

Mental Disorders and Classroom Considerations

A brief talk on selective mental disorders and consideration for amelioration in the classroom

Goals at the end of 75 minutes

- ▶ Become more familiar with what constitutes a mental disorder
- ▶ Have a greater understanding of the issue of comorbidity
- ▶ Learn basic DSM-IV criteria for several frequently occurring mental disorders
- ▶ Learn several meaningful academic strategies specific to particular mental disorders

Mental Disorders

A Mental Disorder is a “Harmful Dysfunction”
(Wakefield, 1992)

- ▶ A deficit/dysfunction in an adaptation: an evolved mental mechanism universal to humans
- ▶ Produces impairment in major life activities (harm)
 - Mortality, morbidity, impaired major life activities

Comorbidity

- ▶ Presence of more than one diagnosis occurring in an individual at the same time
 - May also reflect an inability to supply a single diagnosis that accounts for all symptoms
 - Causes problems with prediction and prognosis

Comorbidity

- ▶ No one size fits all
 - Many disorders are episodic
 - Still a disability according to ADA
 - Successful academic strategies may become obsolete
 - Even if the situation (e.g., classes) have not changed
 - Updated psychiatric or psychological evaluation may be needed
 - People change

Today's Selected Disorders

- ▶ Autism Spectrum
- ▶ Mood
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ ADHD

Autism Spectrum Disorders

- ▶ Autism or Asperger's
 - Diagnosed strictly as a cognitive disability
 - begins in early childhood
 - persists throughout adulthood
 - affects development
 - Communication
 - social interaction
 - creative or imaginative play.
 - Frequently comorbid with...
 - anxiety, mood, Tourette's disorders

Autism Spectrum Disorders

- ▶ Most of the limitations have to do with social problems, communication problems, intense interests and repetitive behaviors
- ▶ Typical classroom accommodations
 - Priority seating
 - Use of audio recorders
 - Use of volunteer note taker
 - Access to power point presentations or instructor's notes
 - Behavioral guidance

Autism Spectrum Disorders

- ▶ Testing accommodations:
 - Extended testing time
 - Testing in a distraction-reduced environment
 - Use of computer with word-processing
 - Use of organizational software for writing down ideas
 - Use of noise-reducing devices such as white noise machines and head phones

Autism Spectrum Disorders

- ▶ Classroom Considerations
 - Behavioral guidance
 - Student
 - Review plan on advocating for themselves
 - Follow-up
 - ADA Coordinators
 - If appropriate and with permission, contact instructors directly
 - Educate and make yourself available for further communication
 - For instance, how to handle inappropriate comments in class

Mood and Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Major Depressive, Bipolar I, Bipolar II Disorders
 - Episodic
 - Vary in degree of distress and dysfunction
 - Described as mild, moderate, severe with or without psychotic features
 - ADA AAA
 - episodic or in remission, it is still to be considered a disability if there would be substantial impairment when active

Mood and Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Mood Disorders
 - Typical accommodations are provided that would help most students
 - Difficult to apply the principle of specificity
 - Targeting an accommodation to alleviate the specific impairments
 - Instability of the student determines degree of intervention
 - Follow up, follow up, follow up
 - Students with active mood problems
 - Consider contingency plans for incompletes or a medical withdrawal

Mood and Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Anxiety Disorders
 - Common features
 - Physiological
 - Cognitive
 - Behavioral
 - Accommodations
 - Based on functional impairment
 - Typically a minimum of extra time and taking tests in a private setting

Mood and Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Classroom considerations
 - Student advocacy
 - Customize the Letter of Accommodation to fit the specific impairments cited in the student's documentation of a disorder
 - GAD, PTSD, Social Phobia
 - Don't call on the student during class
 - If possible, minimize participation grades
 - Allow audio taping of class
 - Panic - Allow seating near the door
 - Panic Disorder With Agoraphobia - consider Online courses
 - OCD with perfectionist traits
 - More time

Mood and Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Student needs to advocate for themselves
 - If avoidant, someone (you?) may need to advocate for them to the instructors
 - Do not allow yourself to be put in the middle
 - Consider academic and department policies and procedures
 - “adopting” a student may bring on additional problems
 - All things said, the students typically have to demonstrate some level of competency to pass the course

ADHD

- ▶ Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
 - Predominately Hyperactive, Inattention or Combined Type
- ▶ A Developmental Disorder of:
 - Inattention and/or
 - Hyperactivity-Impulsivity
- ▶ Developmentally Inappropriate Levels of Symptoms
- ▶ Childhood Onset (Symptoms – Impairment)
- ▶ Cross-setting Occurrence of Symptoms
- ▶ Significant Impairment in Major Life Activities

ADHD

- ▶ Inattentive Subtype
 - Cognitive sluggishness
 - Daydreaming/Spacey/Stares
 - Slow Information Processing
 - Easily Confused, Mentally “Foggy”
 - Poor Focused/Selective Attention
- ▶ Hyperactive Subtype
 - Impulsivity and inattentive symptoms predominate
 - Problems with executive functioning

ADHD

- ▶ Its a Disorder of:
 - Performance, not skill
 - Using past experiences at the “point of performance”
- ▶ ADHD can create a time blindness
- ▶ Its Not an Attention Deficit but an Intention Deficit Disorder (Inattention to mental events & the future)

ADHD

- ▶ Comorbidity
 - Anxiety, Mood, Learning, Personality Disorders
 - Other disorders mask or mimic ADHD
 - A hidden disability may appear
 - Accommodations
 - Consistent with the extent of the disability
 - Typically the same as what would be provided for the individual with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

ADHD

- ▶ Classroom Considerations
 - Student
 - Meet and greet the instructor (in private)
 - Discuss options for testing, seating, recording
 - Meet with instructor after class to review homework assignments (including due dates)
 - Attendance policy
 - Review test and assignment dates
 - Arrange for a study group, bring the pizza
 - Keep lists
 - Meet and establish a relationship with the school counseling center.
 - Develop a long-term perspective

General Considerations

- ▶ Letters of Accommodations
 - Specific to the impairment
 - Accommodations that can reasonably be carried out
 - With the student
 - Focus on utilizing the most effective accommodations
 - USE THEM
 - No letter, no accommodations
 - Instructors need to be informed
 - Sometimes educated
 - Student's responsibility

References in Order of Presentation

- ▶ Diagnosis and Comorbidity
 - Wakefield, J. C. (1992). The concept of mental disorder: On the boundary between biological facts and social values. *American Psychologist*.
 - Ranssen, J. D., & Parks, G. S. (2005). Test accommodations for postsecondary students: The quandary resulting from the ADA's disability definition. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*.
- ▶ Asperger's Syndrome
 - campus.murraystate.edu/services/ursa/cindyclemson.pdf
 - <http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/091028jh.htm>
- ▶ Mood and Anxiety Disorders
 - <http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/faqs/ADAFaqs.htm>
 - http://www.schoolbehavior.com/conditions_mood.htm
 - Wylonis, L. & Schweizer, E. (1998, 2000). Mood and Anxiety Disorders. In Gordon M. & Keiser S. *Accommodations in Higher Education Under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)*.

References in Order of Presentation

▶ ADHD

- Wolf L. E. (2001). College students with ADHD and other hidden disabilities. Outcomes and interventions. *Annals of New York Academy of Sciences*.
- Barkley R. A. (2006). *Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (3rd Ed.)*. Guildford.