

## Behavioral Assessment of Youth: Where Comorbidity is the Norm, Not the Exception



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### Disclosure

- My expenses for this talk are supported by Multi-Health Systems.
- I have developed tests marketed by Multi-Health Systems, Pro-Ed and Western Psychological Services.
- I have authored books marketed by Springer, Wiley, Guilford, Double Day, McGraw Hill, Brookes, Kluwer and Specialty Press.
- I am Editor in Chief of the Journal of Attention Disorders (Sage) and Co-Editor of the Encyclopedia of Child Development (Springer)

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### Learning Objectives




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### The Bus Test



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### I Had a Revelation in St. Augustine

The world operates along a normal curve!



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Not surprisingly all but two things we do as psychologists are dimensional!

- Diagnosis
- Eligibility Determination



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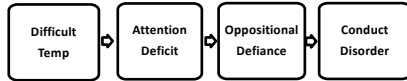
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### The Disruptive Continuum of Behavior




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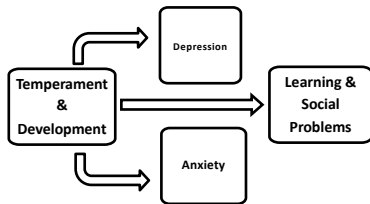
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### The Non-disruptive Continuum of Behavior




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### How Shall We Understand, Define and Categorize Mental Illness and Developmental Problems?



- By etiology or cause?
- By emotions, abilities, behaviors and thoughts?
- By impaired function in activities of life?

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## Diagnosis



*Medicine/Medical.*

The process of determining by examination the nature and circumstances of a diseased condition.

The decision reached from such an examination.

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## Eligible

*adjective*

**Having the right to do or obtain something; satisfying the appropriate conditions.**

"Customers who are eligible for discounts"

Synonyms: *entitled, permitted, allowed, qualified, able*

"Those people eligible to vote"  
(of a person) desirable or suitable as a partner in marriage.  
"The world's most eligible bachelor"

Synonyms: *desirable, suitable*



**Determining eligibility is an outcome best understood and obtained by a thorough assessment.**

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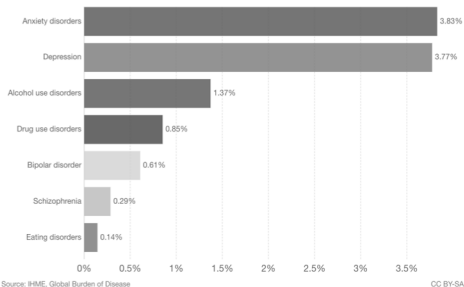
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## Prevalence by mental and substance use disorder, World, 2016

Share of the total population with a given mental health or substance use disorder. Figures attempt to provide a true estimate (going beyond reported diagnosis) of disorder prevalence based on medical, epidemiological data, surveys and meta-regression modelling.




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How distinct are these disorders from each other?

Much less so than makes me comfortable!




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### Co-Occurrence/Comorbidity

Dx	ASD	ODD	CD	Anx	Dep	LD
ADHD	59%	47%	22%	35%	41%	45%
ASD		4% to 37%	1% to 10%	42%	1.4% to 38%	70%+
ODD			42%	62%	39%	55%+

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How distinct are these disorders from each other?

Although the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has prepared well for this undertaking, much remains to be done. Rigorous diagnostic procedures are available for some mental disorders, but not all. Studies to identify the genes that influence the onset of mental disorders have been initiated, but too few are large enough to efficiently detect these genes. Dedicated investigators are working on various aspects of mental disorders, but more researchers with training in molecular and statistical genetics are required (NIH,1997)




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## How distinct are these disorders from each other?

For over a century, psychiatric disorders have been defined by expert opinion and clinical observation. The modern DSM has relied on a consensus of experts to define categorical syndromes based on clusters of symptoms and signs, and, to some extent, external validators, such as longitudinal course and response to treatment. In the absence of an established etiology, psychiatry has struggled to validate these descriptive syndromes, and to define the boundaries between disorders and between normal and pathologic variation.

Expert Review Published: 02 January 2018

### Psychiatric genetics and the structure of psychopathology

Jordan W. Smalley, Ole A. Andreassen, Howard J. Edenberg, Stephen V. Faraone, Stephen J. Glatt & Kenneth S. Kendler

Molecular Psychiatry (2018) | Download Citation &

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## How distinct are these disorders from each other?

