Chapter 2: Contemporary Theories of Abnormality

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish among biological, psychological, and social approaches to abnormality. Discuss how each approach leads to different conceptions of the abnormality. Also discuss how these approaches are not mutually exclusive, and summarize how advocates of all approaches might work together to develop integrated models for understanding abnormality causes of.
- Discuss three biological causes of abnormality.
- Describe the foundations of psychodynamic theory and know each defense mechanism. Describe how Erikson and the object relations school differ from the traditional psychodynamic perspective.
- Summarize classical and operant conditioning, and give examples of each.
- Discuss observational learning and modeling.
- Be able to distinguish among casual attributions, control beliefs, self-efficacy, and global assumptions.
- Discuss the elements of humanistic and existential theories and describe how they differ.
- Discuss the social theories of abnormality in terms of the hypothesized role of interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, and the larger society in producing psychological symptoms.

Contemporary Theories

- Emphasis on biological processes (e.g.,
- Emphasis on psychological factors, such as early childhood
- Emphasis on interpersonal relationships and
Vulnerability → Stress → Disorder

Factors

Biological Theories of Abnormality
- _____, disordered biochemistry, brain anomalies

Psychological Theories of Abnormality
- unconscious conflicts, poor skills, maladaptive

Social Theories of Abnormality
- ____________, chronic stress, etc.

Triggers

onset of a disease, exposure to toxins, etc.

perceived loss of control, violation of

traumatic event, major loss, etc.

Factors Involved in Stress

- Coping strategies
- Physical factors
- Environmental and cultural factors
- Personality factors
- Cognitive factors
Biological Theories of Abnormality

__________ Theories Abnormalities in the structure of the brain cause mental disorders

__________ Theories Imbalances in the levels of neurotransmitters or hormones, or poor functioning of receptors cause mental disorders

__________ Theories Disordered genes lead to mental disorders

Structural Causes of Abnormality

Can occur in three areas of the brain:

– Cerebral Cortex
– Hypothalamus
– Limbic system

Recent studies suggest that schizophrenia may involve cortical, limbic, and subcortical structures as well as multiple neurotransmitter systems. Schizophrenia may result from a perinatal insult in a genetically predisposed individual that produces neuronal alterations that manifest during final synaptic reorganization and myelination of early adulthood.*

Structural Causes of Abnormality

Can occur in three areas of the brain:

– Cerebral Cortex

Orbitofrontal syndrome (disinhibited)*

Disinhibited, impulsive behavior (pseudopsychopathic)
Inappropriate jocular affect, euphoria
Emotional lability
Poor judgment and insight
Distractibility

Can result from injury (Phineas Gage, p.37), such as an ________________, and from diseases that cause deterioration

Structural Causes of Abnormality

Can occur in three areas of the brain:

– Hypothalamus

The posterior region of the hypothalamus is especially important in the study of violence (Restak, 1984:128). The posterior region regulates the emergency responses required when an animal is threatened.*
Structural Causes of Abnormality

Can occur in three areas of the brain:
- Limbic system

…there is a network of neuronal connections, beginning in the limbic system and traveling downstream through the hypothalamus and into the brainstem (Restak 1984:132-133 & 279). The sites that are most important in triggering violence are the frontal and prefrontal areas, and the amygdala, the hippocampus, and the hypothalamus, which are part of the limbic system along with the central gray of the midbrain, and the brain stem. Electrical stimulation of any of these structures can produce affective aggression.*

Biochemical Causes of Abnormality

- The brain needs a number of chemicals to operate properly.
- ______________ are biochemical “messengers.”
- Reuptake occurs when the neurons that initially released the neurotransmitter into the synapse reabsorb the neurotransmitter.
- Degradation occurs when the receiving neuron releases an enzyme into the synapse that breaks down the neurotransmitter into other biochemicals.

