Key Dates

- TH Jan 19 Units 1 and 2
- TU Jan 24 Unit 3; “The myth of mental illness” (on course website)
- TH Jan 26 Unit 4
- TU Jan 31 Begin Dimensions-Emotion, Units IIA, 5; MW Ch 3 Paul
Goal: To show how distinguishing normal from abnormal in human behavior is a complex task

UNIT 1: ESTABLISHING THE BOUNDARIES
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

- List and describe the several criteria that are used to determine whether any particular pattern of psychological functioning should be regarded as “abnormal”
- Explain why we need to be careful when referring to various patterns of psychopathology by using names of mental disorders
- Describe and assess the validity of the key assumptions that underlie what is known as the “medical model” of psychopathology
Establishing the Boundaries

What does the word “abnormal” mean? There are several considerations:

- Cultural inappropriateness (deviance); but not statistical deviance—some forms of abnormal behavior are rather common, and genius is uncommon
- Subjective distress
- Impairment/disability
- Underlying dysfunction
Establishing the Boundaries

- The continuum: abnormality lies on a continuum and is a matter of degree:
  - how much/how many
  - how often
  - how long
- But where to draw the line is not always clear or agreed to
Establishing the Boundaries

By what name shall we call it?
- Abnormal behavior
- Psychopathology
- Mental illness
- Emotional disorder/Behavior disorder
- Nervous disease
- Or, in popular slang: “psycho,” “whacko,” “nuts,” “lunatic,” “retard,” etc.
- Current preference: mental disorder
Establishing the Boundaries

 The “naming fallacy”
  • No matter what name we use, naming a pattern of behavior does not explain it

 The danger of labels
  • No matter what name we use, there is always the danger that the name becomes a derogatory, even stigmatizing, label
Establishing the Boundaries

- Psychiatry and the medical model
  - Psychiatry is a medical specialty
  - Medicine assumes that objective criteria exist to distinguish one illness from another
  - Medicine distinguishes between observable symptoms and underlying disease in the body
  - Correct diagnosis leads to correct treatment
  - Szasz: The “myth of mental illness”
  - Mental disorder as *syndrome*, a clinically significant condition of unknown origin
Establishing the Boundaries

The prevalence of psychopathology

- Definitions and samples vary, so estimates vary
- Srole (1962), New York, 81.5% showed mild to incapacitating mental impairment
- Weissman et al. (1978), New Haven, 15% were experiencing a psychiatric disorder
- Kessler et al. (2005), U.S., 26.6% had a mental disorder in past 12 months, 46.4% showed lifetime prevalence