

Depression and Bereavement in an Elderly Widow

When this woman came to us for treatment, she was 73 years old. Her husband had died the year before, and she found herself filled with grief and completely lost, since she had been a full time housewife and mother, She was mourning the loss of her husband and the loss of companionship. She had become addicted to Valium, and had just completed a drug detoxification program. However, she was still diagnosed as clinically depressed, with extreme loneliness and isolation.

She did quite well in learning to control her brain waves. By the time she had completed ten of her twenty sessions, her depression had left her. She was no longer clinically depressed, and she began to see a new direction for herself. She began reporting that each day, when she had her highest alpha scores, that she was envisioning herself as a leader of people. This was a role which had never surfaced before in her 73 years. When she finished her training, she became head of the Displaced Homemakers, and began helping other widowed and divorced women to overcome their grief and begin to grow again. She began teaching courses on stress reduction at a local college, using course material she designed herself. At her 6 month follow-up, she said that the Brain Wave Energy training had played a major role in her metamorphosis. In her words:

"I now feel that any place I go, I have faith and I can express ME. I have so much confidence in where I'm at, and that makes an impact on other people's lives. I have so much solid ground now. I feel centered and stable, more than ever before in my life. I get so much validation now. Through this brain wave training I am able to put myself out more for others."

By the time of her one year follow-up session, she had not only assumed an active new career as a teacher and a leader in a number of holistic health "networking" groups, but she had also met and moved in with a 45 year old man who, reportedly, found her "both spiritually and sexually fulfilling." She was 74 years old at this time.

To determine the existence of a relationship between learned changes in brain energy and treatment outcome, it is useful to perform correlation's on data which relate EEG changes to personality and mood changes. Left and Right Occipital Alpha changes were separately computed and correlated with changes in the patient's mood and emotional state. This patient had 20 days of EEG feedback training, the first 10 of which trained alpha energy, the last 10 of which trained beta energy. Therefore the left and right occipital beta scores were also correlated with changes in the patient's moods. First to be considered was the Profile of Mood States (POMS). Given the patient's remarkable transformation and her newfound state of boundless energy, we

were especially interested to note that the strongest statistical effects occurred with changes in alpha energy and "Vigor", the effect with left occipital alpha was highly significant ($r=.64$, $p<.025$). Increases in alpha energy at both left and right occipital sites tended to be related to reductions in the following negative moods:

- Tension / Anxiety
- Depression / Dejection
- Anger / Hostility
- Fatigue

Another mood scale assessment instrument was the Multiple Affect Adjective Check List (MAACL). The MAACL has three dimensions, which are Anxiety, Depression, and Hostility. All three dimensions tended to be negatively correlated with alpha energy increases at both left and right occipital sites. Interestingly, left occipital beta tended to be positively correlated with anxiety. Some of the largest brain energy changes in this patient occurred at frontal sites. so some significant portion of her story must await this type of analysis with her frontal brain energy scores. The occipital data are essential for comparison with data from other patients, but R.G. was unique in the magnitude of her frontal EEG energy changes... just as she was unique in her transformation from depressed widow to dynamic organizer and "networker".

To understand the nature and the degree of the changes experienced by this patient, we do well to consider the "Before Training" and the "One Year After Training" versions of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). Improvements (reductions) in the Clinical Scales occurred in a number of important dimensions. Depression (D) dropped 11 percentile points to 67. Hypochondriasis (HY) dropped 3 points to 82, while Psychopathic Deviancy (PD) dropped 7 points to 67. Paranoia (PA) was reduced 15 points from 56 to 41, as the patient grew strong and gained trust and confidence in herself and her control of her world. Mania (MA) dropped 13 points to 47, while Anxiety (Welsh A) dropped 5 points to 41. Not only did this patient reduce her degree of personality disturbance on a number of dimensions, but she also increased on a number of positive dimensions (Ego Strength [ES] increased 5 points to 61).

The MMPI is not very good at measuring positive characteristics of people, since it was designed to make fine distinctions between degrees of serious disturbances and between types of psychopathology. So it will be interesting to quantify this patient's increase in positive traits with assessment instruments like the Personality Orientation Inventory (POI), which is based on Maslow's concept of the "Self-Actualizing Personality". The patient retains, even 6 years after her training, a deep conviction that brain energy training was the major turning point in her life. She remains vigorous,

alert, and tirelessly energetic. Neurofeedback as a form of energy medicine has indeed given her a new life.