Concepts of Normality and Abnormality

Psychology 311
Abnormal Psychology

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Normal and Abnormal Behavior

What is Normal Behavior?

What is Abnormal Behavior?

Culture

• Culture Defines What is Normal and Abnormal

Context also Defines Abnormality

• Hearing voices in church
• Hearing voices on the street
• Both hear voices. Which is Normal?
Models of Abnormal Behavior

- Statistical Model
- Physiological or Biological Model
- Sociological Models
- Psychological Models

Statistical Model

- Uses the concepts of Means and Standard Deviations to explain who is normal or abnormal.

Definition of Abnormal Behavior

- Persons who are greater than two standard deviations away from the mean are considered abnormal.
Example: Intelligence

- Use Intelligence Test WAIS - III, WISC – III, Binet
- Mean = 100  Sd = 15
- Scores >130 = Abnormal
- Scores < 70 = Abnormal

Problem

- Persons who are actually normal, can be also considered abnormal.
- Sports Athletes
  - Physical prowess is significantly better than normal folk
  - By definition, they are abnormal

Example: Belief in Aliens

- Survey Data indicate most Americans (and others too) believe there are aliens – we are not alone.
- People who do not believe  - Abnormal

Example: Belief in Aliens

- Most people do not believe we are controlled by aliens.
- If you believe - Abnormal

Example 3

- Hear voices others cannot hear, see things others cannot see.
- Are they abnormal?
- Depends on the context

Points to note

- Can be applied to anything
- Does work for some things
- Does not work for others
Abnormal behavior is linked to a disease which:
- Has symptoms
- Classify the symptoms
- Get a diagnosis
- From diagnosis
- Get some therapy
- After therapy is complete
- You are cured

Example 1
- Symptoms: runny nose, cough, temperature, feel achy
- Classify sympt.: Get diagnosis
- Upper respiratory infect.
- Diagnosis: Therapy (Aspirin, bed rest, chicken soup)
- Therapy done: Cured

Example 2
- Symptoms: Feeling down, blue, thoughts of suicide.
- Diagnosis: Depression
- Therapy: Drugs, talk therapy, etc
- Therapy done: Are they cured?

Answer
- NO! They are in remission

How do you become abnormal?
- Biological damage
- Head Trauma
  - Strokes
  - Medications
- Genetics
- Environmental influences on the body
  - Lead or Mercury poisoning

Biological Damage
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBA)
- Strokes
- Both cause problems with brain functioning.
- Usually creates specific sets of symptoms
- Usually damage cannot be reversed
- Can be helped with certain types of therapy
Other Biological Disorders

- Brain diseases can result in changes as well.
- Parkinson’s syndrome
- Alzheimer’s Disease
- Others

Drugs / Medications

- Can cause a wide variety of psychological problems.
- Ecstasy destroys serotonin binding sites and presynaptic elements.
  - Is bad stuff
  - Methamphetamines can cause paranoia

Medications

- Can also alter brain functioning
- Side effects of some drugs can reduce affect
  - Result – walking zombie syndrome.

- Other drugs can make you paranoid

Genetic Influences in Abnormality

- One of the hottest areas of research
- Contends some gene causes you to become ______
  - Alzheimers
  - Schizophrenic
  - Alcoholic
- Some are accurate XYY
- Support for most are correlational

Problem

- 60% relationship between monozygotic twins
- What about the other 40%
- Result

Diathesis – Stress Models

- Contends the genes are in there but you need the environment to get it out.
- Problem, many people still do not get the disorder
- Result
Recessed Genes

- Contends the problem results from some recessed gene.
- Thus, is always with you.
- You will pass it on.
- Problems
  - Don’t know where they are
  - Don’t know which one it is
  - Etc.?

Conclusions about genetic influences

- Lots of research is needed
- Human Genome project is just the start.
- Ethical issues
  - What do you do if a person has the gene
  - Abort the fetus
  - Test tube babies
  - Genetic manipulation in vivo

Environmental Causes of Abnormality

- Environment causes you to become abnormal.
- For some disorders, the cause is clear cut
  - Mercury and Lead poisoning damages brain tissue
  - Toxic waste causing birth defects.
  - Alcohol consumption in high quantities causes significant prenatal damage

Other Influences More Abstract

- High-rise buildings causing crime
- High self-esteem causes good grades
- ______ food or beverage product causes you to be abnormal.
- Full moons cause ______
- All are correlational

Sociological Models

- SZAZZ
- Contends mental illness is a myth
- Key to mental disorders is the label
- Without the label – No disorder

Mental Illness

- Mental illness is merely a term we give to people whose behavior is different from the norms of the society.
- However, the behavior is not criminal, heretical, or revolutionary
- To account for the deviance, the person must be mentally ill.
- Mental illness is not a condition: it depends on how the individual is seen by others in the society.
Example - Nursing home patient

- Labeled as such.
- What are your impressions.

Potential Impressions

- Incompetent to care for themselves
- Must be under the care of others at all times
- Cannot think for themselves

Who is in Control?

- Try to leave without getting staff approval and see what happens.

Example 2

ADHD KID

- Labeled as such
- What are your impressions

Impressions

- Does not pay attention well
- Always messing around.
- Cannot sit still
- Intelligence problems
- Parents have a variety of characteristics
  - Drug addicts
  - Poor,
  - Etc.

Who usually applies the label

- The teacher
- Why? Cannot control the kid in the classroom
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Solution

- Get kid on drugs
- What happens if you don’t
- Can be court issues
  - Custody fight with the state
  - Foster care if you don’t
  - Etc.

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Past

- Stopped when done with school
- Today – ADHD forever
  - Need to continue drugs

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Conclusion

- Label
- Gives you the disorder
  - You are not hyperactive
  - You are ADHD