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Research Paper

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EVOLUTIONARY FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT: UNDERSTANDING HEALING BEHAVIOURS

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ABSTRACT:

The exploration of humans offering psychological support to each other remains an underexplored facet within evolutionary psychology compared to the understanding of psychological distress and mental illness. This research endeavors to delve into the evolutionary underpinnings behind why humans engage in alleviating the suffering of others, particularly emphasizing the interpersonal regulation of emotions that shape how individuals console and aid one another during psychosocial distress. The review paper inspects the evolution of cooperation in social species, emphasizing key elements such as emotional contagion, empathy, and self-regulation. Furthermore, it underscores the impact of human biocultural evolution, incorporating elements like symbolic logic, language, intricate social networks, and an extended childhood phase, all of which necessitate the recognition and responsive support of distressed individuals. Acknowledging the intertwined nature of biological and cultural evolution, the review notes that these forces can establish social contexts that either foster or hinder empathetic and consoling behaviors among individuals. The overarching goal of this research lies in comprehending the evolutionary drivers that shape whether humans offer psychological healing or not. Ultimately, this understanding aims to augment global mental health approaches and unearth novel avenues for addressing mental illness across diverse cultures and contexts worldwide. By shedding light on these evolutionary factors, this study seeks to bridge gaps in our comprehension of how and why humans extend psychological support to one another, paving the way for more effective mental health interventions on a global scale.

Keywords: Evolutionary Psychology, Psychological Support, Interpersonal Emotion Regulation, Social Evolution, Empathy and Healing, Biocultural Evolution, Mental Health Interventions, Global Mental Health, Evolutionary Drivers

Background:

Until recently, the concepts of healing were notably absent in both the research and education within the fields of medicine and psychology. As Cassel (1982) pointed out, terms like suffering and healing were seldom found in the subject indices of medical and psychology textbooks until the last century. Cassel argued that modern medicine, driven by the methods of physical sciences, has become overly focused on studying the human body, losing touch with the humane aspect of disease and pain. While medical science has made remarkable strides in understanding the human body, identifying causes of various afflictions, and developing treatment procedures, the emphasis has been predominantly on the physical aspects. The breakthroughs in medical treatments, such as the discovery of sulfa drugs in the 1930s and antibiotics in the 1940s, elevated doctors to unprecedented levels of power and influence in terms of curing diseases. However, despite these advancements in curative capabilities, there has been a conspicuous lack of improvement in the psychological healing aspects. As noted by Siegel (1991), the power to heal people and enhance their lives seems to have diminished as significantly as the power to cure diseases has increased.

The predominant focus in medicine remains on diseases and bodily conditions, neglecting the individual experiencing the suffering. Consequently, the notions of suffering and healing have struggled to find a place in medical discourse. This trend is mirrored in psychology, which, despite claiming to be a study of the human mind and behaviour, has often overlooked the psychological dimensions of suffering and healing. Even clinical and health psychology, which ostensibly study mental and physical health problems, their causation, treatment, and recovery, have seldom delved into the realms of psychological healing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The journey of healing is an intensely personal experience that varies for everyone. No two people undergo identical experiences or progress through the same stages. A traumatic event has the potential to completely disrupt a person, altering their established patterns of living and relating to others. In such situations, individuals must reconstruct their lives and come to grips with the changed reality. While psychological healing is a comprehensive process, it fundamentally involves an internal transformation encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and moral reassessment of the crisis at hand.

Approaching a healer, spiritual guide, or guru in search of solace is typically accompanied by a sense of hope and an expectation of positive development. Local myths, legends, and rituals play a crucial role in sustaining these expectations. The belief in the healer's capabilities holds immense value in facilitating the healing process. An adept healer establishes a direct connection with an individual's consciousness and an indirect connection with their nonconscious, as outlined by Sudhir Kakar (2007).

