**Defining Psychological Disorders**

**Psychological Disorder-**A condition in which behavior is judged. A particular behavior is deemed a "disorder" if it is atypical, disturbing, maladaptive (harmful), and unjustifiable.

Historically, people believed that the gods, evil spirits, the position of the moon and stars, or bad karma caused psychological disorders. Ancient Treatments includedexorcism, caging these people like animals, or being beaten, burned, castrated, mutilated, or having ones blood replaced with animal blood.

Supposedly more "civilized", we now believe that these diseases have physical causes. This medical model assumes that psychological disorders are due to an anatomical or biochemical problem and can be diagnosed, treated, and in most cases, cured. It also assumes that these "mental" illnesses can be diagnosed on the basis of their symptoms and cured medically (with drugs) or through therapy.

The**Bio-psycho-social Perspective**assumes that biological, socio-cultural, and psychological factors combine and interact to produce psychological disorders. Some disorders are universal but others such as eating disorders are not. There is *no* incidence of eating disorders in third world countries and hence we see a socio-cultural factor as one of its causes in North America.

**Organic Disorders**

In the AP course it is important that students understand what is meant by an *organic disorder*.

***Organic disorder***(\*not in the text)**:**A disorder, which is caused by a detectable physiological or structural change, and has a defined pathology. In other words, these differ from the other disorders discussed in that they are a result of an identifiable malfunction and are medical disorders. Examples of organic disorders include those that may develop suddenly such as*alcoholic dementia*, *lead poisoning*, or *brain damage* suffered from an accident for example and those that may develop over time such as *Alzheimers disease* (due to abnormal Acetylcholine producing neurons), *Parkinsons disease* (due to subcortical atrophy/\*brain shrinkage), and*Multiple Sclerosis* (due to myelin loss and plaque formation).

***Classifying Disorders***

Today the **DSM-IV,**theAmerican Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is the most widely used system for classifying psychological disorders. One should note the following terms used in classification but be aware that they are used less and less in practice:

1. **Neurotic disorder**- a disorder that is usually distressing but that allows one to think rationally and function socially. Freud believed that neurotic disorders were ways of dealing with anxiety.

2. **Psychotic disorder**- a disorder in which the person loses contact with reality and experiences irrational ideas and distorted perceptions.

***The dangers of labeling psychological disorders***

Putting a name to a particular set of symptoms and behaviors naturally allows health professionals to treat the condition. However, research has shown that labels affect how we perceive one another and thus how we treat one another. Behaviors that we may observe to be "normal" in an otherwise normal person might be considered abnormal in someone that we are told is mentally ill. These labels cause you to act differently around that person thereby eliciting behaviors that proves that this label is appropriate. For example if someone in class convinces others that you are a mean person, people may avoid you or treat you coldly thereby possibly causing you to respond in an angry way resulting in a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

***Rates of Psychological Disorders***

The World Health Organization has claimed that some 400 million people worldwide suffer psychological disorders. The incidence of serious psychological disorder is doubly high among those below the poverty line.

In general, those who experience a psychological disorder usually do so by early adulthood (75% show first symptoms before the age of 24). Antisocial personality disorder and phobias appear earliest at median age 8 and 10 respectively.