

Examination of clinical psychology

Science



Clinical psychology focuses on the “ assessment, treatment, and understanding of psychological and behavioral problems and disorders; in fact, clinical psychology focuses its efforts on the ways in which the human psyche interacts with physical, emotional, and social aspects of health and dysfunction” (Plante, 2011, P. 5). This paper will examine the field of clinical psychology.

This paper will provide a brief overview of the history and evolving nature of clinical psychology, explain the role of research and statistics in clinical psychology, and last discuss the differences between clinical psychology and other mental health professions, including social work, psychiatry, and social psychology. Throughout the course of history, there have been many events that have laid the foundation for the development of clinical psychology; each era holding a different view and providing new perspective and insight as explanation.

The ancient Greeks believed the Gods “ were the cause of both health and illness and that the mind and body were closely interconnected” (Plante, 2011, P. 46). Moving into the Middle Ages followed the same concept of the relationship between health, illness, body, and mind; however, it was spiritual beings such as demons, sin, and witches that caused disease and insanity. The Renaissance brought new discoveries, beliefs, and insight to the table; decreasing the beliefs that the cause of disease and insanity were the result of supernatural beings or religious views.

Discoveries in medicine provided information in biomedical reductionism. It was suggested that “ disease and mental illness could be understood through scientific observation and experimentation rather than beliefs about

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the mind and soul” (Plante, 2011, P. 46). Moving forward to Freud’s time, Sigmund Freud along with his colleagues brought the notion of the connection between the mind and body to resurface; as Freud demonstrated the “ connection between unconscious conflicts and emotional influences capable of bringing forth disease” (Brown, 1940).

Freud’s views of the connection between the mind and body gave an opening for the beliefs of the Greeks to reemerge; allowing a more holistic view of health to be considered as an acceptable answer regarding emotional life, and one’s health, illness, and behavior. Psychology was first established when Wilhelm Wundt developed the first psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany in 1879 and published the first classic psychology text in 1890 titled Principles of Psychology. The American Psychological Association (APA) was established in 1892 with G.

Stanley Hall as its president and led into the creation of clinical psychology. Clinical psychology was formed not as a result of agreement of the APA, but rather in spite of it as many clinicians felt lack of support and concern for the clinical aspect of psychology. As a result more focus began to take place in clinical psychology and in 1896 the first psychological clinic was opened at the University of Pennsylvania by Lightner Witmer and a future for the need and purpose of clinical psychology.

The evolving nature of clinical psychology holds much in store as advancements in technology and communication fields continue to rise. There are many events that have contributed to the ever-changing and evolving nature of clinical psychology; one event in particular that significantly impacted clinical psychology is the changes made by the APA. The changes
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made in the publications and the revisions of the DSM, particularly regarding the ethical standards (Plante, 2011). The field of clinical psychology will continue to change with new methods and cost efficient ways reaching to expand and redefine quality mental health care.

Research and statistics are a fundamental part of clinical psychology and are, in essence, the very foundation of which it is built. Research is used to help answer questions regarding diagnosis, treatment, and human behavior as well as when investigating research questions; particularly in cases involving new, rare, or unusual phenomenon. Generally, the primary goal of research in clinical psychology is to “ acquire knowledge about human behavior and use this knowledge to help improve the lives of others. Clinical psychologists use the scientific method in conducting their research activities” (Plante, 2011, P. 06); the scientific method is a way to ask and answer questions through making observations and performing experiments. The steps to the scientific method include asking a question, doing background research, constructing a hypothesis, perform an experiment to test hypothesis, analyze data, and draw a conclusion, and finally communicate the results (“ ScienceBuddies,” 2002). Statistics in clinical psychology are applied to research and is used to determine whether the findings are valid and reliable so that they can be modified to accommodate, or remain the same.

The differences between clinical psychology and other mental health professions can include length of education and training, point of focus, and location, or setting, of the work environment. Social workers typically hold a bachelor’s degree in social science, such as psychology or sociology, and

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subsequently enter a two-year graduate program to attain a master's degree in social work; followed by two years supervised clinical experience to become licensed as a Clinical Social Worker (Plante, 2011, P. 25). Unlike with psychology, social work holds less emphasis on training in research.

Psychiatrists are “ physicians who earn a medical degree (MD) and complete residency training in psychiatry” (Plante, 2011, P. 24). Generally, psychiatrists receive a bachelor's degree in premedical related fields such as biology or chemistry; followed by four years of medical school to obtain a MD degree. Prior to residency, a one year clinicalinternshipis completed; however, unlike a clinical psychology internship, medical internships focus on medical training, and the residency is more so aimed to psychotherapy.

Social psychology is “ the scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another; studying how individuals are affected by social interactions with groups and relationships” (Kinderman, 2009). Unlike clinical psychologists, social psychologists do not treat individuals suffering from mental or emotional issues; but rather observe how individuals influence one another's behavior and attitude both individually and in group settings. According to the APA, clinical psychology “ attempts to use the principles of sychology to better understand, predict, and alleviate intellectual, emotional, biological, psychological, social, and behavioral aspects of human functioning” (APA, 2009a, as cited in, Plante, 2011, P. 5). This paper has examined the field of clinical psychology. This paper has discussed the history and evolving nature of clinical psychology, explained the role of research and statistics in clinical psychology, and last discussed

the differences between clinical psychology and other mental health professions, including social work, psychiatry, and social psychology.

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