- Human beings help each other feel better when they're upset in different ways. This happens when family members comfort each other, friends share their worries, or when therapists and regular people support those who are feeling down. Understanding the reasons behind this can help us help others who are feeling sad or dealing with mental health issues. By looking at how humans have evolved to support each other emotionally, we can find better ways to help anyone feeling distressed or struggling with mental health problems worldwide. Nesse and Nesse et al., (1996) made a profound contribution through their book *Why We Get Sick*, to understand why humans get sick both physically and mentally, which also helps better understand distressful emotions. If we can better grasp the evolutionary roots of psychological healing — more particularly, the control of emotions in social interactions — it will be easier for us to cater to the requirements of people in general. People suffering from typical mental diseases as well as those with psychological anguish everywhere in the world.

The model of Psychological Healing is proposed by Kohrt et al. (2020) mentions three premises, these are:

- 1. The management of emotions has evolved within social contexts.
- 2. Emotional distress is rooted in evolutionary origins.
- 3. There exist motivators and methods for interpersonal regulation of emotions leading to consoling behaviors.

Using these three ideas together, we can learn more about how evolution has changed our ability to handle our feelings in relationships. This can help both the way people naturally support others and the way mental health services work. But it's important to know that evolutionary theory can't always explain what causes something. The main goal of evolution is to make sure that genes are passed onto future generations. It does this by choosing immediate biological and behavioural processes that affect survival and reproduction, such as epigenetic factors. These mechanisms can be neutral, helpful, or harmful, based on the people and places around them. So, there isn't a single straight link between passing on genes and what's healthy in terms of health, ethics, or fitness. For example, to understand cooperation at its most basic level, we look at how important it has been in the past or how it helps people stay alive. But when we talk about it in the present, we focus on the mental skills that make people work together.

When it comes to how we deal with our feelings in relationships, it helps to know both the big-picture reasons why people work together and the specific ways that they do it, like how emotions spread, empathy, and actions that make others feel better. Cultural changes, which aren't just about reproduction and life, also influence all these things. So, any behaviour we see is affected by a lot of different things, and evolutionary ideas alone won't fully explain or predict how people will act. These ideas should not replace other knowledge we have about how to heal and treat mental illness. Instead, they should add to it.

Social Context in Psychological Healing

The evolution of social cooperation is the root cause of why we can regulate our feelings in the context of our relationships. The ability of social animals, such as certain types of wolves, rodents, elephants, sea creatures, and primates (including humans), to cooperate with one another while living in groups is one of the most notable characteristics of these animals. Many hypotheses have been proposed by researchers as potential explanations for why members of the same species assist one another as explained by Clutton-Brock (2009). There are multiple other theories which include things like altruism evolving because it helps with the overall fitness of the group (Hamilton, 1964), evolutionary games that explain cooperation (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981), ideas about selection happening at different levels within a group (Wilson & Wilson, 2007), and theories about how our fitness is tied to others' fitness (Chung, 2016). These diverse theories collectively shed light on the intricate mechanisms underlying social cooperation and its implications for emotional regulation in interpersonal relationships among humans and other social mammals.

Emotional context in Psychological Healing

1. Empathy: Being able to understand or feel what someone else is feeling from their point of view is called empathy. It means being able to understand and share other people's thoughts, feelings, and emotions. It's more than just recognizing how someone else feels; it includes a deeper emotional connection that often leads to caring about or feeling compassion for the other person. Having empathy comes in different ways, such as:

A. Cognitive Empathy: This means being able to understand and mentally grasp how someone else is feeling or what they are thinking. It means seeing things from someone else's point of view and understanding their feelings or thoughts without necessarily feeling the same way.

B. Emotional empathy: This means feeling what someone else feels. It means being able to

directly feel what someone else is feeling, which usually causes a strong emotional reaction. C. Empathy with compassion: In this case, there is both logical and emotional empathy. Not only does it mean knowing and feeling someone else's feelings, but it also means wanting to make their emotional state better.

Empathy is an important part of human interactions because it helps people understand, connect, and help each other. Understanding and responding to others' feelings in the right way is an important part of social interaction because it helps people connect emotionally, show support, and get through difficult social situations.

