

Introduction to Abnormal Psychology
(Psych 235)
Jeffrey D. Leitzel, Ph.D.


Chapter 1
Introduction

Outline/Overview

- Abnormality – definitions & related issues
- Treatment of abnormality
- A continuum-mental health to abnormality
- Case study: Joyce Brown (Billie Boggs)
- Diagnostic reliability – issues w/diagnosis
- Research methods


What is psychological abnormality?

- Cultural Inappropriateness – Different, extreme, unusual
- Subjective Distress – Unpleasant & upsetting
- Psychological Disability – Interfering with life
- Disability can elevate to dangerousness




Abnormality (other ideas)

- suffering
- maladaptiveness
- irrationality and incomprehensibility
- unpredictability and loss of control
- vividness and unconventionality
- observer discomfort
- violation of moral and ideal standards



Definitions of abnormality

- Differ dramatically over time
- Across cultures
- Examples
 - homosexuality
 - culture specific disorders



What do we do about abnormality?

Provide treatment to “correct”

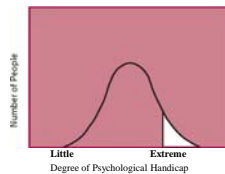
1. A sufferer who seeks relief from the healer
2. A trained, socially acceptable healer, whose expertise is accepted by the sufferer and his or her social group
3. A series of contacts between the healer and the sufferer, through which the healer tries to produce certain changes in the sufferer’s emotional state, attitudes, and behavior

Who does diagnosis & treatment

- Psychiatrist
- Psychologist
- Social Worker
- Counselor
- Whoever is doing the dx/tx
 - essentially a societal judgment
 - simple idiosyncrasies labeled abnormal
 - irrational to an observer may make sense from the actor's perspective


Abnormality is a Continuum

- Lieben und arbeiten - Freud
- Psychological disability - a continuum along which people vary.
- Most fall in middle range, mild-to-moderate handicaps.
- Cut point between normal and abnormal, e.g., unshaded area, is arbitrary.



What is Mental Health?

- Individuals with good mental health tend to share several attributes:
 - able to function effectively and to find satisfaction in life
 - have lasting and emotionally gratifying relations
 - likely to make a realistic appraisal of their own talents and shortcomings
 - able to cope effectively with adverse circumstances



The case of Joyce Brown (a.k.a. Billie Boggs)

JOHN HUSTON: 1906-1987
 Stories on P. 7; Ebert's tribute: P. 15

NEW YORK POST
 Saturday, August 26, 1987

KOCH ORDERS SWEEP-UP OF MENTALLY ILL

Diagnostic Reliability

- The extent to which a measure consistently yields the same results on repeated trials.
 - *Interobserver reliability*: The extent to which different observers (or raters) agree on the way they categorize or in some way quantify a given observation.
- Psychological measurement is never as precise as physical measurement.
 - Psychological measures only sample a small part of the domain of how a person acts, or thinks, or feels

Two examples of diagnostic difficulties

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Symptom pictures
- 43 combinations possible, 63 for children
- Major Depressive Disorder
- 326 different disorders, 489 for children symptom

Generalized Anxiety Disorder


- A. Excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation), occurring more days than not for at least 6 months, about a number of events or activities (such as work or school performance).
- B. The person finds it difficult to control the worry.
- C. The anxiety and worry are associated with three (or more) of the following six symptoms (with at least some symptoms present for more days than not for the past 6 months). Note: Only one item is required in children.
- (1) restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
 - (2) being easily fatigued
 - (3) difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
 - (4) irritability
 - (5) muscle tension
 - (6) sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless unsatisfying sleep)

Major Depressive Disorder

- A. Five (or more) of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2-week period and represent a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.
- Note:** Do not include symptoms that are clearly due to a general medical condition, or mood-incongruent delusions or hallucinations.
- (1) depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, as indicated by either subjective report (e.g., feels sad or empty) or observation made by others (e.g., appears tearful). **Note:** In children and adolescents, can be irritable mood.
 - (2) markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day (as indicated by either subjective account or observation made by others)
 - (3) significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day. **Note:** In children, consider failure to make expected weight gains.
 - (4) insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day
 - (5) psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down)
 - (6) fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day
 - (7) feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day (not merely self-reproach or guilt about being sick)
 - (8) diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day (either by subjective account or as observed by others)
 - (9) recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide

Research methods

- Clinical case study
- Epidemiological studies
 - Incidence
 - Prevalence
- Longitudinal designs
- Correlational studies
 - Correlation ≠ Causation
- Experiments - statistical inference
 - Control group, random assignment, blind design



Research methods (cont.)

- Alternative methods
 - single subject designs A-B-A-B
 - experiments of nature
 - analogue designs
 - quasi experiments
- All methods useful, strengths and weaknesses differ



Psychotherapy research

- Efficacy studies
 - test under controlled laboratory conditions
- Effectiveness studies
 - test treatments actually conducted in the “real world”
