Paradigms in Abnormal Psychology

Paradigms for abnormality

- A paradigm is
  - a conceptual framework
  - model for looking at something
  - each paradigm has specific assumptions about people's behavior and where it originates
- Paradigm adopted will directly influence how abnormal behavior is assessed, measured, and classified
  - broad as a continuity vs. discontinuity approach
  - specific as theoretical orientation

Theoretical Perspectives and Assumptions of Psychopathology

- Different paradigms have different assumptions about what creates human suffering, and what alleviates it
  - Each paradigm is complete
  - Each has pros and cons
  - Each will dramatically affect choices of assessment and intervention
  - Some are more scientific
  - Some are more applicable to psychology
A paradigm will determine
- what behaviors we decide are "disordered"
- the hypothesized etiology of that disorder including the locus of control
- how to assess for the presence of the disorder
- the proposed treatment of that disorder

Different paradigms
- Main paradigms
  - Psychoanalytic/psychodynamic
  - Humanistic/Existential
  - Behavioral/Learning
  - Cognitive
  - Biological
    - Note this one is not psychological

What do we know about each of these paradigms?
Paradigms Affect Classification

- Study by Langer & Abelson (1974)
  - Looked at a group of therapists:
    - 1/2 trained behaviorally
    - 1/2 psychoanalytically trained.
  - Therapists shown videotape and were asked to rate the adjustment of a subject
    - A bearded man with long hair who was discussing job conflicts and a problem with authority

Paradigms Affect Classification

- 1/2 of the therapists in each group were told it was a job interview
- The other 1/2 were told it was a psychiatric interview

2 (raters) X 2 (condition) experimental design

Langer & Abelson Results

![Graph](image_url)

Adapted from Langer and Abelson (1974). Copyright © 1974 by the APA.
Langer & Abelson Results

- the psychoanalytic group was influenced by what they were told the tape was
- behaviorists were less affected by the description - they looked at the person's behavior, not the underlying causes
- Biases that affect a system
  - paradigm that the diagnostician uses
  - the context of the diagnostic situation

The Biological Model

- Takes a medical perspective
- The main focus is that psychological abnormality is an illness brought about by malfunctioning parts of the organism
  - Typically focused on the BRAIN

How Do Biological Theorists Explain Abnormal Behavior?

- Brain anatomy
  - The brain is composed of ~100 billion nerve cells (called neurons) and thousands of billions of support cells (called glia)
  - Within the brain, large groups of neurons form distinct areas called brain regions
How Do Biological Theorists Explain Abnormal Behavior?

Brain anatomy and abnormal behavior

- Clinical researchers have found connections between certain psychological disorders and problems in specific brain areas
  - Example: Huntington’s disease and basal ganglia (forebrain)
  - Emotional outbursts
  - Memory loss
  - Suicidal thinking
  - Involuntary body movements
  - Absurd beliefs

Brain chemistry

- Neurons in the brain don’t touch; they are separated by a space (the synapse), across which a message moves
- When an electrical impulse reaches a nerve ending, the nerve ending is stimulated to release a chemical (a neurotransmitter or “NT”)
  - Some NTs tell receiving neurons to “fire”; other NTs tell receiving neurons to stop firing
How Do Biological Theorists Explain Abnormal Behavior?

- Role of brain chemistry in abnormal behavior
  - Researchers have identified dozens of NTs
    - Examples: serotonin, dopamine, and GABA
  - Studies indicate that abnormal activity in certain NTs can lead to specific mental disorders
    - Examples: depression (serotonin and norepinephrine) and anxiety (GABA)

How Do Biological Theorists Explain Abnormal Behavior?

- Biological abnormalities – genetics
  - Humans have 23 pairs of chromosomes, each with numerous genes that control the characteristics and traits a person inherits
  - Studies suggest that inheritance plays a part in mood disorders, schizophrenia, mental retardation, Alzheimer’s disease, and other mental disorders
    - Aren’t able to identify specific genes
    - Don’t know the extent to which genetic factors contribute to disorders
How Do Biological Theorists Explain Abnormal Behavior?

- Biological abnormalities – evolution
  - Genes that contribute to mental disorders are viewed as unfortunate occurrences:
    - May be mutations
    - May be inherited after a mutation in the family line
  - Evolutionary theorists argue that we can best understand abnormality by examining the millions of years of human evolution
    - Looking at a combination of genes, adaptive behaviors of the past, and the interaction between genes and current environmental events

- Biological abnormalities – viral infections
  - Infection provides another possible source of abnormal brain structure or biochemical dysfunction
    - Example: schizophrenia and prenatal viral exposure
  - Interest in viral explanations of psychological disorders has been growing in the past decade

Biological Treatments

- Biological practitioners attempt to pinpoint the physical source of dysfunction to determine the course of treatment
- Three types of biological treatment:
  - Drug therapy
  - Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
  - Psychosurgery
Biological Approaches

