

Abnormal Behavior: A Social- Psychological View

Amerigo Farina

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Amerigo Farina is Professor of Psychology at the University of Connecticut (Storrs). He previously taught at Duke University, where he earned his PhD. Farina's primary research interest is psychopathology, especially with reference to the role society plays in such conditions. He is author of Schizophrenia.

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IN this text, geared for the student enrolled in a general personality course, Amerigo Farina undertakes a critical ex-

amination of abnormal psychology. He begins with a capsule social history of the field, and then reviews the current classificatory system and some basic epidemiological and demographic facts concerning mental illness. This is followed by brief surveys of the genetic, biochemical, psychoanalytic, and communication theories of psychopathology, with particular emphasis on schizophrenia. The author concludes that the evidence in favor of any of these views is unconvincing at best, and that a new approach is warranted.

Farina's alternative formulation begins with four lines of evidence. First, the mentally ill, by and large, are poor, marginally educated and employed, and isolated from other people. Second, residents of psychiatric hospitals often deliberately present themselves in such a fashion that they remain hospitalized as chronic inpatients. Third, psychiatric diagnoses alter the way that others perceive and react to a person so labelled, with resulting negative effects on the individual's own self-perception and behavior. Fourth, the parents of psychiatric patients themselves generally share their offspring's social incompetence to some degree. Farina offers the interpretation that the mentally ill, incompetent to function in a demanding world, have been set adrift by their parents, however unintentionally. Stigmatized by their fellow citizens, they finally seek refuge in institutions where life is considerably easier. He acknowledges that other variables are also important, and inserts frequent disclaimers about the complexity of the subject matter. Nevertheless, he presents his point of view forcefully, and contends that it provides a more fruitful account of abnormal behavior than any other current approach.

One consequence of the author's zeal in presenting his interpretation is a certain amount of imbalance in his presentation. Certain historical inaccuracies crop up, as in the treatment of the "humor theory" of psychopathology advocated by Rush and others in the 18th century. The *DSM-II* is rightly criticized as inadequate, but there is no discussion of recent work in London, New York, St. Louis, and elsewhere that is beginning to produce a diagnostic system that is rigorously objective, reliable,

discriminating, and therapeutically meaningful. Genetic research is downplayed in a section that relies heavily on Jackson's 1960 critique and that, by lumping genetic studies with unsuccessful biochemical research, imputes "failure by association." The vast experimental literature on information-processing deficits is ignored, as are those models of anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and defense that have emerged from the animal laboratory.

Farina's book underscores important social-psychological components in abnormal behavior that have been largely ignored by others. The lives of some

mental patients are certainly just as he suggests, and there are important aspects of his argument that ring true when applied generally. On the other hand, one might argue that Farina has contended with only a small portion of the domain of psychopathology. After such factors as he describes have been considered, the symptoms of psychopathology remain: abnormal anxiety or depression, difficulties in attending to environmental stimuli or in communicating effectively, etc. If so, it may be that the approach outlined in this volume may obscure as much about psychopathology as it illuminates.