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Psychopathology for Residents

A collection of notes for easy reading and a brief overview of concepts



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Psychopathology for Residents

A structured companion to the classical language of descriptive psychopathology.

Observe · describe · differentiate
Print-and-screen edition · internal navigation enabled

Preface

This book is a collection of notes compiled by a student during the course of postgraduate training in psychiatry. It is not meant to replace textbooks or comprehensive references — rather, it is intended as a companion for easy reading, quick revision, and a structured overview of the foundational concepts of psychopathology.

The chapters follow the classical tradition of descriptive psychopathology, drawing primarily from Fish, Sims, and Jaspers, and are organised in a logical sequence — beginning with the foundations of psychopathology, moving through consciousness, perception, thought, emotion, the self, memory, motor behaviour, and personality. Each chapter aims to present the subject with clarity, clinical relevance, and a touch of historical context.

If these notes help even one fellow resident or student find their footing in the rich and often daunting landscape of psychopathology, the effort will have been worthwhile.

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How to use this book

The twelve chapters in this book follow a logical developmental arc — from the philosophical foundations of psychopathology through to the complex construct of personality. You can read them in sequence for a structured learning experience, or dip into individual chapters as standalone references during clinical postings or exam preparation.

Each chapter preserves cross-references to related topics (marked as "See:" at the end), so you can trace connections between domains. Tables and classification systems are presented in full for quick revision. Historical context and neurobiology are woven in where they deepen understanding, not as an afterthought.

The recommended sequence for a first read: Basics of Psychopathology → Consciousness → Perception → Thought → Speech → Emotions → The Self → Memory → Motor Disorder → Personality.

Read in sequence for the conceptual arc · jump by chapter for revision · use the linked concept index on screen

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Contents

The twelve chapters retain their canonical order. Page numbers and titles are live links in the screen edition.

CHAPTER 01	Basics of Psychopathology	1
CHAPTER 02	Consciousness and Its Disorders	21
CHAPTER 03	Perception	28
CHAPTER 04	Perception and Its Disorders	36
CHAPTER 05	Thought	46
CHAPTER 06	Thought and Its Disorders	52
CHAPTER 07	Speech and Language	69
CHAPTER 08	Emotions and Its Disorders	76
CHAPTER 09	The Self and Its Disorders	88
CHAPTER 10	Memory and Its Disorders	100
CHAPTER 11	Motor Disorder	111
CHAPTER 12	Personality and Its Disorders	121
INDEX	Concept index	136

CHAPTER 01

Basics of Psychopathology

Consciousness is to be conscious, to know about oneself and the world.



OBSERVE · DESCRIBE · DIFFERENTIATE

CONTENTS

History

Frank Fish: Contributions to Psychopathology

Background and Influence

Frank Fish (1917–1971) was a British psychiatrist deeply influenced by Continental European traditions, especially German and French psychiatry. He introduced the **phenomenological approach** to psychopathology into British psychiatry, emphasising clinical observation and the patient's subjective experience. His orientation was shaped by thinkers like **Karl Jaspers** and **Kurt Schneider**, and he is credited with keeping phenomenological thinking central to British psychiatric education.

A lesser-known but telling anecdote: Fish spent formative years at German-speaking psychiatric centres at a time when British psychiatry was largely empirical and classification-driven. He returned convinced that the British tradition was losing touch with the richness of the patient's inner world — and spent the rest of his career correcting that imbalance.

Descriptive Psychopathology

EXAM POINT

A common MCQ trap: descriptive psychopathology describes the 'what' (form and content of symptoms); explanatory psychopathology explains the 'why' (causal mechanisms). The MSE is fundamentally a descriptive exercise.

Fish championed **descriptive psychopathology**, which focuses on the detailed, systematic description of abnormal mental states without premature diagnostic classification. This method aims to observe and report what the patient experiences or what the clinician notices, forming the foundation of diagnostic clarity.

Phenomenological Emphasis

TEACHING TIP

A quick way to remember Jaspers' two modes: Verstehen (understanding) is like standing with the patient; Erklären (explanation) is like standing outside looking in through a microscope.

Fish's approach was rooted in phenomenology, aiming to understand mental illness from the subjective point of view of the patient. Drawing from Jaspers' concept of *Verstehen* (empathic understanding), Fish stressed that psychiatry must be concerned with how experiences appear to the patient — not just observable behaviour or neurobiological underpinnings.

Symptoms vs Signs

A key teaching from Fish was the clear distinction between:

- **Symptoms**: Subjective complaints or internal experiences reported by the patient.
- **Signs**: Objective features or behaviours observed by the clinician.

This distinction remains vital for accurate mental state examination and diagnostic formulation.

Clinical and Educational Legacy

CLINICAL PEARL

Fish's Clinical Psychopathology is still the most commonly recommended text for the MRCPsych Part I exam. If you read one book on descriptive psychopathology, this is it.

Fish's work emphasised clarity, precision, and empathy in psychiatric assessment. His textbook – *Fish's Clinical Psychopathology*, now in its revised edition by Patricia Casey and Brendan Kelly – remains a core reference in the UK and Commonwealth, forming a crucial part of psychiatric training. He helped preserve the descriptive and humanistic aspects of psychiatry, especially amid the increasing dominance of biological and diagnostic systems.

Core Themes in Fish's Approach

- Prioritisation of the patient's inner world and subjective experience
- Rigorous clinical observation without theoretical bias
- Precise use of psychiatric language and concepts
- Strong educational impact on psychiatric training and examination techniques
- Emphasis on phenomenological understanding in diagnosis and formulation

Karl Jaspers: Contributions to Psychopathology

Background and Foundations

Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), a German psychiatrist and philosopher, is regarded as a foundational figure in modern psychopathology. He introduced systematic and philosophical rigour into psychiatry, particularly through phenomenology and epistemology. His thinking reshaped the clinical and conceptual understanding of mental illness and heavily influenced figures like Frank Fish.

Jaspers' career is itself a fascinating story of intellectual migration: he trained as a psychiatrist at Heidelberg, published his magnum opus *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (General Psychopathology) in 1913 at the age of just 30, and then gradually transitioned entirely into philosophy. His psychiatric training, however, permanently shaped his philosophical method – and vice versa.

Phenomenology and the Importance of Form over Content

Jaspers emphasised **phenomenology** as the structured, non-theoretical description of mental phenomena from the patient's point of view. He was particularly concerned with the **form** of symptoms – how an experience occurs – rather than just its **content** or thematic material.

- **Form** refers to the structure or mode of experience (e.g., delusional conviction).
- **Content** refers to what is believed or experienced (e.g., the belief that one is being followed).
- For Jaspers, **form is diagnostically more significant**, especially when differentiating pathological from non-pathological experiences.

Primary vs Secondary Symptoms

Jaspers introduced a crucial distinction between:

- **Primary symptoms**: Experiences that arise autonomously, without any understandable psychological context. They are often "ununderstandable" (e.g., primary delusions, thought insertion).
- **Secondary symptoms**: These are psychologically comprehensible reactions to internal or external events (e.g., anxiety following bereavement).

This distinction was essential to identifying true psychotic phenomena and understanding the limits of empathic grasp.

Static vs Genetic Understanding

Jaspers proposed two modes of clinical understanding:

- **Static understanding** involves describing mental states as they present at a given moment. This is the basis of descriptive phenomenology.
- **Genetic understanding** refers to empathically grasping the developmental sequence of mental states – how one experience leads to another in a meaningful psychological chain.

Objectivity vs Subjectivity

A central concern in Jaspers' method was balancing subjective insight and objective description:

- **Subjective methods** (e.g., phenomenology, *Verstehen*) aim to access the inner world of the patient.
- **Objective methods** (e.g., *Erklären*, biological models) seek to uncover causal mechanisms and observable signs.

Jaspers held that psychiatry must integrate both approaches, but must not reduce subjective experience to biological causation alone.

The Concept of Ununderstandability

FUN FACT

Jaspers published General Psychopathology at age 30, then left psychiatry entirely for philosophy. He never returned to clinical work, yet his psychiatric writings remain foundational over a century later.

A cornerstone of Jaspers' psychopathology is the idea that some experiences are **ununderstandable** (*Unverständlichkeit*). For example, primary delusions are not accessible to genetic or empathic understanding. They must be acknowledged as pathological in themselves, rather than interpreted psychologically. This concept set a diagnostic boundary between psychotic experiences and meaningful psychological responses.

Four Methodological Approaches

Jaspers identified four core methods that continue to structure psychiatric thinking:

- **Phenomenology** – Describing subjective experiences
- **Understanding (Verstehen)** – Grasping meaning through empathy
- **Explanation (Erklären)** – Identifying causal relationships scientifically
- **Comprehensive understanding** – Synthesising both empathic and scientific perspectives

Legacy in Psychiatry

Jaspers' *General Psychopathology* (1913) remains a foundational text. His influence extends to the structure of the mental state examination, the classification of symptoms by form, and the preservation of subjective understanding in modern psychiatry.

Key Concepts in Jaspers' Psychopathology

Concept	Description
Form \> Content	Focused on how experiences occur rather than what they are about
Primary vs Secondary	Differentiated ununderstandable psychotic phenomena from meaningful reactions
Static vs Genetic	Distinguished between descriptive and empathic modes of understanding
Subjectivity vs Objectivity	Balanced empathic insight with scientific explanation
Ununderstandability	Certain symptoms (e.g., primary delusions) cannot be psychologised or understood

Edmund Husserl: Influence on Psychopathology

Background and Philosophical Foundation

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) was a German philosopher and the founder of phenomenology, a philosophical method concerned with the study of consciousness and lived experience from a first-person perspective. While not a psychiatrist, Husserl's method deeply influenced the development of descriptive psychopathology, particularly through the work of Karl Jaspers.

Husserl's Concept of Phenomenology

Husserl defined phenomenology as the study of the structures of consciousness, focusing purely on how things appear to the subjective awareness of the individual, free from theoretical assumptions. His method emphasised:

- **First-person perspective**
- **Bracketing (epoché)** – the suspension of judgement about external reality or scientific explanation
- **Essences of experience** – aiming to grasp the core features of mental phenomena without interpretation

Influence on Karl Jaspers and Clinical Psychopathology

Husserl's phenomenology provided the conceptual foundation for Jaspers' clinical method. Jaspers adapted Husserl's ideas, shifting from a philosophical focus on the essence of consciousness to a clinical focus on describing subjective mental symptoms as reported by patients.

- Husserl's phenomenology: philosophical, aimed at essences and structures of consciousness
- Jaspers' phenomenology: descriptive, aimed at capturing patients' experiences for clinical understanding

Summary of Husserl's Contribution

Aspect	Contribution
Philosophical role	Founder of phenomenology
Focus	Study of consciousness from the first-person perspective
Method	Bracketing assumptions to describe pure experience
Relevance to psychiatry	Indirect influence via Karl Jaspers' adaptation
Legacy in psychopathology	Conceptual foundation for descriptive psychopathology and subjective inquiry

Descriptive Psychopathology vs Explanatory Psychopathology

Descriptive Psychopathology

Definition and Purpose

Descriptive psychopathology refers to the systematic description of abnormal mental experiences and behaviours, as either subjectively reported by the patient (symptoms) or objectively observed by the clinician (signs). It aims to record and clarify what is present in a patient's mental state without attempting to interpret or explain the cause.

This approach maintains an objective, phenomenological stance, avoiding assumptions about underlying mechanisms. It emphasises accuracy, clarity, and neutrality, focusing on form and content rather than causation. Descriptive psychopathology is the foundation for accurate diagnosis, diagnostic classification, and research design.

Phenomenological Influence

- Inspired by Karl Jaspers' *General Psychopathology*, descriptive psychopathology prioritises *how* mental phenomena appear to the consciousness of the individual.
- It uses empathic methods to gain insight into the patient's internal world, while maintaining clinical neutrality.
- Jaspers distinguished **"understanding" (Verstehen)** from **"explanation" (Erklären)** – the former belonging to the realm of descriptive, the latter to explanatory psychopathology.

Explanatory Psychopathology

Definition and Focus

Explanatory psychopathology seeks to account for the causes, mechanisms, and pathophysiological underpinnings of psychiatric symptoms and disorders. It addresses the "why" and "how" behind symptoms, rather than simply documenting them.

This model aligns with the natural sciences, aiming to uncover causal relationships, such as:

- Neurochemical imbalances
- Cognitive distortions
- Psychodynamic conflicts
- Genetic predispositions
- Social stressors or trauma

Key Differences

Feature	Descriptive Psychopathology	Explanatory Psychopathology
Definition	Describes mental symptoms and signs	Explains the causes and mechanisms of mental illness
Methodological Roots	Phenomenology (Jaspers)	Scientific, causal inquiry (biology, psychology, sociology)
Approach	Non-theoretical, observational	Theoretical, interpretive
Purpose	Foundation for diagnosis and classification	Understanding aetiology, guiding treatment
Examples	Auditory hallucinations, delusions, formal thought disorder	Dopamine dysfunction, cognitive schemas, trauma response
Associated Figures	Karl Jaspers, Frank Fish	Freud, Beck, Kandel, Engel

Integration of Both Approaches

Both descriptive and explanatory psychopathology are complementary, not competing. Description must precede explanation — a poor understanding of symptoms leads to flawed theories and misguided interventions. Phenomenological accuracy improves the validity of research and therapeutic interventions.

Kaplan and Sadock reinforce this integration through their biopsychosocial model, which depends on accurate clinical observation (descriptive) as well as comprehensive understanding of mechanisms (explanatory).

Continuous vs Discontinuous Approach in Psychopathology

The distinction between continuous and discontinuous approaches in psychopathology reflects differing views on the relationship between normal psychological processes and abnormal mental states. The core question is whether mental illness represents a spectrum-based deviation from normal mental life or a categorical rupture from it. This debate shapes diagnostic models, treatment planning, and clinicians' understanding of patients' subjective experiences.

Continuous Approach

Definition

The continuous approach sees psychopathological experiences as quantitative extensions or exaggerations of normal psychological functions. Mental phenomena are located on a spectrum, with no clear dividing line between health and illness.

Conceptual and Clinical Implications

- Emphasises **dimensional classification**, where symptoms are assessed along a continuum rather than in discrete categories.
- Suggests that abnormal experiences remain psychologically comprehensible and arise through mechanisms shared with typical human functioning.
- Encourages the view that empathy and therapeutic understanding are possible because symptoms remain connected to familiar experiences.
- Often underlies psychological and behavioural models, which trace symptoms to maladaptive variants of normal processes.

Examples

- **Depressive states** as intensifications of normal sadness or grief.
- **Anxiety symptoms** as heightened or contextually inappropriate fear responses.
- **Paranoid ideation** as an extreme form of vigilance or interpersonal mistrust.
- **Obsessive thoughts** as exaggerated versions of normative concerns about harm or responsibility.

Discontinuous Approach

Definition

The discontinuous approach proposes that some psychopathological phenomena are qualitatively different from normal psychological experiences. These symptoms are not extensions of ordinary mental life, but instead reflect a fundamental break in mental functioning.

Examples

- **Primary delusions** that emerge with full conviction, without cause or context, and are experienced as irrefutably real.
- **Auditory hallucinations** that are clearly externalised and not connected to internal speech or imagination.
- **Thought insertion or thought withdrawal**, where individuals experience alien control over internal mental events.

Summary Table

Feature	Continuous Approach	Discontinuous Approach
Nature of abnormality	Quantitative exaggeration of normal processes	Qualitative break from normal processes

Feature	Continuous Approach	Discontinuous Approach
Conceptual model	Dimensional	Categorical
Philosophical basis	Psychological continuity, empathy	Jaspers' concept of "ununderstandability"
Typical disorders	Mood disorders, anxiety disorders, personality traits	Psychotic disorders (e.g., schizophrenia, delusional disorder)
Examples	Sadness → depression; worry → anxiety	Primary delusion, external auditory hallucination
Clinical orientation	Psychological models, psychotherapy	Biological models, medical intervention
Therapeutic implications	Symptoms are relatable and modifiable	Symptoms may resist empathy; structured treatment often needed

Understanding vs Explanation in Psychopathology

The distinction between understanding and explanation in psychopathology originates from the work of Karl Jaspers and represents two fundamentally different ways of approaching mental phenomena.

Understanding (Verstehen)

Understanding refers to the empathetic and intuitive grasp of a person's mental state. It is concerned with the meaningful connections between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours from the subjective point of view.

- **Static Understanding**: Descriptive, phenomenological account of mental states as they are.
- **Genetic Understanding**: Comprehending how one mental state develops from another in a psychologically meaningful way.

Example: A patient feels anxious after receiving criticism. This is understandable in psychological terms and fits with common human reactions.

Explanation (Erklären)

Explanation refers to the use of causal models to account for the origin or mechanism of mental phenomena. It is objective, scientific, and often grounded in biological, psychological, or social theories.

Example: Explaining depressive symptoms as the result of serotonin imbalance, genetic predisposition, or cognitive distortions involves an explanatory approach.

Empathy vs Sympathy

Based on Hojat, 2007

Empathy: A Predominantly Cognitive Attribute

Definition: Empathy is the cognitive capacity to understand and accurately interpret another person's internal experiences, feelings, and perspectives, and to effectively communicate that understanding back to them.

- It involves **perspective-taking** without emotional entanglement.
- Empathy maintains the **"as if" condition**: understanding the patient's emotions as if they were your own, but without merging emotionally or losing objectivity (Carl Rogers).
- Empathy has a **positive linear relationship** with patient outcomes: more empathy generally leads to better care and more accurate diagnosis.
- Empathy is **teachable and measurable**, especially through tools like the **Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy**.

Sympathy: A Primarily Emotional Response

Definition: Sympathy is the emotional resonance or identification with another person's distress. It involves feeling *with* the patient, often resulting in shared emotional states.

- Sympathy is **affect-laden**, often automatic and emotional in nature.
- The relationship between sympathy and outcomes follows a **curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) pattern**: too little feels cold, too much overwhelms both clinician and patient.

Key Differences

Aspect	Empathy	Sympathy
Nature	Cognitive	Emotional
Process	Perspective-taking, understanding	Emotional identification and sharing
Emotional distance	Maintains professional boundaries ("as if" condition)	May involve over-identification and blurred boundaries
Effect on clinician	Supports reflection, emotional regulation	Risk of emotional fatigue or burnout
Outcome relationship	Positive and linear	Curvilinear; moderate level is optimal

Concept of Disease, Illness, Sickness, and Disorder

Disease

Represents a pathological process identifiable by objective, biological criteria, such as structural, biochemical, or functional abnormalities. Central to the medical model. May exist without subjective awareness or social recognition.

Illness

Refers to the subjective experience of feeling unwell or distressed. Emphasises the patient's internal perception of dysfunction, discomfort, or suffering, even in the absence of objective findings. Central to therapeutic empathy and care.

Sickness

A socially defined role of being unwell, shaped by cultural norms and societal expectations. Determines how society views and treats individuals perceived as ill. May be officially sanctioned (e.g., sick leave) or socially constructed.

The sociologist Talcott Parsons formalised this in his concept of the **"sick role"** (1951), which grants the individual exemption from normal responsibilities in exchange for the obligation to seek help and try to recover – a framework that remains influential in medical sociology.

Disorder

A clinically neutral term used widely in psychiatry to categorise patterns of symptoms, distress, and dysfunction. Avoids assumptions about causation or pathology, making it suitable for conditions with uncertain or multifactorial origins. Used for diagnostic consistency in systems like the DSM-5- TR and ICD-11.

Normal and Abnormal

Defining Normality

Normality is a multi-dimensional concept, understood through several frameworks:

- **Statistical Normality**: Based on frequency within the general population.
- **Idealistic Normality**: Based on a theoretical or cultural standard of optimal mental health.
- **Functional Normality**: Determined by the person's ability to function effectively in daily life.
- **Subjective Normality**: Relates to the individual's own sense of well-being or psychological equilibrium.

Delineation and Zone of Rarity (Robert Kendell)

The process of distinguishing mental disorders from normal psychological variation is called **delineation**. Robert Kendell proposed the concept of a **"zone of rarity"** – a gap in the distribution between normal and disordered mental states. In true diseases, there is a distinct separation between health and illness.

In psychosis, phenomena like primary delusions or thought insertion do not blend smoothly into normal experience – they are separated by a conceptual and phenomenological gap. In contrast, depression flows continuously with normality, with no sharp separation, suggesting dimensional classification may be more appropriate for mood disorders.

Explanatory Discontinuity

Refers to situations where abnormal psychological phenomena cannot be explained by extending normal psychological mechanisms. Often applies to psychotic symptoms such as primary delusions and auditory hallucinations. Supports categorical models of mental illness.

Comorbidity, Co-occurrence, and Consanguinity

Comorbidity

Comorbidity refers to the simultaneous presence of two or more diagnosable psychiatric disorders in the same individual. It is a diagnostic concept widely used in the DSM-5-TR and ICD-11 frameworks.

Co-occurrence

Co-occurrence is a broader and more flexible term that describes the presence of multiple symptoms or phenomena in the same individual, without necessarily implying distinct diagnoses. Comorbidity implies separate formal diagnostic categories; co-occurrence refers to the clinical observation of symptoms occurring together.

Consanguinity

In psychiatry, consanguinity refers to genetic relatedness through shared ancestry, relevant in discussions of hereditary risk. Higher degrees of consanguinity are associated with increased risk for conditions such as schizophrenia, Bipolar Affective Disorder (BPAD), and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Particularly relevant in genetically isolated populations or communities with high rates of consanguineous marriage — a significant consideration in Indian clinical practice.

Summary Table

Term	Definition	Diagnostic Implication	Example
Comorbidity	Coexistence of two or more diagnosable disorders in one person	Requires separate diagnostic labels	MDD + GAD
Co-occurrence	Presence of multiple symptoms or features in one person	May or may not meet criteria for distinct disorders	Paranoia and hallucinations in schizophrenia
Consanguinity	Genetic relatedness, relevant to familial risk	Pertains to heritable vulnerability, not diagnosis	Schizophrenia in a first-degree relative

Philosophical Approach vs Clinical Approach in Psychopathology

Philosophical Approach

Concerned with the conceptual foundations of psychopathology. Explores the nature, definition, and meaning of mental symptoms and experiences. Rooted in phenomenology (Jaspers, Husserl), philosophy of mind, ethics, and hermeneutics.

Strengths: Provides conceptual clarity, encourages critical reflection, highlights subjectivity and meaning, challenges medicalisation.

Limitations: Can be too abstract, lacks immediate diagnostic or therapeutic application.

Clinical Approach

Diagnostic and pragmatic in orientation. Concerned with description, identification, and classification of symptoms. Central to the mental state examination (MSE), clinical interviews, and treatment planning.

Strengths: Highly applicable, standardised, enables diagnostic precision through codified systems (DSM-5-TR, ICD-11).

Limitations: Risk of reductionism; may neglect subjective meaning of symptoms and the personal narrative.

Comparison Table

Feature	Philosophical Approach	Clinical Approach
Primary focus	Conceptual meaning, nature of symptoms	Diagnosis, symptom description, treatment planning
Methodology	Conceptual analysis, phenomenology	Observation, interview, mental state examination
Perspective	Subjective, first-person, theoretical	Objective, pragmatic, third-person
Intellectual roots	Philosophy (Jaspers, Husserl), ethics	Psychiatry, descriptive psychopathology
Strengths	Depth of understanding, critical reflection	Clinical relevance, standardisation, practicality
Limitations	Lacks immediate clinical utility	Risk of oversimplification

Realism vs Constructivism vs Pragmatism in Psychopathology

Three dominant philosophical frameworks provide different answers to the ontological status of psychiatric disorders.

Realism

Psychiatric disorders exist independently of our recognition or categorisation. They are real disease entities, similar to physical illnesses. Supports the biomedical model and the search for objective biomarkers.

Constructivism

Psychiatric disorders are conceptual and cultural constructions, shaped by historical, linguistic, and social processes. Encourages critical scrutiny of diagnostic systems, highlights risks of over-pathologisation and cultural insensitivity.

Pragmatism

Avoids metaphysical debates and focuses on whether the concept is useful in practice. A diagnosis is justified if it improves treatment planning, predicts outcomes, or supports clinical communication.

Comparison Table

Feature	Realism	Constructivism	Pragmatism
Nature of disorder	Exists independently	Constructed through cultural/social factors	Defined by clinical utility
View of diagnosis	Reflects objective disease entities	Labels shaped by context and norms	Useful tools for treatment
Associated model	Biomedical	Sociocultural	Biopsychosocial
Strengths	Grounded in science	Culturally sensitive, critically reflective	Clinically focused, adaptable
Limitations	May ignore subjective/social dimensions	May undermine diagnostic legitimacy	Avoids deeper theoretical engagement

Integrated Perspective

A balanced psychiatric practice draws from all three: using realist insights to pursue biological understanding, applying constructivist awareness for cultural and ethical sensitivity, and employing pragmatist principles to ensure person-centred, functional care.

Interview Schedules

Questionnaire vs Schedule vs Battery

Questionnaire

A structured set of written questions, usually in a self-report or informant-report format, designed to assess specific symptoms, traits, or psychological constructs. Typically standardised and scored quantitatively. Examples: Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), PHQ-9, GAD-7.

Schedule

A semi-structured or structured clinical interview conducted by a trained interviewer to assess psychiatric symptoms and arrive at a diagnosis. Examples: Structured Clinical Interview for DSM Disorders (SCID), Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI), Mini-International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI).

Battery

A collection or series of tests, often from different domains, administered together to evaluate multiple aspects of functioning – cognition, neuropsychological status, or personality. Examples: Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS), Halstead-Reitan Neuropsychological Battery.

Comparison Table

Feature	Questionnaire	Schedule	Battery
Format	Self/informant-reported written tool	Clinician-administered interview	Set of multiple tests/tools
Purpose	Screening, symptom rating	Diagnostic assessment	Comprehensive, multi-domain assessment
Examples	PHQ-9, GAD-7, BDI	SCID, MINI, CIDI	WAIS, MoCA, Neuropsych batteries
Advantages	Quick, efficient, scalable	Depth, diagnostic accuracy	Broad, integrative, clinically rich
Limitations	Response bias, limited depth	Time-consuming, needs training	Time/resource heavy, needs expertise

Present State Examination (PSE)

The PSE is a standardised, semi-structured psychiatric interview designed to assess the current mental state of adult patients, primarily those with neurotic and functional psychotic disorders. Originally developed by J.K. Wing and colleagues, it comprises 140 items rated on an ordinal scale.

The PSE includes a classification system called **CATEGO**, used for data processing and analysis. It demonstrates high inter-rater reliability when users are properly trained.

Hindi Version of the PSE (Indian Adaptation)

Developed at PGIMER, Chandigarh and first operationalised in 1976. Translation challenges included conceptual and linguistic limitations in Hindi for abstract terms like *nervous tension*, *brooding*, and *self-consciousness*. Items were categorised as Category A (satisfactory translation, 60 items), Category B (requiring modification, 23 items), and Category X (general applicability issues, 9 items).

SCAN (Schedules for Clinical Assessment in Neuropsychiatry)

A semi-structured diagnostic interview developed by the WHO. Designed for trained clinicians to assess, classify, and diagnose psychiatric disorders in adults per ICD-10 and DSM criteria. Interviews typically last 60–120 minutes. Provides structured data for both categorical and dimensional analysis.

SCID (Structured Clinical Interview for DSM Disorders)

The SCID is a semi-structured diagnostic interview specifically designed for systematic assessment of DSM psychiatric disorders. Considered the "gold standard" for psychiatric diagnosis in research.

Current versions include SCID-5-RV (Research Version), SCID-5-CV (Clinician Version), SCID-5-PD (Personality Disorders), and SCID-5-AMPD (Alternative Model for Personality Disorders). Typically takes 45–90 minutes.

DIS (Diagnostic Interview Schedule)

A fully structured psychiatric interview designed to be administered by trained lay interviewers. Developed in the late 1970s by the NIMH for the Epidemiologic Catchment Area (ECA) Study. Uses entirely scripted questions with skip patterns. Average time: 60–120 minutes.

CIDI (Composite International Diagnostic Interview)

A fully structured diagnostic interview developed by the WHO in collaboration with NIMH. Generates diagnoses according to DSM-5 and ICD-11. Used extensively in the World Mental Health (WMH) Surveys and the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS). Interview length: 60–180 minutes.

Comparison: SCID, SCAN, and PSE

Feature	SCID	SCAN	PSE
Developer	American Psychiatric Association	WHO Division of Mental Health	J.K. Wing et al., WHO
Diagnostic System	DSM (DSM-IV, DSM-5)	ICD-10/DSM compatible	ICD-9/10 compatible (via CATEGO)
Primary Purpose	Formal DSM diagnosis	Structured symptom-based diagnosis	Standardised symptom assessment
Use	Clinical research, diagnosis	Cross-cultural research, clinical diagnosis	Symptom research, training
Time	45–90+ minutes	60–120 minutes	45–90 minutes

Developmental Psychopathology

Developmental psychopathology is an interdisciplinary field that studies the emergence and progression of psychological disorders across the lifespan, particularly from infancy through adolescence and into adulthood. It integrates principles from developmental psychology, clinical psychiatry, neuroscience, and epidemiology.

Core Assumptions

- Psychopathology is the result of deviations in normal developmental processes.
- There is no clear boundary between normality and pathology – they exist on a continuum.
- Development must be considered in terms of timing, context, and trajectory.
- Risk and protective factors interact dynamically across time and environments.
- Early experiences have long-term impacts, but later experiences can also redirect developmental trajectories (plasticity).

Models of Developmental Psychopathology

Transactional Model

Proposes that child development results from dynamic interactions between the child and their environment. Psychopathology arises when adaptive transactions fail and maladaptive cycles become entrenched.

Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner)

Development occurs within nested systems:

- **Microsystem** (family, school)
- **Mesosystem** (interaction between settings)
- **Exosystem** (community, parental work)
- **Macrosystem** (culture, beliefs)

Equifinality and Multifinality

- **Equifinality**: Different developmental pathways can lead to the same outcome (e.g., depression arising from trauma, neglect, or genetic predisposition).
- **Multifinality**: A single risk factor can lead to diverse outcomes, depending on context and moderators.

Developmental Cascade Model

Early difficulties in one domain (e.g., attention, emotion regulation) can cascade into other areas, amplifying risk for later psychopathology. Example: school problems → peer rejection → low self-esteem → depression.

Risk and Resilience Framework

Psychopathology emerges when risk outweighs resilience, especially at developmental transition points (e.g., adolescence, puberty, school entry).

Riegel et al. (1978): Dialectical Model

Riegel proposed a dialectical framework where development is a process of continuous contradiction and resolution between opposing forces. Development is non-linear, involving discontinuities, crises, and reorganisations. Psychopathology may result from unresolved contradictions.

Clinical Implications

- Assessment and treatment must be developmentally informed.
- Treatment should aim not only to reduce symptoms, but to support adaptive developmental progression.
- Early identification and intervention are crucial to prevent escalation, promote resilience, and alter high-risk trajectories.

