Hopelessness Theory of Depression

Situational cues (e.g., consensus, consistency and distinctiveness information)

Negative life events (the stress)

Depressogenic inferential styles about cause, consequence, and self (the diathesis)

Stable, global attribution for negative life event and attachment of high importance to event

and/or

Inferred negative consequences of negative life event

and/or

Inferred negative characteristics about the self given the negative life event

If stable, global attribution is internal

Hoeplessness

Symptoms of hopelessness depression
1. Retarded initiation of voluntary responses;
2. Sad affect, 3. Suicide;
4. Lack of energy;
5. Apathy;
6. Psychomotor retardation;
7. Sleep disturbance;
8. Difficulty in concentration;
9. Mood-exacerbated negative cognitions.

Other contributory causal pathways to hopelessness (e.g., lack of social support)

Figure 1. Causal chain specified in the hopelessness theory of depression. (Arrows with solid lines indicate sufficient causes. Arrows with broken lines indicate contributory causes.)

As can be seen in Figure 1, the hypothesized causal chain begins with the perceived occurrence of negative life events (or nonoccurrence of positive life events). In contrast to the 1978 reformulation (but consistent with later statements such as those of Peterson & Seligman, 1984), we begin the etiological chain with the perceived occurrence of a negative life event, rather than an uncontrollable event, because the logic of the hopelessness theory requires only the occurrence of the former, rather than the latter, to initiate the series of causes hypothesized to culminate in hopelessness and, in turn, the symptoms of hopelessness depression (see also Raskin, 1978). Epidemiological research has shown that the occurrence of negative life events is involved in the development of depression (e.g., Brown & Harris, 1978; Lloyd, 1980a, 1980b). A fundamental question for the field of depression is why and how negative life events contribute to the onset of depression. In the hopelessness theory, negative events serve as "occasion setters" for people to become hopeless. However, people do not always become hopeless and depressed when confronted with negative life events. When do negative life events lead to depression and when do they not? According to the theory, there are at least three types of inferences people may make that modulate whether they become hopeless and, in turn, develop the symptoms of hopelessness depression in the face of negative life events: (a) inferences about why the event occurred (i.e., inferred cause or causal attribution), (b) inferences about consequences that will result from the occurrence of the event (i.e., inferred consequences), and

3 For the sake of brevity, we will use the phrase negative life events to refer to both the occurrence of negative life events and the nonoccurrence of positive life events.