of greater severity of kaumaha, 'eha'eha too characterizes great pain and agony, torment, distress or tribulations that is often metaphorically expressed as "'Eha'eha ka na'au," or feelings of the gut are truly hurt. Thus, it can be implied from the descriptive forms of 'eha that the precipitant factor of losing a loved one can be severe enough to warrant a subtype of depression.

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Pili hua describes sadness as being sorrowful, dejected, astonished, or feeling bewitched. This term is often related to somatic outcomes of bodily fatigue believed to be caused by curses or chants of sorcery, as in "a pilihua ku'u nui kino (a chant that describes one's entire body as being weary). Therefore, physical exhaustion resulting from black magic is another preceptor for diagnosing a depressive subtype. Consequently, Niuaua is another term that is associated with states of dizziness or confusion that depicts a psychotic form of sadness. Its source is unknown.

Lastly, ho'ino'ino or 'ino'ino portrays a state of being spoiled, contaminated, broken, damaged, or wretched as in a "broken spirit" of depression. 'Ino'ino is used to depict a stormy state of emotional despair or gloom associated with the physical environment. Thus, the Hawaiians' connection to the land, sea, and physical surrounding is essential to their psychological well being. Again, this affective state coincides with earlier theories proposing that depression arises from a disruption of response-reinforcement relationships and that major losses in life can be seen as losses of important sources of reinforcement.^{14,15,16} Thus, the repercussions resulting from a disturbance of such an alliance is yet again, another subtype of depression.

Therefore, the research reported in the previous articles concerning models of Cultural Loss/Disintegration and Additive Stress by ^{11,22} is critical because it provides the theoretical framework for comprehending the etiology of depression among modern Native Hawaiians. In addition, the emphasis on extreme loss or losses, either environmentally (e.g. absence or lack of societal infrastructures, cultural leaders, recreational activities, etc.) or culturally (e.g. traditional practices, customs, beliefs, values, etc.) parallels both native and western perceptions of depressed affect. Additionally, the sequential culmination of several decisive events through out Hawaii's history may potentially constitute for long term psychological effects related to cultural subtypes of depression. Specifically, in 1819 the abolishment of the Hawaiian Kapu System in 1848 the great Mahele, and in 1893 the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom have resulted in progressive losses of socio-religious uniformity, land-tenure, and government^{30,39,40} so severe that their additive effects have had transgenerational implications. The aftermath for many Hawaiians today has been a separation from their land, poor health status, lower academic achievement, and loss of cultural identity and political sovereignty.^{9,11,12,41}

As presented, perhaps the Hawaiian's conceptualization [Maybe "manifestation" would be more appropriate than "conceptualization"?] of depression has no specific DSM-IV diagnostic referent. Native Hawaiians may have developed a form of depression unknown to western scientists that is culturally unique. The terms kaumaha, lu'ulu'u, 'aoa, niniu, niuaua, 'eha, and maloa all depict depression in general as well as for extreme cases of sadness, grief, worry, and or

distress. However, their definitions are contingent upon certain situations and or contexts. Any one of these varying states may be inferred to conceptualize emotional grief or sadness associated with the loss(es) brought about by social changes manifested by the acculturative process. Unlike the DSM-IV the Hawaiian nomenclature is inclusive of subtypes for grief, psychotic-depression, and "broken-spirit." Perhaps it is this subtype that best reflects the plight of the modern Hawaiian today. This type of depressed "broken-spirit" may be the psychological repercussion from years of cultural conflict with Westerners, acculturative discord, and progressive cultural regress.

Therefore, the linguistic analysis presented suggests that the Hawaiian vocabulary does in fact include systematic criteria for diagnosing not only depression in general, but subtypes of affective states as well. Perhaps current western measures of depression do not reflect the Native Hawaiian view of affective subtypes. Given this rationale, recommendations for future research includes: 1) the utility (i.e. validity and reliability) of standardized measures for depression among Native Hawaiians, 2) development of a Native Hawaiian screening measurement for discerning indigenous versus DSM-IV categories of depression and 3) further study of indigenous Hawaiian states of depressive psychopathology which includes cultural-bound syndromes, assessment criteria, and indigenous versus conventional treatment strategies.

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