

## Psychology: Abnormality - Notes for 10/09/03

- Psychometric tests are used to obtain statistical definition.
- The test MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) is used to diagnose abnormality of personality.

Using the various different definitions of abnormality, the following can be said for depression:

- It is the "common cold" of abnormality.
- Failure to function – tired, disrupted sleep, irritation, deteriorating relationships.
- Statistical norm – fairly common.
- Mental health – an overly negative attitude suggests mental ill-health.
- Social deviation – society does not expect such withdrawal and so sees it as abnormal.

### **The fear of heights**

In terms of the failure to function, a phobia of heights severely restricts one's ability to lead a normal life as such can be considered abnormal. Statistically, not many people have this phobia, but the main problem is that people could not leave their house if they suffered. Everything from walking upstairs, flying in a plane, lifts... a phobia of heights severely impacts all areas of daily life. Psychometric tests can measure anxiety and as such a constant fear all the time is abnormal statistically and in terms of mental health. This phobia also creates problems socially as it is often the case that the sufferer is ridiculed because it is a deviation from the social norm.

### **The belief that you must be perfect**

Statistically, a belief that you must be perfect is not common and hence abnormal, however the social norm is to strive to better oneself. Perfection is unachievable and most people realise this; the abnormality is in believing that perfection is achievable and the strife in the process of trying to get there encourages mental ill-health. In terms of dysfunction and distress, the depression that results from trying and failing to be perfect is great, and it is a vicious cycle as an obsession to make people like you will result in the opposite. In certain societies a need to be perfect is encouraged by media etc., so would not be deemed abnormal.

### **Models of Abnormality**

Contain:

- A point of view (an approach) of how normal people develop
- Assumptions about causes of abnormality
- Ideas about how to treat abnormality

### **Biological (medical) Model of Abnormality**

- Genetics
- Neurotransmitter imbalances (eg. depression, uni-polar disorder are associated with too little serotonin)
- Schizophrenia is associated with too much dopamine
- Structural abnormalities, psychosurgery (holes through head, axe in eye cavity etc.)

### **Psychodynamic (Freudian) Model of Abnormality**

- "Mind movement" – what drives the mind
- Associated with unconscious desires and conflicts arising during childhood and with parental relationships
- Psychosexual – libido
- The "Freudian slip".
- Nightmares are when the unconscious mind cannot be contained with the showing of symbols in normal dreams and becomes too real
- Psychiatrists – "let's talk about it"

### **Behavioural – Weston/Skinner**

- Observations. Everything is learned, both normal and abnormal behaviours, therefore can be unlearned.
- Phobias – flooding, systematic desensitisation

### **Cognitive**

- Emphasises the role of thoughts, expectations and attitudes in mental illness
- It is the way you think about a situation that is maladaptive
- Ellis suggested that irrational assumptions lead to mental disorders