Abnormal Psychology: Past and Present

Chapter 1

What is abnormal psychology?

The scientific study of abnormal behavior in an effort to describe, predict, explain, and change abnormal patterns of functioning

Workers in the field may be:
- Clinical scientists
- Clinical practitioners

What Is Psychological Abnormality?

Many definitions have been proposed, yet none has won total acceptance

Most definitions, however, have certain features in common:
- “The Four Ds”
  - Deviance – Different, extreme, unusual, perhaps even bizarre
  - Distress – Unpleasant and upsetting to the person
  - Dysfunction – Interfering with the person’s ability to conduct daily activities in a constructive way
  - Danger – Posing risk of harm
Deviance

• From what?
  – From behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that differ markedly from a society’s ideas about proper functioning
  – From social norms
    • Stated and unstated rules for proper conduct
    • Examples?
• Judgments of abnormality vary from society to society as norms grow from a particular culture
  – They also depend on specific circumstances
    • Examples?

Distress

• According to many clinical theorists, behavior, ideas, or emotions usually have to cause distress before they can be labeled abnormal
  – Not always the case
    • Examples?

Dysfunction

• Abnormal behavior tends to be dysfunctional – it interferes with daily functioning
• Here again culture plays a role in the definition of abnormality
• Dysfunction alone does not necessarily indicate psychological abnormality
Danger

- Abnormal behavior may become dangerous to oneself or others
  - Behavior may be consistently careless, hostile, or confused
- Although often cited as a feature of psychological abnormality, research suggests that dangerousness is the exception rather than the rule

The Elusive Nature of Abnormality

- Ultimately, a society selects general criteria for defining abnormality and then uses those criteria to judge particular cases
  - Szasz places such emphasis on society's role that he finds the whole concept of mental illness to be invalid, a myth of sorts
    - Deviations called "abnormal" are only "problems of living"
    - Societies invent the concept of mental illness to better control or change people who threaten social order

The Elusive Nature of Abnormality

- Even if we assume that psychological abnormality is a valid concept, we may be unable to apply our definition consistently
  - Examples:
    - Diagnosis of alcohol problems in colleges
    - Issue of abnormality versus eccentricity
The Elusive Nature of Abnormality

• In short, although abnormality generally is defined as behavior that is deviant, distressful, dysfunctional, and sometimes dangerous, these criteria often are vague and subjective
• Few categories of abnormality are as clear-cut as they seem; most continue to be debated by clinicians

What Is Treatment?

• Once clinicians decide that a person is suffering from abnormality, they seek to treat it
  – Treatment, or therapy, is a procedure designed to change abnormal behavior into more normal behavior
  • It, too, requires careful definition

What Is Treatment?

• According to Jerome Frank, all forms of therapy have three essential features:
  1. A sufferer who seeks relief from the healer
  2. A trained, socially accepted healer, whose expertise is accepted by the sufferer and his or her social group
  3. A series of contacts between the healer and the sufferer, through which the healer... tries to produce certain changes in the sufferer’s emotional state, attitudes, and behavior
What Is Treatment?

• Despite this straightforward definition, clinical treatment is surrounded by conflict and confusion:
  – Lack of agreement about goals or aims
  – Lack of agreement about successful outcome
  – Lack of agreement about failure
  – Are clinicians seeking to cure? To teach?
  – Are sufferers patients (ill) or clients (having difficulty)?

What Is Treatment?

• Despite their differences, most clinicians agree that large numbers of people need therapy of one kind or another
  – Evidence also indicates that therapy is indeed often helpful

How Was Abnormality Viewed and Treated in the Past?

• In any given year as many as 30% of adults and 19% of children and adolescents in the U.S. display serious psychological disturbances and are in need of clinical treatment
• In addition, most people have difficulty coping at various times
• Is this the fault of modern society?
  – Although modern pressures may contribute, they are hardly the primary cause; every society, past and present, has witnessed psychological abnormality
How Was Abnormality Viewed and Treated in the Past?

• Many present-day ideas and treatments have roots in the past
• A look backward makes it clear that progress in the understanding and treatment of mental disorders has hardly been a steady movement forward

Ancient Views and Treatments

• Historians have concluded that ancient societies probably regarded abnormal behavior as the work of evil spirits
  — This view may have begun as far back as the Stone Age
• The treatment for severe abnormality was to force the demons from the body through trephination and exorcism
Greek and Roman Views and Treatments

• 500 B.C. to 500 A.D.
• Philosophers and physicians offered different explanations and treatments for abnormal behaviors
• Hippocrates believed and taught that illnesses had natural causes
  – He looked to an unbalance of the four fluids, or humors
  – His suggested treatments attempted to "rebalance"

Europe in the Middle Ages: Demonology Returns

• 500 – 1350 A.D.
• The church rejected scientific forms of investigation, and it controlled all education
  – Religious beliefs came to dominate all aspects of life
  – Once again, abnormality was seen as a conflict between good and evil
  – Abnormal behavior apparently increased greatly during this period
  – Some of the earlier demonological treatments reemerged
• At the close of the Middle Ages, demonology and its methods began to lose favor again

The Renaissance and the Rise of Asylums

• 1400 – 1700 A.D.
• Demonological views of abnormality continued to decline
• German physician Johann Weyer believed that the mind was as susceptible to sickness as the body
• The care of people with mental disorders continued to improve in this atmosphere
The Renaissance and the Rise of Asylums