Genetic Factors in Abnormality

- 10 billion neurons in the brain
- Each neuron can interact with 10,000 other neurons

Biochemical Causes

- Depression and serotonin
- ______________ disorders may deplete serotonin*
- SSRIs and the ___________________________*

Genetic Factors in Abnormality

Chromosomes are made up of individual genes.
Alterations in the structure or number of chromosomes can cause major defects.
Polygenic process: it takes multiple genetic abnormalities to create one disorder.
Genetic Factors in Abnormality

- Schizophrenia, smooth eye pursuit movements and a region of chromosome 6*
- ‘5-HTTLPR', which codes for the serotonin transporter protein - involved in regulating the concentration of serotonin in the synapse
  - People who hold different versions of this gene are known to show different levels of anxiety and respond differently to anxiety or fear provoking tasks.
  - Ramsøy notes that the '5-HTTLPR' genotype can determine how the amygdala reacts to fearful and angry faces, suggesting how this differing anxiety response is supported by brain function.*

Genetic Factors in Abnormality

Limitations of heritability studies:

- Twins share prenatal environment
- 2/3 of identical twins share the same placenta and amniotic sac (fraternal twins are almost always separate)
- Post-adoption _________ may be very similar (environmental influence has been estimated at 57%)
- Genes help _________ environments (called the microenvironment, e.g., physical features, predilection for reading, etc.)

Psychological Theories of Abnormality

___________ Theories  Unconscious conflicts between primitive desires and constraints give rise to mental illness
___________ Theories  Symptoms of mental disorders due to reinforcements and punishments for specific behaviors and feelings
___________ Theories  People’s ways of interpreting situations, their assumptions about the world and self-concepts can cause negative feelings / behaviors
___________ Theories  Conform to demands of others instead of pursuing own values and potentials

Psychodynamic Theories

Developed by Freud

Id  Pleasure principle, primary process (wish fulfillment)
Ego  Reality principle, secondary process thinking (rational deliberation)
Superego  Introject (internalize) social standards. Conscience and ego ideal
Psychosexual Stages

Newer Psychodynamic Theories: Object Relations

Stages
- Undifferentiated
- Symbiosis
- Splitting
- Separation/Individuation
- Integration

Behavioral Theories of Abnormality

- Classical Conditioning
- Operant Conditioning
- Modeling and Observational Learning
- Observational Learning

Cognitive Theories of Abnormality

Types of cognition
- Causal attributions
- Control beliefs
- Dysfunctional assumptions (rules for living)

Humanistic and Existential Theories of Abnormality

- Suggest that all humans strive to fulfill their potential for good and to self-actualize.
- The inability to fulfill one’s potential arises from the pressures of society to conform to others’ expectations and values, and from existential anxiety.

Some Common Global Dysfunctional Assumptions
Maslow’s Hierarchy

Social and Interpersonal Approaches

Focus more on the larger social structures within which an individual lives.

Interpersonal Theories  Mental disorders are a result of long-standing patterns of negative relationships that have roots in early caregivers.

Family Systems Theories  Families create and maintain mental disorders in individual family members to maintain homeostasis.

Social Structural Theories  Societies create mental disorders in individuals by putting them under unbearable stress and by sanctioning abnormal behavior.

Interpersonal Theory

- Alfred Adler split with Freud’s teachings and helped developed contemporary interpersonal theories.
- Erik Erikson proposed a series of stages of psychosocial development that are not concerned with the gratification of sexual needs.
- Harry Stack Sullivan developed prototypes; “bad me” “good me” and “not me” images of self.
- John Bowlby argued that the quality of the attachment to our caregivers determines our expectations for ourselves and our relationships.

Family Systems Theory

- The family is a complex system that works to maintain the status quo, or homeostasis.
- Roots of disorder are within the family, not the individual.
- Family systems theories may be more applicable to treatment of children since they are more enmeshed in the family than other members of the family.

Social Structural Theories

- Society increases stress on individuals, leading to disorders.
- Some people live in more chronically stressful circumstances than others, and these people appear to be at greater risk.
- Society influences the types of psychopathology by having rules about what types of abnormal behavior are acceptable and in what circumstances.
- Models are “sloppy”