

# Abnormal Behaviors

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover various types of abnormal behavior, by identifying:

1. Psychopathology
2. Maladaptive Behavior
3. Insanity

## 1. Psychopathology

**Psychopathology** is the study of mental distress and disorders, as well as abnormal and maladaptive behavior. While this is the area that many people think of when they think of psychology, this is only a small area of study. The biggest question in this area of study is what is pathological, or abnormal, behavior that needs to be treated under clinical psychology.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Psychopathology**

The study of mental distress and disorder and of abnormal and maladaptive behaviors

#### **1a. Social Nonconformity**

One of the most important ways to determine what is normal or abnormal behavior is by seeing what the majority of people do or think within a certain type of situation. This basically means looking at social conformity or **social nonconformity** to find out what is abnormal. Social nonconformity is when a person does not conform or fit with the accepted social or group norms that are around them.

↪ **EXAMPLE** If you saw somebody running down the street naked, you would probably classify this as abnormal. This would be an example of social nonconformity because most people don't behave that way.

It's important to note a few points about this way of determining behavior:

- Different kinds of norms and values can change over time with the development of new ideas and new things within a particular culture.

↪ **EXAMPLE** During the early development of human beings, it was acceptable for them to run around naked. It was only later on in history that this became a faux pas.

- Acceptable norms of behavior are dependent on the culture and context of the situation.

↪ **EXAMPLE** Within modern culture, there are times when it is considered acceptable to be naked in public, like on a nude beach.

- Norms and values can differ from culture to culture.

↪ **EXAMPLE** Certain kinds of nudity may not be acceptable in your respective culture, but within other cultures, it may be commonplace.

It is important to keep these points in mind because behavior that is different doesn't necessarily mean it is bad or maladaptive.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Social Nonconformity

When a person does not conform to or follow accepted social or group norms

## 2. Maladaptive Behavior

The most important rule for determining whether something is psychopathological is to determine whether that behavior is **maladaptive behavior**. There are ways of thinking or acting that make it difficult for a person to adjust to the environment and new situations around them. Sometimes these people are not adaptable, and it makes day-to-day life very difficult for them.

It is important to note that as a result of this, often there can be negative effects or stigmas related to labeling people with certain kinds of mental disorders. Determining these diagnoses isn't something that is done lightly within psychology.



#### THINK ABOUT IT

Consider someone who is a nudist. This does not conform to most social norms, but is it maladaptive? The answer is no. This lifestyle is not going to impede a person's day-to-day life and will not be physically harmful. It's also not necessarily socially harmful, either. While it represents a small population, a nudist community of people does exist.

One scenario in which public nudity as a behavior could be maladaptive would be if someone is running through the streets naked. They could suffer physical harm if it incites someone to attack them, and they could suffer social problems as well that could impact their daily life.

It is not easy to determine what is abnormal or what constitutes a mental illness within psychology. Serious mistakes within the field of psychology have been made in the past.

↪ **EXAMPLE** In the DSM-III, the manual that outlines and defines mental illnesses for psychology,

homosexuality was originally considered to be a mental illness. It wasn't until the 1970s that it was finally removed and considered not to be psychopathological.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Maladaptive Behavior

Ways of thinking or acting that make it difficult to adjust to the environment and new situations, and make day-to-day life difficult

## 3. Insanity

**Insanity** is a legal term, not a psychological or medical term. It determines whether a person is fit to stand trial and to be held responsible for their actions in relation to a crime.

When people use insanity as a defense, they are saying that they are not guilty of a crime because they weren't in a mental state where they were responsible for their actions. This is not a term that is generally relied on within psychology.



**EXAMPLE** Temporary insanity refers to when a person is so angry at the sight of something that they are not responsible for their actions at that time.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Insanity

A legal term which determines the mental “fitness” of a person and their level of responsibility



#### SUMMARY

**Psychopathology** is the study of mental distress and disorders, as well as abnormal and **maladaptive behavior**. Abnormal behavior can be determined by looking at social conformity or social nonconformity. Abnormal behavior does not classify someone as psychopathological. To do this, a person must exhibit maladaptive behavior, which means that the behavior makes it difficult for the person to adapt to or function in daily life. **Insanity** is a legal term used to determine if a person is responsible for their actions; it is not a term that is generally relied on within psychology.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia Author Erick Taggart.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Insanity

A legal term which determines the mental “fitness” of a person and their level of responsibility.

#### Maladaptive Behavior

Ways of thinking or acting that make it difficult to adjust to the environment and new situations, and make day-to-day life difficult.

**Psychopathology**

The study of mental distress and disorder and of abnormal and maladaptive behaviors.

**Social Nonconformity**

When a person does not conform to or follow accepted social or group norms.