

PSYCHOBIOLOGY OF SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER – Dan Stein

Given that social anxiety disorder (SAD) is one of the most prevalent and disabling psychiatric disorders, relatively little research has focused on delineating its psychobiology. Nevertheless, a number of key advances have been made. Preclinical studies of fear conditioning and extinction, as well as of social hierarchy, provide a basis for testing hypotheses in clinical studies of neurocircuitry and component neurochemistry. Functional polymorphisms in relevant genes, as well as developmental gene-environment interactions, have gradually begun to be included in such clinical research, and may ultimately impact on decisions about pharmacotherapy, psychotherapy, and combined treatment. As progress in delineating the proximate neurobiology of SAD takes place, so questions about the distal (evolutionary) mechanisms that underpin social anxiety also come to the fore. This presentation reviews recent progress and suggests areas for further research.