- Challenge: not all drugs work for all people
- Challenge: how do you assess for depletion of a neurotransmitter without it being a logical problem
  - e.g., depletion of 5-HT causes depression, SSRIs given to reduce depression, depression reduced, so there must have been a depletion of 5-HT
  - this is a logical fallacy – affirming the consequent

Assessing the Biological Model

**Strengths:**
- Earns considerable respect in the field
- Fruitful
  - Creates new therapies
  - Suggests new avenues of research

**Weaknesses:**
- Can limit rather than enhance our understanding
  - Too simplistic
- Evidence is incomplete or inconclusive
- Treatments produce significant undesirable (negative) effects

The Psychodynamic Model

- Oldest and most famous psychological model
- Based on the belief that a person’s behavior is determined largely by underlying dynamic psychological forces of which she or he is not aware
  - Abnormal symptoms are the result of conflict among these forces
- Father of psychodynamic theory and psychoanalytic therapy:
  - Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939)
How Did Freud Explain Normal and Abnormal Behavior?

Caused by three UNCONSCIOUS forces:
1. Id – guided by the “pleasure principle”
   - Instinctual needs, drives, and impulses
   - Sexual; fueled by libido (sexual energy)
2. Ego – guided by the “reality principle”
   - Seeks gratification but guides us to know when we can and can’t get and express our wishes
   - Ego defense mechanisms protect us from anxiety
3. Superego – guided by the “morality principle”
   - Conscience; unconsciously adopted from our parents

These three parts of the personality are often in conflict
- A healthy personality is one in which compromise exists between the parts
- If the id, ego, and superego are in excessive conflict, the person’s behavior may show signs of dysfunction
How Did Freud Explain Normal and Abnormal Behavior?

Developmental stages
- Freud proposed that at each stage of development, new events and pressures require adjustment in the id, ego, and superego
  - If successful = personal growth
  - If unsuccessful = fixation at an early developmental stage, leading to psychological abnormality
    - Because parents are the key figures in early life, they are often seen as the cause of improper development

Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic…

Expression through ego defenses or defense mechanisms
- Repression
  - banishment from consciousness highly threatening sexual or aggressive material
- Fixation
  - when frustration and anxiety of the next psychosexual stage are so great that person stays at her present level of development

Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic…

Rationalization
- invention of socially acceptable explanation for how you are behaving
- These all take psychic energy
- This is a hydraulic model = only certain amount of tension to be moved around
  - if one uses too many of these mechanisms one will run out of psychic energy (or if you use too much energy in one; i.e. all the psychic energy is tied up in repression)
Psychodynamic Therapies

- Range from Freudian psychoanalysis to more modern therapies
- All seek to uncover past trauma and inner conflicts
  - Understanding early life experience is critically important
  - Therapist acts as a “subtle guide”

Psychodynamic Therapies

- Utilize various techniques:
  - Free association
  - Therapist interpretation
    - Resistance
    - Transference
    - Dream interpretation
  - Catharsis
  - Working through
  - Short-term dynamic therapies
Assessing the Psychodynamic Model

**Strengths:**
- First to recognize importance of psychological theories and treatment
- Saw internal conflict as an important source of psychological health and abnormality
- First to apply theory and techniques systematically to treatment – monumental impact on the field

**Weaknesses:**
- Unsupported ideas; difficult to research
- Non-observable
- Inaccessible to human subject (unconscious)

The Humanistic-Existential Model

**Combination model**

- **The humanist view**
  - Emphasis on people as friendly, cooperative, and constructive; focus on drive to self-actualization

- **The existentialist view**
  - Emphasis on self-determination, choice, and individual responsibility; focus on "authenticity"

Rogers’ Humanistic Theory and Therapy

- **Basic human need for unconditional positive regard**
  - If received, leads to unconditional self-regard
  - If not, leads to “conditions of worth”
    - Incapable of self-actualization because of distortion – don’t know what they really need, etc.

- **Rogers’ “client-centered” therapy**
  - Therapist provides unconditional positive regard
    - Both accurate and genuine in reflection (reflective listening)
  - Little research support
**Gestalt Theory and Therapy**
- Humanistic approach
  - Developed by Fritz Perls
  - Goal is to achieve self-recognition through challenge and frustration
  - Techniques:
    - Skillful frustration
    - Role playing – Empty Chair
    - Rules, including “Here and Now” and “I” language

**Existential Theories and Therapy**
- Psychological dysfunction is caused by self-deception: people hide from life’s responsibilities and fail to recognize that it is up to them to give meaning to their lives
- Therapy is focused on patient acceptance of personal responsibility and recognition of freedom of action
  - Goals more important than technique
  - Great emphasis placed on client-therapist relationship

**Existential Theories and Therapy**
- Existential therapists do not believe that experimental methods can adequately test the effectiveness of their treatments
  - Not surprisingly, very little controlled research has been conducted on this approach
Assessing the Humanistic-Existential Model

**Strengths:**
- Emphasizes the individual
- Taps into domains missing from other theories
  - Non-deterministic
- Optimistic
- Emphasizes health