CHAPTER 01 · NAVIGATION MAP

Related Topics

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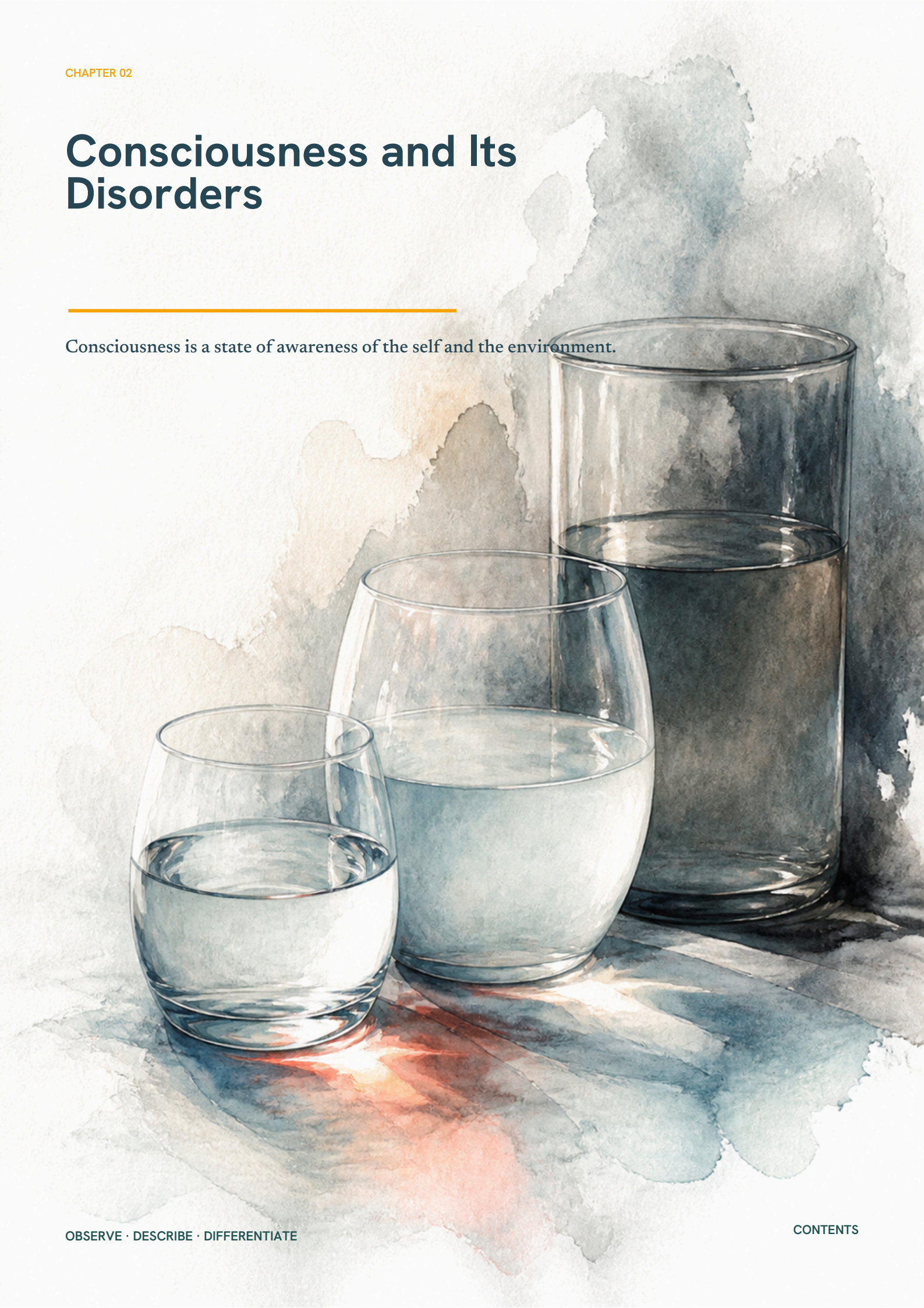
See: Thought and Its Disorders
See: Emotions and Its Disorders
See: Personality and Its Disorders
See: Research Domain Criteria (RDoC)
See: Perception and Its Disorders
See: The Self and Its Disorders
See: Classification Systems in Psychiatry
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders

01

CHAPTER 02

Consciousness and Its Disorders

Consciousness is a state of awareness of the self and the environment.



Consciousness

Consciousness is a state of awareness of the self and the environment. – Fish Consciousness is to

be conscious, to know about oneself and the world. – Scharfetter

The concept of consciousness goes beyond the simple distinction between being asleep and awake. In psychopathology, the focus is on the **process of being conscious of something** – the capacity for subjective experience, self-awareness, and the ability to report on one's inner states. Consciousness is the precondition for all other mental phenomena: one must be conscious in order to experience the world, and disorders of consciousness therefore affect every other domain of the mental state examination.

Philosophical Foundations

Three Basic Facts About Any Theory of Consciousness

FUN FACT

Thomas Nagel's 1974 paper "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" is one of the most cited philosophy papers of the 20th century. His point: even if we knew every neuron in a bat's brain, we still wouldn't know the subjective experience of echolocation.

- **Subjective nature**: Consciousness is united by a unique individual's inner perspective. It is individual-specific – no two people have identical conscious experience. This is what the philosopher Thomas Nagel captured in his famous question: *"What is it like to be a bat?"* (1974).
- **Quality recalcitrant to physical description**: Conscious experience – qualia – cannot be fully reduced to physical or chemical processes. The redness of red, the painfulness of pain, remains stubbornly beyond the reach of neurochemistry alone. This is the so-called **"hard problem of consciousness"** (David Chalmers, 1995).
- **Intentional nature**: Conscious states are always directed towards an object – one is always conscious *of* something. This concept of intentionality was central to Husserl's phenomenology and was adopted into psychopathology by Jaspers.

Husserl's Inseparable Acts of Consciousness

Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, identified three inseparable components of any conscious act:

- **Attention**: The selective focusing of awareness.
- **Perception**: The organisation of sensory input into coherent experience.
- **The actual object of consciousness**: That towards which the conscious act is directed.

Jaspers' Three Aspects of Consciousness

Karl Jaspers extended Husserl's framework into three clinically relevant aspects:

- **Actual inner experience**: The stream of subjective awareness — the ongoing flow of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.
- **Subject-object dichotomy**: The distinction between oneself (the experiencing subject) and the world (the experienced object). This is fundamental to reality testing.
- **Knowledge of the conscious self**: Self-awareness — the capacity to recognise oneself as a continuous, unified being. Impairment of this aspect leads to **dissociative disorders**, where the sense of self becomes fragmented.

Dimensions of Consciousness

Three Dimensions of Consciousness

- **Vigilance**: The level of alertness, attention, and concentration. Regulated primarily by the **ascending reticular activating system (ARAS)** in the brainstem, which projects to the thalamus and cortex.
- **Lucidity**: The clarity of awareness — how clearly and coherently the individual can process and respond to the environment. Impairment of lucidity (clouding) is the hallmark of delirium.
- **Self-consciousness**: Awareness of oneself as a distinct entity. Impairment leads to disorders of the experience of self (depersonalisation, identity disturbance).

Levels of Consciousness

CLINICAL PEARL

In clinical practice, always document the level of consciousness before the rest of the MSE. If consciousness is impaired, every other finding (hallucinations, thought disorder, mood) must be interpreted in that context — it's likely delirium, not psychosis.

Consciousness exists on a continuum from full alertness to death:

Level	Description	Clinical Features
Normal consciousness	Alert, vigilant, lucid	Appropriate responses, oriented, attentive
Clouding	Mildest impairment	Slight reduction in clarity; may be drowsy or agitated; memory disturbance and disorientation likely

Level	Description	Clinical Features
Drowsiness	Next level of impairment	Drifts into sleep if unstimulated; slurred speech; sluggish intention; diminished muscle tone; reflexes present but reduced
Obtundation	Decreased awareness	Sleeps more than normal; drowsy between sleep states; slowed responses to stimulation
Sopor	Abnormal deep sleep	Responds only to repeated strong or painful stimuli; does not fully awaken
Coma	No arousal	No reflexes, no arousal; eyes closed; no purposeful response to stimulation
Death	Irreversible cessation	Absent brainstem reflexes; no spontaneous respiration

The Unconscious

TEACHING TIP

Remember: Freud's unconscious is a dynamic reservoir of repressed material. Jaspers' unconscious is simply anything not currently in awareness. These are fundamentally different concepts despite sharing a name.

Three Core Features of Unconsciousness

- It does not occur as an experience – it has no inner existence.
- It is not thought of as an object and has gone unregarded.
- It has not reached any knowledge of itself.

Three Dimensions of Unconsciousness

- **Comatose**: Complete absence of consciousness due to severe brain dysfunction – the patient cannot be aroused.
- **Deep sleep**: A physiological state of unconsciousness that is reversible with appropriate stimulation. Unlike coma, the brain is functioning normally but awareness is temporarily suspended.
- **The unconscious mind**: The brain is healthy and normal, but certain psychological processes exist that cannot be accessed through introspection. Sigmund Freud termed this the **"preconscious"** (material that can be brought to awareness with effort) and the **"unconscious proper"** (material that is actively repressed and inaccessible without specialised techniques such as free association or dream interpretation).

Disorders of Consciousness

A **disturbed state of consciousness (DSC)** is defined as a state in which a person has no experiences at all, or in which all experiences are deviant (concerning qualities other than tempo and mood colouring) from those expected under similar stimulus conditions in the habitual waking state. Critically, the state qualifies as a DSC only if the individual **cannot return to the habitual state by deciding to do so**, and if others cannot bring about a lasting return through simple social procedures.

Disorders of Lucidity

Clouding of Consciousness

Clouding denotes the lesser stages of impairment of consciousness on a continuum from full alertness to coma (Lishman). The patient may be drowsy or agitated, and is likely to show memory disturbances and disorientation. Clouding is the **cardinal feature of delirium** – its presence should always prompt a search for an underlying organic cause.

A useful clinical point: clouding is often **fluctuating** – the patient may appear lucid at one moment and confused the next, particularly worse at night (**sundowning**). This fluctuation distinguishes delirium from most psychiatric conditions, where the level of consciousness is typically preserved.

Drowsiness

A persistent state representing the next level of impairment. The patient is technically "awake" but will drift into sleep if left without sensory stimulation. Features include slurred speech, sluggishness in intention, and subjective sleepiness. Reflexes including coughing and swallowing are present but reduced. Muscle tone is diminished. The patient may try to avoid painful stimuli.

Obtundation and Sopor

- **Obtundation**: Decreased awareness of the environment with slowed responses to stimulation. The patient tends to sleep more than normal with drowsiness between sleep states.
- **Sopor**: Abnormally deep sleep. The patient responds only to repeated strong or painful stimuli, and even then does not fully awaken.

Specific Disorders of Consciousness

Twilight State

A **well-defined interruption** of the continuity of consciousness, characterised by:

- Abrupt onset and termination
- Variable duration (minutes to days)

- Occurrence of abnormal violent acts or emotional outbursts in an otherwise quiet individual
- Subsequent amnesia for the episode

Twilight states occur in organic conditions including **alcoholism** (mania a potu), **epilepsy** (particularly temporal lobe), **brain trauma**, and **general paresis** (neurosyphilis). The term is also used in dissociative psychiatry to describe states of narrowed consciousness with preserved motor function.

A teaching anecdote: the twilight state was famously invoked as a legal defence in cases where individuals committed violent acts during epileptic automatisms and subsequently had no memory of the event — raising profound questions about criminal responsibility and consciousness.

Mania a Potu

An extraordinarily severe, pathological response to alcohol — often in small amounts — characterised by apparently senseless violent behaviour. Jeremy Coid reviewed the pathological basis and identified four components:

- The condition follows consumption of alcohol in variable quantities.
- Senseless violent behaviour ensues.
- This is followed by prolonged sleep.
- Total or partial amnesia for the disturbed behaviour occurs.

Importantly, intoxication in the usual sense is often **not** involved — the amount consumed may be trivially small. This is therefore a **pathological reaction** to alcohol rather than a dose-dependent intoxication. It is associated with pre-existing brain vulnerability (head injury, epilepsy, personality disorder).

Automatism

Peter Fenwick defined automatism as an **involuntary piece of behaviour** over which the individual has no control. It is inappropriate to the situation, can be complex and co-ordinated, but lacks judgement. The individual has no recollection, or only partial and confused memory, of the episode.

Examples: Epileptic automatism (fumbling, lip-smacking, undressing — typically in temporal lobe epilepsy), speech automatism during seizures (irrelevant or stereotyped speech). Automatisms are medico-legally significant because the individual lacks the *mens rea* (guilty mind) required for criminal responsibility.

Dream-Like State (Oneiroid State)

The patient is disoriented and confused, with elaborate visual and auditory hallucinations. The experience has a vivid, dream-like quality — the patient may act out scenarios as if living in a dream. **Occupational delirium** may occur, where the patient performs actions related to their occupation (e.g., a bus driver making steering movements in bed).

There is no clear-cut delineation from delirium — the oneiroid state is best understood as a variant of delirium with particularly prominent hallucinatory experiences and a more structured, narrative quality to the altered consciousness.

Delirium

Although not separately detailed in this note, delirium is the most clinically important disorder of consciousness. It is characterised by an **acute onset**, **fluctuating course**, **inattention**, and either **disorganised thinking** or an **altered level of consciousness**. The **Confusion Assessment Method (CAM)** is the standard bedside screening tool. Delirium is a medical emergency — mortality rates in hospitalised patients range from 22–76% depending on the population, making it one of the most lethal conditions encountered in clinical practice.

Summary: Disorders of Consciousness

Disorder	Key Feature	Consciousness Level	Common Causes
Clouding	Mildest impairment; fluctuating	Mildly reduced	Delirium (any cause)
Drowsiness	Drifts to sleep without stimulation	Moderately reduced	Metabolic, drug effects, infection
Obtundation	Sleeps excessively; slowed responses	Significantly reduced	CNS infection, raised ICP, metabolic
Sopor	Responds only to strong/painful stimuli	Severely reduced	Severe metabolic, structural brain lesion
Coma	No arousal; no reflexes	Absent	Severe brain injury, massive overdose, brainstem lesion
Twilight State	Abrupt-onset interruption; violent acts; amnesia	Variable (narrowed)	Epilepsy, alcoholism (mania a potu), brain trauma
Automatism	Involuntary, complex, co-ordinated behaviour; amnesia	Altered	Epilepsy (temporal lobe)
Dream-Like (Oneiroid)	Elaborate hallucinations; occupational delirium	Clouded	Delirium, encephalitis, substance intoxication

Related Topics

See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: The Self and Its Disorders
See: Motor Disorder
See: Memory and Its Disorders
See: Perception and Its Disorders
See: Emotions and Its Disorders

Perception

Perception is the process whereby sensory stimulation is elaborated into organized experience.



Sensation, Perception, and Aperception

CLINICAL PEARL

Delusional perception is the classic Schneiderian first-rank symptom that tests aperception: the patient perceives a stimulus correctly (perception intact) but assigns it a bizarre, self-referential meaning (aperception distorted). “I saw the traffic light turn red, and I knew I had been chosen to save the world.”

Sensation

Sensation is "the registration of physical stimuli by the sense organs." – Fish

Sensation represents the **raw, unprocessed input** received by sensory organs (light, sound, pressure, chemical molecules). It is a passive and physiological process occurring before any interpretation. Sensations are not inherently meaningful – they require further processing to become part of conscious awareness.

Types of Sensation:

- **Visual**: Detection of light and formation of visual images.
- **Auditory**: Perception and localisation of sound.
- **Tactile (Somatosensory)**: Touch, pressure, temperature, and pain.
- **Olfactory**: Processing of smell and chemical odours.
- **Gustatory**: Sensation of taste.
- **Kinaesthetic**: Awareness of body position and movement.
- **Proprioceptive**: Sense of the relative position of body parts and the strength of effort employed in movement.

Clinical relevance: Sensation is usually intact in psychiatric disorders, unless there is an underlying neurological or organic cause. Hallucinations are **not** disturbances of sensation – they are disturbances of perception.

Perception

Perception is "the process whereby sensory stimulation is elaborated into organized experience." –

Fish

Perception involves the **organisation, identification, and interpretation** of sensory input. It transforms raw sensations into meaningful experiences, allowing recognition of objects and events. It is an **active process**, influenced by previous knowledge, expectations, and context.

The critical distinction: sensation is the **input**; perception is the **interpretive process** that constructs awareness from that input.

Clinical relevance: Perceptual disturbances include **illusions** (misperceptions of real external stimuli) and **hallucinations** (perceptions without an external stimulus). These are central to psychotic states, especially hallucinations in schizophrenia.

Aperception

Aperception is "the process by which new perceptual material is interpreted in terms of past

experience." – Sims

Aperception is a **higher-order cognitive function** that integrates perception with memory, attention, emotion, and meaning. It is where **meaning is ascribed** to perceptions, drawing on the individual's internal world and prior knowledge.

Clinical relevance: **Delusional perception** arises from normal perception followed by abnormal aperception – the application of delusional meaning to a real perception. This is a Schneiderian first-rank symptom and is particularly relevant in schizophrenia, where aperceptive processes become pathologically distorted.

A teaching aide: think of the three as a pipeline – **Sensation → Perception → Aperception**. The signal enters (sensation), is organised into coherent experience (perception), and is then interpreted with personal meaning (aperception). Pathology can arise at any stage, but psychiatric disorders most commonly affect perception and aperception.

Summary Table

Term	Definition	Nature	Clinical Importance
Sensation	Registration of physical stimuli by the sense organs	Passive, physiological	Intact in most psychiatric illnesses
Perception	Elaboration of sensory input into organised experience	Active, interpretive	Basis for illusions and hallucinations
Aperception	Interpretation of perception using past experience	Integrative, subjective	Key to delusional perception and psychotic meaning-making

Models of Perception with Neurobiological Correlates

1. Bottom-Up Model (Data-Driven Processing)

TEACHING TIP

Think of bottom-up as "data drives the brain" and top-down as "the brain drives the data." Hallucinations in schizophrenia involve excessive top-down processing – the brain generates percepts that override absent sensory input.

Perception starts with **external sensory input** and proceeds in a hierarchical, unidirectional manner toward higher cortical processing, with no reliance on prior experience or expectation.

Information Flow: Stimulus → Thalamus (LGN, MGN, VPL/VPM) → Primary Sensory Cortex (e.g., V1) → Secondary Sensory Areas (V2–V4) → Multimodal Association Areas

Neurobiological Correlates:

- The **thalamus** acts as a sensory relay (LGN for vision, MGN for audition).
- **Primary sensory cortices** (V1, A1) process raw input, with initial processing in Layer IV of the cortex.
- Association cortices integrate input without top-down modulation.

Clinical relevance: In **schizophrenia**, impaired sensory gating due to thalamic dysfunction (especially the reticular nucleus) disrupts bottom-up filtering. In **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**, atypical hyper- or hypo-reactivity in sensory cortices is observed.

Example: Entering a dark room and suddenly seeing a flickering light – the retina detects the stimulus, signals relay via the thalamus to V1, building up to recognition of a candle. This occurs without prior expectation; it is purely stimulus-driven.

2. Top-Down Model (Concept-Driven Processing)

Perception is guided by **expectations, prior knowledge, goals**, and **attentional focus**. The brain actively interprets sensory data based on internal models.

Information Flow: Prefrontal Cortex (DLPFC, ACC) → Parietal and Temporal Association Areas → Feedback to Primary Sensory Areas

Neurobiological Correlates:

- **DLPFC**: Holds attentional set and goals.
- **ACC**: Conflict monitoring and response regulation.
- **Parietal cortex**: Modulates sensory attention.
- Feedback pathways from prefrontal/parietal areas regulate activity in V1.
- **Dopamine**, **acetylcholine**, and **noradrenaline** modulate salience and attentional weighting.

Clinical relevance: In **psychosis**, overactive top-down processing generates hallucinations and delusions – the brain "sees" what it expects rather than what is actually there. This is the basis of the **predictive coding model of hallucinations**.

Example: Walking in a forest expecting to see a snake – when you see a curved stick, your prefrontal cortex and attentional bias lead you to momentarily perceive it as a snake.

3. Template Matching Model

Recognition occurs by comparing sensory input to **stored perceptual templates**. A stimulus is perceived when it closely matches an internal exemplar.

Neurobiological Correlates: The **inferotemporal cortex (IT)** stores visual templates; the **fusiform gyrus** specialises in word and object form recognition; the **ventral visual stream** transmits "what" information.

Clinical relevance: **Visual agnosia** results from damage to IT cortex, impairing access to stored templates. Common in posterior cortical atrophy.

Example: Recognising the letter "A" in different fonts (Times New Roman, Arial, cursive) – the brain matches each to an internal template stored in the inferotemporal cortex.

4. Feature Matching Model

Perception results from identifying and assembling **distinct visual features** (lines, angles, edges), which are matched with known configurations in memory.

Neurobiological Correlates: **V1** detects orientation, contrast, and spatial frequency; **V2–V4** integrate features into shapes and textures; the **posterior parietal cortex** coordinates visual attention and spatial binding.

Clinical relevance: **Simultanagnosia** (impaired integration of features, often from parietal damage); **ADHD** (deficits in feature-based attention, possibly from dorsal network dysfunction).

Example: Recognising a bicycle by assembling its features – two wheels, handlebars, a frame – even when partly obscured.

5. Recognition-by-Components (RBC) Model

Objects are recognised by breaking them into **3D components called geons**. Recognition depends on identifying geon arrangements, which are **viewpoint-invariant**.

Neurobiological Correlates: The **Lateral Occipital Complex (LOC)** encodes 3D shape representations; the **inferotemporal cortex** maps geon configurations to known objects.

Clinical relevance: **Apperceptive visual agnosia** – preserved feature detection but impaired geon integration due to LOC dysfunction. Seen in bilateral occipitotemporal lesions.

Example: Identifying a teapot by mentally assembling its geons – a cylinder for the body, a curved handle, and a spout. Even from different angles, recognition is preserved because geon arrangement is viewpoint-invariant.

6. Configural Processing Model

Objects, especially **faces**, are recognised based on **spatial relationships between features** rather than the features alone. Central to social and emotional perception.

Neurobiological Correlates:

- **Fusiform Face Area (FFA)**: Specialises in face-specific processing.
- **Superior Temporal Sulcus (STS)**: Detects eye gaze, motion, and facial dynamics.
- **Amygdala**: Assesses emotional salience of faces.
- **Orbitofrontal Cortex (OFC)**: Supports social judgements and reward relevance.

Clinical relevance: **Prosopagnosia** (inability to recognise faces, FFA damage); **ASD** (altered FFA–STS–amygdala connectivity, reduced face salience); **schizophrenia** (deficits in facial affect recognition from impaired fronto-limbic integration).

Summary: Models of Perception

Model	Key Mechanism	Principal Brain Regions	Clinical Associations
Bottom-Up	Hierarchical sensory-driven processing	Thalamus, primary/secondary sensory cortices	Schizophrenia (sensory gating), ASD
Top-Down	Expectation-driven modulation	DLPFC, ACC, parietal cortex, feedback to sensory cortices	Psychosis (hallucinations, delusions)
Template Matching	Match to stored internal exemplars	Inferotemporal cortex, fusiform gyrus, ventral stream	Visual agnosia, posterior cortical atrophy
Feature Matching	Modular feature detection and assembly	V1–V4, posterior parietal cortex, ventral stream	ADHD, simultanagnosia
Recognition-by-Components	Structural decomposition into geons	LOC, inferotemporal cortex, ventral stream	Apperceptive agnosia
Configural Processing	Holistic analysis of spatial relationships	FFA, STS, amygdala, OFC	Prosopagnosia, ASD, schizophrenia

Imagery

"Imagery is the internal representation of perceptual experience; it occurs in subjective space, is dependent on the will, lacks the vividness of true perception and is recognised as unreal." – Sims

Imagery is fundamentally a **memory-based reconstruction**. It allows us to visualise, hear, or feel something internally without current sensory input. It differs sharply from pathological phenomena like hallucinations due to its **voluntary** nature and the individual's awareness of its internal origin.

Characteristics of Imagery (Mnemonic: FIGURE)

- **F – Figurative**: Imagery is often symbolic or abstract, shaped by prior experience and emotional tone. Unlike real perception, imagery is not bound to actual sensory fidelity – it is a tool for thought rather than direct experience.
- **I – Inner subjective space**: It occurs within the mind, with no projection into external space. This feature distinguishes imagery from hallucinations, which are experienced as projected into external or objective space.
- **G – Gross (not clearly delineated)**: Imagery is usually less vivid, less detailed, and less stable than real perception. Hallucinations, by contrast, may carry perceptual richness equal to or greater than true perception.
- **U – Unsufficient sensory stimuli**: Imagery arises without adequate external stimuli – often none at all. This distinguishes it from illusions (which depend on real sensory input) and delusional perception (which begins with real perception).
- **R – Recreation of images from memory**: Imagery is drawn from stored representations. It is shaped by personal experience and may be distorted by emotion or wish-fulfilment.
- **E – Emerge from will (dependent on will)**: A core distinction – imagery is volitional. The person can initiate, alter, or stop the experience. Fish highlights this as the decisive feature, contrasting it with hallucinations, which are involuntary.

Imagery vs Hallucination

Feature	Imagery	Hallucination
Volition	Voluntary, under the subject's control	Involuntary, cannot be dismissed at will
Reality Testing	Recognised as imaginary	Experienced as real
Location	Occurs in subjective (inner) space	Projected into objective (external) space
Vividness	Lacks sensory clarity	Often has full sensory vividness
Source	Memory and internal recreation	Experienced as arising from external source

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) — The Perception Process

The **Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)** is a projective psychological assessment tool developed by Henry Murray and Christiana Morgan at Harvard in 1935. It presents individuals with ambiguous social images and asks them to construct a narrative around each. The process of perception in TAT is not passive – it involves complex interactions between bottom-up visual processing and top-down interpretative mechanisms, influenced heavily by unconscious content, internal drives, and personality structure.

Perceptual Processing in TAT

- **Visual Stimulus**: Ambiguous black-and-white images depicting vague interpersonal scenes trigger bottom-up sensory processing in the primary and secondary visual cortices (V1–V4).
- **Initial Perceptual Registration**: The Lateral Occipital Complex (LOC) and ventral visual stream analyse object forms; the fusiform gyrus processes faces and body postures.
- **Top-Down Modulation**: The DLPFC organises a coherent narrative; the medial Prefrontal Cortex (mPFC) and Default Mode Network (DMN) contribute to mentalising and self-referential processing.
- **Projection of Internal Content**: The ambiguous stimulus permits insertion of internal needs, conflicts, fantasies, and defence mechanisms. The amygdala and ACC modulate emotional salience during interpretation.
- **Narrative Construction**: Involves episodic memory retrieval (hippocampus), language generation (left inferior frontal gyrus), and affective colouring (limbic circuitry). The final story reflects how the subject perceives others, relationships, and themselves.

In TAT, perception becomes an active interpretive process wherein ambiguous visual stimuli are unconsciously transformed into meaningful narratives – guided by top-down processes, shaped by internal psychological content, and mediated through neurocognitive systems involved in social cognition, emotional regulation, and autobiographical memory.

Related Topics

See: Perception and Its Disorders
See: Thought and Its Disorders
See: The Self and Its Disorders
See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders
See: Memory and Its Disorders

CHAPTER 04

Perception and Its Disorders

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



Introduction and History

Perception is the fundamental process by which we receive, organise, and interpret information from the world around us. It shapes our understanding of reality and is essential to our ability to make decisions, interact with others, and function effectively. Disorders of perception can profoundly disrupt these processes, resulting in a range of symptoms that greatly impact quality of life.

In ancient and mediaeval times, mental illness – including perceptual disorders – was attributed to supernatural forces, and treatment often involved exorcism or trepanation. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a shift from supernatural to scientific explanations: Freudian psychoanalysis emphasised the unconscious mind, while biological psychiatry focused on brain function.

Gestalt psychology, founded by Max Wertheimer (1880–1943), emerged as a reaction to the prevailing structuralist approach of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920). While structuralism viewed perception as the sum of its parts, Gestalt psychology emphasised that the **whole is greater than the sum of its parts**. It argued that perception is an active process where the brain organises and interprets sensory information to create a unified, meaningful experience. Key Gestalt principles include the laws of **proximity**, **similarity**, **closure**, and **good continuation** – all of which continue to inform our understanding of perceptual disorders.

Definition of Perception

Perception, derived from the Latin *perceptio* (gathering, receiving), is a complex, multi-stage process. It transcends passive reception of sensory stimuli, actively organising, identifying, and interpreting sensory information to construct a meaningful representation of the environment.

Key elements involved in perception:

- **Sensation**: The initial detection and registration of stimuli through various sensory systems.
- **Attention**: Selective focusing on specific aspects of the sensory environment, filtering out irrelevant information.
- **Organisation**: Grouping and structuring sensory input into recognisable patterns and forms.
- **Interpretation**: Assigning meaning to sensory data, drawing on prior experiences, memories, learned concepts, and cultural expectations.

The Influence of Top-Down Processing

Perception is not simply a bottom-up process driven solely by raw sensory input. It is also shaped by top-down influences:

- **Affect (emotional state)**: Emotions can influence how stimuli are perceived and interpreted.
- **Cultural expectations**: Cultural background shapes perceptual frameworks and biases.
- **Context**: The surrounding environment can alter stimulus perception.
- **Memory**: Past experiences help interpret new sensory information.

Models of Perception

Four principal models describe how the brain processes and recognises perceptual input:

- **Template matching model**: Requires an internal template in memory to which an object can be matched.
- **Feature matching model**: Requires only that a distinct, discriminating feature should specify the object.
- **Recognition-by-components model**: Requires knowledge of the correct arrangement of 3D parts (geons) in space.
- **Configural model**: Deals with the mechanism whereby individual examples of a class are recognised (especially faces).

For detailed neurobiological correlates of these models, see the companion note on Perception.

Imagery

EXAM POINT

The key distinction for exams: illusions need a real stimulus (misperceived), hallucinations have no external stimulus, and pseudohallucinations are perceived in inner subjective space and recognised as unreal. Pseudohallucinations lack the 'as-if-real' quality of true hallucinations.

Imagery is the internal mental representation of the world, actively drawn from memory. Functional imaging studies have demonstrated that the same cortical areas are implicated in visual imagery and visual perception. Behavioural experiments confirm that participants can construct mental images possessing perceptual qualities such as colour, size, shape, and orientation.

Abnormal Perception

FUN FACT

Charles Bonnet syndrome — vivid visual hallucinations in elderly patients with deteriorating vision — was first described in 1760 by the Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet, who observed the phenomenon in his own 87-year-old grandfather.

Disorders of perception can be broadly classified into two categories: **sensory distortions** (where a real stimulus is perceived in a distorted manner) and **false perceptions / sensory deceptions** (where perception occurs without an adequate external stimulus). False perceptions are further divided into illusions, hallucinations, and pseudohallucinations.

Sensory Distortions

CLINICAL PEARL

Always ask about sensory distortions before jumping to hallucinations. A patient saying "colours look brighter" or "sounds are louder" is describing hyperaesthesia (distortion), not a false perception. This distinction matters for diagnosis.

Sensory distortions are changes in perception resulting from a change in the intensity, quality, or spatial form of a stimulus. The perceived object is correctly recognised and identified, yet there is a deviation from its customary appearance.

Changes in Intensity

- **Hyperaesthesia**: Lowering of physiological threshold leading to increased sensitivity. Seen in hypomania.
- **Hyperacusis**: Increased sensitivity to noises. Seen in alcohol hangover, anxiety, and depressive disorders.
- **Hypoacusis**: Decreased sensitivity to sound. Seen in delirium, where thresholds for all sensations are raised.

In depression, visual and gustatory sensation thresholds are lowered – colours may appear duller and food may taste bland.

Changes in Quality

Changes in the quality of perceptual experience are seen in mania, depersonalisation, and derealisation. A clinically relevant example is the metallic taste associated with lithium use – this represents a true change in gustation rather than a perceptual distortion.

Changes in Spatial Form

Changes in the perceived shape or size of objects:

- **Micropsia**: Objects are perceived as smaller than they are.
- **Macropsia**: Objects are perceived as larger than they are.
- **Dysmegalopsia**: Objects are perceived as larger (or smaller) on one side than the other.

Causes include retinal disease, disorders of accommodation and convergence, and most commonly temporal and parietal lobe lesions. Rarely associated with schizophrenia.

Alice in Wonderland Syndrome (AIWS) describes a set of symptoms with alteration of body image and visual perception – the sizes of body parts or external objects are perceived incorrectly. First described in relation to migraine by John Todd in 1955 (who named it after Lewis Carroll's character), it is most

commonly experienced at night. Carroll himself suffered from migraines and likely experienced the syndrome.

Other Distortions (Blom et al., 2010)

- **Palinopsia**: Persistent recurrence of a visual image after the stimulus has been removed.
- **Achromatopsia**: Absence of colour perception (occipital lesions).
- **Telopsia**: Objects appearing farther away than they are.
- **Pelopsia**: Objects appearing nearer than they are.
- **Akinetopsia**: Impairment of visual perception of motion – the individual cannot perceive objects in motion.
- **Palinaptia**: Tactile sensation outlasting the stimulus.

Distortions of the Experience of Time

Personal judgement of the passage of time is affected by psychiatric disorders:

- In **severe depression**, time feels as though it passes very slowly and may even stand still – a feature of marked psychotic depressive symptoms.
- In **mania**, time feels as though it speeds by and the days are not long enough.
- In **schizophrenia**, there is evidence of abnormalities in time judgement, with patients estimating intervals to be shorter than they are. Age disorientation is another feature in chronic schizophrenia.

