

TALK

EVOLUTION OF "PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS" AND AN ETHOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR TREATING PATIENTS WITH "PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS"

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ABSTRACT

This presentation provides evidence that psychiatric symptoms may have evolved as adaptations to an omnivorous way of life rather than representing psychiatric disorders. It also introduces a novel ethological approach for treating people with these kinds of "symptoms".

In caged groups, white-faced monkeys (*Cebus capucinus*) tend to develop highly individual, peculiar, habitual behavior patterns different from the usual white-faced monkey repertoire of signals. Moynihan has labeled these peculiar behavior patterns "quirks". A comparative study with other New World monkeys in caged groups suggests this propensity is much greater for white-faced monkeys, an omnivorous species, than for other species which are not omnivorous. While the tendency to develop quirks appears to be general, the propensity for each species correlates with the social structures evolved for inhabiting each niche.

Informed by the study of the white-faced monkey quirks, I have effectively employed an ethological approach in my psychiatric practice for treating patients with a variety of "psychiatric disorders" including obsessive-compulsive patterns, anxiety, panic, and depression. Combined with the white-faced monkey study, these results suggest that these behavior patterns have evolved in humans as adaptations to an omnivorous way of life rather than representing disorders. The implications of this conclusion for psychiatry and for us as humans will also be discussed.