• Across Europe, religious shrines were devoted to the humane and loving treatment of people with mental disorders
  – One, at Gheel, became a community mental health program of sorts
• Unfortunately, this time also saw a rise of asylums – institutions whose primary purpose was care of the mentally ill
  – The intention was good care, but because of overcrowding they became virtual prisons

The Nineteenth Century: Reform and Moral Treatment

• As 1800 approached, the treatment of people with mental disorders began to improve once again
  – Pinel (France) and Tuke (England) advocated moral treatment – care that emphasized moral guidance and humane and respectful techniques
    • In the U.S., Benjamin Rush (father of American psychiatry) and Dorothea Dix (Boston schoolteacher) were the primary proponents of moral treatment

The Nineteenth Century: Reform and Moral Treatment

• By the end of the nineteenth century, several factors led to a reversal of the moral treatment movement:
  – Money and staff shortages
  – Declining recovery rates
  – Overcrowding
  – Emergence of prejudice
• By the early years of the twentieth century, the moral treatment movement had ground to a halt; long-term hospitalization became the rule once again
The Early Twentieth Century: Dual Perspectives

• As the moral movement was declining in the late 1800s, two opposing perspectives emerged:
  – The Somatogenic Perspective
    • Abnormal functioning has physical causes
  – The Psychogenic Perspective
    • Abnormal functioning has psychological causes

The Early Twentieth Century: The Somatogenic Perspective

• Two factors were responsible for the rebirth of this perspective:
  – Emil Kraepelin’s textbook argued that physical factors (such as fatigue) are responsible for mental dysfunction
  – New biological discoveries were made, such as the link between untreated syphilis and general paresis

• Despite the general optimism, biological approaches yielded mostly disappointing results throughout the first half of the twentieth century, when a number of effective medications were finally discovered

The Early Twentieth Century: The Psychogenic Perspective

• The rise in popularity of this perspective was based on work with hypnotism:
  – Friedrich Mesmer and hysterical disorders
  – Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis

• Freud and his followers offered treatment primarily to patients who did not require hospitalization – now known as outpatient therapy
  – By the early 20th century, psychoanalytic theory and treatment were widely accepted
Current Trends

- It would hardly be accurate to say that we know live in an period of great enlightenment about or dependable treatment of mental disorders
  - 43% of people surveyed believe that people bring mental health disorders upon themselves and 35% consider mental health disorders to be caused by sinful behavior
  - Nevertheless, the past 50 years have brought major changes in the ways clinicians understand and treat abnormal functioning

How Are People with Severe Disturbances Cared For?

- In the 1950s, researchers discovered a number of new psychotropic medications:
  - Antipsychotic drugs
  - Antidepressant drugs
  - Antianxiety drugs
- These discoveries led to deinstitutionalization and a rise in outpatient care
  - This change in care was not without problems
How Are People with Severe Disturbances Cared For?

- Outpatient care has now become the primary mode of treatment
  - When patients do need institutionalization, they are usually given short-term hospitalization, and then, ideally, outpatient psychotherapy and medication in community settings
  - The approach has been helpful for many patients, but too few community programs are available in the U.S.; only 40 to 60% of those with severe disturbances receive treatment of any kind

How Are People with Less Severe Disturbances Treated?

- Since the 1950s, outpatient care has continued to be the preferred mode of treatment for those with moderate disturbances
  - Although this type of care was once exclusively private psychotherapy, now most health insurance plans cover it, and it now includes various settings, as well as specialty care

How Are People with Less Severe Disturbances Treated?

- Surveys suggest that nearly 1 in 6 adults in the U.S. receives treatment for psychological disorders in the course of a year, the majority for fewer than 5 sessions
- Yet another change in outpatient care has been the development of programs devoted exclusively to one kind of psychological problem
A Growing Emphasis on Preventing Disorders and Promoting Mental Health

• The community mental health approach has given rise to the prevention movement
  – Many of today’s programs are trying to:
    • Correct the social conditions that underlie psychological problems
    • Help individuals at risk for developing disorders
  – Prevention programs have been further energized by the growing interest in positive psychology – the study and enhancement of positive feelings, traits, and abilities

Multicultural Psychology

• In response to growing diversity in the U.S., this new area of study has emerged
  – Multicultural psychologists seek to understand how culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and similar factors affect behavior and thought and how people of different cultures, races, and genders may differ psychologically

The Growing Influence of Insurance Coverage

• Today the dominant form of insurance coverage is the managed care program – a program in which the insurance company determines key care issues
  – At least 75% of all privately insured persons in the U.S. are enrolled in managed care programs
  – A key problem is that reimbursements for mental disorders tend to be lower than those for medical disorders
    • In 2011, a federal parity law went into effect
What Are Today’s Leading Theories and Professions?

• One of the most important developments in the field of abnormal psychology has been the growth of numerous theoretical perspectives, including:
  – Psychoanalytic
  – Biological
  – Behavioral
  – Cognitive
  – Humanistic-existential
  – Sociocultural

• At present, no single perspective dominates the clinical field

What Are Today’s Leading Theories and Professions?

• In addition to multiple perspectives, a variety of professionals now offer help to people with psychological problems

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What Are Today's Leading Theories and Professions?

• One final key development in the study and treatment of mental disorders has been a growing appreciation of the need for effective research.

• Clinical researchers have tried to determine which concepts best explain and predict abnormal behavior, which treatments are most effective, and what kinds of changes may be required.