False Perceptions (Sensory Deceptions)

False perceptions are perceptions of objects that are not actually present in the manner perceived. They comprise three types: **illusions**, **hallucinations**, and **pseudohallucinations**.

A. Illusions

Illusions are instances where sensory information from a real, external stimulus is integrated with a mental image, resulting in a distorted or false perception. Crucially, illusions can occur in individuals without any underlying psychopathology.

1. Completion Illusions

Rooted in Gestalt Psychology's principle of closure – the brain's tendency to fill in gaps and complete incomplete patterns. The individual draws on memories, expectations, or fantasy to give meaning to fragmented sensory input. **Example**: Seeing familiar shapes in clouds.

2. Affect Illusions

The prevailing mood state influences the content of the illusion. Emotional states bias perceptual processes, leading to misinterpretations of neutral or ambiguous stimuli. Can often be dispelled by focused attention. **Example**: A person in a state of anxiety perceives shadows as threatening figures.

3. Pareidolic Illusions

Vague or unstructured sensory stimuli are combined with vivid imagination to form detailed but illusory perceptions. Unlike other illusions, pareidolic illusions tend to become **more elaborate under focused attention**. More common in children. **Example**: Seeing faces or animals in wood grain or rock formations.

B. Hallucinations

Hallucinations are vivid, false perceptions that occur in the absence of a corresponding external stimulus. They possess the full force and impact of real sensory experiences, emerging spontaneously beyond the individual's conscious control.

Definitions

- **Jaspers**: Hallucinations are not distortions of normal perceptions but entirely novel perceptual experiences that occur alongside real sensory input.
- **Slade**: Hallucinations are percept-like experiences that lack an external stimulus, feel fully real, and are involuntary and difficult to control.
- **Cutting**: Hallucinations are "perceptions without an object" – the appearance of something without a corresponding real-world event.
- **Ball**: A sensory experience which occurs in the absence of corresponding external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ, has a sufficient sense of reality to resemble a veridical perception, and occurs in the awake state.

Key Features (Rasmussen)

Rasmussen emphasised several features that distinguish hallucinations from other mental phenomena:

- **Experienced as real sensations** – not merely internal thoughts
- **Behavioural relevance** – carry a sense of importance for emotions and potential actions
- **Objectivity** – possess a feeling of objective reality
- **Persistence** – feel as though they exist independently of the individual's will
- **Involuntariness** – difficult to control or dismiss through conscious effort
- **Alien origin** – often imbued with a sense of being generated externally

Aetiology of Hallucinations

1. Neurotransmitter Hypothesis

- **Dopamine (DA)**: Excessive dopamine in the mesolimbic pathway is strongly linked to hallucinations, particularly in schizophrenia.
- **Acetylcholine (ACh)**: Cholinergic dysfunction is implicated in hallucinations in Alzheimer's disease and Lewy body dementia.
- **Serotonin (5-HT)**: Hallucinogenic drugs (e.g., LSD, psilocybin) act primarily via 5-HT2A receptors. Hallucinations can also be a side effect of SSRIs.
- **Glutamate (Glu)**: Glutamate antagonists (e.g., ketamine, PCP) induce hallucinations, suggesting a role for NMDA receptor hypofunction.
- **GABA**: Reduced GABA-A binding is associated with increased intensity of hallucinations.

2. Sensory Modality Deprivation

When normal sensory input is blocked or impaired, past perceptions or memories may resurface as hallucinations. Sensory deprivation can contribute to delirium (e.g., after cataract surgery – **"black patch disease"**, where vivid visual hallucinations occur after eye patching).

3. Disorders of Peripheral Sense Organs

Charles Bonnet syndrome is characterised by complex visual hallucinations in individuals with significant vision loss, particularly those who have lost vision later in life. The hallucinations are detailed and realistic (people, animals, landscapes), occur in clear consciousness, and the individual is aware they are not real. Named after the Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet, who first described the phenomenon in his grandfather in 1760.

Modalities of Hallucination

Auditory Hallucinations (Phonemes)

- **Elementary and unformed**: Simple sounds – noises, bells, whispers, undifferentiated voices. Seen in organic conditions and severe depression.
- **Organised**: Formed music or fully-formed voices, characteristic of schizophrenia.
- **Schneider's first-rank symptoms**: Hearing thoughts spoken aloud; voices providing running commentary; voices conversing in third person.

Visual Hallucinations

- Range from simple flashes of light (elementary) to complex scenes with people or objects.

- **Delirium tremens**: Characterised by gross perceptual changes including **Lilliputian hallucinations** (tiny figures/objects) and visions of small animals and insects.
- Complex visual hallucinations are less typical of schizophrenia (their presence should prompt consideration of organic causes).

Olfactory Hallucinations (Phantosmia)

Hallucinations of smell, occurring in schizophrenia, organic states, or depressive psychosis. Often carry a strong emotional association. The **Padre Pio phenomenon** describes reports of smelling roses associated with saints in religious individuals.

Gustatory Hallucinations (Phantageusia)

Hallucinations of taste, occurring in schizophrenia and acute organic states. Often co-occur with olfactory hallucinations. May occur in temporal lobe epilepsy or as side effects of medications (e.g., lithium carbonate, disulfiram).

Tactile (Somatic) Hallucinations

- **Superficial**: thermic (heat/cold), haptic (touch), hygric (perception of fluid), paraesthetic ("pins and needles")
- **Kinaesthetic**: Hallucinations of muscle or joint movement (limbs twisted, muscles squeezed). Seen in benzodiazepine/alcohol withdrawal and delirium tremens.
- **Visceral (deep sensation)**: Often reported in chronic schizophrenia (organs being ripped out, internal battles).
- **Formication**: Sensation of insects crawling on/under the skin. Associated with cocaine withdrawal and delusional parasitosis (**Ekbom syndrome**, described by Ekbom in 1938; reviewed by Freudenmann and Lepping).

Special Types of Hallucination

- **Hypnagogic hallucinations**: Occur while falling asleep; often involve a sense of falling. Associated with narcolepsy.
- **Hypnopompic hallucinations**: Occur while waking up. May involve shadowy figures that dissipate with full alertness.
- **Imperative (command) hallucinations**: Instructions given to the patient, who may or may not feel compelled to obey. Major risk assessment consideration.
- **Thought echo / Sonorisation (Gedankenlautwerden)**: Hearing one's own thoughts spoken aloud — a Schneiderian first-rank symptom.
- **Sexual hallucinations**: Tactile hallucinations centred on the genital area. Can occur in delusional disorders.
- **Formication**: Sensation of insects crawling over the skin. Classic in cocaine withdrawal.

- **Delusional zoopathy (internal)**: False perception of animals inside the body.
- **Delusional zoopathy (external)**: False perception of animals crawling on the body surface.
- **Autoscopy**: Seeing oneself in external space, with awareness that it is one's own image. Associated with parietal and temporal lobe lesions.
- **Negative autoscopy**: Inability to see one's image in a mirror. Described in depersonalisation disorder.
- **Internal autoscopy**: Hallucination of seeing one's internal organs.
- **Experiential hallucinations**: Vivid flashback-like hallucinations triggered by epileptic activity, particularly temporal lobe epilepsy. First described by Penfield during cortical stimulation experiments.
- **Sense of presence (Anwesenheit)**: Feeling that someone is present despite being alone. May result from misperceptions of bodily signals or frontoparietal lesions (Brodmann area 7). Occurs in healthy individuals (bereavement, extreme isolation), psychiatric disorders (schizophrenia, Borderline Personality Disorder), and organic states.
- **Extracampine hallucinations**: Hallucinations experienced beyond the limits of the sensory field (e.g., seeing someone behind one's head). Occur in schizophrenia, epilepsy, and organic states.
- **Reflex hallucinations**: A stimulus in one sensory modality triggers a hallucination in another (analogous to synaesthesia). Can occur under influence of LSD.
- **Functional hallucinations**: An external stimulus triggers a hallucination in the same sensory modality – the stimulus is still perceived alongside the hallucination. Classic example: hearing voices every time a tap runs. Seen in chronic schizophrenia.

Body Image Distortions

- **Hyperschemazia**: Exaggeration of body parts. Seen in hypochondriasis, depersonalisation, conversion disorder, and anorexia nervosa.
- **Aschemazia**: Perception of body parts as absent.
- **Paraschemazia**: Distortion of body image (twisted, separated from the body).
- **Hemiasomatognosia**: Unilateral loss of body awareness, typically following stroke affecting the non-dominant parietal lobe.

C. Pseudohallucinations

Pseudohallucinations are perceptual experiences that share some features with true hallucinations but occur within **internal, subjective mental space** rather than being projected into external reality. They are figurative in nature, lack the full vividness and substantiality of true hallucinations, and the individual may retain some insight and voluntary control over the experience.

Pseudohallucinations vs True Hallucinations

Feature	Pseudohallucinations	True Hallucinations
Location	Inner subjective space	Perceived as external, objective reality

Feature	Pseudohallucinations	True Hallucinations
Vividness	Less vivid and substantial	Vivid, detailed, and fully convincing
Control	Some voluntary control possible	Typically outside the individual's control
Insight	Person may recognise experience as unreal	Impaired insight, belief in reality of hallucination

Diagnostic significance: Unlike true hallucinations, pseudohallucinations do not necessarily indicate psychopathology. They can occur in:

- Non-psychotic psychiatric disorders
- Grief reactions (hearing the deceased's voice — extremely common and not pathological)
- Intense stress and sleep deprivation
- Sensory deprivation
- Substance use
- Neurological conditions

A clinically important teaching point: the distinction between true hallucinations and pseudohallucinations is not always clear-cut. Hare (1973) and Sedman (1966) both cautioned that the dichotomy may be overly rigid. In clinical practice, what matters most is the **impact on functioning**, the **degree of distress**, and the **patient's relationship to the experience** — not simply whether it is "true" or "pseudo".

Related Topics

See: Perception
See: Thought and Its Disorders
See: The Self and Its Disorders
See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders
See: Schizophrenia and Psychosis

Thought

Thought is the cognitive rearrangement of information from the environment and symbols stored in long-term memory.



Definitions

Thought can be defined as the covert symbolic responses to stimuli that are either intrinsic (arising from within) or extrinsic (arising from the environment). It is considered to mediate between inner activity and external stimuli.

More precisely, thought refers to the **cognitive rearrangement** or manipulation of both information from the environment and symbols stored in long-term memory. It is the form of **information processing** that occurs during the interval between a stimulus event and the response to it.

In clinical psychiatry, the assessment of thought is central to the **mental state examination (MSE)**. Disorders of thought are broadly divided into disorders of **form** (how a person thinks) and disorders of **content** (what a person thinks) — a distinction rooted in Jaspers' phenomenological tradition.

Normal Thinking

Schneider's Three Features of Healthy Thinking

Carl Schneider proposed that healthy, normal thinking is characterised by three features — often remembered by the mnemonic **COC**:

- **Constancy**: A completed thought maintains its internal consistency and remains stable until intentionally replaced by a new thought process. The mind does not drift mid-thought or get easily sidetracked by unrelated ideas.
- **Organisation**: Thoughts follow a logical structure and clear relationships. Ideas are arranged sequentially and do not become jumbled or confused.
- **Continuity**: The flow of thought is smooth and uninterrupted. While new ideas or observations may emerge, they are integrated into the current train of thought without causing abrupt disruptions or derailments.

When any of these three features is disrupted, the result is a **formal thought disorder** — a disturbance in the form rather than the content of thinking. This framework remains clinically useful for identifying and categorising thought abnormalities during the MSE.

Jaspers' Model of Associations

Karl Jaspers described a model of thinking that focuses on how thoughts flow and connect with one another, shaping psychological experiences. His key concepts were:

- **Uninterrupted Sequence**: Thoughts progress in a continuous stream, with one thought naturally leading to or triggering associated ideas.
- **Associations**: Each thought acts as a hub, potentially giving rise to multiple related thoughts or mental events (memories, emotions, perceptions).
- **Constellation**: The vast network of potential associations that can emerge from a single thought — like a cluster of linked ideas surrounding a central concept.

- **Determining Tendency**: The underlying drive that gives the thought process its directionality. It is the invisible force guiding thoughts towards specific themes or conclusions, even when many potential associations are available.

Jaspers' model is particularly helpful in understanding how formal thought disorder arises: in conditions like schizophrenia, the **determining tendency** may be weakened or lost, leading to loose associations, tangentiality, or derailment.

Types of Normal Thinking

Rational (Conceptual) Thinking

Rational thinking encompasses **problem solving** and **reasoning** – the two pillars of goal-directed cognitive activity.

- **Problem solving** is defined as the set of cognitive processes applied to reach a goal when obstacles must be overcome.
- **Reasoning** is the cognitive process used to make inferences from existing knowledge and to draw conclusions.

Subtypes of rational thinking include:

- **Analogical thinking**: Drawing parallels between two different domains to solve problems (e.g., using the structure of the solar system to understand atomic structure).
- **Inductive reasoning**: Moving from specific observations to broader generalisations (e.g., noticing that every patient with this presentation improved on lithium, then concluding lithium may be effective for the condition).
- **Deductive reasoning**: Moving from general principles to specific conclusions (e.g., if all antipsychotics block D2 receptors, and clozapine is an antipsychotic, then clozapine blocks D2 receptors).

Example: A student uses mathematical formulae (reasoning) to solve a physics problem (problem-solving).

Fantasy Thinking

Fantasy thinking involves creating scenarios or narratives that are not grounded in immediate reality. As Sims notes, fantasy may be of short duration – such as the daydream before going to sleep – or it may become an established way of life.

Fantasy serves important adaptive functions:

- **Mental preparation**: Imagining how one will behave or speak in future situations (e.g., rehearsing a conversation before a job interview).
- **Self-evaluation**: Mentally replaying past events to critique performance and assess whether one could have done better.

When fantasy thinking becomes maladaptive, it can manifest as:

- **Maladaptive daydreaming** (acting out fantasy): Extensive, immersive daydreaming that interferes with daily functioning.
- **Pseudologia fantastica** (pathological lying): Habitual telling of elaborate, often believable falsehoods that the individual may partially believe themselves. First described by Anton Delbrück in 1891, it is associated with personality disorders and factitious presentations.
- **Hysterical conversion** (somatic dissociative phenomenon): Physical symptoms arising from unconscious fantasy processes.
- **Delusion-like ideas** in affective psychosis: Fantastical beliefs that are mood-congruent and arise in the context of severe mood disturbance.
- **Dissociation**: A disruption in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception, often with a fantasy-like quality.

Imaginative Thinking

Imaginative thinking covers psychological states such as fantasy, the generation of novel ideas, and the creative outputs that constitute art or scientific discoveries. Sims identifies at least three components:

- **Mental imagery**: The ability to create image-based mental representations of the world – essentially, "seeing" things in the mind's eye.
- **Counterfactual thinking**: The capacity to disengage from reality in order to think of events and experiences that have not occurred and may never occur ("what if\..." scenarios).
- **Symbolic representation**: The use of concepts or images to represent real-world objects or entities. This is the basis of language, art, and mathematics.

Example: An artist develops sketches for a new sculpture (mental imagery), explores "what if" scenarios to refine the concept (counterfactual thinking), and utilises art as a language to convey a message (symbolic representation).

A related concept is **maternal reverie**, described by Wilfred Bion and elaborated by Winnicott – the mother's capacity for imaginative, receptive attunement to her infant's emotional states. Bion conceptualised this as the mother's ability to "contain" the infant's unprocessed experiences (beta elements) and return them in a digestible form (alpha elements). This concept has become foundational in psychoanalytic thinking about early development and the origins of the capacity to think.

Autistic Thinking

CLINICAL PEARL

Bleuler's 'autism' in schizophrenia refers to withdrawal into a private inner world governed by idiosyncratic logic – it has nothing to do with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This is one of the most common sources of confusion for trainees.

Autistic thinking, first described by Eugen Bleuler in the context of schizophrenia, refers to a form of thought that is dominated by **internal, private, idiosyncratic logic** rather than shared, consensual reality. The individual's thinking is governed by personal wishes, fantasies, and internal preoccupations rather than

external facts.

Bleuler considered autistic thinking one of the fundamental symptoms of schizophrenia (the "Four A's": *Associations, Affect, Ambivalence, Autism*). It is distinct from the modern diagnostic concept of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), although both involve a degree of withdrawal from shared social reality.

In clinical practice, autistic thinking may be observed in patients whose delusions or thought content appears internally coherent to them but makes no reference to — or is frankly contradicted by — the external world.

Decision Making

FUN FACT

Daniel Kahneman won the Nobel Prize in Economics (2002) despite never having taken an economics course. His work with Amos Tversky on cognitive biases fundamentally changed how we understand human reasoning — and clinical decision-making in medicine.

Decision making is the cognitive process of selecting a course of action from multiple alternatives. In psychiatry, it is relevant both as a normal cognitive function and as a domain that is impaired in various disorders (e.g., mania, frontal lobe lesions, gambling disorder).

Kahneman's Dual-Process Theory

Daniel Kahneman, Nobel laureate in Economics (2002), proposed a highly influential model of human decision making in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). He described two systems:

- **System 1 (Fast Thinking)**: Automatic, intuitive, effortless, and emotion-driven. Operates below conscious awareness. Responsible for snap judgements, pattern recognition, and heuristic-based decisions. Prone to cognitive biases.
- **System 2 (Slow Thinking)**: Deliberate, analytical, effortful, and logical. Engages conscious attention. Used for complex reasoning, calculations, and decisions that require weighing evidence.

Kahneman demonstrated that most everyday decisions are made by System 1, which is efficient but vulnerable to systematic errors (**cognitive biases**). Examples of clinically relevant biases include:

- **Anchoring bias**: Over-relying on the first piece of information encountered (e.g., the initial diagnosis becomes "stuck").
- **Availability heuristic**: Judging likelihood based on how easily examples come to mind (e.g., over-diagnosing conditions one has recently seen).
- **Confirmation bias**: Seeking information that confirms pre-existing beliefs while ignoring disconfirming evidence.

This model is directly relevant to clinical reasoning in psychiatry — understanding how clinicians themselves think helps mitigate diagnostic error.

CHAPTER 05 · NAVIGATION MAP

Related Topics

Continue by concept. Every destination below is live in the screen edition.

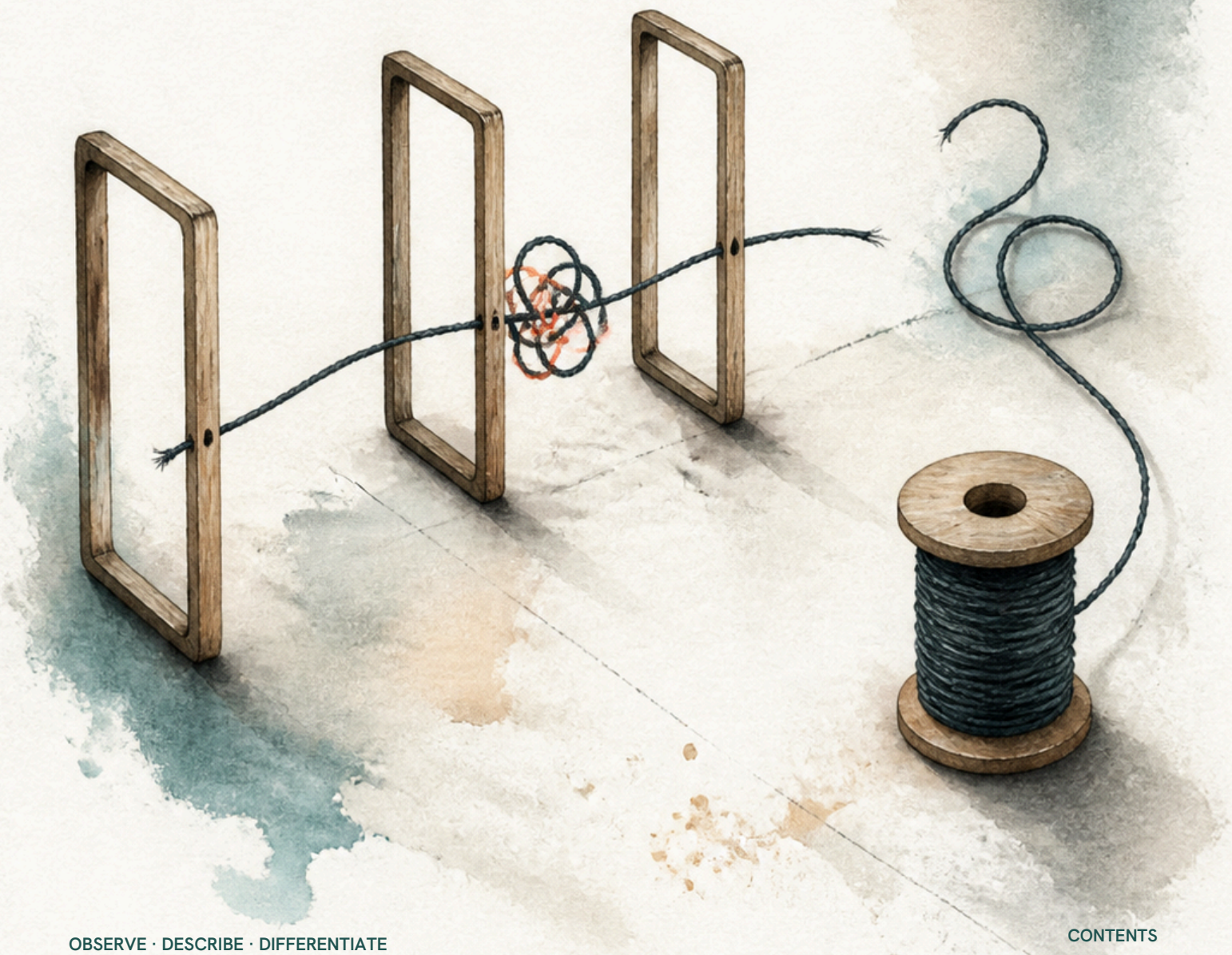
See: Thought and Its Disorders
See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Speech and Language
See: Perception and Its Disorders

05

CHAPTER 06

Thought and Its Disorders

Mental diseases are brain diseases.



OBSERVE · DESCRIBE · DIFFERENTIATE

CONTENTS

Classification of Disorders of Thought

Disorders of thought in psychiatry are broadly classified into four categories:

- **A. Disorders of Form (Structure)** – disturbances in the way thoughts are connected and organised (e.g., derailment, loosening of associations, incoherence)
- **B. Disorders of Stream (Flow)** – disturbances in the tempo and continuity of thinking (e.g., pressure of speech, poverty of thought, perseveration, thought blocking)
- **C. Disorders of Possession** – disturbances in the sense of ownership of one's thoughts (e.g., thought insertion, thought withdrawal, thought broadcasting, obsessions)
- **D. Disorders of Content** – disturbances in what is believed or thought about (e.g., delusions, overvalued ideas)

This classification, rooted in the phenomenological tradition of Jaspers and Fish, remains the standard framework used in the mental state examination (MSE) and descriptive psychopathology.

Historical Account

The understanding of thought disorders has evolved across centuries, shaped by philosophical inquiry, clinical observation, and neuroscience. The following figures made foundational contributions:

Jean-Etienne Dominique Esquirol (1772–1840)

Developed Pinel's classification further, emphasising **delusions as distinct pathological phenomena**, separate from hallucinations. Defined **monomania**, characterised by delusions restricted to a specific theme with otherwise preserved functioning – contributing to the later understanding of delusional disorder and systematised delusions.

James Cowles Prichard (1786–1848)

Introduced the term **"moral insanity"**, reflecting abnormalities in behaviour and reasoning without overt psychosis. Acknowledged disturbances in reasoning, judgement, and thinking, forming an early bridge toward recognising subtle thought content abnormalities in personality and affective conditions.

Joseph Guislain (1797–1860)

Proposed a comprehensive classification system where disorders of thought, affect, and will were interrelated. Emphasised **disorganisation of thought processes as a core element of psychotic states**, using the term *delirium* to refer to disordered thinking and perception.

Wilhelm Griesinger (1817–1868)

Strong proponent of biological psychiatry, asserting that all mental symptoms – including thought disturbances – have a basis in brain pathology. His famous dictum *"Geisteskrankheiten sind Gehirnkrankheiten"* (mental diseases are brain diseases) positioned disorders of thought as central in psychotic illness.

Jules Seglas (1856–1939)

Major contributor to the clinical phenomenology of disorders of thought and language. Coined and systematised terms like **logorrhoea**, **mutism**, **perseveration**, and **verbigeration**, which are still used in psychopathological description today. Critically differentiated disorders of thought content (delusions) from disorders of form (loosening of associations, derailment).

Emil Kraepelin (1856–1926)

Pioneered the clinical nosology separating **dementia praecox** (schizophrenia spectrum) from **manic-depressive illness**, with disorders of thought form playing a central role. Described **loosening of associations** as a hallmark of dementia praecox – a fundamental disturbance of logical connections leading to disorganised, fragmented speech. Identified paralogical thinking, neologisms, and thought blocking as central features. His differentiation of affective psychoses (with preserved thought form) from schizophrenic psychoses (with formal thought disorder) remains foundational.

John Locke (1632–1704)

Provided early philosophical groundwork in recognising errors in reasoning and judgement. Argued that ideas can become disconnected from external reality, leading to irrational thought patterns – an early conceptualisation parallel to delusions and fixed false beliefs.

Karl Kleist (1879–1960)

Extended Kraepelin's ideas with precise clinical descriptions of formal thought disorders. Differentiated **conceptual fragmentation** (loosening of associations) from **syntactic and grammatical abnormalities**, recognising the multi-layered nature of disturbances in thought and speech.

Paul Eugen Bleuler (1857–1939)

Introduced the term **"schizophrenia"**, signifying a splitting or fragmentation of psychic functions. Identified the **four fundamental symptoms (the Four A's)**: Affectivity disturbance, Autism, Ambivalence, and **Association disturbance** (core to thought disorder). Placed loosening of associations as the primary characteristic of schizophrenia. Described neologisms, thought blocking, perseveration, and autistic thinking.

A useful teaching point: Bleuler's "splitting" refers not to split personality (a common misconception) but to the dissociation between thought, emotion, and behaviour – the internal fragmentation of psychic functions.

Kurt Goldstein (1878–1965)

Studied brain-injured patients and described **concrete thinking** – the inability to engage in abstract, flexible, and generalised thought. Noted that concrete thinking is prevalent in schizophrenia, reinforcing the idea that patients struggle with abstraction and generalisation, leading to literal interpretations and difficulty handling metaphors.

Norman Cameron (1905–1963)

Focused on cognitive distortions and peculiar thought patterns in schizophrenia, particularly **autistic thinking** and **pseudologic thinking**, where patients construct elaborate yet disconnected belief systems.

Frank Fish (1917–1971) and Max Hamilton (1912–1988)

Frank Fish extensively described formal thought disorders, providing a systematic classification including derailment, tangentiality, circumstantiality, perseveration, and thought blocking – becoming the clinical standard for descriptive psychopathology. Max Hamilton developed rating scales that incorporated assessment of psychotic symptoms, contributing to quantitative assessment of disordered thinking in clinical trials.

Nancy Andreasen (b. 1938)

Brought modern empirical and structured assessment methods to formal thought disorder. Developed the **Scale for the Assessment of Thought, Language, and Communication (TLC)**, providing operational definitions of thought disorder symptoms. Differentiated **positive formal thought disorders** (e.g., derailment, tangentiality, incoherence) from **negative thought disorders** (e.g., poverty of speech, poverty of content). Contributed significantly to neurobiological studies correlating formal thought disorder with brain imaging and cognitive deficits in schizophrenia.

A. Disorders of Form (Structure) of Thinking

Disorders of form affect the **way** thoughts are connected and organised – the structure and logic of the thinking process itself, independent of what is being thought about. These are identified primarily through the patient's speech.

Derailment

TEACHING TIP

The scenic route analogy: Circumstantiality = scenic route (eventually arrives). Tangentiality = wrong highway (never arrives). Derailment = car goes off-road entirely (no route at all). Flight of ideas = derailment + speed.

Definition (TLC): *"A pattern of spontaneous speech in which the ideas slip off the track onto another one which is clearly but obliquely related, or onto one which is completely unrelated."*

Derailment is characterised by a disruption in the logical flow of ideas, where the patient's speech suddenly shifts from one idea to another that is only marginally related or entirely unrelated. Unlike flight of ideas (which involves rapid derailments within pressured speech), derailment does not necessarily include speeded speech.

Example (Fish): *"I went to buy some bread at the bakery. The bakery is owned by Mr. Smith. Smith is a common name. I like the colour green. Green is the colour of grass. The grass is wet because of the rain. Rain makes me think of umbrellas and people in New York who always seem to be in a hurry."*

Substitution

Definition (TLC): *"One major thought or its part is substituted by a subsidiary thought."* In substitution, an important or central idea is replaced by a lesser or subsidiary thought, leading the discourse away from the main theme. The substitution may appear related but is actually secondary or peripheral, interrupting the logical train of thought.

Example (Fish): Patient asked about their job says: *"My job? Well, the building I work in is very tall. I always take the lift to the top floor because the stairs are tiring."*

Desultory Thinking and Omission

Desultory Thinking

In desultory thinking, the flow of speech is interrupted by sudden, unrelated but otherwise appropriate thoughts. Speech remains grammatically intact. The main thread is loosened but not lost.

Example: *"I was reading a book about history – oh, I forgot to feed the cat today. The book was very interesting and covered the Roman Empire."*

Omission

In omission, the continuity is not just loosened but actually broken. The original intention is lost, creating an obvious gap. The patient may pause or shift entirely, unable to resume the intended thought.

Example: *"I was telling you about\... I forgot. Anyway, did you see the match last night?"*

Drivelling

Definition (Fish): *"The patient has a preliminary outline of a complicated thought with all its necessary particulars, but loses preliminary organisation of the thought, so that all the constituent parts get muddled together."*

In drivelling thinking, the patient seems to possess a complex idea, but their speech lacks organised structure, leading to a confused, muddled mixture of different parts. Unlike incoherence (which is total breakdown), drivelling retains some recognisable parts, but the organisation is chaotic.

Example: *"Well, the party had lights, you know, people were wearing clothes, and the music – oh, the speakers were large – but the cake, the taste of chocolate, oh the candles were there."*

Fusion

Definition (Fish): *"There is some preservation of the normal chain of associations, but there is a bringing together of heterogeneous elements. These form links that cannot be seen as a logical progression."*

In fusion, disparate, unrelated ideas are fused together in a way that disrupts logical progression. The impression is of inappropriate or bizarre mixing of unrelated contents.

Example: *"The sun is shining, which means the stock market is up, and that is why the refrigerator needs fixing."*

Loosening of Associations

In loosening of associations, the logical connections between thoughts are weakened, disrupted, or completely lost. Speech becomes vague, diffuse, and without clear direction. Ideas may be connected by chance, superficial similarity, or no connection at all.

Example: *"My family is very tall. I was born on a Tuesday. The sky is blue, but you can't always see the stars when the soup is hot."*

Clang Association

Speech is governed more by the **sound** of words – such as rhyme, alliteration, or punning – rather than by meaning. The meaning is disregarded in favour of phonetic similarity.

Example (Sims): *"The train brain gain pain rain plain insane."*

Incoherence (Word Salad)

The most severe form of thought disorder, where speech becomes completely incomprehensible. Even grammatical structures are disrupted. The listener cannot make sense of the words.

Example: *"Blue under justice jumping foxes macaroni clarify song justice blue jumping."*

Neologism

FUN FACT

The word 'schizophrenia' is itself a neologism – coined by Bleuler in 1911 from Greek schizein ('to split') and phrēn ('mind'). Ironically, this neologism has caused more confusion than any patient's private vocabulary, given how often it is misunderstood as 'split personality.'

The creation of new words which have idiosyncratic meanings understood only by the patient. Often observed in schizophrenia.

