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University of Toronto at Scarborough  
Division of Life Sciences

# Current Topics in Abnormal Psychology

PsyD33

Thursdays 7-9 PM, AA 205

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## Brief Description of Current Topics in Abnormal Psychology:

In your Abnormal Psychology class 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, we tried to answer the question "what is abnormality?" In others words we 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. 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 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.

Students will be expected to demonstrate the following:

1. A clear understanding of statistical significance testing and its limitations
2. Theoretical knowledge and practical application of alternative methodologies for assessed the 'significance' of a research study
3. An ability to demonstrate that he/she can critically evaluate the research literature of a chosen area of interest
4. And finally, a greater understanding of a chosen area of interest in Abnormal Psychology

### **Important Notes:**

This course is meant to be a seminar. As such, you will find that the nature of a seminar is unlike many of the courses you have taken to date. Moreover, a seminar is much like the type of learning experience you would gain in graduate or medical school. 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) and to your participation in class.

**\*NOTE: Students with a disability/health consideration are encouraged to approach me and/or the AccessAbility Services Office @287-7560. They can also drop by the office, S302B, inside the Resource Centre. The Coordinator is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations.**

## Readings:

**Please E-mail me and I will forward you the related readings for the course which include:**

Bakan, D., (1966). The test of significance in psychological research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 66, 423-436

Rosenthal, R. (1995). Writing meta-analytic reviews. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 183-192.

Zakzanis, K. K. (1998). Brain is related to behavior ( $p < .05$ ). *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*, 20, 419-427.

Zakzanis, K. K. (1998). Quantitative evidence of neuroanatomic and neuropsychological markers in dementia of the Alzheimer's type. *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*, 20, 259-269

Zakzanis, K. K., & Heinrichs, R. W. (1999). Schizophrenia and the frontal brain: A quantitative review. *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society*, 5, 556-566.

Zakzanis, K. K. (2001). Statistics to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: Formulae, illustrative numerical examples, and heuristic interpretation of effect size analyses for neuropsychological researchers. *Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology*, 16, 653-667.

**\*Once you have grasped the content of these readings, you are expected to gather your related readings in keeping with your chosen area of interest.**

## Further Recommended Readings:

Cooper, H., & Hedges, L. V. (1994). *The handbook of research synthesis*. New York: Sage.

Schmidt, F. L. (1996). *Statistical significance testing and cumulative knowledge in psychology: implications for training of researchers*. *Psychological Methods*, 1, 115-129.

## **Grading Scheme:**

### **(1) Proposal (15%)**

On February 14, 2008 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 want). 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 is appropriately.

### **(2) Presentation (20%)**

*Students are required to present a 20-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. Neurobehavioral, qualitative aspects of the disorder
- 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 (use the Rosenthal Article as a guide)
  - E. Your findings, interpretations and conclusions

***Your review paper is due on the last day of classes (April 3, 2008)***

**(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:

**January 10:** Welcome & Course Description and Requirements; Examples of Topics

**Readings:**

Bakan, D., (1966). The test of significance in psychological research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 66, 423-436

**January 17:** Students required to select presentation dates today & **Lecture:** Critical review of traditional statistical methodologies and introduction to effect sizes and meta-analysis

**Readings:**

Zakzanis, K. K. (1998). Brain is related to behavior ( $p < .05$ ). *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*, 20, 419-427.

**January 24: Lecture:** Critical review of traditional statistical methodologies and introduction to effect sizes and meta-analysis

**Readings:**

Zakzanis, K. K. (1998). Quantitative evidence of neuroanatomic and neuropsychological markers in dementia of the Alzheimer's type. *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*, 20, 259-269

**January 31: Lecture:** Instructor's example presentation on "Searching the Brain for Schizophrenia" & illustrative examples and calculations. Bring your calculators to class!

**Readings:**

Zakzanis, K. K., & Heinrichs, R. W. (1999). Schizophrenia and the frontal brain: A quantitative review. *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society*, 5, 556-566.

Zakzanis, K. K. (2001). Statistics to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: Formulae, illustrative numerical examples, and heuristic interpretation of effect size analyses for neuropsychological researchers. *Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology*, 16, 653-667.