Before the modern era of genomic research, family and twin studies demonstrated that all major psychiatric disorders aggregate in families and are heritable. Over the past decade, the success of large-scale genomic studies has confirmed several key principles: (1) psychiatric disorders are highly polygenic, reflecting the contribution of hundreds to thousands of common variants of small effect and rare (often de novo) SNVs and CNVs; (2) genetic influences on psychopathology commonly transcend the diagnostic boundaries of our clinical DSM nosology. At the level of genetic etiology, there are no sharp boundaries between diagnostic categories or between disorder and normal variation

Expert Review Published: 09 January 2018

### Psychiatric genetics and the structure of psychopathology

Jordan W. Smalley, Ole A. Andreassen, Howard J. Edenberg, Stephen V. Faraone, Stephen J. Glatt & Kenneth S. Kendler

Molecular Psychiatry (2018) | Download Citation &

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*Comorbidity is the*  
***RULE***  
*not the Exception*




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### What is the Goal of a Comprehensive Evaluation?



- Identify and define symptoms?
- Identify and define strengths and weaknesses?
- Appreciate the relationship of a set of symptoms to a unitary condition?
- Define limits of functional impairment to set a baseline for intervention?

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### Components of a Thorough Assessment

- |                                                       |                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • History                                             | • Self report Questionnaires |
| • Broad Spectrum Questionnaires (Parent and Teacher)  | • Ability Assessment         |
| • Impairment. Risk. Executive Functioning             | • Achievement Assessment     |
| • Narrow Spectrum Questionnaires (Parent and Teacher) | • Interview with student     |




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### General Guidelines for a Comprehensive Evaluation

- A distinction should be made between acute vs. chronic problems.
- Person and environment protective factors need to be understood.
- Assessment should be strength and risk focused.
- Test results should be presented in ways that are useful to consumers (e.g. family, school, etc.).
- The least amount of assessment needed to answer referral questions should be completed.




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### Person Attributes Associated With Successful Coping\*

- Affectionate, engaging temperament.
- Sociable.
- Autonomous.
- Above average IQ.
- Good reading skills.
- High achievement motivation.
- Positive self-concept.
- Impulse control.
- Internal locus of control.
- Planning skills.
- Faith.
- Humorous.
- Helpfulness.



\*Replicated in 2 or more studies.

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### Environmental Factors Associated With Successful Coping\*

- Smaller family size.
- Maternal competence and mental health.
- Extended family involvement.
- Close bond with primary caregiver.
- Supportive siblings.
- Living above the poverty level.
- Friendships.
- Supportive teachers.
- Successful school experiences.
- Involvement in pro-social organizations.



\*Replicated in 2 or more studies.

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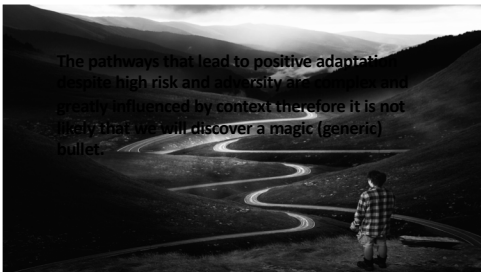
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The pathways that lead to positive adaptation despite high risk and adversity are complex and greatly influenced by context therefore it is not likely that we will discover a magic (generic) bullet.




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Determining eligibility is an outcome best understood and obtained by a thorough assessment.




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### Critical Issues In Assessment

- Demographics
- Symptoms vs. consequences
- Categories vs. dimensions
- Eligibility vs. diagnosis
- Developmental pathways: accept a moment in time
- There are no shortcuts
- Assess the environment




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### Critical Issues in Assessment

- Assess for intervention
- Understand positive and negative predictive power
- Understand sensitivity vs. specificity
- Begin with the disruptive/non-disruptive continuum
- Keep low incidence problems in mind
- Consider resilience (protective) factors
- Measure impairment




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## How the Brain Works Ability, Knowledge and Skill




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## Organizing the Data

- A day in the life
- Ability/Knowledge/Skill
- Take a chronological perspective.
- Risk and Protective factors
- Determining eligibility
- Suggesting possible diagnoses
- Recommending needs
- Considering continuum of services

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ADOPT A LEARNING TO RIDE A  
BICYCLE MINDSET!




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Questions?

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TEDx: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isfw8JJ-eWM>

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