Example (Sims): *"I need to fix my flibberblats because the snorlog is making them snizzle."*

Quick Revision: Disorders of Form

Disorder	Definition	Key Feature
Derailment	Ideas slip off track to loosely or unrelated topics	Thought train shifts abruptly
Flight of Ideas	Rapid derailment within pressured speech	Speed + derailment combined
Tangentiality	Irrelevant answer to a question; never returns	Sharp turn, no return
Substitution	Major thought replaced by a subsidiary one	Central idea lost to peripheral detail
Desultory Thinking	Random appropriate ideas intrude; core thread loosened	Intrusions but grammar intact
Omission	Intention itself interrupted; gap in thought	Complete break, not just loosening
Drivelling	Complex thought outline muddled together	Recognisable parts in chaotic order
Fusion	Heterogeneous elements fused illogically	Bizarre mixing despite some continuity
Loosening of Associations	Logical connections between ideas weakened or lost	Vague, diffuse, directionless
Clang Association	Speech governed by sound rather than meaning	Rhyming/alliteration dominates
Incoherence (Word Salad)	Complete breakdown of meaning	No grammar, syntax, or logic
Neologism	Invented words with private meanings	Patient-specific vocabulary

Tangentiality vs Circumstantiality

Both are forms of disorganised thought processes, but they differ in severity, goal-directedness, and the ability to eventually address the topic.

Feature	Tangentiality	Circumstantiality
Definition	Sharp deviation; speaker introduces irrelevant topics and fails to return	Excessive unnecessary detail; speaker eventually answers the question
Thought Process	Sharp turn to unrelated topics – loss of goal-directedness	Circuitous path with digressions but retains goal-directedness

Feature	Tangentiality	Circumstantiality
Return to Topic	Original topic completely abandoned	Speaker circles back after lengthy explanation
Severity	Greater disorganisation; more indicative of formal thought disorder	Milder disorganisation; more commonly seen in mania or OC traits
Analogy	Wrong highway – never gets back on track	Scenic route – eventually reaches destination
Associated Disorders	Schizophrenia, dementia, severe thought disorganisation	Mania, obsessive-compulsive personality traits, normal conversation

Tangentiality vs Derailment

Feature	Tangentiality	Derailment
Definition	Response starts logically but becomes irrelevant or oblique	Breakdown in logical connections; abrupt shifts to unrelated topics
Relation to Topic	Retains some connection but fails to address directly	No logical connection; thoughts become disconnected
Type of Disruption	Content-related disorder of thought	Form-related disorder of thought
Severity	Less severe; train of thought somewhat intact	More severe; train of thought fragmented
Associated Disorders	Schizophrenia with mild disorganisation	Schizophrenia with severe formal thought disorder

B. Disorders of Stream (Flow) of Thought

Disorders of Thought Tempo

Pressure of Speech / Flight of Ideas

In flight of ideas, thoughts follow each other rapidly; there is no general direction of thinking, and the connections between successive thoughts appear to be due to chance factors which can usually be understood (Fish). Pressure of speech refers to the feeling of urgency to talk – an unstoppable flow where simple questions prompt long-winded answers.

Features of pressure of speech include: exceeding 150 words per minute, incomplete ideas as new ones override current thought, intense volume and emphasis, and talking without social cues or even ignoring the absence of listeners.

Can be seen in:

- Mania – typically

- Schizophrenia – when the patient is excited
- Organic states – intoxication, lesions of the hypothalamus

Poverty of Thought

Slowing down of the thinking process which hampers formation of associations and may prevent the patient from reaching the original goal of thought. Poverty of speech (alogia) refers to a reduction in the amount or content of spoken language, and is classified as a negative symptom of schizophrenia.

Circumstantiality

Circumstantiality occurs when thinking proceeds slowly with many unnecessary and trivial details, but finally the point is reached. The goal of thinking is never completely lost – thinking proceeds towards it by an intricate and convoluted path (Fish).

Disorders of Thought Continuity

Perseveration

Perseveration occurs when mental operations persist beyond the point at which they are relevant, thus preventing the progress of thinking. It can manifest as compulsive repetition of words or phrases, impairment of switching between topics, or ideational perseveration where the same theme dominates despite changing context.

Example (Fish): A patient asked the name of the previous Prime Minister replies "Manmohan Singh". On being asked the name of the present Prime Minister, he again replies "Manmohan Singh".

NOTE

Update note: The current Prime Minister of India is Narendra Modi (since 2014). Manmohan Singh served as PM from 2004–2014. This example remains clinically illustrative of perseveration.

Thought Blocking

Thought blocking occurs when there is a sudden arrest of the train of thought, leaving a "blank". An entirely new thought may then begin (Fish). The patient typically describes the experience as their mind going suddenly empty. When thought blocking is attributed to an external agency removing thoughts, it becomes **thought withdrawal** – a Schneiderian first-rank symptom.

C. Disorders of Possession

The Concept of 'Myness'

Jaspers described the fundamental quality of normal thought as having a sense of **"myness"** – the inherent conviction that one's thoughts belong to oneself. This sense of ownership over one's mental contents is part of what Jaspers termed the **ego boundary**. When this boundary is disrupted, the individual experiences thoughts as alien, imposed, or accessible to others.

Bortolotti and Broome identified several conditions for normal thought ownership: the spatial condition (thoughts are experienced as located within the self), the introspective condition (one can access one's own thoughts), and the self-ascription condition (thoughts are attributed to oneself as their author).

Thought Alienation

Thought alienation refers to a disturbing feeling that one's own thoughts and internal experiences are not truly one's own. The major forms are:

- **Thought Insertion**: The belief that external forces or people are placing thoughts into one's mind. The patient distinguishes these from their own thoughts.
- **Thought Withdrawal**: The sensation that thoughts are being removed from the mind by an alien force, often experienced as sudden gaps in thinking.
- **Thought Broadcasting**: The conviction that others can hear or access one's thoughts as one is thinking them. Also known as *Gedankenlautwerden* or *echo de la pensee*.

All three are classified as Schneider's first-rank symptoms and are considered strong indicators of schizophrenia, though they are not pathognomonic.

Obsessions and Compulsions

An **obsession** (also termed a rumination) is a thought that persists and dominates an individual's thinking despite the individual's awareness that the thought is either entirely without purpose or has persisted beyond the point of relevance. **Compulsions** are obsessional motor acts – they may result from an obsessional impulse leading directly to action, or be mediated by an obsessional thought (e.g., obsessional fear of contamination leading to compulsive washing) (Fish).

Jaspers' Five Essential Characteristics of Obsessions

- The thought is experienced as **irresistible**
- It is **recognised as one's own** (ego-syntonic in origin but ego-dystonic in character)
- It is **resisted** by the individual
- It is recognised as **senseless or irrational**
- It causes marked **distress or anxiety**

Historical Aspects

- **Jean Esquirol** – described volitional monomania (*delire partiel*)
- **Benedict Augustin Morel** – conceptualised obsessions as a disorder of emotion (*delire emotif*)
- **Pierre Janet** – proposed three stages of development of obsessions
- **Sigmund Freud** – described the Rat Man case as a paradigm for understanding Obsessive- Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Forms of Obsessions

- **Obsessive doubts** – no satisfaction from an act done, therefore re-checks
- **Obsessive thinking** – worrying about a future event
- **Obsessive fears** – fear of losing control
- **Obsessive images** – intrusive visual imagery
- **Obsessive impulses** – urge to perform an act (usually aggressive or inappropriate)

Forms of Compulsions

- **Yielding compulsions** – the individual gives in to the obsessional urge
- **Controlling compulsions** – the individual performs an act to counteract or neutralise the obsession
- **Autonomous compulsions** – motor acts performed without a clear preceding obsessional thought
- **Mental compulsions** – covert rituals performed mentally (e.g., counting, praying silently)

D. Disorders of Content

Forms of Belief

Jaspers outlined a spectrum of belief types ranging from normal to pathological. Understanding this spectrum is essential for distinguishing delusions from overvalued ideas, preoccupations, and normal convictions.

Overvalued Ideas

An overvalued idea is a thought which takes precedence over all other thoughts and maintains this for a prolonged period (Fish). It is an acceptable, comprehensible idea pursued beyond the bounds of reason (Sims). McKenna defined it as a solitary abnormal belief that is neither delusional nor obsessional but preoccupying to the extent of dominating the sufferer's life.

Unlike delusions, the person usually retains some awareness that the belief might not be entirely accurate. Unlike obsessions, overvalued ideas lack the intrusive, unwanted, ego-dystonic quality. They can be rooted in personality traits, cultural norms, or psychological stress.

Examples: Fixation on perceived injustice leading to relentless legal action; extreme political, religious, or health-related beliefs that dominate all aspects of life.

Delusions

A delusion is a **false, unshakeable belief** that is out of keeping with the patient's educational, cultural, and social background; it is held with extraordinary conviction and subjective certainty and clearly arises from a morbid state of mind (Sims).

True delusions are the result of a **primary delusional experience** that cannot be deduced from any other morbid phenomenon, while delusion-like ideas are secondary and can be understandably derived from some other morbid psychological phenomenon.

Primary Delusions (Autochthonous Delusions)

A new, distorted meaning arises seemingly out of nowhere and becomes firmly attached to an experience. This meaning is not derived from pre-existing thoughts, emotions, or other mental states. Types include:

- **Delusional Mood (Atmosphere)**: A pervasive sense that something is fundamentally different or wrong in the world – often a precursor to other primary delusions.
- **Sudden Delusional Idea (Autochthonous Delusion)**: A fully formed delusional belief erupts into the mind – it feels like sudden revelation rather than reasoned conclusion.
- **Delusional Perception**: An everyday object or event is imbued with a new, highly personalised, self-referential meaning that feels profound but illogical. This is a Schneiderian first-rank symptom.

Secondary Delusions

The delusional belief emerges as an attempt to explain or make sense of other psychological experiences – hallucinations, intense moods, or traumatic events. While false, secondary delusions may seem more understandable in context. **Example**: A person experiencing auditory hallucinations of voices criticising them develops the delusion that they are being stalked.

Delusional Memory

A retrospective falsification in which a patient "remembers" an event that never occurred, or reinterprets a real past event with delusional significance. Buchanan discussed whether delusional memories constitute first-rank symptoms.

Theories of Delusion Formation

Psychodynamic Theories

Freud: Delusions are seen as a defence mechanism against unconscious, repressed impulses. Denial, contradiction, and projection allow the person to avoid confronting unacceptable desires.

Phenomenological and Cognitive Theories

- **Distortions of Experience (Binswanger, Minkowski)**: Delusions arise from underlying changes in how one experiences space, time, and a sense of control.
- **Abnormal Perception and Reasoning (Maher)**: Delusions begin with a distorted perception; the person searches for a reason behind the unusual experience, and the delusional explanation is maintained like any strong belief.

Faulty Logic (von Domarus)

Delusions involve errors in reasoning where the person assumes identity based on shared characteristics, leading to unfounded conclusions (*paralogical thinking*).

Social and Systemic Theories

- **Learning Theory**: Delusions as an extreme form of avoidance, especially of anxiety-triggering social interactions.
- **Luhmann's Systems Theory**: Breakdown in communication between internal mental processes and external information, leading to detachment and self-fulfilling delusional beliefs.

Neuro-Computational Model

Dysregulation of dopamine and noradrenaline contributes to anxiety, suspicion, and disrupted neural signalling. Acute delusions arise from a surge in neuromodulators causing unusual experiences. Chronic delusions are maintained by long-term changes in brain plasticity.

Conrad's Stages of Delusion Formation

Klaus Conrad described a staged progression of delusion development in early schizophrenia:

- **Trema (Stage Fright)** – the prodromal phase: an undefinable change in the patient's environment; the world seems strange, unreal, and charged with meaning; heightened attention to insignificant details.
- **Apophany (Delusional Revelation)** – the sudden formation of a delusion providing an explanation for the strange experiences of Trema; the entire perceptual field is now imbued with meaning; the world appears to revolve around the individual.
- **Anastrophe (Turning Back)** – deepening of delusions where the patient perceives themselves as the focal point of reality; both external and internal control delusions emerge; the delusion becomes fully structured and unshakeable.
- **Consolidation** – forming of a new world based on new meanings; the distorted belief structure solidifies and becomes resistant to change.
- **Residuum** – a potential end-stage of withdrawal into the delusional world, with increasing isolation and deterioration in functioning.

Kendler's Dimensions of Delusions

EXAM POINT

Kendler's 7 dimensions of delusions (conviction, bizarreness, extension, disorganisation, pressure, affective response, deviant behaviour) are frequently tested. They are clinically superior to simply classifying delusions as 'bizarre' or 'non-bizarre.'

Kenneth Kendler proposed that any delusion should be evaluated across seven dimensions:

- **Affective response** – degree of emotional involvement with the belief
- **Bizarreness** – degree of departure from culturally determined consensual reality
- **Conviction** – degree of certainty about the reality of the belief
- **Disorganisation** – degree of internal consistency, logic, and systematisation
- **Deviant behaviour** – whether the patient acts on the delusion
- **Extension** – degree to which the belief involves areas of the patient's life
- **Pressure** – degree of preoccupation and concern with the belief

Common Types of Delusions

- **Delusion of Reference**: Neutral events are perceived as having special, personal significance. Always a secondary delusion, except during active delusion formation.
- **Delusion of Grandeur**: Beliefs about worthiness, power, ability, knowledge, identity, special mission, or special relationship.
- **Delusion of Love (Erotomania / de Clerambault Syndrome)**: The conviction that someone (usually of higher social status) is in love with the patient. Also known as *psychose passionelle*.
- **Delusion of Infidelity (Morbid Jealousy)**: The unfounded conviction that one's partner is being unfaithful. Lacks definitive evidence. Described by Shepherd; Mullen identified four key features.
- **Delusion of Guilt (Berrios)**: The conviction that one has committed a wrong, but characteristically without remorse.
- **Cotard Syndrome (Jules Cotard) / Delusion of Nihilism**: Denial of one's own existence, body, or the existence of the world. Can be seen with autoscopy.
- **Somatic Delusions**: Including delusional parasitosis, delusional dysmorphophobia, and olfactory reference syndrome (Pryse-Phillips).
- **Delusional Misidentification Syndromes**: Capgras syndrome (impostor replacing a familiar person), Fregoli syndrome (a persecutor disguised as different people), intermetamorphosis (Courbon), syndrome of subjective doubles (Christodoulou).
- **Shared Delusions (Folie a deux/trois/quatre etc.)**: Delusional beliefs shared between two or more people, typically within close relationships.
- **Persecutory Delusions**: May occur in the context of primary delusional experiences, auditory hallucinations, bodily hallucinations, or experiences of passivity.

Delusion vs Obsession

Feature	Delusion	Obsession
Conviction	Strong belief as absolute truth	May waver; recognises thought as excessive
Insight	Absent – not seen as mental symptom	Present – recognised as irrational (ego-dystonic)
Resistance	Little to no effort to resist	Actively tries to resist or suppress
Emotional Impact	Distress from content of belief	Distress from intrusive nature of thought
Ego Quality	Ego-syntonic	Ego-dystonic
Fixity	Fixed; resists contradictory evidence	Recurrent but recognised as potentially incorrect
Behavioural Response	Actions congruent with false belief	Compulsions aimed at reducing distress

Resolution of Delusions

- **Encapsulation**: The delusion remains but no longer dominates the patient's life; it is "walled off" from everyday functioning.
- **Longitudinal Splitting (Double Book-keeping)**: The patient simultaneously holds the delusional belief and functions in reality as if it were not true.
- **Complete Resolution**: The delusion is fully relinquished, often with insight that it was a symptom of illness.

Schneider's First-Rank Symptoms

Considered by Schneider to be highly suggestive of schizophrenia, though they alone are not pathognomonic:

- **Auditory hallucinations**: voices discussing the patient (third person), running commentary, thought echo (audible thoughts)
- **Delusional perception**: normal sensory experience assigned abnormal, personalised delusional meaning
- **Passivity experiences ("made" phenomena)**: somatic passivity, thought insertion, thought withdrawal, thought broadcasting, made feelings/impulses/volition

Neurobiology of Delusions

Delusions as a Failure of Predictive Coding

The brain constantly predicts incoming sensory information using stored experiences (**priors**). When actual input matches predictions, no update is needed. When there is a mismatch, the brain generates a **Prediction Error (PE)**. The **precision** of these error signals acts as a confidence filter – deciding whether to update beliefs or dismiss the error as noise.

In delusions, this system becomes faulty:

- The brain generates PEs when there are **no actual mismatches** (false alarms)
- Trivial events are treated as highly meaningful (**misassignment of precision**)
- **Dopamine dysregulation** amplifies minor signals, acting like a volume knob for PE signals
- **NMDA receptor hypofunction** reduces the brain's ability to form accurate predictions

Once delusions form, they persist because the belief-updating system itself is faulty.

The Salience Network

Key brain areas: **Ventral Tegmental Area (VTA)**, **Associative Striatum**, **Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC)**, **Anterior Insula**, **Orbitofrontal Cortex (OFC)**, **Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex (DLPFC)**, and **Amygdala**. In delusions, dopamine overactivity in the VTA and striatum falsely amplifies the salience of trivial events. The OFC and DLPFC fail to inhibit these signals, and the amygdala tags them with emotional significance – leading to **delusions of reference**.

The Agency Network

Key brain areas: **Inferior Parietal Lobule (IPL)**, **Temporoparietal Junction (TPJ)**, **Cerebellum**, **Supplementary Motor Area (SMA)**, and **Putamen**. Cerebellar dysfunction disrupts forward modelling; parietal dysfunction misattributes agency. Results in **passivity phenomena**: delusions of control, thought insertion, and thought broadcasting.

The Fear Network

Key brain areas: **Amygdala**, **Hippocampus**, **OFC**, **Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex (vmPFC)**, **Periaqueductal Grey (PAG)**, and **Habenula**. Amygdala hyperactivity exaggerates threat perception; hippocampal dysfunction causes false novelty detection; habenula dysfunction impairs extinction learning. This results in **persecutory delusions**.

Interaction of Networks

The interplay of dysfunctional networks produces the rich, complex experiences of delusions:

- **Reference delusions** – salience network errors

- **Control and thought insertion delusions** – agency network failures
- **Persecutory delusions** – fear network hyperactivation

Prediction errors become exaggerated, the salience network falsely elevates irrelevant stimuli, the agency network misattributes actions, the fear network adds emotional threat, and prefrontal circuits fail to correct these false beliefs – cementing them into delusions.

Scales for Assessment of Thought Disorder

- **Scale for the Assessment of Thought, Language, and Communication (TLC)** – Nancy Andreasen; the most widely used standardised tool for formal thought disorder
- **Thought Language Index (TLI)** – Liddle et al.; assesses poverty, disorganisation, and dysregulation of thought
- **Schizophrenia Communication Disorder Scale (SCD)** – assesses communication deviance
- **Whitaker Index for Schizophrenia Thinking (WIST)** – assesses idiosyncratic thinking patterns
- **Other tools**: Rorschach Inkblot Test, Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, Object Sorting Test

Differential: Delusion vs Obsession vs Rumination vs Overvalued Idea vs Preoccupation

Feature	Delusion	Obsession	Anxious Rumination	Overvalued Idea	Preoccupation
Insight	Absent	Present (ego-dystonic)	Partial	Partial to minimal	Present
Resistance	None – accepted as reality	Present – tries to suppress	Less than obsessions	Typically none	None
Basis in Reality	Clearly false or impossible	Not reality-based but recognised	Distorted exaggeration of real concern	Based on reality but unreasonable extent	Often based on real issues
Ego Quality	Ego-syntonic	Ego-dystonic	Often ego-syntonic	Ego-syntonic	Ego-syntonic
Fixity	Fixed and firm	Recurrent, variable intensity	Repetitive and persistent	Strongly held but not fixed	Variable intensity
Bizarre Content	May be bizarre	Usually not	Not bizarre	Not bizarre	Not bizarre
Associated Disorders	Schizophrenia, Delusional Disorder	OCD	GAD, Depression	Anorexia, BDD	Adjustment, Mood Disorders

Related Topics

See: Thought
See: Speech and Language
See: The Self and Its Disorders
See: Schizophrenia and Psychosis
See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Perception and Its Disorders
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders

Speech and Language

Speech is the motor act of communicating through articulated vocal expression.



Definitions

Speech

Speech is the motor act of communicating through articulated vocal expression. It is the physical production of sounds using the larynx, tongue, lips, palate, and respiratory apparatus. Speech can be assessed for its rate, rhythm, volume, tone, articulation, spontaneity, and latency of response.

In the mental state examination (MSE), speech is observed directly by the clinician and is considered a **sign** (objective finding), in contrast to thought — which is inferred from the patient's verbal output. Disorders of speech may reflect underlying thought disorder, mood disturbance, neurological disease, or a combination of these.

Language

Language is the system of symbols and rules used for meaningful communication. It is a higher-order cognitive function that encompasses the comprehension, formulation, and expression of ideas. Language can be spoken, written, or signed, and is mediated by specific cortical regions — predominantly in the dominant (usually left) hemisphere.

A critical clinical distinction: **speech disorders** affect the mechanical production of vocal output, while **language disorders** (aphasias/dysphasias) affect the cognitive processing of linguistic symbols. A patient with Broca's aphasia has a language disorder (they know what they want to say but cannot organise the words), while a patient with dysarthria has a speech disorder (the motor output is impaired but linguistic processing is intact).

Components of Language

Language is traditionally analysed across three dimensions — **form**, **content**, and **use**:

Form — the structural rules governing language:

- **Phonology**: The system of sounds (phonemes) in a language and the rules for their combination. For example, English permits the consonant cluster /str/ at the beginning of words ("string") but not /tsr/.
- **Morphology**: The study of the smallest meaningful units of language (morphemes). The word "unhappiness" has three morphemes: *un-* + *happy* + *-ness*. Morphological errors can indicate language regression or developmental delay.
- **Syntax**: The rules governing the arrangement of words into sentences. Syntactic errors — such as word-order violations or missing function words — are characteristic of Broca's (non-fluent) aphasia.
- **Semantics**: The meaning of words and sentences. Semantic errors include using words in the wrong context, circumlocution (talking around a word one cannot retrieve), or semantic paraphasias (substituting a related word, e.g., "chair" for "table").
- **Pragmatics**: The social rules governing language use in context — turn-taking, inferring intent, adjusting register, understanding sarcasm and metaphor. Pragmatic deficits are a hallmark of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and right-hemisphere lesions.

Content – the meaning and subject matter communicated through language. This is what the person is talking about, and in psychiatry it provides the window into thought content (delusions, obsessions, preoccupations).

Use – the functional and social application of language, encompassing communicative intent (requesting, informing, persuading), conversational skills, and narrative coherence. Assessed clinically through the quality of the patient's discourse.

Aphasia

Aphasia (or **dysphasia**) is an acquired disorder of language resulting from damage to the language-dominant hemisphere of the brain – typically the left hemisphere. It affects the production, comprehension, or repetition of spoken or written language, and is distinct from disorders of speech articulation (dysarthria) or voice production (dysphonia).

Neurophysiology

The classical model of language processing involves two primary cortical areas connected by a major white matter tract:

- **Broca's area** (inferior frontal gyrus, Brodmann areas 44–45): responsible for speech production, motor programming of articulation, and syntactic processing.
- **Wernicke's area** (posterior superior temporal gyrus, Brodmann area 22): responsible for language comprehension and semantic processing.
- **Arcuate fasciculus**: the white matter tract connecting Wernicke's to Broca's area, essential for repetition of heard speech.

This model, known as the **Wernicke-Geschwind model**, while oversimplified (language involves distributed networks far beyond two discrete areas), remains clinically useful for classifying aphasias and localising lesions. Modern neuroimaging has revealed additional networks including the dorsal and ventral language streams, angular gyrus, and subcortical contributions from the thalamus and basal ganglia.

Diagnostic Algorithm for Six Major Types of Aphasia

TEACHING TIP

The aphasia algorithm in 3 steps: (1) Is speech fluent? (2) Is comprehension intact? (3) Can they repeat? These three questions classify all six major aphasia types. Draw it as a decision tree for instant revision.

Aphasias are classified by assessing three key functions: **fluency**, **comprehension**, and **repetition**.

Type	Fluency	Comprehension	Repetition	Lesion Site
Broca's (Expressive / Non-fluent)	Impaired – effortful, telegraphic	Relatively preserved	Impaired	Inferior frontal gyrus (Broca's area)

Type	Fluency	Comprehension	Repetition	Lesion Site
Wernicke's (Receptive / Fluent)	Preserved – fluent but paraphasic	Impaired	Impaired	Posterior superior temporal gyrus
Conduction	Preserved	Preserved	Impaired (disproportionately)	Arcuate fasciculus
Global	Impaired	Impaired	Impaired	Large perisylvian lesion
Transcortical Motor	Impaired	Preserved	Preserved	Anterior/superior to Broca's area
Transcortical Sensory	Preserved – fluent, empty	Impaired	Preserved	Posterior to Wernicke's area

Additional Aphasia Subtypes

- **Pure Word Deafness**: Difficulty understanding spoken words despite intact speech, reading, and writing. Caused by bilateral or left-sided lesions isolating Wernicke's area from auditory input. The patient hears sounds but cannot decode them as language – they may describe speech as sounding like a foreign language.
- **Pure Word Blindness (Alexia without Agraphia)**: Difficulty reading despite intact writing and spoken language. Classically caused by a left posterior cerebral artery stroke affecting the visual cortex and splenium of the corpus callosum.
- **Anomic Aphasia**: The mildest and most common form, characterised by word-finding difficulty (anomia). Fluency, comprehension, and repetition are relatively preserved. Can localise to the angular gyrus but is often seen as a residual phase after recovery from other aphasias.

Stuttering

Stuttering (also called **stammering**) is a disorder of speech fluency characterised by involuntary repetitions, prolongations of sounds or syllables, and silent blocks where the person is unable to produce sound. Onset is typically in early childhood (2–5 years), and approximately 75–80% of children who stutter recover spontaneously. Persistent developmental stuttering affects about 1% of adults, with a male-to-female ratio of approximately 4:1.

The neurobiology of stuttering involves anomalies in the **basal ganglia–thalamo-cortical loop**, with neuroimaging studies showing reduced grey matter volume in the left inferior frontal gyrus and abnormal white matter tracts connecting speech-motor areas. Genetic studies have implicated mutations in lysosomal targeting genes (*GNPTAB, GNPTG, NAGPA*), though the mechanism by which these affect speech fluency remains under investigation.

Cluttering

Cluttering is a fluency disorder distinct from stuttering, characterised by an excessively rapid and irregular rate of speech with breakdowns in clarity. Unlike stuttering, individuals who clutter are typically **unaware** of their disfluency. Speech is often described as "rushed" or "tumbling out", with frequent collapsing of syllables, omission of sounds, and poor narrative organisation. Cluttering may co-occur with ADHD and is associated with difficulties in language formulation.

Beech and Fransella: Experimental Effects in Stuttering

Beech and Fransella described three classical experimental observations in stuttering research:

- **Adaptation Effect**: When a stutterer reads the same passage repeatedly, the frequency of stuttering decreases with each successive reading. This suggests a habituation or desensitisation process to the linguistic material.
- **Consistency Effect**: Stuttering tends to occur on the same words across repeated readings of the same passage. This indicates that certain phonemic, prosodic, or anticipatory features of specific words reliably trigger disfluency.
- **Expectancy Effect**: Stutterers can often predict which words they will stutter on, and this anticipation itself increases the likelihood of disfluency — creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. The *anticipatory struggle hypothesis* suggests that stuttering is partly maintained by the anxiety and muscular tension generated by expecting to stutter.

These three effects together demonstrate that stuttering is not a random motor failure but involves significant cognitive, linguistic, and emotional components — an insight that has shaped modern therapeutic approaches, particularly the **Lidcombe Programme** for children and **cognitive-behavioural approaches** for adults.

Disorders of Speech in Psychiatry

Disorders Affecting Vocalisation

- **Aphonia**: Complete loss of ability to produce vocal sound. Communication is limited to whispering. May be organic (vocal cord pathology, recurrent laryngeal nerve palsy) or functional (psychogenic aphonia, often seen in dissociative disorders).
- **Dysphonia**: Hoarseness or changes in voice quality, but some ability to vocalise remains. Causes range from laryngitis to functional voice disorders.

Disorders Affecting Fluency

- **Logoclonia**: Uncontrollable, spastic repetition of the terminal syllable of words. Classically associated with Parkinsonism and other extrapyramidal disorders. Distinct from stuttering in that the repetition is always of the final syllable.
- **Stuttering**: Difficulty with fluent speech flow, including repetitions, prolongations, and blocks (discussed in detail above).

- **Palilalia**: Involuntary repetition of one's own words or phrases with increasing speed and decreasing volume. Associated with basal ganglia lesions and post-encephalitic parkinsonism.

Disorders Affecting Language Processing (Aphasias)

See the Aphasia section above for detailed classification. A summary of clinically important subtypes:

Disorder	Key Feature	Preserved Functions
Pure Word Deafness	Cannot understand spoken words	Speech, reading, writing
Pure Word Blindness	Cannot read (alexia without agraphia)	Speech, writing, comprehension
Primary Sensory Dysphasia (Wernicke's)	Fluent but paraphasic; poor comprehension	Articulation fluency
Conduction Dysphasia	Cannot repeat despite preserved fluency and comprehension	Fluency, comprehension
Nominal Dysphasia (Anomic)	Word-finding difficulty	Fluency, comprehension, repetition
Transcortical Motor Dysphasia	Cannot speak spontaneously; repetition preserved	Repetition, comprehension
Transcortical Sensory Dysphasia	Fluent, empty speech; poor comprehension; repetition preserved	Repetition, fluency

Other Speech and Language Disorders

- **Echolalia**: Automatic, meaningless repetition of words or phrases heard. Can be **immediate** (repeating what was just said) or **delayed** (repeating phrases heard hours or days earlier). Seen in ASD, catatonia, Tourette syndrome, transcortical aphasias, and dementia.
- **Verbigeration**: Stereotyped, meaningless repetition of words or phrases, often with no apparent communicative intent. Classically associated with chronic schizophrenia and catatonia. Distinguished from perseveration (which is triggered by a stimulus) and echolalia (which repeats others' speech).
- **Mutism**: Complete absence of speech. May be **elective/selective** (the person chooses not to speak in certain contexts, as in selective mutism of childhood), **akinetic** (associated with frontal lobe or brainstem lesions), or **catatonic** (part of the catatonic syndrome).
- **Logorrhoea**: Excessive, rapid, often incoherent speech. Classically seen in mania (where it accompanies flight of ideas) and in Wernicke's aphasia (where fluent but meaningless speech is produced).
- **Dysarthria**: A motor speech disorder resulting from impaired control of the muscles used for speech. Causes include cerebellar disease (scanning/ataxic dysarthria), pseudobulbar palsy (spastic dysarthria), bulbar palsy (flaccid dysarthria), and extrapyramidal conditions (hypokinetic dysarthria of Parkinsonism).
- **Dysprosody**: Loss of the normal melody, rhythm, and inflection of speech. Can be expressive (the patient speaks in a monotone) or receptive (the patient cannot interpret emotional tone in others' speech). Right hemisphere lesions are the classic cause.

CHAPTER 07 · NAVIGATION MAP

Related Topics

Continue by concept. Every destination below is live in the screen edition.

See: Thought and Its Disorders
See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders
See: Thought
See: Motor Disorder

07

Emotions and Its Disorders

Life would be weary without feelings. They add colour and spice to living.



Life would be weary without feelings. They add colour and spice to living; they are the sauce which adds pleasure and excitement to our lives.

Definitions

The terminology surrounding emotions in psychiatry is specific and clinically important. The following definitions — drawn from Fish, Sims, and Kleinginna — form the standard vocabulary for the mental state examination.

- **Feeling**: A positive or negative reaction to some experience or event; it is the subjective or experiential aspect of emotion (Fish).
- **Emotion**: A stirred-up state caused by physiological changes occurring as a response to some event, which tends to maintain or abolish the causative event (Fish). A comprehensive definition (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981) should address: (1) the subjective feeling, (2) the physiological basis, (3) effects on perception, thinking, and behaviour, (4) the motivational properties (e.g., fear, anger), and (5) expression in language, facial expressions, and gestures.
- **Mood**: A pervasive and sustained emotion that colours the person's perception of the world (Fish). A prolonged prevailing state or disposition (Sims). Described under five headings: **reactivity**, **range**, **intensity**, **quality**, and **appropriateness**.
- **Affect**: The patient's present emotional responsiveness (Fish). The expression of emotion as judged by external manifestations associated with specific feelings (Sims).