Most comforting and social repair behaviors are rooted in empathy, serving as their central process. Empathy is essential to prompt consoling actions and other responses toward distress, allowing for accurate communication of the distressed state and initiating suitable reactions. It is activated upon witnessing distress in a member of one's social circle.

De Waal & Preston (2017) described Empathy as any process that arises from individuals comprehending each other's states through activating personal, neural, and mental representations of those states. This includes the ability to be affected by and share the emotional state of another person, assess the reasons behind their state, and relate to them by adopting their perspective.

Emotional contagion becomes apparent through motor mirroring, like mimicking a distressed facial expression, which constitutes a part of state matching. This involves sharing the emotional state of another person.

Consoling

When a member of a counselling group goes from experiencing another person's misery to responding to it with consoling behaviours, it is extremely important for that individual to be able to self-regulate their own emotions. The management of one's emotional response is a step in this process, and it can entail both purposeful and inadvertent ways. It modifies the Individual's capacity for empathy, making it possible for them to aid another person who is in need. The counsellor must first engage in emotional self-regulation before attempting to engage in interpersonal emotional regulation. This is since the empathic reaction frequently evokes similar sensations of pain or discomfort inside the consoler (De Waal & Preston, 2017). Once the person giving comfort has helped the other person start to control their emotions, they can do several things that are meant to comfort the other person. Touching each other, which can include actions like grooming or licking, is a typical way for most social mammals to relieve stress and anxiety.

Interpersonal regulation of feelings, which leads to comforting behaviours, is affected by many factors and methods that are deeply rooted in how societies work. Some of these are compassion and empathy, social ties and relationships, and societal rules and expectations. Some ways to keep your feelings in check are active listening and validation, giving supportive answers, being physically present and using nonverbal cues, reciprocal altruism, and cognitive reappraisal. Understanding other people's pain leads to empathy and kindness, which in turn drives people to comfort and support others. Relationships and social ties also help people control their emotions, which is good for the group's health. A lot of the time, societal rules and expectations tell people to control their feelings so they can meet social standards of support and empathy.

On the other hand, nonverbal cues like touch, movements, or just being there help control emotions and show care and support. Kindness and support that are returned in social groups help people keep their emotions in check by encouraging mutual care and understanding. Reframing upsetting events or feelings in your mind can help you control your emotional responses and make it easier to do things that will make others feel better. It's important to understand these drivers and strategies if you want to know how people deal with their emotions in social situations and build relationships that are helpful and understanding.

Some animal species, like primates and dogs, are known to be able to comfort others. For example, an uninvolved observer may make an unintentional link with someone who has just been through violence or disaster. A member who wasn't directly involved in the painful event sends this kind of spontaneous connection to the person who is upset as a way to comfort and support them. This action is taken by a person who is not part of the group (Webb et al., 2017).

Physical Presence

One important trait seen in social animals is allow-grooming, which means grooming another member of the same species. This is also known as social grooming. Grooming someone goes back before complex symbolic communication and may have been one of the first ways people used social behaviours to ease their mental discomfort. It works because it brings people closer together over time, which is like how people talk to each other, and it also lets you touch each other.

Being groomed has relaxing benefits on the body. Researchers have found that being brushed can lower your heart rate, lower your stress levels, and sometimes even put you to sleep As Dunbar (2010) and Nelson and Geher (2007) both pointed out, it creates a psychopharmacological setting by releasing oxytocin, a hormone that helps people bond and trust each other. This physiological reaction makes people more committed to relationships, which leads to a trusting and cohesive mental environment within the group.

Recent Development

Moving beyond individual-centred methods for addressing racial trauma, (French et al., 2019) advocate for a fresh and comprehensive psychological framework called "radical healing" designed specifically for People of Colour and Indigenous communities. Radical healing encompasses several crucial elements: fostering critical consciousness, nurturing radical hope, embracing inner strength and resistance, valuing cultural authenticity and self awareness, and promoting collectivism, (French et al., 2019) propose strategies on implementing this radical healing model across various domains such as clinical practice, research endeavours, training methodologies, and advocacy for social justice. This framework is based on five anchors, which are (a) collectivism, (b) critical awareness, (c) crazy hope, (d) strength and resistance, and (e) cultural truth and knowing yourself.

