

Making Observations of Psychological Processes in Everyday Life [Student Handout]

[11] Psychological Conditions

A. Introduction

Everyday language is peppered with references to psychological conditions. Now that using racial epithets is no longer socially condoned next to using ones connected with sexual orientation calling someone crazy or insane is (arguably) the most common way to put someone down. It's also the other of the two most common ways that we commit the Fundamental Attribution Error.

Key Concepts

- Nature of mental illness
- Psychological Diagnosis
- Alternative diagnosis (systemic diagnosis)

The fact is, mental health conditions are not rare—but most people aren't suffering one, and even those who do at one point don't at another. In any case, people with active mental conditions are sufficiently adversely affected by them that they are less likely than the average person to act violently or harm anyone. At the same time, people suffering mental health conditions are vulnerable—often enough their conditions are themselves connected with abuse they have received—but however their conditions have developed having them makes it more difficult to take proper care of themselves, so they themselves are more likely to be the recipients than the perpetrators of violence.

B. Questions to Guide Your (Re)Search

[1] How often does a movie, book, video game or the media explain something that a person does by presenting their mental state as deranged or abnormal—that is, by using words like 'crazy', 'insane', 'stupid', 'idiotic', etc?

[2] How often do people in everyday life explain the behavior of other people by reference to their mental state? What circumstances particularly predispose people to think this way?

[3] Are there people who are particularly likely to be labeled as having one sort or another mental health condition? How does the dominant culture group such people—that is, Are they 'poor' people? Are they 'Black'? Are they 'Immigrants'? Are they 'mentally retarded'? Are they 'gays'? Are they 'women'?

[4] Type 1 thinking is designed to resolve all mental conflicts with some sort of 'answer'. How often do people explain anything that a person does that is not immediately comprehensible—or acceptable—as being caused by a mental health condition?

[5] Nowhere is the discrepancy between how a person feels and how they act greater than in syndromes of addiction. After a run no one is more remorseful or determined to do things differently—but the very essence of addiction is that it happens again anyway. No doubt there are many reasons for such outcomes, but the most important in this context is that the phenomenon is not limited to addicts. How many instances, in how many situations, can you find of people falling into such illusions of power or control in the media, movies and daily life—and so doing exactly what they swore they wouldn't?