A helpful clinical distinction: **mood** is the sustained emotional climate (like the weather over a season), while **affect** is the moment-to-moment emotional expression (like the weather today). In the MSE, mood is usually reported by the patient (subjective) while affect is observed by the clinician (objective).

Expression of Affect (Tasman and Lieberman)

Affect is communicated through three channels:

- **Autonomic responses**: Sweating, blushing, pupil dilation, heart rate changes.
- **Speech changes**: Tone, rate, volume, and prosody of speech.
- **Body movements**: Facial expression, gesture, posture, and psychomotor activity.

Paul Ekman and Basic Emotions

CLINICAL PEARL

Paul Ekman's research with the Fore people of Papua New Guinea — a culture with no exposure to Western media — provided powerful evidence that basic emotional expressions are universal and innate, not culturally learned. The TV show "Lie to Me" was based on his work on micro-expressions.

Paul Ekman identified **six basic emotions** that are expressed universally across cultures through characteristic facial expressions: **sadness**, **happiness**, **disgust**, **surprise**, **fear**, and **anger**. His cross-cultural research in the 1960s–70s, including studies with the Fore people of Papua New Guinea who had no exposure to Western media, demonstrated that these emotional expressions are innate rather than learned – supporting Darwin's earlier hypothesis of the universality of emotional expression.

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them. James Gross and Brett Ford developed one of the most influential models in this field.

Gross's Process Model of Emotional Regulation

Gross proposed that emotional regulation occurs at five sequential points in the emotion-generative process:

- **Situation selection**: Choosing to approach or avoid situations based on their likely emotional impact (e.g., avoiding a party when feeling socially anxious).
- **Situation modification**: Actively altering a situation to change its emotional impact (e.g., bringing a friend to a difficult meeting).
- **Attentional deployment**: Redirecting attention within a situation (e.g., distraction, rumination, mindfulness).
- **Cognitive change**: Modifying how one appraises a situation to alter its emotional significance (e.g., reappraisal – reframing a failed exam as a learning opportunity). This is the mechanism targeted by Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).
- **Response modulation**: Directly influencing physiological, experiential, or behavioural components of the emotional response (e.g., suppression, substance use, relaxation techniques).

Research consistently shows that **reappraisal** (cognitive change) is associated with better psychological outcomes than **suppression** (response modulation), which is linked to greater physiological arousal, poorer memory, and impaired social functioning.

Theories of Emotions

Body Reaction Theories

James-Lange Theory

Postulates that emotions are the result of self-awareness of physical and bodily changes in the presence of a stimulus. William James wrote: *"We feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble."*. In this model, the physiological response precedes and generates the emotional experience.

Criticisms of the James-Lange theory:

- Visceral responses to stimuli are too slow to account for the rapidity of emotions.
- Visceral responses to varying stimuli are similar, yet the resulting emotions may be as disparate as fear, surprise, and joy.
- An injection of adrenaline produces visceral changes but not necessarily emotional change.

Cannon-Bard Theory

Argued that emotion has **temporal primacy** – any visceral or behavioural change follows the emotion, not the reverse. The thalamus simultaneously sends signals to the cortex (producing the emotional experience) and to the autonomic nervous system (producing physiological changes). This theory leaves no room for a cognitive component in the origin of emotions.

Schachter-Singer Two-Factor Theory (Jukebox Theory)

The two relevant factors are **physiological arousal** and **cognition**. An individual, when in a given social context, responds with physiological arousal. The meaning attributed to this arousal is determined by cognitive interpretation of the context.

Example: A man walking alone down a dark alley sees a figure with a gun. The perception triggers physiological arousal; this arousal is interpreted in terms of knowledge about dark alleys and guns, and the state is labelled "fear". The same arousal in a different context (e.g., a roller coaster) might be labelled "excitement".

Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Richard Lazarus)

Lazarus proposed that cognitive appraisal **precedes** both physiological arousal and emotional experience. The emotion we feel depends on how we evaluate (appraise) the significance of an event for our personal well-being. This theory places cognition at the centre of emotional experience and has been enormously influential in the development of CBT.

A useful teaching connection: the **Lazarus effect** described in catatonia refers to the sudden, dramatic improvement sometimes seen after administration of a benzodiazepine challenge – the patient "returns to life" from an immobile state, analogous to the biblical Lazarus.

Plutchik's Theory of Relationships Among Emotions

Robert Plutchik proposed a descriptive theory identifying eight primary emotions arranged in pairs of opposites: joy–sadness, trust–disgust, fear–anger, and surprise–anticipation. These emotions differ in intensity, similarity, and polarity. His **wheel of emotions** illustrates how primary emotions can blend to form secondary and tertiary emotions – just as primary colours mix to form new hues. For example, joy + trust = love; fear + surprise = alarm.

Leeper's Theory: Motivation and Emotion

Robert Leeper argued that emotions are not disorganising forces (as was traditionally believed) but rather **motivational states** that organise and direct behaviour. Fear motivates avoidance, anger motivates confrontation, and joy motivates approach. This perspective was ahead of its time and is now supported by

affective neuroscience research on the role of the amygdala and reward circuitry in goal-directed behaviour.

Panksepp's Affective Neuroscience

Jaak Panksepp identified seven primary emotional systems hardwired into the mammalian brain, each with distinct neuroanatomical substrates: **SEEKING** (curiosity, exploration – mesolimbic DA), **RAGE** (anger – medial amygdala to hypothalamus), **FEAR** (anxiety – central amygdala to PAG), **LUST** (sexual desire – hypothalamic circuits), **CARE** (nurturance – anterior cingulate, oxytocin), **PANIC/GRIEF** (separation distress – PAG, anterior cingulate), and **PLAY** (social joy – thalamic circuits). This framework bridges basic science and clinical psychiatry, linking emotional disorders to specific circuit dysfunctions.

Normal and Abnormal Emotional Reactions

Normal emotional reactions are emotional states that arise in response to events and lie within cultural and social norms – for example, grief following the death of a loved one, or distress following a life-threatening diagnosis. Although a period of 6–12 months is usually mentioned for normal grief, the period of significant dysfunction probably ranges from a few days to a few weeks.

The **Yerkes-Dodson curve** (1908) demonstrates that stress and performance have an inverted U-shaped relationship: up to a certain level, stress enhances performance, but beyond a tipping point, functioning deteriorates. The inflection point is determined by individual attributes (genetic predisposition, personality) and external factors (social support, stressor duration and severity).

Abnormal Emotional Reactions

The ICD-11 and DSM-5-TR define abnormal emotional reactions as **adjustment disorders** with disturbance of mood (anxiety, depression, other emotions, or disturbance of conduct). Two key clinical questions: *First, is the person suffering? Second, is the expression of mood inappropriate in this social setting?*

Anxiety

TEACHING TIP

In the MSE, mood is what the patient tells you ("I feel low") and affect is what you observe (tearful, blunted, incongruent). A patient who says "I'm fine" while crying has incongruent affect – always document both.

Anxiety is an unpleasant affective state, simply defined as "fear for no adequate reason". It may be accompanied by physical symptoms (palpitations, sweating, difficulty breathing, dizziness). When these symptoms occur suddenly and in combination, the result is a **panic attack** – overwhelming fear that may lead to inactivity (being "paralysed with fear") or ill-directed, chaotic overactivity.

Phobia

When fear is restricted to one object, situation, or idea, the term **phobia** is used. Phobias are associated with physical symptoms of anxiety and with avoidance. Most are learned responses through classical conditioning or modelling, though some may be secondary to a morbid process.

Anxious Foreboding

A fear that something terrible will happen, although the person cannot identify what they are frightened of. Seen in Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), depressive illness, and panic disorder.

Demoralisation

A state characterised by feelings of isolation, despair, discouragement, and helplessness – common in patients with terminal diseases. Differs from depression in key ways: anhedonia is absent, uncertainty about future direction is present, motivation is intact, and guilt is absent. The source of distress is seen as external.

Abnormal Expression of Emotion

Abnormal emotional expression refers to emotional expressions that deviate significantly from the average normal reaction. Those with abnormal expressions are generally **aware** of the abnormality. Eileen Kennedy-Moore described five levels of normal emotional expression as a framework for understanding where abnormalities occur:

- **Level 1 – Preconscious processing** based on past experiences
- **Level 2 – Bodily awareness** leading to distress or relief
- **Level 3 – Labelling of emotions** based on pre-existing information
- **Level 4 – Evaluation of responses** based on goals (valid vs invalid)
- **Level 5 – Selection of expression** based on social context

Dissociation of Affect

Faulty Level 2 processing – an unconscious defence against overwhelming stress. The person fails to exhibit emotion where some would be expected. Described as a feeling of numbness. **Depersonalisation** and **derealisation**, although primarily disorders of the experience of self, are associated with this dissociative quality.

Smiling Depression

The patient retains the communicatory smile but loses the emotional element. The eyes remain unchanged and there is tension in the surrounding muscles – a smile trying to say *"Don't worry about me; I'm all right."* Especially important for assessing suicide risk, as the patient's apparent cheerfulness may mask severe depression.

Belle Indifference

A variant of dissociation of affect seen in conversion disorder (Functional Neurological Disorder). Patients with gross conversion symptoms and severe disabilities appear undisturbed by their suffering.

Denial

Faulty Level 1 processing. The person denies awareness of an event even though it has clearly taken place. A primitive defence mechanism that operates at the preconscious level.

Apathy

Emotional indifference, often with a sense of futility. Manifests as a lack of motivation. Found in schizophrenia, frontal lobe syndrome, and the amotivational syndrome associated with cannabis misuse.

Perplexity

A tentative, bewildered, slightly puzzled state – faulty Level 3 processing. Occurs in anxiety, mild clouding of consciousness, and emerging schizophrenia as new psychotic experiences begin.

Morbid Expression of Emotion

In morbid expression, the patient is **unaware** of the abnormality even though it is apparent to observers. Kennedy-Moore's framework classifies these by intensity, appropriateness, mobility, and variability.

Disorders of Intensity

Diminution: Feeling of Loss of Feeling

A pervasive deficiency affecting all emotions – sadness, joy, anger, fear. It is a **subjective experience of loss of feelings** that were formerly present, rather than an objectively observed absence. **Deaffectualisation** describes feelings being numbed, diminished, or made remote from the patient.

Anhedonia – a subset of diminished intensity – specifically refers to loss of the capacity to experience joy and pleasure. Now understood to also involve impairments in reward valuation, decision making, anticipation, and motivation (involving the ventral striatum and prefrontal cortical regions). Coined by Ribot. Considered one of the best clinical markers predicting response to treatment in depressive illness. In schizophrenia, anhedonia is especially likely to be social.

Blunted Affect

Faulty Level 5 processing. Manifests as social awkwardness and inappropriateness – an insensitivity to the subtleties of social interaction. The affect is present but expressed with reduced intensity.

Emotional Constriction

A limitation in the usual range of emotional responses. The patient displays little emotional response in any direction, although what is expressed is in the **appropriate direction** – distinguishing it from incongruity.

Flattening of Affect

The severe form of emotional constriction, with distorted environmental experiences. Seen in chronic psychosis. The distinction from blunting: in flattening, the range is severely reduced; in blunting, the **intensity** is reduced.

Stiffening of Affect

Seen in some patients with schizophrenia – the emotional response is initially congruent but then becomes unchanging irrespective of the situation. The affect "freezes" and fails to modulate with context.

Disorders of Appropriateness

Incongruity of Affect

The emotional expression is discordant with the content of thought or the situation. A key distinction: **appropriateness** relates to the **situation**, while **congruity** relates to **cognition and behaviour**. A patient laughing while describing a tragic event demonstrates incongruity. This is a characteristic feature of schizophrenia, particularly the disorganised (hebephrenic) subtype.

Disorders of Mobility and Variability

Lability of Affect

Rapid and abrupt changes in emotion, largely unrelated to external stimuli. Commonly seen in Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), mania (especially dysphoric mania), and organic conditions such as frontal lobe damage after cerebrovascular accidents.

Emotional Lability

The severe form of lability – patients have difficulty controlling their emotions, with rapid, unpredictable shifts.

Affective Incontinence

Total loss of emotional control – spontaneous outbursts of laughter or crying with minimal or no provocation. Common in cerebral atherosclerosis, pseudobulbar palsy, and multiple sclerosis.

Forced Laughing or Forced Crying

The most severe form of lability – pathological laughing or crying that is **dissociated from the underlying emotional state**. The patient may cry without feeling sad or laugh without feeling amused. Seen in pseudobulbar palsy.

Morbid Disorders of Emotion

These are pathological states that, although sometimes triggered by stressful events, **do not spontaneously resolve with removal of the stressor**. They have their own independent momentum.

Morbid Depression

Patients with depressive illness use terms such as "a weight", "a cloud", or "a darkness" to capture the emotional feeling. This morbid sadness may be associated with morbid thinking reaching delusional intensity (delusions of guilt, poverty, nihilism).

Often there is **inhibition of thinking**, **loss of drive**, and decreased voluntary activity. Physical and psychological slowing is known as **psychomotor retardation**. There may be difficulty making decisions due to poor concentration or obsessional doubting secondary to the mood state. Inner unrest, loss of confidence, anxiety, and **anhedonia** (inability to enjoy anything) are core features.

Kurt Schneider coined the term **vital hypochondriacal depression** for depression with dominant somatic symptoms – the patient feels a tight band around the head, oppression in the chest. Now termed **somatisation**, the misattribution of symptoms to physical rather than psychiatric illness.

Morbid depression may also produce an inner emptiness or deadness. Loss of emotional resonance gives rise to complaints of **depersonalisation** and **derealisation**. This is distinct from depersonalisation in schizophrenia, where there is a breakdown of ego boundaries later evident in passivity feelings and thought alienation.

Clinical pearl: The apparent indifference of severe depression must be distinguished from the apathy of schizophrenia. The person with schizophrenia does not care that housework is undone; the person with severe depression understands its necessity but is unable to act, and experiences failure with shame and guilt.

Impression of Unreality

Seen in depression – the world feels unreal, distant, or flat. Related to loss of emotional resonance rather than a primary perceptual disturbance.

Morbid Euphoria and Elation

Morbid euphoria and elation classically occur in mania and hypomania. Features include increased pressure of speech with prolixity, flight of ideas or subjective awareness of racing thoughts, superficial bustling activity, disinhibition, distractibility, sometimes hypersexuality, and a tendency to be argumentative.

The distinction between mania and hypomania lies in the presence of psychotic symptoms (typically grandiose delusions) in mania and/or "marked" impairment in functioning.

Grades of Elevated Mood

A clinically useful spectrum:

- **Euthymia**: Baseline normal mood.
- **Elevated mood**: Cheerfulness that may be non-pathological.
- **Euphoria**: Exaggerated feeling of well-being, inappropriate to the context.
- **Elation**: Euphoria combined with increased psychomotor activity and flight of ideas.
- **Exaltation**: Elation with delusions of grandiosity.
- **Ecstasy**: An exalted, blissful state with a feeling of rapture and grace. Characteristically self-referent (e.g., "the flowers of spring open for *me*"). Unlike elation, it is not associated with flight of ideas but with a feeling of communion with God or a religious figure. May occur in schizophrenia, LSD use, epilepsy, and mass hysteria.

Moria and Witzelsucht

Seen in frontal lobe syndrome. **Moria** refers to a fatuous, silly euphoria with lack of foresight and indifference. **Witzelsucht** (literally "joke addiction") is a compulsive tendency to make puns, jokes, or pointless humorous remarks — first described by Hermann Oppenheim and Moritz Jastrowitz in the context of frontal lobe tumours.

Communication of Emotions

Charles Darwin proposed that there is an innate, inborn basis for the facial expression of certain emotions. The face is the most expressive part of the body — but also, as Ekman and Friesen noted, the most easily controlled when trying to deceive. Gestures of the hands, feet, and legs are less easily controlled but harder to interpret.

Mirror Neurons and Empathy

Mirror neurons fire both when an animal performs an action and when it observes the same action performed by another. In humans, mirror neurons are located in the premotor cortex and inferior parietal cortex. Rizzolatti and Craighero (2004) proposed that this system underlies imitative learning.

Gallese (2007) extended this: we form internal representations of others' actions, emotions, and sensations by activating the same neural systems as when we experience them ourselves. By means of this system, *the objectified other becomes for us another experiencing self*. This mechanism forms the neurobiological basis of **empathy**.

Emotions and the Nervous System

The **sympathetic nervous system** is active during arousal states (anger, fear), increasing heart rate, blood pressure, glucose, and catecholamines. The **parasympathetic nervous system** is active during calm, relaxed states, building and conserving energy stores. The **somatic nervous system** activates the skeletal muscles responsible for changes in breathing, muscle tension, and posture seen in emotion.

Deep, prolonged exhalations decrease sympathetic activity and increase parasympathetic activity – the neurophysiological basis of many relaxation and breathing techniques used in clinical practice.

The Brain and Emotions: The Limbic System

The limbic system is a functional network of interconnected brain structures that plays a crucial role in emotions, memory, and cognition:

- **Hippocampus**: Formation and consolidation of emotional memories (Squire, 1992).
- **Amygdala**: Central to emotional processing, particularly fear and pleasure responses (Phelps & LeDoux, 2005).
- **Thalamus**: Relays sensory information to the cortex; contributes to emotional arousal and awareness.
- **Hypothalamus**: Regulates the autonomic nervous system and endocrine system, influencing emotional responses.
- **Cingulate Cortex**: Involved in emotional and cognitive processing. The anterior mid-cingulate cortex (aMCC) is linked to tenacious, goal-directed behaviour (Touroutoglou et al., 2020).
- **Fornix**: White matter tract connecting the hippocampus to other limbic structures.

Summary: Classification of Emotional Disorders

Category	Examples	Awareness	Clinical Significance
Normal Emotional Reactions	Grief, stress response	Full	Self-limiting; within social norms
Abnormal Emotional Reactions	Adjustment disorder, anxiety, phobia, panic	Full	Prolonged impairment; ICD-11 adjustment disorders
Abnormal Expression	Dissociation of affect, smiling depression, denial, apathy, perplexity	Patient is aware	Defence mechanisms; important for risk assessment
Morbid Expression	Blunted/flat affect, incongruity, lability, affective incontinence	Patient is unaware	Characteristic signs of schizophrenia, organic conditions
Morbid Disorders	Depression, mania, euphoria, ecstasy	Variable	Independent pathological states; do not resolve with stressor removal

CHAPTER 08 · NAVIGATION MAP

Related Topics

Continue by concept. Every destination below is live in the screen edition.

See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Personality and Its Disorders
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders
See: Thought and Its Disorders
See: The Self and Its Disorders
See: Defence Mechanisms

08

The Self and Its Disorders

I know who I am, and that I am, in part, because I see my body.



Definition of Self in Psychiatry

The **self** is the sense of identity, continuity, and consciousness that integrates thoughts, feelings, and actions into a coherent whole. It operates simultaneously as **subject** (the experiencing "I") and **object** (the entity perceived by oneself and others). As Gibbs explained: *"I know who I am, and that I am, in part, because I see my body\... as I move and experience specific sensations as a result of action."*

Three key characteristics define the self:

- **Identity**: A stable sense of who one is, encompassing beliefs, values, and roles.
- **Continuity**: The feeling of being the same person over time, even as circumstances change.
- **Consciousness**: Awareness of oneself as distinct from others, involving reflection and self-awareness.

Self and the Ego

The **self** is a broad construct encompassing the core sense of who one is — identity, consciousness, and self-perception holistically. Think of it as the entire car. The **ego** (from Freudian psychodynamic theory) is the mediator between the Id (primitive desires), the Superego (internalised morals), and external reality. Think of it as the driver.

Dan Zahavi, the Danish philosopher with extensive work on psychosis and phenomenology, described four types of self: the **ecological self**, **personal self**, **extended self**, and **private self**.

Jasperian View of the Self

Jaspers identified two essential criteria for the self: the observer and the observed (noting that observation itself can change the state being observed). He distinguished:

- **Self-awareness**: A psychological state relating to traits, feelings, and behaviour.
- **Subjective awareness**: Awareness of self with respect to the environment.

Characteristics of Ego (Scharfetter and Jaspers)

- **Ego Activity**: Feeling of awareness of being active. The individual knows they are the sole agent who initiates and executes thought, feeling, and action.
- **Ego Consistency and Coherence**: Awareness of unity. The individual knows they are one person at any given point in time.
- **Ego Identity**: Awareness of identity over time. The individual knows they have been the same person throughout life.
- **Ego Demarcation**: Awareness of boundaries of self. The individual knows they are distinct from all other things and beings — the boundary between self and non-self.
- **Ego Vitality**: Awareness of being or existing. The individual knows they are alive — this is the most fundamental aspect of self-awareness. Scharfetter described this as the precondition for all other ego characteristics.

Embodiment and Self

Descartes' Dualism regarded the body as distinct from the thinking, immaterial self. However, despite the convention of thinking of them as separate, the mind and body are inseparable. The self expresses itself using the body. The locus of self is called **embodiment**.

Characteristics of the Somatic Self (Scharfetter and Jaspers)

- **Continuity**: Although body image changes over time, the experiencing "I" does not change.
- **Unity or coherence**: Despite diversity in experience, memory, and belief, each person experiences themselves as one single person.
- **Sense of embodiment or ownership**: Ownership begins with "our" body.
- **Sense of agency**: "We" in the body are in charge of our actions and destiny.
- **Self-reflection**: An individual can carry out reflection of being aware of themselves.

Self-Image

Bahnson described how body and self-images develop through audio-visual self-confrontation. The self is initially entangled with the environment, then separates itself, takes on roles, develops a unique way of thinking, and finally invests in social relationships and procreation. Body image is dynamic, amorphous, and changes with age.

Younger individuals tend to describe themselves using personal traits; older individuals use social roles. The developmental progression moves: **Physical descriptions → Social roles → Personal traits → Existential statements**.

Historical Perspectives on Self

Eastern Philosophical Foundations

CLINICAL PEARL

The Kathopanishad's teaching that the self is distinct from body, senses, and mind predates Descartes' mind–body dualism by over two millennia. Indian philosophical traditions had sophisticated models of consciousness and self long before Western phenomenology.

In Indian philosophy, **Brahman** represents the ultimate, eternal, unchanging reality – the source of all consciousness. **Atman** refers to the inner self or soul, considered eternal and indivisible. The key insight of the Upanishads is that Atman is not separate from Brahman – self-realisation involves understanding this unity. This mirrors modern psychiatry's focus on self-awareness and integration.

The **Kathopanishad** emphasises that the self is distinct from the body, senses, and mind. Self-realisation requires detaching from the material world and focusing inward – a teaching that parallels psychotherapy's aim to explore beyond external symptoms.

Western Philosophical Foundations

Descartes ("Cogito, ergo sum" – I think, therefore I am) established the self as a thinking, conscious entity and positioned the mind as central to human identity. **John Locke** expanded on this, emphasising the role of memory in maintaining identity over time – a person who remembers key milestones forms a coherent self-concept, while memory loss (as in dementia) disrupts the sense of self.

Psychodynamic Contributions

Freud divided the mind into Id (pleasure principle), Ego (reality principle), and Superego (moral conscience). Defence mechanisms are tools the ego uses to protect itself from anxiety. **Erikson** proposed eight psychosocial stages, with the adolescent crisis of **Identity vs Role Confusion** being particularly relevant. **Jung** introduced the collective unconscious, archetypes, and the process of **individuation** (integrating conscious and unconscious elements into an authentic identity).

Evolution of Self-Concept

The field moved from psychodynamic emphasis on unconscious drives → the **cognitive revolution** (Aaron Beck's cognitive distortions, Albert Bandura's self-efficacy) → **biological models** (Antonio Damasio's Somatic Marker Hypothesis) → **phenomenology** (Jaspers' subjective experience) → **neuroscientific advances** (prefrontal cortex, Default Mode Network).

Psychological Components of Self

Self-Identity and Personality

Self-identity refers to a person's unique sense of who they are – encompassing beliefs, experiences, and roles. It is dynamic and evolves with new experiences and social contexts. Personality traits (the Big Five: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism) represent more stable, biologically influenced behavioural tendencies.

Marcia's Identity Status Theory

Building on Erikson, James Marcia identified four identity statuses:

- **Diffusion**: Lack of exploration and commitment.
- **Foreclosure**: Commitment without exploration (accepting family expectations without questioning).
- **Moratorium**: Active exploration without final commitment.
- **Achievement**: Exploration followed by commitment.

Self-Awareness and Metacognition

Self-awareness is the ability to recognise oneself as a distinct entity. Internal self-awareness focuses on personal beliefs and feelings; external self-awareness concerns how others perceive you. **Metacognition** is thinking about one's own thought processes – enhancing self-regulation and emotional control. **Metacognitive Therapy (MCT)** targets unhelpful thinking patterns, particularly in anxiety and depression.

Self-Esteem and Self-Worth

Carl Rogers' Congruence Theory stressed the importance of alignment between self-perception and lived experience. Congruence between the **ideal self** and **real self** leads to self-actualisation; development depends on "unconditional positive regard".

Higgins's Self-Discrepancy Model identified three self-domains: the **actual self** (attributes one believes one has), the **ideal self** (attributes one would like to possess), and the **ought self** (attributes one should possess). Discrepancy between these domains may result in psychological distress – and in extreme cases, persecutory delusions.

Argyle's factors influencing self-esteem: reaction of others, comparison with others, social roles, and identification.

Theory of Mind implies the ability to recognise the mental state of others. This is faulty in Autism Spectrum Disorder and schizophrenia, leading to limited understanding of behaviour, beliefs, and desires of both self and others.

Cultural Variations in Self-Concept

Individualistic cultures (e.g., Western societies) emphasise independence, personal goals, and self-expression; self-esteem is tied to individual achievements. **Collectivistic cultures** (e.g., India, Japan) emphasise interdependence, group harmony, and social obligations; self-esteem derives from contributing to group welfare. **Social Identity Theory** (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) explains how ingroup/outgroup dynamics shape self-concept.

Family, Attachment, and Early Environment

Bowlby (1969) and **Ainsworth** demonstrated that attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant, disorganised) shape self-concept. Disorganised attachment is linked to BPD and anxiety disorders. **Baumrind (1971)** identified parenting styles: authoritative (warmth + structure → self-efficacy), authoritarian (rigid → self-doubt), and permissive (no boundaries → poor self-regulation).

Cathexis: A psychodynamic concept referring to the investment of emotional energy in objects, people, or goals. Disruptions may appear in depression, where emotional detachment reduces self-driven energy.

Biological Foundations of Self

Neuroanatomy of Self

The **medial Prefrontal Cortex (mPFC)** is the common link circuit underlying self-referential processing.

Cognitive Component	Brain Region(s)	Function
Own Face Recognition	Prefrontal Cortex	Visual and emotional identification of self
Autobiographical Knowledge	Medial PFC, Hippocampus	Memory of personal life events
Personal Beliefs	Medial PFC	Self-evaluation and judgement
Conception of Self	PFC + Right Lateral Parietal Cortex	Abstract self-identity
Self-representation (overall)	Right Lateral Parietal Cortex	Physical and mental understanding of self

Self Types and Neural Correlates

Self Type	Neural Correlates	Description
The Embodied Self	Somatosensory cortex, insula, parietal cortex, vestibular system	Self anchored in a physical body; body ownership and spatial positioning
The Passionate Self	Amygdala, hypothalamus, OFC (Limbic System)	Emotional aspect – desires, attachments, affective states
The Executive Self	ACC, pre-SMA, DLPFC	Agency and volitional control; decisions and motor commands
The Mnemonic Self	Hippocampus, medial temporal lobe, posterior cingulate	Self constructed using long-term and autobiographical memory
The Unified Self	ACC, Limbic System, Default Mode Network	Maintains coherence and continuity of consciousness and identity
The Vigilant Self	Intralaminar nuclei of thalamus, Reticular Activating System	Wakefulness, attention, readiness for action
The Conceptual and Social Self	PFC, OFC, vmPFC	Abstract concepts: love, morality, social belonging, happiness

Default Mode Network (DMN)

The DMN – comprising the mPFC, posterior cingulate cortex (PCC), and TPJ – is active during rest and introspection. It facilitates self-reflection and mind-wandering. Dysregulation is linked to depression (excessive rumination from overactivation) and schizophrenia (impaired self-boundaries from

underactivation).

Neurotransmitters and Self-Perception

- **Serotonin**: Regulates mood and emotional stability. Low levels → negative self-perception, self-criticism, rumination.
- **Dopamine**: Governs motivation and self-reward. High activity → grandiosity, delusions. Low activity → anhedonia.
- **GABA**: Supports emotional stability and self-regulation. Deficiency → anxiety, intrusive self-critical thoughts.

Psychopathology Related to the Self

Disorders of Awareness of Being (Ego Vitality)

CLINICAL PEARL

Scharfetter's ego characteristics map beautifully onto psychotic symptoms: disrupted ego activity = passivity phenomena; disrupted ego demarcation = thought broadcasting; disrupted ego identity = delusional identity change; disrupted ego vitality = Cotard's syndrome.

Every psychic manifestation – perception, bodily sensation, idea, memory, thought, or feeling – carries an "I" quality or sense of personally belonging. This is called **personalisation**. When this is lost, **depersonalisation** occurs. The term was used by Heymans (1904), Dugas and Mautier (1911), and Mapother coined "derealisation" in 1935.

Depersonalisation

TEACHING TIP

Depersonalisation = "I feel unreal" (self feels strange). Derealisation = "The world feels unreal" (environment feels strange). Both preserve reality testing – the patient knows it's a feeling, not a fact. This distinguishes them from psychotic experiences.

A condition where individuals feel detached from their own thoughts, emotions, or body – often described as an "out-of-body" experience. Sedman called these **"as if" phenomena**.

Positive features: Experience of internal and external change; unpleasant experience; insight preserved; any mental function may be subject to change.

Negative features (to rule out): Ego boundary disturbance of schizophrenia; delusional elaboration of unreality; loss of personal identity.

Components (Sims, Sierra and Berrios): Emotional numbing; changes in body, visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory experience (desomatisation); loss of feelings of agency; distortions in time experience; changes in subjective experience of memory; thought emptiness; inability to evoke images; heightened self-observation.

Derealisation

The perception that the external world feels unreal, dreamlike, or distorted. Objects may appear blurred or lifeless, with altered perception of time and space.

Desomatisation

Not being able to experience or use a certain organ – a specific form of depersonalisation affecting bodily awareness.

What is NOT Depersonalisation

- **Ecstatic states**: Lack the distress observed in depersonalisation (seen in intoxication, mania).
- **Nihilistic delusions**: Delusion *of* depersonalisation (seen in severe depression – Cotard syndrome).
- **Deaffectualisation**: Consistent loss or failure to feel emotion (seen in depression, anxiety, schizophrenia).

Depersonalisation: Symptom vs Syndrome

Feature	Depersonalisation (Symptom)	Depersonalisation Syndrome
Definition	Subjective detachment from self; occurs within other disorders	Primary condition where depersonalisation is the central issue
Occurs in	Depression, mania, schizophrenia, PTSD, panic disorder	Independent diagnosis (ICD-10: F48.1)
Duration	Usually transient	Persistent and often distressing
Insight	Preserved	Preserved
Treatment	Treat the underlying disorder	Requires specific intervention (CBT, SSRIs)

Aetiology of Depersonalisation

- **Freud**: Conflictual impulses or overwhelming painful stimulus → ego disintegration → body preserves the ego → affective response in defence = depersonalisation.
- **Stamm**: Aggressive and libidinal drives → ordinary ego defences disrupted → depersonalisation.

- **Stewart**: Predisposed individuals + drives and stress → incongruence between self-perception and others' perception → faulty coping → splitting of ego → depersonalisation.
- **Biological theory (Mayer-Gross)**: Stressful situation → predisposed individuals → non-specific preformed functional response of the nervous system.
- **Hughlings Jackson**: Experience of self is a function of higher CNS levels; depersonalisation represents dissolution of these higher levels, uncovering lower levels.
- **Wilder Penfield**: Stimulation of the superior or medial temporal gyrus produces depersonalisation and derealisation.