The study by Zhang (2022) aims to improve the mental health of college students by applying educational psychology theory, aesthetic theory, and poetry appreciation to their mental health education. It introduces the long tradition of Chinese poetry teaching, discusses the theoretical basis of poetry therapy and aesthetic psychology, and discusses foreign poetry. Poetry appreciation is used to promote personality shaping and psychological healing, based on educational psychology and poetry appreciation psychotherapy. The study also examines the importance of college students' mental health education from the perspective of poetry appreciation. An experimental study was conducted on college students and patients in a hospital department to verify the practical application of this method in psychotherapy. The results showed that college students who completed a one-semester poetry appreciation course had lower scores in different dimensions of mental disorders, but higher positive trait scores in personality traits.

The findings of the study conducted by Lee et al., (2019) illustrated the participants' self healing processes through interactions with nature, guides, and other group members. This study aimed to understand how spending time in an urban forest affected middle-aged women who took part in a therapy program there. The researchers gathered information by talking to these women in group discussions and interviews. They then analysed this information using a method called grounded theory.

The findings showed that the main change experienced by the participants was in how they

saw themselves, which the researchers called "Efforts to recognize self-worth." When the women first entered the urban forest with people they didn't know, they felt a bit uneasy. But as they spent more time there, they began to feel more comfortable and peaceful. They learned more about the forest, connected emotionally, and started thinking about their own lives differently. This process helped them develop ways to deal with challenges and feel better about themselves.

This thesis by Dici Zou (2023) deals with the mental health challenges faced by college students and suggests a new approach. It focuses on reimagining the Rhode Island School of Design's psychological counselling centre to better support students' mental well-being. Many existing campus mental health spaces don't fully meet students' psychological needs. This the thesis aims to offer a solution by redesigning an existing space, considering elements like lighting, colour, layout, acoustics, and materials to address individual sensory concerns.

The current conditions of the RISD mental health facility—located in the city centre without much natural surroundings, lacking sufficient natural light indoors, and not having enough functional spaces for psychological services—motivated the idea of adapting and reusing the space to better serve students' mental health needs.

After exploring various relaxation programs and studying the opportunities and limitations of the original site, the plan involves expanding the one-story Psychological Services Centre by adding two more floors. This move allows for better lighting using skylights. Inside, a lounge the area in the centre would serve as a relaxation space, integrating natural elements to create a soothing environment. The rest of the space would primarily consist of counseling rooms and new programs. Externally, a greenhouse addition aims to increase natural light indoors and provide a connection to nature. This greenhouse area would extend to a rooftop garden, creating a cohesive flow across all three floors.

Zhao (2021) conducted research that delves into the influence of Chinese classical music on the anxiety levels of contemporary college students. It employs experimental data comparison as a method to investigate the impact of classical music on students' psychological states before and after intervention. The study aims to innovate music therapy techniques, promote emotional mitigation methods, and ultimately enhance the quality of college life.

As contemporary college students face mounting psychological pressures, this research uses music as a conduit to navigate emotional transitions. By analyzing the changes in students' psychological states following classical music intervention, the study highlights the potential of music therapy in addressing current emotional challenges.

The conclusions emphasize that classical music therapy differs from traditional psychotherapy by focusing on immediate emotional health and adaptability to the present living, learning, and working environments. Classical music intervention is depicted as forward-looking, capable of relieving tension and pressure and contributing to the development of a healthy personality. It is credited with both physiological and psychological effects, including the regulation of various bodily systems and the ability to evoke and regulate emotions. Classical music serves as a medium to express emotions, influence the nervous system, and aid in emotional regulation, stress resistance, and the amelioration of mental sub-health.

Overall, the research underscores the multifaceted benefits of classical music intervention in addressing contemporary college students' anxiety, highlighting its potential as a therapeutic tool to promote emotional well-being and improve overall quality of life.