**Weaknesses:**
- Focuses on abstract issues
- Not much influence
- Weakened by disapproval of scientific approach
  - Changing somewhat

Behavioral Models of Psychotherapy

Reactionary Movement Against Psychoanalysis and Non-Scientific Approaches

The Behavioral Model

Like the psychodynamic perspective, behaviorism is deterministic, and is based on the idea that our actions are determined largely by our life experiences.
- Emphasis is on observable behavior and environmental factors
- Focus on how behavior is acquired (learned) and maintained over time
- People learn their problems
# The Behavioral Model

- Historical beginnings in laboratories where conditioning studies were conducted
  - Several forms of conditioning:
    - Operant conditioning
    - Modeling
    - Classical conditioning
  - May produce normal or abnormal behavior

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# How Do Behaviorists Explain Abnormal Functioning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operant conditioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humans and animals learn to behave in certain ways as a result of receiving consequences whenever they do so</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals learn behavioral responses by observing and repeating behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No direct consequences</td>
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# Classical conditioning

- Learning by temporal association
  - When two events repeatedly occur close together in time, they become fused in a person's mind; before long, the person responds in the same way to both events

- Father of classical conditioning: Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936)
  - Classic study using dogs and meat powder
Classical Conditioning

**US**
- Meat

**US**
- Meat

**CS**
- Tone

**US**
- Meat

**CS**
- Tone

**UR**
- Salivate

**UR**
- Salivate

**CR**
- Salivate

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Behavioral Therapies

- Aim is to identify the behaviors that are causing problems and replace them with more appropriate ones
  - Avoidance of things, places, thoughts, feelings
  - Violence
  - Withdrawal
  - Alcohol/drug use
  - Withholding food/vomiting
  - Suicide

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Behavioral Therapies

- Classical conditioning may be used to change abnormal reactions to particular stimuli
  - Example: systematic desensitization for phobia
    - Step-by-step procedure
      - Learn relaxation skills
      - Develop a fear hierarchy
      - Confront feared situations
  - Operant conditioning takes place by helping person contact other consequences
    - Example: rape victim in intimate relationship
  - Modeling may be used by having person observe others or in therapy relationship
Assessing the Behavioral Model

- **Strengths:**
  - Powerful force in the field
  - Rooted in empiricism
    - Phenomena can be observed and measured
  - Significant research support for behavioral therapies

- **Weaknesses:**
  - Simple
  - Thought to be unrealistic for some problems
  - Historically did not emphasize role of cognition
  - New focus on interpretation and perception

Evolution to Cognitive Behavioral Models

- More recently the role of cognition/perception has entered into the equation
- Reaction against simple "behavioral" explanations
- In the middle of the night you hear a "Crash" - what do you think/how do you react?
  - Cat knocked over flower pot - anger
  - Someone breaking in window - fear

Cognitive Model

- Assumptions of psychopathology
  - Thoughts are the cause of our problems
  - The way we think about the world can dictate how we feel about ourselves, others, and the future
  - A negative cognitive triad (neg views of self others and the future) produces psychopathology
The Cognitive Model

- Seeks to account for behavior by studying the ways in which the person attends to, interprets, and uses available information
- Argues that clinicians should ask questions about assumptions, attitudes, and thoughts
  - Concerned with internal processes
  - Present-focused

How Do Cognitive Theorists Explain Abnormal Functioning?

- Maladaptive thinking is the cause of maladaptive behavior
- Several kinds of faulty thinking:
  - Faulty assumptions and attitudes
  - Illogical thinking processes
  - Example: overgeneralization

Cognitive Therapies

- People must be taught a new way of thinking to prevent maladaptive behavior
- Main model: Beck’s cognitive therapy
  - The goal of therapy is to help clients recognize and restructure their thinking
  - Therapists also guide clients to challenge dysfunctional thoughts, try out new interpretations, and apply new ways of thinking in their daily lives
  - Widely used in treating depression
Assessing the Cognitive Model

- **Strengths:**
  - Broad appeal
  - Clinically useful and effective
  - Focuses on a uniquely human process
  - Correlation between symptoms and maladaptive cognition
  - Therapies effective in treating several disorders
  - Adapt well to technology
  - Research-based

- **Weaknesses:**
  - Singular, narrow focus
  - Overemphasis on the present
  - Limited effectiveness
  - Verification of cognition is difficult
  - Precise role is hard to determine

Evolution to Cognitive Behavioral Models

- Perception/interpretation has consequences for affect
- Cognitive elements are now commonly integrated in behavioral treatments
- Good empirical support
Summary

- All approaches have legitimacy as philosophies
  - Each has pros and cons
  - Some assume a disease model of suffering
  - Some use hypothetical constructs for behavioral or psychological problems
  - All theories will dictate assessment and intervention strategies

Summary

- The key is to examine which most effectively produces an understanding of human behavior that can alleviate suffering
- Which theories are most dominant?
- How does this affect how we view pathology?