Abnormal Psychology

What is Abnormality?

Psychology 3303
Professor June Gruber
Roadmap

Logistics

Defining Abnormality

10 Myths

Take-Away Questions
Course Logistics

Weekly Reading Reactions
Extended Due Date: Thursday before class (before 9:30am MT) instead of Monday each week

Course Email Reminder
Please use “PSYC 3303” in subject line
QUESTIONS?
Roadmap

Logistics

Defining Abnormality

10 Myths

Take-Away Questions
HOW DO WE DEFINE ABNORMALITY?
A STARTING POINT

- Abnormal Psychology: The application of psychological science to the study of mental disorders.

- Psychopathology: Pathology of the mind.
Tom is uncomfortable riding escalators. As a result, Tom avoids using any escalator.

Is his behavior abnormal?
CASE EXAMPLE #2

Rachel has been caught urinating in the corner of her bedroom.

Is her behavior *abnormal*?
CASE EXAMPLE #3

Sally was arrested last week because she had taken up residence in a redwood tree to protest logging.

Is her behavior *abnormal*?
CASE EXAMPLE #4

Sam was vice president of the freshman class at a local college and played on the school's football team. Later that year he dropped out of these activities and gradually became more and more withdrawn from friends and family. Neglecting to shave and shower, he began to look dirty and unhealthy. He spent most of his time alone in his room and sometimes complained to his parents that he heard voices in the curtains and in the closet. In his sophomore year he dropped out of school entirely. With increasing anxiety and agitation, he began to worry that people were plotting to kill his family and kidnap him.
DEFINING ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR: 4 APPROACHES

Defining Psychological Disorder

- Personal Distress
- Violation of Social Norms
- Disability
- Dysfunction

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DEFINING ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR: 4 APPROACHES

1. Personal distress (consider subjective discomfort and insight)

2. Statistical norms (how unusual?)

3. Unexpected cultural response (behaviors or attitudes that do not occur in a society very often)

4. Harmful dysfunction
HARMFUL DYSFUNCTION

Inability/ dysfunction of internal mechanisms

Causes harm as judged by the standards of a culture.

Mental Disorder
A behavioral or psychological syndrome (groups of associated features) that is associated with:

- Present distress (painful symptoms), or
- Disability (impairment in one or more important areas of functioning)
- A significantly increased risk of suffering, death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom
SO WHAT IS ABNORMALITY?
Can psychiatrists reliably distinguish what is abnormal?

Rosenhan (1973) study: “Being Sane in Insane Places”

• **Study 1:** 8 “pseudo-patients” as field scientists.
  • Psychiatrists did not detect them, but other patients did.
  • Normal behaviors viewed as pathological.
  • Patients treated as invisible
  • *Failure to detect “sanity”*
Rosenhan (1973) study: “Being Sane in Insane Places”

- **Study 2:** hospitals told they’d be admitting a pseudo-patient, but never did.
- Staff estimated 10% pseudo-patients.
- *Failure to detect “insanity”*
WHAT SHOULD WE DO THEN?
Roadmap

Logistics

Defining Abnormality

10 Myths

Take-Away Questions
10 MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS
1

People with Mental Disorders are Different than “Us”
REALITY:
Nationwide studies show that about half the population in the United States could be diagnosed with a mental disorder at some time in their lives.
September 13, 2018

One in Three College Freshmen Worldwide Reports Mental Health Disorder

Students from 19 colleges in eight countries report symptoms consistent with psychological disorder, study says

WASHINGTON — As if college were not difficult enough, more than one-third of first-year university students in eight industrialized countries around the globe report symptoms consistent with a diagnosable mental health disorder, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

"While effective care is important, the number of students who need treatment for these disorders far exceeds the resources of most counseling centers, resulting in a substantial unmet need for mental health treatment among college students," said lead author Randy P. Auerbach, PhD, of Columbia University. "Considering that students are a key population for determining the economic success of a country, colleges must take a greater urgency in addressing this issue."