Hu (2023) delves into the impact of art aesthetics on healing and stress relief, particularly focusing on its role in improving mental health and social adaptability. Centred on the Long March Memorial Museum in Ninghua County, Fujian province, the research conducts an empirical study using survey data questionnaires (SD) and in-depth interviews to explore visitors' aesthetic experiences. The methodology involves a questionnaire survey to understand visitors' psychological characteristics, in-depth interviews analysing aesthetic

differences in public art, and the relationship between public art aesthetics and psychological healing. The study aims to establish a model illustrating the connection between public art aesthetics and psychological healing, outlining five methods of psychological healing through art. These methods include enhancing aesthetic experiences, sparking interest in life, enriching cultural and artistic knowledge, shaping individual psychology, and alleviating emotional pressure.

The work contributes to the understanding of public art aesthetics by highlighting its influence not only by societal factors like politics, culture, customs, and lifestyle but also by religious beliefs. By approaching the relationship between public art aesthetics and psychological healing through cognitive psychology, the research aims to pave a path for utilizing public art aesthetics to foster psychological healing. It aims to expand traditional aesthetic ideologies and further explore the role of religious art in psychological healing, ultimately providing valuable insights and references for promoting holistic human development.

Jiang (2022) The impact of COVID-19 has profoundly disrupted people's daily lives and societal norms, significantly affecting both their physical and mental well-being. This study addresses the heightened psychological crisis induced by the pandemic, prompting a reassessment of the design of healing environments. Presently, therapeutic building designs primarily target medical centres and the treatment of physical ailments. Thus, this research examines post-pandemic psychological needs, emphasizing the importance of psychological healing in architectural design.

The study identifies the necessity for a prolonged mechanism for psychological recovery post-COVID-19, highlighting the widespread requirement for individual stress relief, enhancements in living environments, and adaptable spaces. Additionally, it explores how healing architecture can address these psychological needs through structural, spatial, colour, and horticultural aspects. By analysing the functions of architecture in these dimensions, the research aims to contribute to the physical and mental recuperation of individuals and foster harmonious social development in the aftermath of the pandemic.

2. CONCLUSION

The various studies and theses reviewed here encompass diverse approaches to addressing mental health challenges through innovative methods and environment-focused interventions. They span multiple disciplines, each offering unique insights into healing, therapy, and architectural design concerning mental health. The research conducted by French et al. (2019) advocates for "radical healing," a comprehensive framework tailored for People of Colour and Indigenous communities. This framework emphasizes fostering critical consciousness, radical hope, inner strength and resistance, cultural authenticity, and collectivism. Zhang (2022) discusses the therapeutic aspects of poetry appreciation and its role in personality shaping and psychological healing. Empirical evidence from an experimental study supports the effectiveness of a poetry appreciation course in reducing mental disorder scores and enhancing positive personality traits in college students. Lee et al.'s study (2019) investigates the self-healing processes of middle-aged women in an urban forest therapy program. The findings highlight the participants' transformations in self-perception and efforts to recognize self-worth through interactions with nature and fellow group members. Dici Zou's thesis (2023) focuses on redesign involving considering sensory elements like lighting, colour, layout, acoustics, and materials to create a more conducive space for mental health support. Yancheng's research (2021) highlights the potential of music therapy in alleviating psychological pressure, regulating emotions, and improving overall well-being. Hu's study (2023) elucidates the link between public art

aesthetics and psychological healing. It outlines methods such as enhancing aesthetic experiences, enriching cultural knowledge, and alleviating emotional pressure through art appreciation. Lastly, Jiang's research (2022) proposes architectural dimensions such as structure, space, colour, and horticulture to contribute to individuals' physical and mental recuperation and social development in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Collectively, these studies showcase the importance of holistic approaches, diverse interventions, and innovative thinking in addressing mental health challenges. From cultural frameworks to poetry therapy, nature interactions, architectural redesigns, and music therapy, these multidisciplinary approaches offer valuable insights and strategies for promoting psychological well-being and healing in various contexts.

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