

Clinical psychology: a brief overview

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Clinical Psychology: A Brief Overview Elaine Moore University of Phoenix

Clinical Psychology: A Brief Overview “ What is wrong with that girl? Why does she seem so different from us? ” This is a phrase commonly uttered by many individuals, especially the youth of today. The field of clinical psychology is a direct result of initial studies attempting to integrate mind and body with abnormal behavior. Abnormal behavior is stunningly obvious in some and quietly hidden in others, but who is to say what is normal? Once the complex field of abnormal behavior was acknowledged as a scientific discipline, clinical psychology slowly emerged from it. This paper will discuss the history and evolution of clinical psychology while providing a brief overview of how abnormal psychology evolved into a scientific discipline itself. This paper will also analyze the role of research and statistics in clinical psychology, discuss its importance, and provide an example. The History and Evolution of Clinical Psychology There are not many issues in the field of psychology that all can agree upon, but the origins of clinical psychology as its own discipline, seems to be one of the rare few. The history and evolution of clinical psychology can be traced back through the decades to a time when scientific minds were first attempting to understand abnormal behavior as it pertains to the mind and body (Plante, 2005). Sigmund Freud believed that most forms of psychopathologies originated during childhood and adolescents and further research and studies have confirmed his theory, although not through empirical data (Muris, 2006). There are four prevalent factors involved with his theory: genetics and temperament, parental rearing and modeling, life events and negative information, and society and culture (Muris, 2006). Although these factors

relate to children and adolescents, when abnormal behavior is not acknowledged and addressed, a more severe form of pathology may develop, thus providing advancements in clinical psychology. The University of Pennsylvania also provided a milestone for the field of clinical psychology. In 1896, Lightner Witmer was employed by the university as head of the psychology lab and it was he whom established the first practicing psychology clinic. This event is considered the true birth of clinical psychology (Plante, 2005). Witmer was asked by a fellow professor to assess a student that was having a difficult time in class. Witmer assessed the problem, followed through with treatment, and clinical psychology was essentially born (Plante, 2005). Although, Witmer did approach the APA with his ideas, his research alone was not enough to provide the APA with sufficient cause to form a new discipline of psychology, thus the emerging field struggled through and slowly advanced as abnormal psychology became a distinguished field in its own right. A Brief Overview of Abnormal Psychology In the early years of societal history, people exhibiting abnormal behavior were treated inhumanely and cruelly with no empathy, sympathy, or understanding. It took many centuries for humane treatment to evolve, but the unfortunate afflicted prior to the 19th century were essentially tortured and degraded (Long, 2009). During ancient times animism was a popular belief. People “ suffering” from animism were considered possessed by demonic spirits, thus explaining the abnormal behavior (Hansell & Damour, 2005). The process of trepanation, drilling holes through the skull, would take place to allow the evil spirit to depart the mind (Long, 2009). Exorcisms were also popular treatment methods during this period. The mid

16th century brought about the insane asylum (Long, 2009). Large buildings were constructed to house the abnormal and treatments were not yet considered as valuable options. If a treatment was attempted, it would usually result in long term injury or even death to the individual (Long, 2009). These asylums were simply a repository to house the “ wild animals” that no-one wanted to deal with. The middle ages did not help the mentally afflicted, either. It was during this time that two Catholic priests wrote the Malleus Maleficarium (Long, 2009). This document was a reference manual for defining abnormal behavior and lead to an era called the Inquisition. During this era, individuals who were found to be “ guilty” of deviant or abnormal behavior were either hung or burned (Long, 2009). The inquisition found these people to be criminals and punishment was swift and harsh. Justice finally came to the mentally ill in the late 18th century by the French psychiatrist, Philippe Pinel (Hansell & Damour, 2005). Pinel introduced a diagnostic system that classified four categories of mental illness: melancholia, mania, idiocy, and dementia. Nearly a century later, a German physician, Emil Kraepelin, expanded upon Pinel’s classification system to include 18 categories of mental illness (Hansell & Damour, 2005). In the early 20th century, the mentally ill gained even more good will as Freud's psychoanalysis theories were developed and asylum inmates were finally called patients and asylums themselves were changed to psychiatric hospitals (Hansell & Damour, 2005). After hundreds of years, abnormal psychology and clinical psychology finally emerged as scientific disciplines and in 1952, the American Psychiatric Association published the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which classified

108 mental disorders. In 2000, the fourth and current DSM was published and it classifies 300 disorders (Hansell & Damour, 2005). Over the course of so many years the mentally ill have traversed a rough road filled with torture and ridicule with the result being the emergence of two distinct fields of psychology: abnormal and clinical. Clinical psychology emerged slowly as the integration of mind and body developed and research and statistics provided empirical data. Research and Statistics Research and statistics continue to play a primary role in the field of clinical psychology and is at the core of most diagnoses and treatments in practical theory (Plante, 2005). Research and statistics are vital and imperative in providing directions, per se, for the clinical psychologist to follow with regard to the decision making process. A clinical psychologist will often conduct research studies and publish results for the benefit of others as well as themselves and their current case load. It is this type of research program that provides different assessment tools for the diagnosing and treating of patients (Plante, 2005). Research and statistical studies have been performed in most areas of clinical mental health issues, such as: depression, abuse issues, anxiety, and eating disorders, to name a few. These published studies may assist a clinical psychologist in better diagnosing and treating of patients (Plante, 2005). For example, a patient is seen for depression but complains of other symptoms typically not related to depression. One psychologist may treat the depression and tell the patient to see his or her primary care physician for the remaining symptoms. Three months later the same patient is now experiencing worsening depression and increased agitation as initial symptoms are still present. The clinical psychologist who currently reads

journals and published studies may recall reading of a similar situation with a patient experiencing depression and other seemingly unrelated symptoms. This informed clinical psychologist will use the knowledge others have gained through research and statistics and apply it to the patient, thus treating the underlying condition, alleviating the depression, and potentially stopping a hospitalization. It is interesting to note that the clinical psychologist that practices in the academic setting, such as a university professor, will produce more published studies than their mental health practicing counterparts (Plante, 2005). It is also interesting that while psychiatry is the main psychological field focusing on biological treatments, clinical psychologist research areas do include psychological, social, and biological aspects of human behavior through spiritual influence, ethnic factors, and neuroimaging techniques (Plante, 2005). As the studies performed by clinical psychologist are so vast and diverse, the benefits to a wide variety of the patient population are greatly enhanced. Although not all clinical psychologists actively participate in publishing research and statistics, they must continually peruse professional journals so they may gain knowledge and insight through others research. This allows the clinical psychologist an advantage when diagnosing and treating mental health issues. Conclusion “ Ok Mommy, she is a little strange but so what, she is fun to play with, ” the little girl exclaimed as she went running out the door. Clinical psychology is a direct result of abnormal psychology and Sigmund Freud believed that most forms of abnormal psychology originated during childhood and adolescents. The field of abnormal psychology has been considered a scientific discipline for about 100 years, but it took centuries for

it to get that way and in the process those who displayed abnormal behavior were tortured and ridiculed. Within that 100 year span, clinical psychology was also born as the integration of mind and body and the relationship to abnormal psychology was understood. Research and statistics also played an important role in the development of clinical psychology and continues to expand this field every day as new information is revealed. This paper has discussed the history and evolution of clinical psychology and provided a brief overview of how abnormal psychology evolved into a scientific discipline as well. This paper has also analyzed the role of research and statistics in clinical psychology, discussed its importance, and provided an example. The human mind is as intricate as a silken spider's web and clinical psychology assists us in unraveling these delicate threads. References

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