

A study on  
psychopathology  
psychology essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Psychopathology is a scientific discipline which has evolved over the years. It involves studying maladaptive behavior, mental distress and mental illness. Psychopathology is concerned with studying disease elements which affect the mental state of people. Abnormal psychology is a discipline within psychology involving the study of unusual emotion, thought or behavior patterns. These unusual emotions, thought or behavior patterns may be due to mental disorders, in some cases. Throughout history, behavior seen as deviant or aberrant has been studied and ways to control it sought.

Abnormal psychology uses diverse theories and different causalities for conditions to understand these forms of behavior. Historically, the major debate has hinged on body-mind problem with many explanations focusing on the biological and psychological debates (Comer, 2006). This paper will analyze abnormal psychology in more detail; trace its origins and how it evolved to be a scientific discipline. Different theories which focus on psychosocial, biological and socio-cultural models will be pursued. Finally, a conclusion on the discussed subject will be given.

### **Origins of abnormal psychology**

Abnormal psychology can be traced to thousands of years back when man tried understanding and changing things which were seen as abnormal forms of behaviors. According to Barlow and Vincent (2004), there were three explanations to abnormal behavior and these were biological, supernatural and psychological. Initially, abnormal behavior was explained by the supernatural perspective. Thousands of years ago, man strongly believed in the supernatural and abnormal behavior was blamed on spirits, demons, astral and planetary influences. This can be seen in the period of Stone Age

where holes were drilled into people's heads whenever they exhibited abnormal behavior, and this was done to provide evil spirits with escape routes. During ancient Europe, abnormal behavior was attributed to evil spirits and was treated through exorcism.

During the 16th Century, a Swiss astrologer, physician and alchemist, Paracelsus, attributed mental disorders to star and moon movements and also evil spirits and demons (Kowalski & Westen, 2005). However, the shift to the biological perspective began with the Greek physician, Hippocrates. He believed that abnormal behaviors were diseases linked to the brain since it was responsible for intelligence, consciousness, wisdom and emotions, which were characteristics of abnormal behavior. Later, abnormal behavior was linked to social reasons by sociologists who were keen on studying sociology of human behaviors.

### **Overview of evolution of abnormal psychology into scientific discipline**

As earlier discussed, during the Stone Age, abnormal behavior was linked to evil spirits. Exorcism or other crude means of treatment such as drilling holes on people's heads were used to treat abnormal behavior. However, Greek physicians such as Galen and Hippocrates began differing with this view and treatment intervention (Scum Doctor Website, 2009). They were of the view that abnormal behavior could be treated like any disease. During the early 19th century, Wilhelm Griesinger, a German Physician, explained that abnormal behavior was a brain disease. He influenced the modern model which treats mental disorders as physical illnesses.

Between the 15th and 16th centuries, people who exhibited abnormal behavior were housed in asylums in Europe. During this time, the conditions within the asylum were poor, but they improved in the 19th century after moral therapy began being practiced. Supporters of moral therapy were of the opinion that care, respect and understanding shown to people with abnormal behavior could help heal them. However, moral therapy declined and people viewed mental disorders as incurable by the end of the nineteenth century. During the 20th century, awareness campaigns began being initiated after people realized that mental patients were living in misery. According to Davidson and Neale (2005), mental health centers were built within communities and they acted as institutions where mental patients lived in until they were cured of their disorders. There was also the invention of psychoactive drugs to treat mental patients during this period. This influenced the modern mental institutions which care for and treat mental patients.

### **Theoretical viewpoints and interpretations of the biological, psychosocial, and socio-cultural models**

#### **Biological model**

This model assumes that the neuroanatomy, bio-chemicals and brain are physical in nature and that their role is to regulate psychological processes (Hansell & Damour, 2005). This in turn means that treatment of mental abnormalities should be biological and physical in nature. Evidence to support this model stems from Serotonin, a neurotransmitter which has been linked with development of disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bipolar disorder. This model supports the use of drugs or surgery in treating abnormal behavior, which is seen as a disease. Other treatment

interventions in this model include electroconvulsive therapy and other therapeutic techniques. Weaknesses of this model arising from use of drugs, is the possibility of causing addiction or allergic reaction to patients (Sims, 2002).

### **Psychosocial model**

This model analyzes how individuals interact with the environment.

According to Studer (2006), this model was developed by Erikson, a psychologist, as a means of explaining mental disorders. He gave eight factors which evaluated the mental development of a person. These are independence, trust, industry, enterprise, intimacy, individuality, integrity and productivity. He explained that for one to move to a different stage, the present stage must be completed. In case one did not fully complete a stage or chose a disadvantageous stage, then he or she may develop a mental disorder. This model is consistent with the diagnostic manual of mental illnesses (4th axis), which evaluate environmental factors which lead to mental disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). These include schooling, social environment, lodging, work, health care and financial services, environmental and legal system.

### **Socio-cultural model**

This model evaluates cultural and social effects which are present in society.

It emphasizes that behavior is understood best according to cultural and social forces which influence individuals. These include social norms, family structures, social roles, social perception of individual and other aspects of society (Masterpasqua, 2009). Two sociology fields, that is, study of social institutions and culture, and study of social groups and human relationships,

guide the socio-cultural model. When behavior is deemed to be significantly different from that expected by society, or that prevalent in society, then it is considered abnormal.

For instance, societies which promote positive health and physical fitness may view obesity as abnormal.

### **Summary**

Psychopathology has developed over thousands of years to be a scientific discipline practiced in society today. Previously, abnormal behavior was attributed to evil spirits and demons, but this view has changed due to the contributions of various psychologists over the years. In the modern world, some of the major approaches which explain abnormal behavior are the psychosocial model, biological model and the socio-cultural model. These models have certain weaknesses and strengths and it is important to evaluate them through further research. This will enable the society to apply the most effective treatment intervention for abnormal behavior.

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