PSY 3315: Correspondence

Course Sample
Welcome to

PSY 3315

Abnormal Psychology

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Throughout the ages, western thought has evolved its view of mental disorders. Other cultures may have different beliefs based on their own histories. The ideas we have about mental disorders are influenced by our cultural heritage.

In prehistoric times, mental and physical disorders were believed to be closely linked. Any type of abnormality was attributed to evil spirits that could reside within or take possession of one’s body. Many illnesses were attributed to demonic possession, offended spirits, or sorcery. Demonology, as this belief was called, often held the victim responsible for the problem. Records of the Greeks, Chinese, Egyptians, and early Christians recount demonic possessions. This belief led to various treatments to get the body rid of the demons. There were exorcisms that included elaborate prayers, noise making, drinking foul-tasting concoctions to cause vomiting, flogging, and starvation. Trephining (drilling holes in the skull) was also employed to provide an opening to allow the demon to escape.

Hippocrates, the Greek physician, is often referred to as the father of modern medicine. He questioned beliefs in the supernatural and looked for more naturalistic explanations. He saw the brain as the central organ of intellectual activity and deviant behavior as being caused by brain pathology. He classified disorders into three categories: mania, melancholia, and phrenitis (brain fever). He believed that normal brain functioning was dependent on a balance of four bodily fluids he called humors. These included blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm. If there was an imbalance, the person would suffer a disorder.

In the Middle Ages, history saw the collapse of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity, and supernatural causes were once again emphasized. Scientific endeavors were discarded as the acceptance of nature as a manifestation of God’s will strengthened. The death of Galen, a Greek physician, in about 200 A.D., signaled the beginning of the Dark Ages (5th through 10th centuries). The fervor of Christianity brought with it ideas of heresy and punishment. Scientific thought went underground, and the written works were preserved by monks and Arab scholars. Some monks also began to take care of people with mental disorders and would pray for them and have them engage in rituals tied to moon phases. In some cases, the care was not very kind, and those with mental illness were forced to repent and atone for their evil ways that incurred God’s wrath.

In the 13th century, Europeans turned back to demonology to explain widespread disasters and famines. Witchcraft was seen as being caused by Satan and as a denial of God. Some witches were thought to be unwilling victims as punishment for their sins, while others were believed to have willingly entered into a pact with the devil in exchange for supernatural powers. There came to be very little differentiation between the two types of witches; both were tortured to gain confessions of their wrongdoing. Any unusual behavior was seen as an indication of witchcraft, and many individuals with mental illness and other innocent people were killed. Later in this same century, hospitals began to care for those with mental illness as municipalities began to take over from the churches. Lunacy trials began to be held in England to determine a person’s mental health based on the crown’s responsibility for protecting people with mental illness.

Hospitals for the treatment of persons with mental illness did not come about until the 15th century. As leprosy gradually disappeared from Europe, the hospitals used to lepers were converted to asylums for people with mental illness. One famous asylum was the Priory of Mary of Bethlehem (also called Bedlam), whose conditions were deplorable, with patients being viewed as if in a zoo.

Philippine Pinel, a French physician in the 18th century, is credited with instituting the moral treatment movement. He is said to have removed the chains of the inmates of the mental hospital in which he worked and to have replaced their dungeons with sunny rooms. He encouraged outdoor exercise and treated patients with kindness. However, historians have discovered that these treatments were for the wealthy and that the lower classes were still tortured and that straightjackets were used to replace their shackles.
Assignment: **In progress**

Complete the form, then choose the appropriate button at the bottom.

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**Instructions**

Begin this assignment by reading [Bedlam 1945](#).

Then, compose an essay of a minimum of 600 words on your thoughts about the article. How do you think this state of affairs came about and was allowed to continue?

This assignment is worth 10 points.

Type your essay in the box below below and click **Submit**.
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