Neurobiology (Sierra and Berrios): Cortico-limbic disconnection → overactivation of PFC → emotional dampening by overly inhibiting the limbic system → depersonalisation. The reverse (limbic overactivation) can lead to a hypercognitive state.

Disorders of Activity of Self

Abnormalities in the sense of **agency** – feeling controlled by external forces. Common in schizophrenia (thought insertion, delusions of control – passivity phenomena).

- **Lassitude**: Delay in initiation of action due to abnormal mood state (depression).
- **Change in belief of initiation of activity**: Passivity phenomena – the patient feels their actions, thoughts, or feelings are being controlled by an external force. A Schneiderian first-rank symptom.

Disorders of Immediate Awareness of Self-Unity

Double Phenomenon

A break in the awareness of outside and inside. The patient experiences an outside version and inside version of themselves – unity is lost. There are cognitive and experiential changes, but perceptual changes are typically absent. Dissociation of self (decreased awareness) persisting for longer disturbs the flow of thoughts (doubling of personality experience).

Out-of-Body Experience (OBE)

The locus of self (centre of awareness) is felt as being outside the body. Three core features: **disembodiment**, **distanced perspective**, and **autoscopy**. All perceived perceptions are organised to be consistent with the elevated visuospatial perspective.

Autoscopy

People experience seeing a double of themselves in extrapersonal space – but without disembodiment (unlike OBE). The centre of awareness remains inside the body. Sims described six types:

- **Feeling of presence**: Distant feeling of the physical presence of another person.
- **Negative autoscopy**: Failure to perceive oneself when looking in a mirror.
- **Inner autoscopy**: Seeing internal organs in extracorporeal space.

- **Autoscopic hallucinations**: Seeing one's own body in external space.
- **Out-of-body experience**: Centre of awareness is outside the body.
- **Heautoscopy proper** (Doppelganger): Centre of awareness alternates between inside and outside the body in alternating or simultaneous fashion.

Lesions are usually found in the parietal and occipital regions (Blondiaux et al.).

Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID)

First described by Morton Prince. Formerly called Multiple Personality Disorder. Defined by the presence of two or more distinct personality states. Two main types:

- **Psychogenic depressive depersonalisation**: The person feels they are talking and acting automatically.
- **Possession depersonalisation**: The person feels they are made of two people, both inside the same body.

Often linked to severe early trauma, particularly during childhood. **Karl Bonhoeffer** coined the term "lability and awareness of personality" for the loss of self seen in paranoid psychosis.

Disorders of Continuity of Identity

Disturbances in the temporal continuity of self include deja vu, deja pense, deja entendu, and jamais vu (covered in detail in the Memory and Its Disorders note).

Disorders of Embodiment (John Charles Cutting)

Cutting divided disorders of embodiment (awareness of the body) into five categories:

Disorders of Bodily Function

Term	Definition	Example
Astasia-abasia	Inability to walk or stand despite normal motor function (conversion disorder)	Patient falls dramatically when walking but moves legs normally lying down
Ganser syndrome	Giving approximate answers; linked to dissociation, often forensic contexts	Asked "2+2?", replies "5"
Mass hysteria	Group physical symptoms without organic cause, triggered by shared stress	Students faint after rumour of gas leak; no toxin found
Multiple personalities (DID)	Two or more distinct identities with memory gaps	Calm persona alternates with angry, unaware alternate identity

Disorders of Physical Characteristics and Emotional Value

- **Body Dysmorphic Disorder**: Preoccupation with an imagined or slight defect in appearance causing significant distress.
- **Gender Dysphoria**: Persistent incongruence between experienced gender and assigned sex, often with desire for hormonal or surgical transition.

Disorders of Beliefs About the Body

Hypochondriasis – preoccupation with a symptom or specific illness. Barsky identified four distinct concepts: (1) a psychiatric syndrome with physical symptoms disproportionate to organic disease, (2) psychodynamically a derivative of aggressive drives or defence against guilt, (3) perceptual and cognitive amplification of normal body function, and (4) socially learned behaviour.

Disorders of Eating and Body Size

- **Anorexia Nervosa**: Restriction of food intake with distorted body image and intense fear of weight gain.
- **Bulimia Nervosa**: Recurrent binge eating followed by compensatory behaviours with overvaluation of body shape.

Disorders of Sensory Awareness of the Body

Term	Definition
Hyperschemazia	Body part perceived as larger than it actually is
Hyposchemazia	Body part perceived as smaller or diminished
Aschemazia	Loss of awareness or perception of a body part
Paraschemazia	Distorted perception of body shape or configuration

Personality Disorders and the Self

- **Narcissistic Personality Disorder**: Grandiosity, fragile self-esteem, hypersensitivity to criticism. Overinflated self-concept masking deep insecurities.
- **Borderline Personality Disorder**: Unstable self-image, chronic emptiness, intense fear of abandonment. DBT helps improve self-awareness, emotional regulation, and relationship stability.

The Self in Psychotic Disorders

Schizophrenia produces profound disruptions in self-perception: **thought insertion** (external entities inserting thoughts), **delusions of control** (manipulation by external forces), **identity confusion** (loss of stable self-concept). Hallucinations often involve self-critical thoughts projected as external voices. Grandiosity or persecution reflects a fragmented self-concept.

The Self in Therapeutic Contexts

Self-concept influences how individuals perceive their abilities, emotions, and potential for change. A distorted or fragmented self-concept exacerbates depression, anxiety, and personality disorders.

Key Therapeutic Approaches

- **CBT**: Challenges distorted beliefs and replaces them with realistic, positive self-appraisals.
- **Humanistic Therapy (Carl Rogers)**: Emphasises self-acceptance and authenticity through unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence.
- **Psychodynamic Therapy**: Explores unconscious conflicts that influence self-concept.
- **Schema Therapy**: Identifies and modifies deep-rooted maladaptive self-schemas (e.g., "I am unlovable").
- **Narrative Therapy**: Reconstructs self-narratives to address negative self-beliefs.

Self-Compassion (Kristin Neff, 2003)

Three core components: **self-kindness** (replacing self-criticism with supportive inner dialogue), **common humanity** (recognising that suffering is part of the human experience), and **mindfulness** (maintaining balanced perspective). Self-compassion reduces self-criticism and shame, promotes resilience and emotional stability.

Integration of Self in Therapy

The goal is to restore a cohesive sense of self disrupted by trauma, identity crises, or mental illness. Key approaches include trauma-focused therapy (revisiting and reprocessing traumatic memories), Schema Therapy (modifying maladaptive self-schemas), and holistic approaches combining psychological, biological, and social perspectives.

Related Topics

See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Memory and Its Disorders
See: Emotions and Its Disorders
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders
See: Perception and Its Disorders
See: Personality and Its Disorders

CHAPTER 10

Memory and Its Disorders

Learning-dependent storage of ontogenetically acquired information.



Definitions

Learning-dependent storage of ontogenetically acquired information. – Eric Kandel A general term

for a mental process which helps a person to store information for later recall. – Strub and Black

Memory is a fundamental cognitive ability that provides the essential substrate for experience, personality development, and the possibility of growth and change. Its complex architecture involves information flowing through sensory memory (where stimuli are fleetingly registered), to short-term memory (which holds limited information briefly), to long-term memory (which allows for vast, enduring storage of both conscious facts and unconscious skills).

Conation refers to the connection of knowledge and affect to one's behaviour – the motivational bridge between knowing something and acting on it. It is the volitional, striving aspect of mental life that connects memory and cognition to goal-directed action.

Process of Memory: Obtaining Information

Before information can be stored, it must first be acquired. Three prerequisite processes govern this:

- **Attention**: The ability to focus on a specific stimulus without being disturbed by internal or external distractions.
- **Concentration**: The ability to maintain attention on a specific stimulus for an extended period.
- **Vigilance**: The sense of alertness referring to the basic arousal process in which the awake person can respond to any stimulus in the environment.

All three are prerequisites for effective encoding. Disorders that impair attention (e.g., ADHD, delirium, anxiety) will secondarily impair memory formation – not because the memory system itself is damaged, but because information never enters it properly.

Mechanism of Memory: The Five Rs

When examining long-term memory phenomenologically, it can be divided into five distinct functions:

- **Registration (Encoding)**: The capacity to add new information to existing memory stores by transforming it into a format suitable for storage.
- **Retention (Storage)**: The ability to maintain knowledge so as to return it to consciousness – holding information over time.
- **Retrieval**: The capacity to access stored information from memory by recognition, recall, or demonstrating that a relevant task is being performed.
- **Recall**: Effortful, conscious retrieval of stored information at a chosen moment. A complex search process affected by primacy effects (remembering first items) and recency effects (remembering last items).
- **Recognition**: Retrieval that depends on identification of previously learnt items. Subdivided into **remembering** (effortful, detailed contextual recollection) and **knowing** (a sense of familiarity without full contextual re-experiencing).

Temporal Classification of Memory

Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin proposed the **Multi-Store Memory Model** (1968), which remains the foundational framework for understanding how memory is organised by time.

Sensory Memory (Ultra-Short Memory)

The initial, fleeting phase of memory registered for each sensory modality. It facilitates rapid processing of incoming stimuli and fades within seconds:

- **Iconic memory** (visual): Lasts up to 200 milliseconds. Studied by George Sperling (1960) using partial report paradigms.
- **Echoic memory** (auditory): Lasts up to 2000 milliseconds (2 seconds).

Short-Term Memory

Also known as **working memory**, this system holds a small amount of information available for a short period (15–30 seconds) to facilitate constant updating of one's surroundings. Mediated by fronto-parietal circuits, particularly the Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex (DLPFC) and Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex (vmPFC). George Miller (1956) famously described the capacity as **"the magical number seven, plus or minus two"** – the average number of items that can be held in short-term memory.

Working Memory Model (Baddeley and Hitch, 1974)

Baddeley and Hitch proposed a multi-component model of working memory with four systems:

- **Central Executive**: Controls attention; determines which information is retained, discarded, or stored. The "supervisory attentional system" that allocates resources.
- **Phonological Loop** ("inner ear"): Retains verbal information through subvocal rehearsal. Comprises a phonological store (holds speech-based information for 1–2 seconds) and an articulatory control process (refreshes the store through rehearsal).
- **Visuospatial Sketchpad** ("inner eye"): Retains visual and spatial information. Used in tasks like mental rotation, navigation, and visual imagery.
- **Episodic Buffer** (added by Baddeley in 2000): Integrates information from various sources and is under the control of the central executive. Holds episodes of memory across space and time, acting as a limited-capacity temporary storage system.

Long-Term Memory

Information stored "offline" for minutes to decades. The limbic system (particularly the hippocampus) is involved in formation and consolidation, while the cerebral cortex is responsible for long-term storage. The process by which short-term memories are converted to long-term memories is called **consolidation**.

Content-Based Classification of Memory

Long-term memory is divided into **explicit (declarative) memory** – that which can be consciously recalled and stated – and **implicit (non-declarative) memory** – that which cannot be consciously articulated but influences behaviour.

Declarative / Explicit Memory	Non-Declarative / Implicit Memory
Accessible to conscious awareness by recall	Not available to conscious recall
Example: Learning a phone number – more immediate, smaller effort	Example: Riding a bicycle – takes many attempts to build up
Fades relatively rapidly without recall and refreshing	More robust; lasts a lifetime even without further practice
Mediated by hippocampus and medial temporal lobe	Mediated by basal ganglia, cerebellum, amygdala

Explicit Memory

Episodic Memory

Episodic memory (Endel Tulving, 1972) stores personal experiences and specific events in time and place. It is the "what, where, and when" of memory – the memory of your wedding day, your first day at medical school, or what you had for breakfast. Episodic memory is critically dependent on the **hippocampus** for encoding and early consolidation, and on the **prefrontal cortex** for strategic retrieval.

A clinical teaching point: episodic memory is the type most devastatingly affected in early Alzheimer's disease. Patients lose the ability to form new autobiographical memories while semantic knowledge may be relatively preserved in the early stages.

Semantic Memory

Semantic memory stores factual knowledge independent of time and place – general knowledge about the world, meanings of words, concepts, and rules. It is meaning-based and acquired through rehearsal. Mediated by the **anterior and inferolateral temporal cortex**, with contributions from the **angular gyrus**.

Semantic Memory	Episodic Memory
Factual knowledge, independent of time and place	Personal knowledge of a specific moment in time and place
Meaning-based; acquired when rehearsed	Event-based; acquired even with single exposure
Example: Remembering that Delhi is the capital of India	Example: Remembering the day you visited Delhi

Implicit Memory

Procedural Memory

Involves the performance of a task without conscious awareness of remembering. Brain areas involved include the basal ganglia, cerebellum, premotor cortex, motor cortex, and neocortical areas. **Clinical relevance**: Procedural memory is characteristically preserved in amnestic syndromes and early Alzheimer's disease — a patient who cannot remember their doctor's name can still tie their shoelaces.

Emotional Conditioning

The learning of emotions associated with an event — essential for survival. Mediated by the amygdaloid-limbic system. This is the basis of fear conditioning and explains why a patient with amnesia (hippocampal damage) may still show a fear response to a stimulus they cannot consciously remember encountering.

Priming

When the same stimulus is presented again, it is more likely to be selected and recognised — even in the absence of conscious reflection. Priming improves speed and efficiency of processing. Mediated by association areas of the parietal and temporal cortex.

Neurobiology of Memory

The Papez Circuit

Proposed by James Papez in 1937, this circuit is a network of interconnected limbic structures crucial for memory formation:

- **Hippocampus** → **Fornix** → **Mammillary bodies** (hypothalamus) → **Anterior thalamic nuclei** → **Cingulate gyrus** → back to **Hippocampus**

The Papez circuit remains the foundational model for understanding the neuroanatomy of memory, though modern research has expanded it to include the basal forebrain, prefrontal cortex, and perirhinal/entorhinal cortices.

Consolidation Theory

CLINICAL PEARL

The reason benzodiazepines cause anterograde amnesia is that they impair hippocampal consolidation — the transfer from short-term to long-term memory. The patient registers and attends to information normally but cannot form new lasting memories. This is also why ECT causes memory gaps around treatment sessions.

Information arrives from multimodal inputs (parahippocampal gyrus, perirhinal cortex, retrosplenial cortex) → reaches the entorhinal cortex → enters the hippocampus → leaves the hippocampus → reaches the neocortex for consolidation into long-term memory. This process can take weeks to years, during which the hippocampus gradually "teaches" the neocortex to store the memory independently.

Long-Term Potentiation (LTP)

LTP is the process of strengthening synaptic connections between neurons so that information is transferred with greater efficacy for future stimuli. **Eric Kandel** studied this in the sea slug *Aplysia* (chosen for its large hippocampus and easily visible nerves) and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine (2000) for this work.

The molecular cascade: increased 5-HT → increased cAMP → increased Protein Kinase A (PKA) → activation of **CREB-1** (cAMP Response Element Binding Protein-1) → new protein synthesis → structural synaptic changes. This is the molecular basis of how short-term memory is converted to long-term memory.

Disorders of Memory

Memory disturbances can be classified into: (1) normal variations, (2) meaningful disturbances, (3) disturbances secondary to psychiatric disorders, and (4) affective disorders of memory. A separate category covers organic (true) amnesias.

Normal Variations

Deja Vu and Related Phenomena (Paramnesia)

These phenomena involve distortions in feelings of familiarity, not in memory storage or retrieval themselves.

- **Deja vu**: The intense feeling of familiarity accompanying a novel experience – as if one has experienced it before. Characteristics: more common in educated individuals, teenagers, frequent travellers; more common during the evening; lasts a few seconds; precipitated by stress, fatigue, or anxiety. Also seen in temporal lobe epilepsy.
- **Deja entendu**: Feeling of already having heard something for the first time.
- **Deja pense**: A new thought is recognised as having previously occurred.
- **Jamais vu**: The opposite of deja vu – a familiar experience lacks the expected feeling of familiarity. May be accompanied by a vague sense that something important should be remembered.

Clinical significance: While often benign and fleeting, these phenomena can be significant symptoms of temporal lobe epilepsy and cerebrovascular disorders.

Selective Forgetting (Repression)

Selective forgetting involves specific biases in what is forgotten or retained, influenced by meaningfulness, conceptual style, elaboration, and age. Causes of normal forgetting include:

- **Disuse**: Infrequently accessed information decays over time.
- **Proactive interference**: Previously learned material interferes with newly learned material.
- **Retroactive interference**: Newly learned material interferes with older memories.

In psychoanalytic theory, **repression** involves the unconscious suppression of unpleasant or traumatic memories. **Directed forgetting** is the intentional, conscious effort (supported by the prefrontal cortex) to reduce recall of unwanted memories using executive control processes in the parietal cortex.

Falsification of Memory

Involves reporting events that never occurred or grossly distorting actual experiences. Even healthy individuals are susceptible — **post-event misinformation** can contaminate original memories. False memories can be held with the same emotion and conviction as genuine ones.

Mazzoni's Three-Step Model of False Memory Formation:

- Belief in plausibility: the person believes the false event *could* have happened.
- Belief in occurrence: they come to believe it happened *to them*.
- Source monitoring error: they incorrectly attribute the memory to a real experience.

Hyperamnesia

Exaggerated memory function encompassing enhanced encoding, retention, and recall:

- **Flashbulb memories** (Brown and Kulik): Unusually vivid, detailed, long-lasting memories of the circumstances in which one learned of a very surprising and consequential event.
- **Flashbacks**: Sudden, intrusive re-experiencing of traumatic events — a core symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- **Eidetic images**: Memories with near-hallucinatory visual clarity. Associated with substance misuse, especially hallucinogens.

Meaningful Disturbances of Memory

Cryptomnesia

The experience of unconsciously remembering information but experiencing it as a new, original creation rather than a retrieved memory — a form of unintentional plagiarism. The famous **Twin Poems Case** illustrates this: Vita Sackville-West unknowingly reproduced Clifford Dyment's poem years after reviewing it.

Pseudologia Fantastica

First described by Anton Delbruck. Grandiose, elaborate lies often believed by the individual. Also known as Pinocchio syndrome, mythomania, or pathological lying. William and Mary Healy defined pathological lying as a trait factor – falsification disproportionate to practical gain, not associated with epilepsy, insanity, or feeble-mindedness. Dupre identified three essential criteria: the story must be plausible, the imaginary adventures must manifest in multiple circumstances, and the hero or victim is always the subject.

Seen in Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), histrionic personality disorder, organic conditions (e.g., traumatic brain injury), and malingering.

Recovered Memory and False Memory Syndrome

Recovered memory: A memory of a traumatic experience (typically childhood abuse) that was initially forgotten due to psychogenic amnesia and later resurfaces. Potential mechanisms include repression and dissociation. Evidence suggests recovered memories can be essentially accurate, but this is not always the case.

False Memory Syndrome: A condition where individuals believe they experienced a traumatic event due to implanted memories rather than true recall. The term was coined in 1992 by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. False memories may be "implanted" through suggestive therapeutic techniques in susceptible individuals.

Dissociative Focal Retrograde Amnesia

Loss of autobiographical memories limited to a specific time period, with no anterograde amnesia. Triggered by psychological stressors as an unconscious, maladaptive coping mechanism. Can overlap with neurological amnesia, but the severity of memory loss is disproportionate to any neurological explanation.

Dissociative Fugue

A dissociative disorder featuring narrowing of awareness, purposeful travel away from familiar surroundings, loss of autobiographical memory (including identity), and subsequent amnesia for the episode. Superficial normality is maintained. Predisposing factors include severe stress, depressed mood, and history of transient organic amnesia.

Memory Disturbances Secondary to Psychiatric Disorders

Confabulation

A **falsification of memory occurring within clear consciousness**, linked to organic amnesia. The patient is unaware they are confabulating, making it distinct from lying. Manifestations range from mild distortions (intrusions, embellishments) to bizarre, implausible narratives.

Bonhoeffer's Types:

- **Confabulation of embarrassment**: Momentary, triggered by questions exposing memory gaps. Reflects social awareness – the patient tries to save face.

- **Fantastic confabulation**: Spontaneous, elaborate narratives exceeding the needs of the memory gap. Often seen in significant organic deterioration.

Modern Classification (Kopelman; Schnider, 2008):

- **Provoked confabulation**: Elicited by questions about events – resembles errors in healthy subjects.
- **Spontaneous confabulation**: Rare; signals frontal lobe damage alongside amnesia.
- **Intrusions in memory**: Minor distortions or insertions of incorrect details into otherwise accurate memories.
- **Behaviourally spontaneous confabulations**: Behaviour driven by false memory without verbalisation (e.g., packing for a trip never planned).

Special forms: **Phantabulation** (confusion between real and imagined objects due to failure to inhibit visual imagery) and **graphabulation** (drawing things not in reference – "drawn confabulation").

Neurobiology: Confabulation is caused by damage to basal forebrain areas and frontal executive systems, disrupting strategic memory retrieval and memory verification. Suggestibility is high and confabulations may involve misplaced experiences, wishes, or dream-like elements.

Memory Impairment in Schizophrenia

Modern research challenges the historical view (Bleuler, Kraepelin) that schizophrenia spares cognition:

- **Long-term memory**: Impaired retrieval in both recall and recognition.
- **Short-term memory**: Reduced forward digit span.
- **Working memory**: Deficits in holding and manipulating information.
- **Semantic memory**: Problems with storage and understanding of general knowledge.
- **Procedural memory**: Characteristically **intact**.

Memory difficulties worsen with illness duration and severity, and are correlated with negative symptoms and formal thought disorder. Schizophrenia also affects how memories are **interpreted** – accurate events may acquire new, delusional significance (delusional memories and delusional retrospective falsification).

Affective Disorders of Memory

Mood strongly impacts memory processes. Depression creates a **mood-congruent memory bias** – negative memories are more easily recalled during a depressive episode. The mood disorder reduces cognitive resources, hindering how information is processed, organised, and retrieved. **State-dependent memory** is a related concept: information learned in a specific mood is easier to recall when experiencing that same mood.

Ganser State

Originally described by Sigmund Ganser in four criminals, this rare condition features:

- **Vorbeigehen** (Carl Westphal): Giving deliberately incorrect answers that are close to correct — "near-miss" or approximate answers. Seen in schizophrenia, dementia, depression, substance intoxication, and brain injuries.
- Clouded consciousness and disorientation
- "Hysterical" symptoms (conversion/dissociative symptoms)
- Recent stressor (head injury, severe illness, emotional trauma)
- Pseudohallucinations
- Amnesia for the period of symptoms

The central debate: is Ganser State primarily psychological (dissociation) or organic (underlying brain dysfunction)? No clear consensus exists. Enoch and Trethowan viewed it as a type of hysterical dissociative reaction. Cutting suggested it may stem from depression or a transient left-hemisphere issue impacting language and semantic knowledge.

Organic Impairment of Memory

Organic (true) amnesias are associated with disease of the brain, and can be described by the function of memory that is impaired.

Impairment of Registration (Encoding)

Anterograde amnesia – the primary difficulty lies in forming new memories after onset of a neurological condition. In Korsakoff's syndrome, patients struggle to spontaneously process and encode the meaning (semantic features) of new information, making creation of strong memory traces difficult.

Impairment of Retention (Storage)

Retrograde amnesia – loss of memory for events before the onset of brain injury. Often follows a **temporal gradient** (Ribot's Law): newer memories are more likely to be lost than older, more established ones. Duration varies from minutes to decades.

Impairment of Retrieval (Recall)

Two types of retrieval are distinguished:

- **Direct retrieval**: Automatic access triggered by a specific cue. Relies on the medial temporal lobes. Example: "Have you ever been to Lagos?"
- **Strategic retrieval**: Effortful search triggered by less specific prompts. Depends on the ventromedial prefrontal cortex. Example: "Who won the World Cup before the current champions?"

Confabulation is a manifestation of retrieval failures – disruptions in creating accurate cue-memory associations, search strategies, and monitoring of retrieved memories.

Impairment of Recognition

Recognition involves the **"remember-know" paradigm** (Tulving):

- **Remembering**: Conscious recollection with details and context of the original encounter.
- **Knowing**: A sense of familiarity without detailed recollection.

Recognition deficits are documented in Alzheimer's disease (impacting both "remember" and "know" judgements – Dalla Barba, 1997) and in schizophrenia (Drakeford et al., 2006).

Tests to Assess Memory

A range of instruments is used to assess different components of memory in clinical and research settings:

- **Wechsler Memory Scale (WMS-IV)**: The most widely used comprehensive memory battery. Assesses auditory memory, visual memory, working memory, and delayed recall.
- **Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test (RAVLT)**: Assesses verbal learning and memory – the patient learns a 15-word list over five trials.
- **Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test**: Assesses visuospatial constructional ability and visual memory – the patient copies a complex figure and then draws it from memory.
- **Digit Span (forward and backward)**: Part of the Wechsler scales. Forward span assesses attention; backward span assesses working memory.
- **Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE)**: Includes a brief memory component (3-word registration and recall). Screening tool, not a comprehensive memory assessment.
- **Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA)**: More sensitive than MMSE for mild cognitive impairment. Includes delayed recall of 5 words.
- **Addenbrooke's Cognitive Examination (ACE-III)**: Assesses five cognitive domains including memory. Particularly useful for differentiating Alzheimer's from frontotemporal dementia.

Related Topics

See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: The Self and Its Disorders
See: Emotions and Its Disorders
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders
See: Thought and Its Disorders
See: Neurocognition in Schizophrenia

Motor Disorder

Will is goal-directed striving based on cognitively planned motivation.



Fundamental Concepts: Needs, Drive, Instinct, Motivation, and Will

Understanding motor behaviour in psychiatry requires a grasp of the hierarchy from basic biological needs through to volitional action. This hierarchy – needs → drive → motivation → will – represents increasing levels of cognitive control over behaviour.

Needs

Needs are the fundamental biological requirements that must be met for survival and well-being. They generate the initial impetus for action and include appetite, thirst, sleep, and exploratory behaviour.

Abnormalities of Needs

Appetite:

- **Anorexia**: Loss of appetite – seen in Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), anorexia nervosa, and medical illness.
- **Kleine-Levin Syndrome**: A rare disorder characterised by recurrent episodes of hypersomnia, hyperphagia, and behavioural disturbance. Predominantly affects adolescent males. Episodes last days to weeks, with complete normality between episodes. The aetiology likely involves hypothalamic dysfunction.
- **Pica**: Persistent eating of non-nutritive substances (clay, chalk, paper). Seen in intellectual disability, iron deficiency, pregnancy, and certain cultural practices.

Thirst:

- **Psychogenic polydipsia**: Excessive water intake (often \>3 litres/day) without a physiological cause. Common in chronic schizophrenia – can lead to dangerous hyponatraemia ("water intoxication"). The mechanism may involve dysregulation of the hypothalamic thirst centre or a compulsive quality to the drinking behaviour.
- **Diabetes insipidus**: Excessive thirst and dilute urine due to ADH deficiency (central) or renal insensitivity to ADH (nephrogenic). The nephrogenic form is a well-known side effect of lithium therapy.

Sleep: Disturbed in anxiety (initial insomnia), depression (early morning awakening, hypersomnia in atypical depression), Pickwickian syndrome (obesity-hypoventilation syndrome with daytime somnolence), and Kleine-Levin syndrome (recurrent hypersomnia).

Exploratory behaviour: Increased in mania (restless, distractible, novelty-seeking), decreased in depression (psychomotor retardation, withdrawal), and disorganised in schizophrenia.

Drive

Drive is a hypothetical construct referring to the energising force that compels an organism toward action. It has two dimensions: **selectivity** (the direction of action) and **strength** (the vigour of action).

Abnormalities of drive are seen in schizophrenia (diminished drive — avolition, a negative symptom), mania (excessive, poorly directed drive), depression (global reduction in drive), and paraphilias (drive directed toward atypical sexual objects or behaviours).

Instinct

Instinct refers to an innate, unlearned pattern of behaviour that leads to drive satisfaction. Unlike drive (which is a motivational state), instinct describes the specific behavioural program that unfolds in response to the drive.

Motivation

Motivation is a hypothetical activating factor, governed by need, that moves an individual to action to satisfy those needs. It involves cognitive appraisal of both the need and the available means of satisfaction. Avolition (loss of motivation) is a core negative symptom of schizophrenia and is also seen in severe depression and frontal lobe lesions.

Will

Will is goal-directed striving or intention based on cognitively planned motivation. It represents the highest level of volitional control — the capacity to choose, initiate, and sustain purposeful action.

Jaspers: Urge, Drive, and Volitional Act

Jaspers distinguished three levels of purposive behaviour:

- **Urge (Impulsive act)**: An immediate, unreflective motor act without conscious deliberation.
- **Drive**: A more sustained and directed form of activity with some awareness.
- **Volitional act**: A fully conscious, deliberate act preceded by awareness of intention and involving inhibition of competing impulses.

Jaspers also described the clinical concepts of **awareness of inhibition of will** (the patient feels they want to act but cannot — seen in depression), **awareness of loss of will** (the patient recognises their volitional capacity has diminished — seen in schizophrenia), and **availability of willpower** (the degree to which the patient can mobilise volitional effort).

Motor Disorders

Motor disorders in psychiatry are classified into: **disorders of adaptive movements** (expressive, reactive, and goal-directed) and **disorders of non-adaptive movements** (spontaneous movements, abnormal induced movements). A separate category covers **disorders of posture** and **abnormal complex patterns of behaviour** (stupor, excitement).

Disorders of Adaptive Movements

Disorders of Expressive Movements

Expressive movements are the motor accompaniments of emotional states – facial expressions, gestures, and body posture. They depend on culture, affective state, and personality.

Signs in Depression:

- **Omega sign (Ω sign)**: A fold or furrow between the eyebrows caused by contraction of the corrugator supercilii muscle, giving the forehead an omega (Ω) shape. Described by Charles Darwin as the *omega melancholicum*, later formalised by Heinrich Schüle as the *melancholic omega*.
- **Veraguth sign**: Upper lid fold – the palpebral fold runs obliquely, higher laterally than medially, producing a triangular contour of the upper lid. Described by Otto Veraguth as characteristic of chronic depression.
- **Ratlosigkeit**: A facial expression of bewilderment and perplexity, described by Oswald Bumke. Seen in both melancholia and early schizophrenia.

Signs in Anxiety: Fidgeting, hand wringing, jiggling (moving legs up and down restlessly).

Signs in Mania: Increased psychomotor activity (PMA) – except in ecstasy, where PMA is paradoxically reduced as the patient becomes still and absorbed.

Signs in Schizophrenia: **Schnauzkrampf** (literally "pig snout") – a snout spasm with pursing and protrusion of the lips. Classically associated with chronic schizophrenia and tardive dyskinesia.

Ointment Facies: A flat, full, greasy, expressionless face – seen in catatonia and parkinsonism (including drug-induced). The seborrhoeic quality is thought to result from autonomic dysregulation.

Disorders of Reactive Movements

Reactive movements are the immediate, automatic adjustments to new stimuli associated with a sense of alertness and adaptation.

- **Exacerbation**: Seen in anxiety and mania – heightened startle response, hypervigilance, and excessive orienting.
- **Reduction**: Seen in catatonia, parkinsonism, and stupor – diminished or absent orienting responses, poor startle, and reduced environmental awareness.

Disorders of Goal-Directed Movements

Stereotypies: Repetitive, non-goal-directed movements that are uniform in form and occur in a fixed pattern. They serve no obvious adaptive function and are not influenced by the environment. Seen in ASD, schizophrenia, intellectual disability, and catatonia.

Mannerisms: Always goal-directed but carried out in a peculiar, idiosyncratic manner. The goal itself is normal, but the way it is executed is odd or bizarre. Seen in normal individuals (who wish to get noticed), anxious individuals, schizophrenia, and catatonia.

Bizarreries: Grotesque, distorted movements with no discernible goal or aim. Can be considered a form of stereotypy. The distinction from mannerisms: mannerisms have a recognisable goal; bizarreries do not.

Disorders of Non-Adaptive Movements

Spontaneous Movements

Motor habits that are non-goal-directed (though they may have been goal-directed at some point). Their frequency increases during anxiety. **Example**: Throat clearing that originally served to relieve anxiety while talking but has now become an automatic, purposeless act.

Displacement acts: When a normal pattern of movement is prevented, an abnormal or substitute pattern emerges. Normal motor activities can also become displacement activity — for example, scratching one's head or adjusting glasses when frustrated.