Auerbach and his co-authors analyzed data from the World Health Organization’s World Mental Health International College Student Initiative, in which almost 14,000 students from 19 colleges in eight countries (Australia, Belgium, Germany, Mexico, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Spain and the United States) responded to questionnaires to evaluate common mental disorders, including major depression, generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder.

The researchers found that 35 percent of the respondents reported symptoms consistent with at least one mental health disorder, with major depression and anxiety disorders being the most common.
Mental health disorders among college students

% of students presented with depression or anxiety as reason for seeking help.

Anxiety

Depression

Mental health trends by school year of students already receiving counseling services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purposely injured self without suicidal intent</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriously considered attempting suicide</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a suicide attempt</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered seriously hurting another person</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You Either Have a Mental Health Problem, or You Don’t
REALITY:
Symptoms of mental health disorders are based on a continuum ranging from subthreshold to meeting full criteria.
MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

3

People with Mental Disorders are Dangerous
REALITY:
Violence is uncommon among former psychiatric patients w/o substance abuse; more common w/substance abuse
Mental Disorders are Entirely Biological
REALITY:
Several studies found that people with a gene that confers risk for depression may only become depressed if they also experience stress (e.g., Caspi et al., 2003; Kaufmann et al., 2004).
MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

5

People with Mental Disorders are “Weak”
Personal Stories

Stronger Than You Know

Sometimes I don’t know what to say. My mental illness is not something I discuss openly something I lay out there for everyone to know. If asked, I’ll answer, but I never know what to say.

My story begins in college. Sure, I had a history with depression, it had been on and off middle school. But in college, I spiraled. Freshman year was picture perfect, sorority, leadership positions. Sophomore year? Not quite. I had to take a leave of absence, my friends disappeared.
MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

6

People with Mental Disorders come from “Bad” or “Broken” Homes
REALITY:
Poverty, abuse, and neglect do increase vulnerability to mental disorders, but so do other environmental factors, such as lack of social support and access to care.

Many people with mental disorders grow up in healthy homes.

Andrew Solomon, Yale Alumnus
what is born. The death is one's own decay, the cracking of the branches that support this misery. The first thing that goes is happiness. You cannot gain pleasure from anything. That's famously the cardinal symptom of major depression. But soon other emotions follow happiness into oblivion: sadness as you had known it, the sadness that seemed to have led you here; your sense of humor; your belief in and capacity for love. Your mind is leached until you seem dim-witted even to yourself. If your hair has always been thin, it seems thinner; if you have always had bad skin, it gets worse. You smell sour even to yourself. You lose the ability to trust anyone, to be touched, to grieve. Eventually, you are simply absent from yourself.
Children with Mental Health Disorders are going through a “Phase”
REALITY:
Early signs of mental health problems are quite important; early interventions may temper some of the potential negative outcomes of psychiatric disorders.
Many major mental disorders have their onset in childhood or adolescence.

The earlier the age of onset, the more negative the course: more relapses, more impairment.
MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

8

You Can Never Recover from a Mental Disorder
REALITY:
Many people recover fully, or nearly fully, from a mental disorder. Example: Princeton professor, John Nash, on which “A Beautiful Mind” was based.
What’s Life Like After Depression? Surprisingly, Little Is Known

Most research on depression focuses on the afflicted, a new paper argues, overlooking a potentially informative group: people who have recovered.

By Benedict Carey

Oct. 22, 2018

Leer en español
Psychotherapy takes “forever” and may not work
REALITY:
Modern therapies may be very time limited; CBT has been demonstrated as effective in 12-18 weeks; It is effective with many mental disorders, including anxiety, depression, eating, and substance disorders.
10
You Must Take “Drugs” To Treat Mental Illness
REALITY:
Many people can get relief from symptoms with psychotherapy alone (DeRubeis, Hollon et al., 2005)

A group of patients received Paxil, while others received CBT or placebo; equal rates of recovery between CBT and Paxil
Thank You!

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