

Fall 2003

Abnormal Psychology

Psych 5401

Monday's 4-6pm, Room 570 Sid Smith

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Brief Description of 5401 Abnormal Psychology:

As an undergraduate you were taught that throughout history, whether a person's behavior is labeled abnormal often has depended on the cultural norms for appropriate behavior and the gender and ethnicity of the person and that current definitions of abnormality focus on the person's ability to function in daily life and his or her level of distress and grasp of reality. You were also told that many biological and psychological tests are used to assess people's functioning and well-being and that the information gathered in these tests is compared to criteria for diagnosing psychological disorders provided in guidebooks such as the DSM. You were also shown that several modern biological and psychological theories provide different ways of understanding and treating people with psychological disorders and that most disorders appear to be influenced both by biological and psychosocial factors, and some of these theories integrating these factors have proven most useful in understanding and treating abnormality, while others have failed miserably.

In short, you were taught to answer the question "what is abnormality?" In other words you answered the "what" question. What remains to be asked, however, is "how are these abnormalities established and supported in the scientific literature?" In other words, we need to answer the "how" question. To do so, this course will provide students with a framework for critically assessing the research literature in the field of abnormal psychology. That is, we typically accept 'scientific findings' if they have been found to equate to established statistical criterion (e.g., $p < .05$). When a research hypothesis (e.g., frontal lobe reduction in schizophrenia) is supported with significant statistical evidence (i.e., $p < .05$), research scientists will then argue in support of their hypotheses (i.e., frontal lobe reduction causes schizophrenia).

This methodology is both faulty and illogical.

We will first explore why this methodology is faulty and illogical. Students will then be shown alternative methodologies for assessing the 'significance' of a research study (i.e., effect size analyses and meta-analysis), and then asked to apply these alternative methodologies to their chosen area of interest in the field of abnormal psychology. For example, students may wish to critically evaluate what treatments are most effective in

ameliorating depressive symptomatology. Is it psychopharmacology or cognitive behavioural therapy? Students might also wish to evaluate competing etiological theories of anorexia nervosa or other eating disorders. Other topics may include the evaluation of long posited neurotransmitter theories of schizophrenia, genetic hypotheses for substance dependency, neuropsychological impairment in patients with dementia, or perhaps even identifying by way of effect sizes, what specific test measures can differentiate, by way of test sensitivity, between personality disorders. In short, the methodological tools provided will allow students to survey and evaluate a specific area of interest within abnormal psychology. Finally, students will be expected to communicate their summary findings amongst fellow students by way of leading a classroom seminar on their specific topic within their chosen field of abnormal psychology. Thus, students will be exposed to detailed analyses of a broad range of topics in abnormal psychology.

Important Notes:

This course is meant to be a seminar, as any other graduate course should be in my opinion. As such, you will find that the nature of a seminar is unlike many of the courses you have taken to date at the undergraduate level. Because of its smaller size, there is greater opportunity for independent learning under the supervision of the instructor. At the same time, students are expected to learn from each other by way of participation during presentations. Hence, you will find that your final grade is very much tied to your ability to learn independently (e.g., by gathering appropriate and plentiful readings to be used in your critical review of your chosen area) and to your participation in class.

Readings:

- (1) Wolf, F. M. (1986). *Meta-analysis: quantitative methods for research synthesis*. Newbury, London: Sage.
- (2) Meltzoff, J. (1998). *Critical Thinking about research: Psychology and related fields*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association
- (3) Reading Package

Grading Scheme:

(1) Proposal (10%)

On October 20, 2003 your proposal is due. On this day, each student's proposal will be reviewed with the instructor in class to determine (1) whether you grasp the task at hand required to successfully complete the critical review paper, and (2) determine whether your area of interest is suitable for critical review.

To meet these requirements, your proposal should include a very brief outline of your critical review paper (e.g., what you will cover, what you won't). It should

include evidence that you have begun an exhaustive search for research studies (e.g., outline your search methods to date, and how many studies you believe are appropriate to be included into a critical review—ie., you can calculate effect sizes from). Finally, it should include a detailed example of your ability to calculate an effect size from an actual research study, and your ability to interpret it appropriately.

(2) Presentation (25%)

Students are required to present a 30-minute review of their chosen area of study.

The presentation will be evaluated on your demonstrated knowledge of your area (e.g., a fluent understanding of the topic—hence, you do not want to stand there and read). It will also be to your benefit to use your newly acquired methodological skills to demonstrate that you have critically reviewed research studies related to a specific area of interest within your topic.

The order in which you will present will be decided on the following: The student who has the earlier date of presentation, will have first choice of topic. Note, no two students may have the same topic.

(3) Critical Review Paper (50%)

Students are required to complete a critical review paper. The review is expected to incorporate both a qualitative review of your chosen area of study and demonstration of your ability to “critically review” the research literature surrounding your area of study.

As an example outline of what is expected, the following is a review paper outline that was commonly used in previous years:

- I. History of the disease (key people and early thinking)
- II. Epidemiology (genetics where applicable)
- III. Pathophysiology
- IV. Behavioral, qualitative aspects of the disorder (DSM Overview)
- V. Critical review of the research literature
 - A. Surveying studies (how and which ones, and why)
 - B. What do these studies say on the surface according to their statistical significance?
 - C. Rationale as to why these studies may be faulty
 - a. Review of effect sizes and why they may be more insightful
 - b. Review of meta analysis and how it can be used to review these studies more validly
 - D. Presentation of Effect sizes and Meta-Analysis
 - E. Your findings, interpretations and conclusions

Your review paper is due on the last day of classes (December 1, 2003)

(4) Participation (15%)

As noted, students are expected to learn from each other by way of attendance and participation during presentations. Hence, you will find that your final grade is very much tied to your participation in class—15% of your final grade to be exact.

Lecture Dates:

September 15: Welcome, Course Description and Requirements

September 22: Students required to select presentation dates today & Lecture: Critical review of traditional statistical methodologies and introduction to effect sizes and meta-analysis

September 29: Lecture: Illustrative examples and calculations. Bring your calculators to class!

October 6: Lecture: Instructor's example presentation on "Searching the Brain for Schizophrenia"

October 13: NO CLASS—Thanks-Giving.

October 20: YOUR PROPOSAL IS DUE TODAY. Each student's proposal will be reviewed with the instructor in class to determine (1) whether you grasp the task at hand required to successfully complete the critical review paper, and (2) determine whether your area of interest is suitable for critical review.

*Please come to class according to surname order so that you don't waste time waiting around. For example, if your last name begins with the letter 'A,' come to class at 4pm. If it starts at the letter "M," come to class at 4:45pm, and so on...

October 27: Student Presentations Begin

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

November 3: Student Presentations

- 1.

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

November 10: Student Presentations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

November 17: Student Presentations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

November 24: Student Presentations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

December 1: Student Presentations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

NOTE: YOUR PAPER IS ALSO DUE TODAY...