Tics: Sudden, rapid, involuntary twitching of small muscle groups. They are reminiscent of expressive or defensive movements, psychogenically generated, and precipitated during emotional tension. Tics may occasionally be voluntarily suppressed, but this builds inner tension until the tic is released. They are the hallmark of Tourette syndrome, which is characterised by multiple motor and vocal tics lasting more than one year.

Involuntary Movement Disorders

Tremors:

- **Enhanced physiological tremor (8–12 Hz)**: Fine, fast tremor exacerbated by anxiety, caffeine, thyrotoxicosis, and medications. Lithium toxicity produces this type.
- **Parkinsonian tremor (3–5 Hz)**: The classic "pill-rolling" tremor — adduction and abduction of the thumb with flexion and extension of the fingers. Present at rest, diminishes with intentional movement.
- **Essential tremor (4–8 Hz)**: Familial, postural, and action tremor. Characteristically improves with alcohol (a useful diagnostic clue, though not a therapeutic recommendation).
- **Cerebellar tremor (2–4 Hz)**: Intention tremor with side-to-side oscillation, worst during goal-directed movement. Often accompanied by a head titubation.

Athetosis: Slow, sinuous, writhing movements producing strange postures of the body or its parts. Slower, more sustained, and larger in amplitude compared to chorea. The **overflow phenomenon** is characteristic — athetosis can be brought out or intensified by voluntary movement of another body part.

Pseudoathetosis: Athetoid movements caused by loss of position sense (sensory athetosis) rather than basal ganglia pathology. Results from posterior column damage — can be caused by peripheral nerve disease, spinal cord pathology, or parietal lobe lesions. Classic example: tabes dorsalis.

Chorea: Abrupt, jerking, irregular movements that are excessive and reactive. Patients may attempt to disguise choreiform movements by incorporating them into voluntary or habitual movements — a phenomenon called **parakinesia**. The **Gordon phenomenon** is characteristic of Huntington's chorea: hypotonia, hyporeflexia, and prolonged muscle contraction when eliciting tendon reflexes.

Ballismus: A violent form of choreiform movement composed of wild, flinging, large-amplitude movements affecting proximal limbs. Most commonly caused by involvement of the subthalamic nucleus (of Luys) or putamen. **Hemiballismus** (affecting one half of the body) is the most common form. **Monoballism** affects one limb; **paraballism** affects all four limbs.

Parakinetic catatonia: Chorea and athetosis can be seen as part of the catatonic syndrome. Patients are in constant motion but remain able to perform simple tasks and answer simple questions – distinguishing this from the immobility of classic catatonic stupor.

Abnormal Induced Movements

These are motor phenomena that are elicited or triggered by an examiner or external stimulus. Many are hallmarks of catatonia.

Positivism (Co-operative Phenomena)

Lohr and Wisniewski described **positivism** as comprising four components: mitgehen, mitmachen, automatic obedience, and echo phenomena.

- **Automatic obedience**: Excessive co-operation regardless of consequence. The patient performs every instruction given by the examiner. Also termed **command automatism** (coined by Bumke).
- **Mitmachen** (German: "co-operation"): The body can be put in any position. When instructed to resist, the patient provides no resistance, but returns gradually to the earlier position.
- **Mitgehen** (German: "to go with"): Passive obedience – the patient moves in any direction with the slightest pressure, like an anglepoise lamp (Max Hamilton's analogy). The most extreme form of co-operation.

Echo Phenomena

- **Echolalia**: Automatic repetition of words or phrases heard, whether understood or not. In children, echo speech is normally suppressed when voluntary speech develops – echolalia in adults can be considered a regression or disinhibition. Types: immediate and delayed.
- **Echopraxia**: Imitation of motor acts seen in the environment. May be non-specific or the patient may be selective about whom they imitate. In ASD, hyperimitation of actions is related to reduced understanding of others' minds (impaired mentalising).
- **Echologia**: Echoing the content of a question using different words – a verbal paraphrase rather than a verbatim repetition. Seen in transcortical aphasia, dementia, catatonia, delirium, and organic personality disorders.

Perseveration

Persistent repetition of words, phrases, ideas, or movements beyond the point of relevance, preventing progress. Freeman and Gathercole described three types:

- **Compulsive repetition**: Continues until next stimulation is given.

- **Impairment of switching**: The patient keeps giving the same answer to subsequent different questions.
- **Ideational perseveration**: A specific part of a sentence is repeated (seen particularly in dementia).

Logoclonia and Palilalia

Logoclonia: The last syllable of a word or sentence is repeated, usually in response to a question. Classically associated with Parkinsonism and dementia.

Palilalia: The patient repeats their own perseverated word with increasing frequency – a failure to terminate speech. Two types are recognised:

- **Type A (Palilalie spasmodique / Heterolalique)**: Increasing frequency and decreasing volume, with inability to maintain pitch.
- **Type B (Palilalie atonique / Homolalique)**: Constant rate with periods of silence.

Grasp Phenomena

- **Forced grasping**: The patient holds the examiner's hand despite being instructed not to touch it. A failure of voluntary inhibition.
- **Grasp reflex**: The patient automatically catches an object placed in the palm (elicited by stroking the palm). Unilateral in a conscious patient – suggests frontal lobe pathology. Bilateral with clouding of consciousness – suggests diffuse cortical disease.
- **Magnet reaction**: The examiner touches the patient's palm and steadily removes their hand; the patient's hand follows the examiner's hand as if magnetically attracted.

Advertence

The patient turns toward the examiner when approached and carries out a non-specific, non-goal-directed act, continuing until interrupted.

Negativism

Negativism is motiveless resistance to all instructions or interference, not associated with any defensive attitude. It is distinct from motivated refusal or failure to co-operate. The degree of negativism depends on the environment. Seen in specific learning disability, dementia, and catatonia.

- **Active negativism**: The patient does the exact opposite of what is asked, in a reflex-like manner.
- **Passive negativism**: The patient resists all interference but performs no action at all.

Gegenhalten (paratonia / oppositional muscle tension): The patient opposes all movement with the same degree of force as is being applied by the examiner – a proportional resistance. Distinct from rigidity (which is constant regardless of applied force).

Ambitendency

Ambitendency is the motor equivalent of ambivalence (which relates to thought). The patient becomes motorically stuck when confronted with contradictory signals. **Example**: The examiner offers their hand but asks the patient not to shake it – the patient, in conflict, becomes frozen with tentative, incomplete reaching movements.

Motor Speech Disorders

Attitude Towards Conversation

- **Easy distractibility**: The patient's attention shifts rapidly away from conversation – seen in schizophrenia and mania.
- **Negativism**: Resistance to engaging in conversation – seen in dementia and catatonia.
- **Whispering**: Speech reduced to a whisper – seen in dementia and catatonia.

Flow of Speech

- **Decreased**: Seen in depression (psychomotor retardation), catatonia (mutism), and psychosis.
- **Increased**: Seen in agitated depression, anxiety, and mania (pressure of speech).

Sperrung (obstruction of speech): The motor component of thought blocking. The patient stops mid-sentence, with a visible pause, and may or may not resume the same topic.

Disorders of Posture

Postural abnormalities are among the most clinically striking features of catatonia and certain neurological conditions. Key phenomena include:

- **Catalepsy (waxy flexibility / cerea flexibilitas)**: The patient maintains an imposed posture for an abnormally long period. When the examiner moves the patient's limb, there is initial waxy resistance (like bending a candle), followed by the limb remaining in the new position.
- **Posturing**: The patient spontaneously assumes and maintains unusual or uncomfortable positions for extended periods without apparent distress. Classic examples include the

psychological pillow (the patient lies with their head raised off the bed as if on an invisible pillow) and the **crucifixion posture**.

- **Opisthotonus**: Severe hyperextension of the back with the body forming an arc, supported only by the head and heels. Seen in catatonia, tetanus, and strychnine poisoning.
- **Dystonia**: Sustained involuntary muscle contraction producing abnormal postures. Acute dystonia is a common extrapyramidal side effect of First-Generation Antipsychotics (FGAs), especially in young males. Types include torticollis (neck), oculogyric crisis (eyes), and trismus (jaw).

Abnormal Complex Patterns of Behaviour

Stupor

Stupor is a state of near-complete or complete absence of responsiveness to external stimuli, with apparent preservation of consciousness (the patient's eyes are often open and may track the environment). It is a clinical presentation, not a diagnosis – the underlying cause must always be identified.

Types of Stupor:

Type	Key Features	Distinguishing Characteristics
Psychogenic (Dissociative) Stupor	Seen in war veterans ("shell shock"); paralysed with fear	Virtually mute and motionless (severe) or mute only (mild); resolves with reassurance or abreaction
Akinetic Mutism	Eyes open, patient alert, slight reaction to pain, uncooperative	No new memory registration occurs; associated with bilateral frontal or cingulate lesions
Petit-mal Status	Recurrent bursts of seizures with intervening stupor	EEG shows burst-and-suppression pattern
Catatonic Stupor	Flaccid muscles with increased and fluctuating muscle tension	Associated catatonic features present (waxy flexibility, posturing, negativism)
Depressive Stupor	Normal tone, minimal response	Other symptoms of catatonia are absent; responds to antidepressant treatment

Excitement

Excitement refers to a state of excessive motor activity, which may be secondary to various psychiatric and neurological conditions. The type of excitement provides important diagnostic clues:

- **Catatonic excitement**: Aimless overactivity, destructiveness, and violence – not directed at a specific target.
- **Schizophrenic excitement**: Secondary to delusions and hallucinations – the patient may be responding to command hallucinations or acting on persecutory beliefs.
- **Delirious excitement**: Ill-directed overactivity with fluctuating consciousness – the patient appears confused and disoriented.
- **Manic excitement**: Affect-guided, increased goal-directed activity – the patient is elated, grandiose, and purposeful (even if the purpose is misguided).
- **Mania a potu**: Post-alcohol excitement characterised by senseless violence. Typically occurs after relatively small amounts of alcohol in predisposed individuals.
- **Agitated depression**: Psychomotor agitation in the context of depressive affect – the patient is restless, paces, wrings hands, but the mood is one of anguish rather than elation.

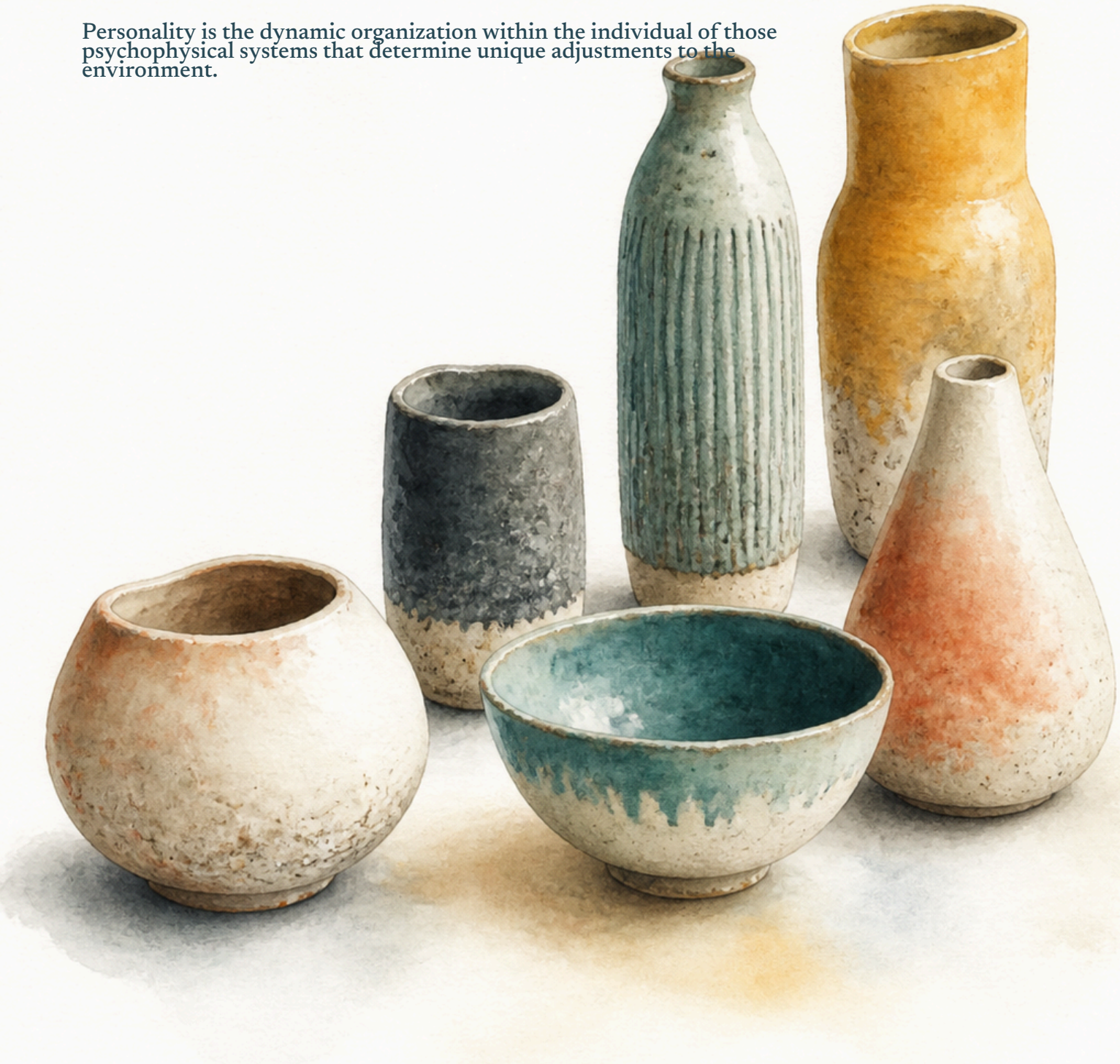
- **Epileptic furore**: May occur in the pre-ictal, ictal, or post-ictal phase. Characterised by purposeless, often violent behaviour with subsequent amnesia.

Related Topics

See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Emotions and Its Disorders
See: Schizophrenia and Psychosis
See: Consciousness and Its Disorders
See: Speech and Language
See: Extrapyramidal Side-effects Practical Guide

Personality and Its Disorders

Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine unique adjustments to the environment.



Trait Theory of Personality

Trait theory represents one of the most enduring and scientifically grounded approaches to understanding personality. It emphasises the role of stable, internal characteristics – **traits** – that consistently influence behaviour across time and situations.

Gordon Allport and the Foundations of Trait Theory

Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that

determine unique adjustments to the environment. – Gordon Allport

Allport (1897–1967) was the first to propose that traits are **real, internal predispositions** – not merely descriptive labels. His definition encapsulates several key concepts: **dynamic organisation** (personality is structured yet adaptable), **psychophysical systems** (interplay between biological substrates and psychological functions), and **unique adjustments** (individuals respond uniquely to environmental demands). Allport advocated for the **idiographic approach** – studying the whole individual in depth – over the nomothetic approach of seeking universal laws.

Allport's Classification of Traits

- **Cardinal traits**: Rare but dominant traits that govern nearly all behaviour. Example: Self-sacrifice in a religious leader, lifelong activism in a political figure.
- **Central traits**: General characteristics forming the foundational personality structure. Commonly used in descriptions (e.g., loyal, ambitious, sociable). Most people have 5–10 central traits.
- **Secondary traits**: Less consistent, more context-dependent. Examples: Preferences, situational anxiety, temporary moods.

Functional Autonomy

A distinctive concept introduced by Allport – behaviours that originally served one purpose become independent motivations over time. **Example**: A person begins writing poetry to cope with grief but later continues writing for creative fulfilment. This illustrates how motivation can evolve, and behaviours persist even after the original drive has faded.

Later Developments in Trait Theory

Raymond B. Cattell

Cattell advanced trait theory by applying **factor analysis** – a statistical method identifying clusters of related behaviours. He identified **16 underlying personality dimensions** (source traits) and organised them into the **16 Personality Factors (16PF) Questionnaire**, which remains influential in clinical assessment and occupational screening. He distinguished **surface traits** (observable behaviours) from **source traits** (deeper, stable, biologically based dimensions).

Hans J. Eysenck

Eysenck proposed a **biologically rooted, three-factor model** (the PEN model): **Extraversion–Introversion**, **Neuroticism–Emotional Stability**, and **Psychoticism**. He argued that traits are genetically based and linked to arousal levels in the brain — extraverts have lower baseline cortical arousal and thus seek stimulation. He developed the **Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)**.

Costa and McCrae: The Big Five

FUN FACT

The Big Five (OCEAN) model has been replicated across more than 50 cultures and even in non-human primates. Chimpanzees reliably show individual differences in extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism — suggesting these personality dimensions have deep evolutionary roots.

Costa and McCrae developed the **Five-Factor Model (Big Five)**, currently the dominant model in personality psychology: **Openness to experience**, **Conscientiousness**, **Extraversion**, **Agreeableness**, and **Neuroticism** (mnemonic: **OCEAN**). This model is empirically validated across cultures and has strong predictive validity for behaviour and psychopathology. Assessed using the **NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R)**.

Trait vs State

EXAM POINT

The trait-state distinction is a perennial exam favourite. Traits are stable, enduring, and genetically influenced (personality disorders). States are temporary and situationally triggered (adjustment disorders). A person's traits determine how they react to states.

A **trait** is an enduring, internal disposition that remains relatively stable over time and is genetically influenced. A **state** is a temporary condition triggered by external circumstances. A person's reaction to a state (e.g., stress) is shaped by their underlying traits (e.g., anxiety-proneness). This distinction is fundamental in clinical practice — personality disorders reflect maladaptive **traits**, while adjustment disorders reflect maladaptive responses to **states**.

Criticisms of Trait Theory

- Difficulties in operationalising and measuring traits precisely.
- May neglect **situational factors** that strongly influence behaviour (the person-situation debate, Walter Mischel).
- Focuses more on description than on explaining personality development or change.

Emil Kraepelin and Early Classification of Personality Disorders

Emil Kraepelin (1856–1926), the father of modern psychiatric classification, used the term **"psychopathic"** to refer to individuals with pathological personality traits not attributable to psychosis, intellectual disability, or mood disorders. These individuals exhibited persistent dysfunction in social, moral, or occupational domains.

In his **7th edition (1904)**, Kraepelin identified four types: **born criminals**, **weak-willed individuals**, **pathological liars (mythomanes)**, and **pseudo-querulants**. In his **8th edition (1915)**, he expanded this to seven types, reflecting a shift toward viewing personality pathology as a distinct diagnostic category rather than moral failing.

Kraepelin's descriptive approach directly influenced Kurt Schneider and contributed to the eventual development of ICD and DSM personality disorder classifications.

CLINICAL PEARL

Schneider's definition — "those who suffer or who cause society to suffer" — remains the most clinically useful threshold for personality disorder. It captures both the subjective distress (ego-dystonic types) and the social dysfunction (ego-syntonic types like antisocial PD) that define the boundary between personality variation and disorder.

Kurt Schneider and the Typology of Psychopathic Personalities

Those abnormal personalities who suffer or who cause society to suffer because of their

abnormality. — Kurt Schneider

Kurt Schneider (1887–1967) refined Kraepelin's concept by emphasising **subjective suffering** and **social dysfunction** rather than moral or legal deviance. He proposed ten personality types as clinical prototypes:

Type	Key Features	Modern Resonance
Hyperthymic	Cheerful, overconfident, energetic, reckless, poor impulse control	Cyclothymic/hypomanic traits
Depressive	Chronically pessimistic, self-critical, ruminative, low self-esteem	Depressive personality, dysthymia
Insecure (Anxious)	Timid, hesitant, self-doubting, seeks reassurance	Avoidant PD
Fanatical	Dogmatic, rigidly ideological, intolerant of opposition	Paranoid PD features
Recognition-Seeking	Desires admiration, superficial charm, manipulative	Histrionic/Narcissistic PD
Recognition-Seeking with Labile Mood	Above + emotional instability, hypersensitivity	Borderline PD features
Explosive	Sudden anger outbursts, disproportionate to provocation	Intermittent Explosive Disorder, BPD

Type	Key Features	Modern Resonance
Emotionally Blunted	Cold, indifferent, lacks empathy, socially isolated	Schizoid PD, Antisocial PD
Weak-Willed	Lacks persistence, easily swayed, inconsistent	Dependent PD features
Asthenic	Physically/emotionally fragile, chronic fatigue, anxious	Avoidant/Dependent PD features

Schneider's typology marked a departure from morally charged classifications and helped define personality disorders as **clinical syndromes** rather than character flaws – a conceptual shift that remains foundational in European psychiatry.

Otto Kernberg and Structural Diagnosis of Personality Organisation

Otto Kernberg (b. 1928), integrating psychoanalytic object relations theory with clinical observation, proposed three levels of **personality organisation** based on the individual's structural functioning:

Neurotic Personality Organisation

The highest level: intact sense of identity, mature defence mechanisms (repression, intellectualisation), stable reality testing, capacity for empathy and stable relationships. Responds well to psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural therapies.

Borderline Personality Organisation

Intermediate level – more impaired than neurotic but less disorganised than psychotic. Key features:

- **Identity diffusion**: Unstable, contradictory self-image; difficulty maintaining a coherent sense of self.
- **Primitive defences**: Splitting (all-good or all-bad), projective identification, idealisation and devaluation.
- **Intact reality testing** in most situations, though transiently impaired under stress.
- Marked instability in relationships, affect regulation, and impulse control.

This is a **structural diagnosis**, not synonymous with DSM Borderline Personality Disorder – it encompasses a broader range of Cluster B disorders. Kernberg developed **Transference-Focused Psychotherapy (TFP)** specifically for this level.

Psychotic Personality Organisation

Most severe level: severely impaired reality testing, severe identity diffusion, psychotic-level defences (denial, delusional projection, distortion). Seen in schizophrenia spectrum disorders. Requires structured environments, antipsychotic medication, and supportive psychotherapy.

Theodore Millon and the Classification of Personality Disorders

Theodore Millon (1928–2014) integrated clinical observation, evolutionary theory, and psychometric research to create a comprehensive model. His framework, described in *Personality Disorders in Modern Life*, significantly influenced the DSM-III's introduction of formal personality disorder diagnoses and the **cluster system**.

Millon's Continuum: Normal to Pathological

- **Normal personality styles**: Adaptive, flexible, context-sensitive traits (confident, conscientious, sociable).
- **Neurotic personality patterns**: Mild to moderate maladaptive traits causing distress but not meeting full PD criteria.
- **Borderline personality organisation**: Severe pathology with identity disturbance, affective instability, primitive defences, and impaired interpersonal functioning.

DSM Clusters (Reflecting Millon's Influence)

- **Cluster A (Odd/Eccentric)**: Paranoid, Schizoid, Schizotypal – detached, cognitively distorted traits.
- **Cluster B (Dramatic/Emotional/Erratic)**: Antisocial, Borderline, Histrionic, Narcissistic – emotional dysregulation and interpersonal intensity.
- **Cluster C (Anxious/Fearful)**: Avoidant, Dependent, Obsessive-Compulsive – inhibition, fearfulness, dependency.

A useful exam mnemonic: Cluster A is **"Mad"**, Cluster B is **"Bad"**, Cluster C is **"Sad"**.

Tyrer and Johnson: Graded Classification of Personality Disorders

Peter Tyrer and **Tony Johnson** proposed a dimensional severity system, validated in the Nottingham Study of Neurotic Disorder, as an alternative to categorical (present/absent) approaches:

Level	Label	Description	Prognostic Significance
0	No Personality Disorder	Normal functioning; good capacity for relationships and coping	Best outcomes; lowest symptom burden
1	Personality Difficulty	Traits cause problems only under stress; do not meet full PD criteria	Subclinical but clinically significant vulnerabilities
2	Simple Personality Disorder	Persistent pathological traits causing marked difficulties; corresponds to one DSM/ICD diagnosis	Meets diagnostic threshold; moderate dysfunction

Level	Label	Description	Prognostic Significance
3	Diffuse Personality Disorder	Widespread, severe dysfunction involving traits from multiple clusters; meets criteria for two or more PDs	Highest symptom burden; poorest treatment response

This graded system explained **97% of the variation** in clinical outcomes — significantly more than earlier categorical models (72%). It aligns with the dimensional perspectives adopted in **ICD-11** and the **DSM-5 Alternative Model for Personality Disorders (AMPD)**. The ICD-11, notably, has abandoned specific personality disorder categories entirely in favour of a severity-based dimensional model — making Tyrer and Johnson's framework prophetically relevant.

Tri-Dimensional Model Across Personality Theories

Multiple personality theories converge on three core dimensions that reflect biologically and psychologically meaningful aspects of temperament: (1) **Emotionality/Neuroticism**, (2) **Sociability/Extraversion**, and (3) **Impulsivity/Novelty Seeking**. These have been linked to specific neurobiological systems and are considered evolutionarily conserved.

Cloninger: Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI)

C. Robert Cloninger introduced a neurobiologically informed model with three **temperament dimensions** (heritable, linked to neurotransmitters):

- **Novelty Seeking** — Exploratory activity, impulsiveness, excitability. Linked to **dopaminergic activity**. High levels: impulsivity, extravagance, disorderliness.
- **Harm Avoidance** — Behavioural inhibition, fearfulness, anticipatory worry. Linked to **serotonin function**. High levels: anxiety-prone, pessimistic, cautious.
- **Reward Dependence** — Social attachment, dependence on approval, emotional sensitivity. Linked to **noradrenergic systems**. High levels: sentimental, warm, sociable.

Cloninger later added three **character traits** (Self-directedness, Cooperativeness, Self-transcendence) to capture mature personality functioning, but the temperament triad remains foundational. A key clinical application: patients with low Self-directedness and low Cooperativeness are at particularly high risk for personality disorder diagnoses regardless of their temperament profile.

Eysenck: PEN Model

Eysenck's biologically grounded model: **Psychoticism** (aggressiveness, egocentricity, low empathy — DA/5-HT dysfunction), **Extraversion** (sociability, assertiveness — low baseline cortical arousal → seeks stimulation), and **Neuroticism** (emotional instability, worry — autonomic nervous system reactivity).

Simonov: Neurophysiological Theory

The Soviet neuroscientist P.V. Simonov proposed three core systems: **Need for Information** (curiosity, novelty-seeking), **Emotional Reactivity** (susceptibility to fear/anxiety), and **Dominance– Submission** (social hierarchy, competitiveness). His model was influential in bridging neuroscience with personality psychology in Eastern European psychiatry.

Watson and Clark: Positive and Negative Affectivity

David Watson and Lee Anna Clark mapped personality onto affect: **Positive Affectivity** (enthusiasm, energy – correlates with extraversion), **Negative Affectivity** (distress, anxiety – correlates with neuroticism), and **Disinhibition vs Constraint** (impulsivity, sensation seeking). Their work influenced hierarchical models of affect and the DSM-5 personality trait model.

Zuckerman: Alternative Five-Factor Model

Marvin Zuckerman emphasised the biological bases of temperament through the **Zuckerman- Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire (ZKPQ)**. His key contribution was **Impulsive Sensation Seeking** – strongly linked to dopaminergic pathways and risk-taking behaviours, with empirical backing from behavioural genetics, psychophysiology, and animal models.

Summary: Tri-Dimensional Convergence

Dimension	Cloninger	Eysenck	Watson & Clark	Zuckerman	Neurobiology
Emotionality	Harm Avoidance	Neuroticism	Negative Affectivity	Neuroticism-Anxiety	Serotonin, ANS reactivity
Sociability	Reward Dependence	Extraversion	Positive Affectivity	Sociability	Noradrenaline, cortical arousal
Impulsivity	Novelty Seeking	Psychoticism	Disinhibition	Impulsive Sensation Seeking	Dopamine

Paranoid Personality Disorder

Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD) is characterised by a pervasive, inflexible pattern of **suspiciousness and distrust** toward others. Its conceptual history stretches from ancient philosophy to modern cognitive-behavioural models.

Historical Evolution

Theophrastus (student of Aristotle) described the *Suspicious Man* in his *Characters* – one who *"believes that everything is fraudulent, suspects that even those who wish him well are plotting against him."* This classical portrayal predates psychiatry by over two millennia.

Valentin Magnan (1835–1916) conceptualised "fragile personalities" with idiosyncratic thinking, hypochondriasis, suspiciousness, and undue sensitivity — locating paranoid traits within a spectrum rather than as discrete illness.

Kraepelin first used the term *"paranoide Persönlichkeitsstörung"* and described the **pseudo-querulous personality** — excessive distrust, preoccupation with perceived injustice, litigiousness, and hypersensitivity, crucially without delusions. This separated personality pathology from paranoid psychosis.

Eugen Bleuler described a paranoid triad: **suspiciousness**, **grandiosity**, and **feelings of persecution**. **Kretschmer** described the paranoid-prone personality with sensitivity to rejection and tendency toward overvalued ideas. **Jaspers** characterised the self-insecure personality (inadequacy masked by defensive hostility). **Schneider** described the fanatic psychopath (rigid beliefs, inflexible moralism).

Akhtar: Six Domains of Psychosocial Functioning

Salman Akhtar synthesised overt and covert manifestations of PPD:

Domain	Overt Presentation	Covert Presentation
Self-Concept	Arrogant, self-important, explosively angry	Timid, frightened, envious of others
Interpersonal	Demanding, accusatory, mistrusting	Naive, dependent, fearful of intimacy
Social Adaptation	Industrious in solitary work, meticulous	Poor peer functioning, conflict-prone
Love and Sexuality	Disengaged, disdainful of romantic bonds	Deep anxiety about sexual adequacy
Ethics and Ideals	Moralistic, religious fantasies, ideological rigidity	Idiosyncratic or eccentric moral systems
Cognitive Style	Highly alert, persuasive, biased data gathering	Loss of perspective, denial of contradictions

Bernstein: Six Core Traits

David Bernstein distilled PPD into six dimensions: **mistrust/suspiciousness**, **antagonism/hostility**, **introversion/excessive autonomy**, **hypersensitivity**, **hypervigilance**, and **rigidity**. These create a self-perpetuating cycle of suspicion, isolation, and defensiveness.

Schizoid Personality Disorder

Schizoid Personality Disorder (SPD) is defined by a pervasive pattern of **detachment from social relationships** and a **restricted range of emotional expression**. The term "schizoid" reflects a morbid exaggeration of introversion — a preference for internal over external reality, without frank psychosis. SPD straddles the boundary between psychosis-prone temperaments and functionally adapted introverted individuals.

Historical Foundations

Eugen Bleuler coined "schizoid personality" for individuals who, though not schizophrenic, were quiet, suspicious, outwardly dull yet internally sensitive, disconnected from real-world goals, obsessed with vague purposes, and characterised by a lack of uniformity of affectivity. **August Hoch** described the **shut-in personality** – shy, secretive, prone to magical thinking and daydreaming. **Ernst Kretschmer** distinguished **schizothymes** (healthy, withdrawn, introspective – genetically related to schizophrenia) from **schizoids** (pathological amplifications), proposing a continuum: normal → personality disorder → psychotic illness.

Gladys Terry and Thomas Rennie described the **parergasic personality** (shy, snobbish, hypersensitive, with compulsive sexual fantasies – from Adolf Meyer's term *parergasia*). **Franz Josef Kallmann** introduced the **schizoid psychopath** – eccentric borderline personalities with ideological delusions and secretiveness. **Donald Winnicott** contributed the **false self organisation** – emotional detachment and compliance masking internal chaos, formed in response to emotional trauma or intrusive caregivers.

Extended Models

Gregory Zilboorg described **ambulatory schizophrenia** – socially intact facade but fantasy-dominant cognition and autistic thought. **Helene Deutsch** introduced the **"as-if" personality** – superficial social normality masking emotional impoverishment, with imitative rather than genuinely felt relationships. **Hoch and Polatin** described **pseudo-neurotic schizophrenia** with three features: pan-anxiety, pan-neurosis, and pan-sexuality.

Sandor Rado conceptualised **schizotypy** as the psychodynamic expression of the schizophrenic genotype, with two fundamental deficits: **integrative pleasure deficiency** and **proprioceptive disorder**. **Paul Meehl** advanced the neurobiological model through **schizogene** (hypothesised gene) → **schizotaxia** (biologically based integrative deficit) → **schizotypy** (personality-level expression), with traits of cognitive slippage, anhedonia, interpersonal aversiveness, and ambivalence.

Clinical Features: Overt and Covert (Akhtar)

Domain	Overt Features	Covert Features
Self-Concept	Compliant, stoic, self-sufficient, feels inferior	Cynical, depersonalised, empty, hidden grandiosity
Interpersonal	Withdrawn, aloof, afraid of intimacy	Exquisitely sensitive, deeply curious, needy
Social Adaptation	Prefers solitary work, seems lazy or esoteric	Poor goal clarity, sometimes passionately creative
Love and Sexuality	Asexual, avoids romantic interests	Secret voyeuristic interests, vulnerable to erotomania
Ethics and Ideals	Idiosyncratic moral/political beliefs, mystical	Morally uneven; swings between amoral and self-sacrifice
Cognitive Style	Absent-minded, fantasy-prone, vague speech	Autistic thinking, hyperreflective, unusual language

Key differential: Schizoid individuals **do not desire** social connection (unlike avoidant individuals, who desire it intensely but avoid it out of fear). This is the single most important clinical distinction between SPD and Avoidant PD.

Borderline Personality Disorder

BPD is characterised by **affective instability**, **identity disturbance**, **interpersonal chaos**, and **impulsivity**. The term "borderline" originally reflected its position between psychosis and neurosis. It is now recognised as a distinct syndrome with developmental, structural, and phenomenological features.

Conceptual Origins

John Gunderson emphasised diagnostic overlap with schizophrenia (transient psychosis, paranoia, identity confusion) and affective disorders (mood dysregulation, depression, reactivity), arguing that BPD should be conceptualised as a primary disturbance of **affect regulation and identity integration**.

Kernberg: Borderline Personality Organisation

Key features: (1) **Identity diffusion** – poorly integrated, contradictory self-image; (2) **Primitive defences** – splitting, projective identification; (3) **Reality testing generally intact** but vulnerable to transient lapses (micro-psychotic episodes, quasi-psychotic phenomena) under stress; (4) Low anxiety tolerance, poor impulse control, limited sublimatory capacity.

Grinker: The Borderline Syndrome

Roy Richard Grinker described four core features: **anger** (frequent, intense, inappropriate), **defect in affectional relationships** (idealisation-devaluation cycles), **depression** (chronic dysphoria and emptiness), and **lack of consistent self-identity**. Additional features: lowered self-esteem, suspiciousness, hypersensitivity, extreme fearfulness, deficient reality orientation, and primitive defences (denial, projection).

Robert Knight: Borderline States

Knight described borderline states as neurotic symptoms of unusual intensity with unusual ego functions: ego-syntonic symptoms, unrealistic planning, bizarre dreams, absence of precipitating stress, preserved intellectual functioning, and **"psychic bleed"** – emotional collapse in response to crisis. Brief psychotic or impulsive episodes occur under stress, but reality testing is largely preserved.

Synthesis of the Borderline Construct

Modern understanding of BPD involves core disruptions across six domains: (1) Self-identity (fluctuating, fragmented, chronic emptiness); (2) Interpersonal relationships (idealisation-devaluation, abandonment fear); (3) Affect regulation (rapid, intense, short-lived emotional responses); (4) Impulse control (self-harm, substance abuse, reckless behaviour); (5) Cognitive functioning (transient psychotic symptoms under stress); (6) Defence mechanisms (splitting, projection, acting out, projective identification).

Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (Anankastic Personality)

OCPD is characterised by a pervasive pattern of **preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, mental and interpersonal control**, at the expense of flexibility and efficiency. It differs from OCD in that it does **not involve true obsessions or compulsions** – rather, it is a characterological rigidity and need for control. The disorder has rich roots in European psychiatry, associated with overconscientiousness, doubt, guilt, and moral rigidity.

Historical and Theoretical Foundations

Kurt Schneider identified: permanent feeling of guilt, lack of hedonistic joy, qualms and feelings of insufficiency, doubt ending in despair, and a mask of confidence fencing off inner fragility. This reflects the deep internal conflict between **inner fragility** and **external perfectionism**.

Ernst Kretschmer described the **sensitive personality** – moral seriousness, social discomfort, high conscientiousness, rigid adherence to internal standards. **Karl Jaspers** characterised the **insecure personality** – lacking inner certainty, excessive self-monitoring, perfectionism driven by fear of inadequacy rather than intrinsic standards.

Millon: Four Dimensional Constructs of OCPD

- **Aims of Existence**: Prioritises security and predictability over pleasure or spontaneity.
- **Modes of Adaptation**: Passively accommodative to authority, actively controlling in familiar environments.
- **Strategies of Replication**: Intense self-discipline; need for individualisation through competence and moral correctness.
- **Nurturance and Object Relations**: Ambivalence toward dependency – craves approval yet fears intimacy. Uses control and criticism as distancing defences.

Pfohl and Blum: Core Triad

Three defining traits: **rigidity** (inflexibility regardless of context), **perfectionism** (excessive attention to detail → inefficiency and procrastination), and **restricted emotional expressiveness** (emotions controlled, repressed, or intellectualised). This triad reflects the core belief that emotional discipline ensures safety, while spontaneity risks failure.

Clinical Features: Overt and Covert

Domain	Overt Features	Covert Features
Self-Concept	Disciplined, conscientious, self-controlled	Doubting, guilty, perfectionistic, insecure
Interpersonal	Formal, judgemental, demanding	Ambivalent about closeness, fears loss of control

Domain	Overt Features	Covert Features
Social Adaptation	Overachiever, meticulous, prefers routine	Inefficient due to perfectionism; passive-aggressive
Love and Sexuality	Controlled, inhibited, formal	Fear of spontaneity; repressed desires, guilt over sexuality
Ethics and Ideals	Morally scrupulous, rule-bound	Vulnerable to moralistic overreach, harsh self-judgement
Cognitive Style	Ruminative, detail-focused, structured	Obsessive thinking, dichotomous reasoning

Key differential: OCPD is **ego-syntonic** (the patient sees their perfectionism and orderliness as virtues), while OCD is **ego-dystonic** (the patient recognises their obsessions and compulsions as irrational and distressing). This is the fundamental clinical distinction.

Avoidant Personality Disorder

Avoidant Personality Disorder (AvPD) is characterised by **social inhibition**, **feelings of inadequacy**, and **hypersensitivity to negative evaluation**. Individuals deeply desire social closeness but are held back by intense fear of criticism, rejection, or humiliation. AvPD lies at the intersection of anxiety and personality pathology.

Historical Foundations

Karen Horney classified neurotic personalities into three coping types: moving toward people (compliant), moving against people (aggressive), and **moving away from people (detached)**. The detached personality corresponds conceptually to AvPD — hyper-independent to the point of interpersonal detachment, maintaining protective distance to preserve self-integrity.

Alden and Capreol: Subtypes

- **Cold-Avoidant**: Emotional detachment, inability to express positive affect. Misperceived as indifferent though internally anxious.
- **Exploitable-Avoidant**: Inhibited assertiveness, inability to set boundaries. Susceptible to manipulation and abuse.

Psychodynamic Understanding

AvPD is rooted in early attachment injuries: caregiver rejection, harsh criticism, humiliation, and emotional neglect. These shape internal working models where the self is seen as inadequate and others as critical. Central defences: **avoidance** (to prevent anticipated humiliation), **introjection of critical others** (leading to self-loathing), and **fantasy of ideal acceptance** as a substitute for real intimacy.

Clinical Features: Overt and Covert

Domain	Overt Presentation	Covert Experience
Self-Concept	Humble, self-effacing, compliant	Feels worthless, inferior, expects rejection
Interpersonal	Avoids closeness, limits contact	Deep craving for connection, fears humiliation
Social Adaptation	Declines opportunities, underachieves	Feels trapped by fear, believes failure is inevitable
Love and Sexuality	Withdrawn, fears exposure or ridicule	Yearns for intimacy but dreads vulnerability
Ethics and Ideals	High self-expectations, fearful of failure	Rigid conscience, prone to shame and guilt
Cognitive Style	Cautious, ruminative, pessimistic	Catastrophises setbacks, preoccupied with imagined criticisms

Key differential: AvPD vs Schizoid PD — the avoidant individual **desperately wants connection** but fears rejection, while the schizoid individual is **genuinely indifferent to social contact**. AvPD vs Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) — AvPD is broader, more pervasive, and more ingrained in personality structure, while SAD is more circumscribed and focused on specific performance situations. However, there is significant overlap, and some researchers consider them variants of the same spectrum.

Other Personality Disorders: Brief Notes

The following personality disorders, while not covered in the same depth as the above in this note, are essential knowledge for the psychiatry resident:

Antisocial Personality Disorder (Dissocial PD)

Characterised by a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others. Core features: deceitfulness, impulsivity, irritability, aggressiveness, reckless disregard for safety, consistent irresponsibility, and lack of remorse. Diagnosis requires evidence of Conduct Disorder before age 15. The **Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)** by Robert Hare distinguishes psychopathy (a more specific, severe construct characterised by callous-unemotional traits and superficial charm) from the broader ASPD diagnosis.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy. Heinz Kohut's **self psychology** describes narcissistic injury (threats to the grandiose self) and narcissistic rage. Two subtypes are recognised: **grandiose (overt)** — entitled, exploitative, arrogant — and **vulnerable (covert)** — hypersensitive, shame-prone, socially withdrawn but with internal grandiosity.

Histrionic Personality Disorder

Excessive emotionality and attention-seeking behaviour. Features include discomfort when not the centre of attention, inappropriate sexually seductive behaviour, rapidly shifting and shallow emotions, impressionistic speech, suggestibility, and considering relationships more intimate than they actually are.

Dependent Personality Disorder

Excessive need to be taken care of, leading to submissive and clinging behaviour and fear of separation. Difficulty making everyday decisions without excessive reassurance, difficulty expressing disagreement, and going to excessive lengths to obtain nurturance and support. Overlaps conceptually with Bowlby's anxious attachment style.

Schizotypal Personality Disorder

A pattern of acute discomfort in close relationships, cognitive or perceptual distortions, and eccentricities of behaviour. Features include ideas of reference, magical thinking, unusual perceptual experiences, odd thinking and speech, suspiciousness, inappropriate affect, and odd behaviour. Considered part of the schizophrenia spectrum – genetic studies show increased prevalence among first-degree relatives of schizophrenia patients. In ICD-11, it is classified under schizophrenia spectrum disorders rather than personality disorders.

Related Topics

See: The Self and Its Disorders
See: Emotions and Its Disorders
See: Defence Mechanisms
See: Basics of Psychopathology
See: Thought and Its Disorders
See: Schema Therapy

Concept index

Every source heading is represented. Entries are grouped alphabetically, retain chapter context, and link to the relevant section.

1

1. Bottom-Up Model (Data-Driven Processing) CH 03 31
1. Completion Illusions CH 04 40
1. Neurotransmitter Hypothesis CH 04 42

2

2. Affect Illusions CH 04 41
2. Sensory Modality Deprivation CH 04 42
2. Top-Down Model (Concept-Driven Processing) CH 03 31

3

3. Disorders of Peripheral Sense Organs CH 04 42
3. Pareidolic Illusions CH 04 41
3. Template Matching Model CH 03 32

4

4. Feature Matching Model CH 03 32

5

5. Recognition-by-Components (RBC) Model CH 03 32

6

6. Configural Processing Model CH 03 33

A

A. Disorders of Form (Structure) of Thinking CH 06 55
A. Illusions CH 04 40
Abnormal Complex Patterns of Behaviour CH 11 119
Abnormal Emotional Reactions CH 08 80
Abnormal Expression of Emotion CH 08 81
Abnormal Induced Movements CH 11 116
Abnormal Perception CH 04 38
Abnormalities of Needs CH 11 112
Additional Aphasia Subtypes CH 07 72
Advertence CH 11 117
Aetiology of Depersonalisation CH 09 95
Aetiology of Hallucinations CH 04 42
Affective Disorders of Memory CH 10 108
Affective Incontinence CH 08 83
Akhtar: Six Domains of Psychosocial Functioning CH 12 129
Alden and Capreol: Subtypes CH 12 133
Allport's Classification of Traits CH 12 122
Ambitendency CH 11 118
Antisocial Personality Disorder (Dissocial PD) CH 12 134
Anxiety CH 08 80
Anxious Foreboding CH 08 81
Apathy CH 08 82
Aperception CH 03 30
Aphasia CH 07 71
Attitude Towards Conversation CH 11 118

Auditory Hallucinations (Phonemes) CH 04 42
Autistic Thinking CH 05 49
Automatism CH 02 26
Autoscopy CH 09 96
Avoidant Personality Disorder CH 12 133

B

B. Disorders of Stream (Flow) of Thought CH 06 59
B. Hallucinations CH 04 41
Background and Foundations CH 01 3
Background and Influence CH 01 2
Background and Philosophical Foundation CH 01 6
Battery CH 01 16
Beech and Fransella: Experimental Effects in Stuttering CH 07 73
Belle Indifference CH 08 82
Bernstein: Six Core Traits CH 12 129
Biological Foundations of Self CH 09 93
Blunted Affect CH 08 82
Body Image Distortions CH 04 44
Body Reaction Theories CH 08 78
Borderline Personality Disorder CH 12 131
Borderline Personality Organisation CH 12 125

C

C. Disorders of Possession CH 06 61
C. Pseudohallucinations CH 04 44
Cannon-Bard Theory CH 08 79
Changes in Intensity CH 04 39
Changes in Quality CH 04 39
Changes in Spatial Form CH 04 39
Characteristics of Ego (Scharfetter and Jaspers) CH 09 89
Characteristics of Imagery (Mnemonic: FIGURE) CH 03 34
Characteristics of the Somatic Self (Scharfetter and Jaspers) CH 09 90
CIDI (Composite International Diagnostic Interview) CH 01 17
Circumstantiality CH 06 60
Clang Association CH 06 57
Classification of Disorders of Thought CH 06 53
Clinical and Educational Legacy CH 01 3
Clinical Approach CH 01 14
Clinical Features: Overt and Covert CH 12 132
Clinical Features: Overt and Covert CH 12 134
Clinical Features: Overt and Covert (Akhtar) CH 12 130
Clinical Implications CH 01 19
Cloninger: Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI) CH 12 127
Clouding of Consciousness CH 02 25
Cluttering CH 07 73
Co-occurrence CH 01 13
Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Richard Lazarus) CH 08 79
Common Types of Delusions CH 06 65
Communication of Emotions CH 08 85
Comorbidity CH 01 13
Comorbidity, Co-occurrence, and Consanguinity CH 01 13
Comparison Table CH 01 14
Comparison Table CH 01 15
Comparison Table CH 01 16
Comparison: SCID, SCAN, and PSE CH 01 18
Components of Language CH 07 70
Concept of Disease, Illness, Sickness, and Disorder CH 01 11
Conceptual and Clinical Implications CH 01 9
Conceptual Origins CH 12 131
Confabulation CH 10 107
Conrad's Stages of Delusion Formation CH 06 64
Consanguinity CH 01 13
Consciousness CH 02 22
Consolidation Theory CH 10 104
Constructivism CH 01 15
Content-Based Classification of Memory CH 10 103
Continuous Approach CH 01 8
Continuous vs Discontinuous Approach in Psychopathology CH 01 8
Core Assumptions CH 01 18
Core Themes in Fish's Approach CH 01 3
Costa and McCrae: The Big Five CH 12 123
Criticisms of Trait Theory CH 12 123
Cryptomnesia CH 10 106
Cultural Variations in Self-Concept CH 09 92

D

D. Disorders of Content CH 06 62
Decision Making CH 05 50
Default Mode Network (DMN) CH 09 93
Defining Normality CH 01 12
Definition CH 01 8
Definition CH 01 9
Definition and Focus CH 01 7
Definition and Purpose CH 01 7
Definition of Perception CH 04 37
Definition of Self in Psychiatry CH 09 89
Definitions CH 04 41
Definitions CH 05 47
Definitions CH 07 70
Definitions CH 08 77
Definitions CH 10 101
Deja Vu and Related Phenomena (Paramnesia) CH 10 105
Delineation and Zone of Rarity (Robert Kendell) CH 01 12
Delirium CH 02 27
Delusion vs Obsession CH 06 66
Delusional Memory CH 06 63
Delusions CH 06 63
Delusions as a Failure of Predictive Coding CH 06 67
Demoralisation CH 08 81
Denial CH 08 82
Dependent Personality Disorder CH 12 135
Depersonalisation CH 09 94
Depersonalisation: Symptom vs Syndrome CH 09 95
Derailment CH 06 55
Derealisation CH 09 95
Descriptive Psychopathology CH 01 2
Descriptive Psychopathology CH 01 7
Descriptive Psychopathology vs Explanatory Psychopathology CH 01 7
Desomatisation CH 09 95
Desultory Thinking CH 06 56
Desultory Thinking and Omission CH 06 56
Developmental Cascade Model CH 01 19
Developmental Psychopathology CH 01 18
Diagnostic Algorithm for Six Major Types of Aphasia CH 07 71
Differential: Delusion vs Obsession vs Rumination vs Overvalued Idea vs Preoccupation CH 06 68
Dimensions of Consciousness CH 02 23
Diminution: Feeling of Loss of Feeling CH 08 82
DIS (Diagnostic Interview Schedule) CH 01 17
Discontinuous Approach CH 01 9
Disease CH 01 11
Disorder CH 01 12
Disorders Affecting Fluency CH 07 73
Disorders Affecting Language Processing (Aphasias) CH 07 74
Disorders Affecting Vocalisation CH 07 73
Disorders of Activity of Self CH 09 96
Disorders of Adaptive Movements CH 11 114
Disorders of Appropriateness CH 08 83
Disorders of Awareness of Being (Ego Vitality) CH 09 94
Disorders of Beliefs About the Body CH 09 98
Disorders of Bodily Function CH 09 97
Disorders of Consciousness CH 02 25
Disorders of Continuity of Identity CH 09 97
Disorders of Eating and Body Size CH 09 98
Disorders of Embodiment (John Charles Cutting) CH 09 97
Disorders of Expressive Movements CH 11 114
Disorders of Goal-Directed Movements CH 11 114
Disorders of Immediate Awareness of Self-Unity CH 09 96
Disorders of Intensity CH 08 82
Disorders of Lucidity CH 02 25
Disorders of Memory CH 10 105
Disorders of Mobility and Variability CH 08 83
Disorders of Non-Adaptive Movements CH 11 115
Disorders of Physical Characteristics and Emotional Value CH 09 98
Disorders of Posture CH 11 118
Disorders of Reactive Movements CH 11 114
Disorders of Sensory Awareness of the Body CH 09 98
Disorders of Speech in Psychiatry CH 07 73
Disorders of Thought Continuity CH 06 60
Disorders of Thought Tempo CH 06 59
Dissociation of Affect CH 08 81
Dissociative Focal Retrograde Amnesia CH 10 107
Dissociative Fugue CH 10 107
Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) CH 09 97
Distortions of the Experience of Time CH 04 40
Double Phenomenon CH 09 96
Dream-Like State (Oneiroid State) CH 02 26
Drive CH 11 112
Drivelling CH 06 56
Drowsiness CH 02 25
DSM Clusters (Reflecting Millon's Influence) CH 12 126

E

Eastern Philosophical Foundations CH 09 90
Echo Phenomena CH 11 116
Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner) CH 01 19
Edmund Husserl: Influence on Psychopathology CH 01 6
Embodiment and Self CH 09 90
Emil Kraepelin (1856–1926) CH 06 54
Emil Kraepelin and Early Classification of Personality Disorders CH 12 124
Emotional Conditioning CH 10 104
Emotional Constriction CH 08 83
Emotional Lability CH 08 83
Emotional Regulation CH 08 78
Emotions and the Nervous System CH 08 86
Empathy vs Sympathy CH 01 10
Empathy: A Predominantly Cognitive Attribute CH 01 11
Episodic Memory CH 10 103
Equifinality and Multifinality CH 01 19
Evolution of Self-Concept CH 09 91
Examples CH 01 9
Examples CH 01 9
Excitement CH 11 119
Explanation (Erklären) CH 01 10
Explanatory Discontinuity CH 01 13
Explanatory Psychopathology CH 01 7
Explicit Memory CH 10 103
Expression of Affect (Tasman and Lieberman) CH 08 77
Extended Models CH 12 130
Eysenck: PEN Model CH 12 127

F

False Perceptions (Sensory Deceptions) CH 04 40
Falsification of Memory CH 10 106
Family, Attachment, and Early Environment CH 09 92
Fantasy Thinking CH 05 48
Faulty Logic (von Domarus) CH 06 64
Flattening of Affect CH 08 83
Flow of Speech CH 11 118
Forced Laughing or Forced Crying CH 08 84
Forms of Belief CH 06 62
Forms of Compulsions CH 06 62
Forms of Obsessions CH 06 62
Four Methodological Approaches CH 01 5
Frank Fish (1917–1971) and Max Hamilton (1912–1988) CH 06 55
Frank Fish: Contributions to Psychopathology CH 01 2
Functional Autonomy CH 12 122
Fundamental Concepts: Needs, Drive, Instinct, Motivation, and Will CH 11 112
Fusion CH 06 57

G

Ganser State CH 10 108
Gordon Allport and the Foundations of Trait Theory CH 12 122
Grades of Elevated Mood CH 08 85
Grasp Phenomena CH 11 117
Grinker: The Borderline Syndrome CH 12 131
Gross's Process Model of Emotional Regulation CH 08 78
Gustatory Hallucinations (Phantageusia) CH 04 43

H

Hans J. Eysenck CH 12 123
Hindi Version of the PSE (Indian Adaptation) CH 01 17
Historical Account CH 06 53
Historical and Theoretical Foundations CH 12 132
Historical Aspects CH 06 62
Historical Evolution CH 12 128
Historical Foundations CH 12 130
Historical Foundations CH 12 133
Historical Perspectives on Self CH 09 90
History CH 01 2
Histrionic Personality Disorder CH 12 135
Husserl's Concept of Phenomenology CH 01 6
Husserl's Inseparable Acts of Consciousness CH 02 22
Hyperamnesia CH 10 106

I

Illness CH 01 12
Imagery CH 03 33
Imagery CH 04 38
Imagery vs Hallucination CH 03 34
Imaginative Thinking CH 05 49
Impairment of Recognition CH 10 110
Impairment of Registration (Encoding) CH 10 109
Impairment of Retention (Storage) CH 10 109
Impairment of Retrieval (Recall) CH 10 109
Implicit Memory CH 10 104
Impression of Unreality CH 08 84
Incoherence (Word Salad) CH 06 57
Incongruity of Affect CH 08 83
Influence on Karl Jaspers and Clinical Psychopathology CH 01 6
Instinct CH 11 113
Integrated Perspective CH 01 15
Integration of Both Approaches CH 01 8
Integration of Self in Therapy CH 09 99
Interaction of Networks CH 06 67
Interview Schedules CH 01 16
Introduction and History CH 04 37
Involuntary Movement Disorders CH 11 115

J

James Cowles Prichard (1786–1848) CH 06 53
James-Lange Theory CH 08 78
Jasperian View of the Self CH 09 89
Jaspers: Urge, Drive, and Volitional Act CH 11 113
Jaspers' Five Essential Characteristics of Obsessions CH 06 61
Jaspers' Model of Associations CH 05 47
Jaspers' Three Aspects of Consciousness CH 02 23
Jean-Etienne Dominique Esquirol (1772–1840) CH 06 53
John Locke (1632–1704) CH 06 54
Joseph Guislain (1797–1860) CH 06 53
Jules Seglas (1856–1939) CH 06 54

K

Kahneman's Dual-Process Theory CH 05 50
Karl Jaspers: Contributions to Psychopathology CH 01 3
Karl Kleist (1879–1960) CH 06 54
Kendler's Dimensions of Delusions CH 06 65
Kernberg: Borderline Personality Organisation CH 12 131
Key Concepts in Jaspers' Psychopathology CH 01 5
Key Differences CH 01 8
Key Differences CH 01 11
Key Features (Rasmussen) CH 04 41
Key Therapeutic Approaches CH 09 99
Kurt Goldstein (1878–1965) CH 06 55
Kurt Schneider and the Typology of Psychopathic Personalities CH 12 124

L

Lability of Affect CH 08 83
Language CH 07 70
Later Developments in Trait Theory CH 12 122
Leeper's Theory: Motivation and Emotion CH 08 79
Legacy in Psychiatry CH 01 5
Levels of Consciousness CH 02 23
Logoclonia and Palilalia CH 11 117
Long-Term Memory CH 10 102
Long-Term Potentiation (LTP) CH 10 105
Loosening of Associations CH 06 57

M

Mania a Potu CH 02 26
Marcia's Identity Status Theory CH 09 91
Meaningful Disturbances of Memory CH 10 106
Mechanism of Memory: The Five Rs CH 10 101
Memory Disturbances Secondary to Psychiatric Disorders CH 10 107
Memory Impairment in Schizophrenia CH 10 108
Millon: Four Dimensional Constructs of OCPD CH 12 132
Millon's Continuum: Normal to Pathological CH 12 126
Mirror Neurons and Empathy CH 08 85
Modalities of Hallucination CH 04 42
Models of Developmental Psychopathology CH 01 18
Models of Perception CH 04 38

Models of Perception with Neurobiological Correlates CH 03 31
Morbid Depression CH 08 84
Morbid Disorders of Emotion CH 08 84
Morbid Euphoria and Elation CH 08 84
Morbid Expression of Emotion CH 08 82
Moria and Witzelsucht CH 08 85
Motivation CH 11 113
Motor Disorders CH 11 113
Motor Speech Disorders CH 11 118

N

Nancy Andreasen (b. 1938) CH 06 55
Narcissistic Personality Disorder CH 12 134
Needs CH 11 112
Negativism CH 11 117
Neologism CH 06 57
Neuro-Computational Model CH 06 64
Neuroanatomy of Self CH 09 93
Neurobiology of Delusions CH 06 67
Neurobiology of Memory CH 10 104
Neurophysiology CH 07 71
Neurotic Personality Organisation CH 12 125
Neurotransmitters and Self-Perception CH 09 94
Normal and Abnormal CH 01 12
Normal and Abnormal Emotional Reactions CH 08 80
Normal Thinking CH 05 47
Normal Variations CH 10 105
Norman Cameron (1905–1963) CH 06 55

O

Objectivity vs Subjectivity CH 01 4
Obsessions and Compulsions CH 06 61
Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (Anankastic Personality) CH 12 132
Obtundation and Sopor CH 02 25
Olfactory Hallucinations (Phantosmia) CH 04 43
Omission CH 06 56
Organic Impairment of Memory CH 10 109
Other Distortions (Blom et al., 2010) CH 04 40
Other Personality Disorders: Brief Notes CH 12 134
Other Speech and Language Disorders CH 07 74
Otto Kernberg and Structural Diagnosis of Personality Organisation CH 12 125
Out-of-Body Experience (OBE) CH 09 96
Overvalued Ideas CH 06 62

P

Panksepp's Affective Neuroscience CH 08 80
Paranoid Personality Disorder CH 12 128
Paul Ekman and Basic Emotions CH 08 77
Paul Eugen Bleuler (1857–1939) CH 06 54
Perception CH 03 29
Perceptual Processing in TAT CH 03 35
Perplexity CH 08 82
Perseveration CH 06 60
Perseveration CH 11 116
Personality Disorders and the Self CH 09 98
Pfohl and Blum: Core Triad CH 12 132
Phenomenological and Cognitive Theories CH 06 64
Phenomenological Emphasis CH 01 2
Phenomenological Influence CH 01 7
Phenomenology and the Importance of Form over Content CH 01 4
Philosophical Approach CH 01 14
Philosophical Approach vs Clinical Approach in Psychopathology CH 01 14
Philosophical Foundations CH 02 22
Phobia CH 08 81
Plutchik's Theory of Relationships Among Emotions CH 08 79
Positivism (Co-operative Phenomena) CH 11 116
Poverty of Thought CH 06 60
Pragmatism CH 01 15
Present State Examination (PSE) CH 01 17
Pressure of Speech / Flight of Ideas CH 06 59
Primary Delusions (Autochthonous Delusions) CH 06 63
Primary vs Secondary Symptoms CH 01 4
Priming CH 10 104
Procedural Memory CH 10 104
Process of Memory: Obtaining Information CH 10 101
Pseudohallucinations vs True Hallucinations CH 04 44
Pseudologia Fantastica CH 10 107

Psychodynamic Contributions CH 09 91
Psychodynamic Theories CH 06 63
Psychodynamic Understanding CH 12 133
Psychological Components of Self CH 09 91
Psychopathology Related to the Self CH 09 94
Psychotic Personality Organisation CH 12 125

Q

Questionnaire CH 01 16
Questionnaire vs Schedule vs Battery CH 01 16
Quick Revision: Disorders of Form CH 06 58

R

Rational (Conceptual) Thinking CH 05 48
Raymond B. Cattell CH 12 122
Realism CH 01 15
Realism vs Constructivism vs Pragmatism in Psychopathology CH 01 14
Recovered Memory and False Memory Syndrome CH 10 107
Related Topics CH 01 20
Related Topics CH 02 27
Related Topics CH 03 35
Related Topics CH 04 45
Related Topics CH 05 51
Related Topics CH 06 68
Related Topics CH 07 75
Related Topics CH 08 87
Related Topics CH 09 99
Related Topics CH 10 110
Related Topics CH 11 120
Related Topics CH 12 135
Resolution of Delusions CH 06 66
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Smiling Depression CH 08 81
Social and Systemic Theories CH 06 64
Special Types of Hallucination CH 04 43
Specific Disorders of Consciousness CH 02 25
Speech CH 07 70
Spontaneous Movements CH 11 115
Static vs Genetic Understanding CH 01 4
Stiffening of Affect CH 08 83
Stupor CH 11 119
Stuttering CH 07 72
Substitution CH 06 56
Summary of Husserl's Contribution CH 01 6
Summary Table CH 01 9
Summary Table CH 01 13
Summary Table CH 03 30

Summary: Classification of Emotional Disorders CH 08 86
Summary: Disorders of Consciousness CH 02 27
Summary: Models of Perception CH 03 33
Summary: Tri-Dimensional Convergence CH 12 128
Sympathy: A Primarily Emotional Response CH 01 11
Symptoms vs Signs CH 01 3
Synthesis of the Borderline Construct CH 12 131

T

Tactile (Somatic) Hallucinations CH 04 43
Tangentiality vs Circumstantiality CH 06 58
Tangentiality vs Derailment CH 06 59
Temporal Classification of Memory CH 10 102
Tests to Assess Memory CH 10 110
The Agency Network CH 06 67
The Brain and Emotions: The Limbic System CH 08 86
The Concept of Ununderstandability CH 01 5
The Concept of 'Myness' CH 06 61
The Fear Network CH 06 67
The Influence of Top-Down Processing CH 04 37
The Papez Circuit CH 10 104
The Salience Network CH 06 67
The Self in Psychotic Disorders CH 09 98
The Self in Therapeutic Contexts CH 09 99
The Unconscious CH 02 24
Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) – The Perception Process CH 03 34
Theodore Millon and the Classification of Personality Disorders CH 12 126
Theories of Delusion Formation CH 06 63
Theories of Emotions CH 08 78
Thought Alienation CH 06 61
Thought Blocking CH 06 60
Three Basic Facts About Any Theory of Consciousness CH 02 22
Three Core Features of Unconsciousness CH 02 24
Three Dimensions of Consciousness CH 02 23
Three Dimensions of Unconsciousness CH 02 24
Trait Theory of Personality CH 12 122
Trait vs State CH 12 123
Transactional Model CH 01 18
Tri-Dimensional Model Across Personality Theories CH 12 127
Twilight State CH 02 25
Types of Normal Thinking CH 05 48
Tyrer and Johnson: Graded Classification of Personality Disorders CH 12 126

U

Understanding (Verstehen) CH 01 10
Understanding vs Explanation in Psychopathology CH 01 10

V

Visual Hallucinations CH 04 42

W

Watson and Clark: Positive and Negative Affectivity CH 12 128
Western Philosophical Foundations CH 09 91
What is NOT Depersonalisation CH 09 95
Wilhelm Griesinger (1817–1868) CH 06 54
Will CH 11 113
Working Memory Model (Baddeley and Hitch, 1974) CH 10 102

Z

Zuckerman: Alternative Five-Factor Model CH 12 128

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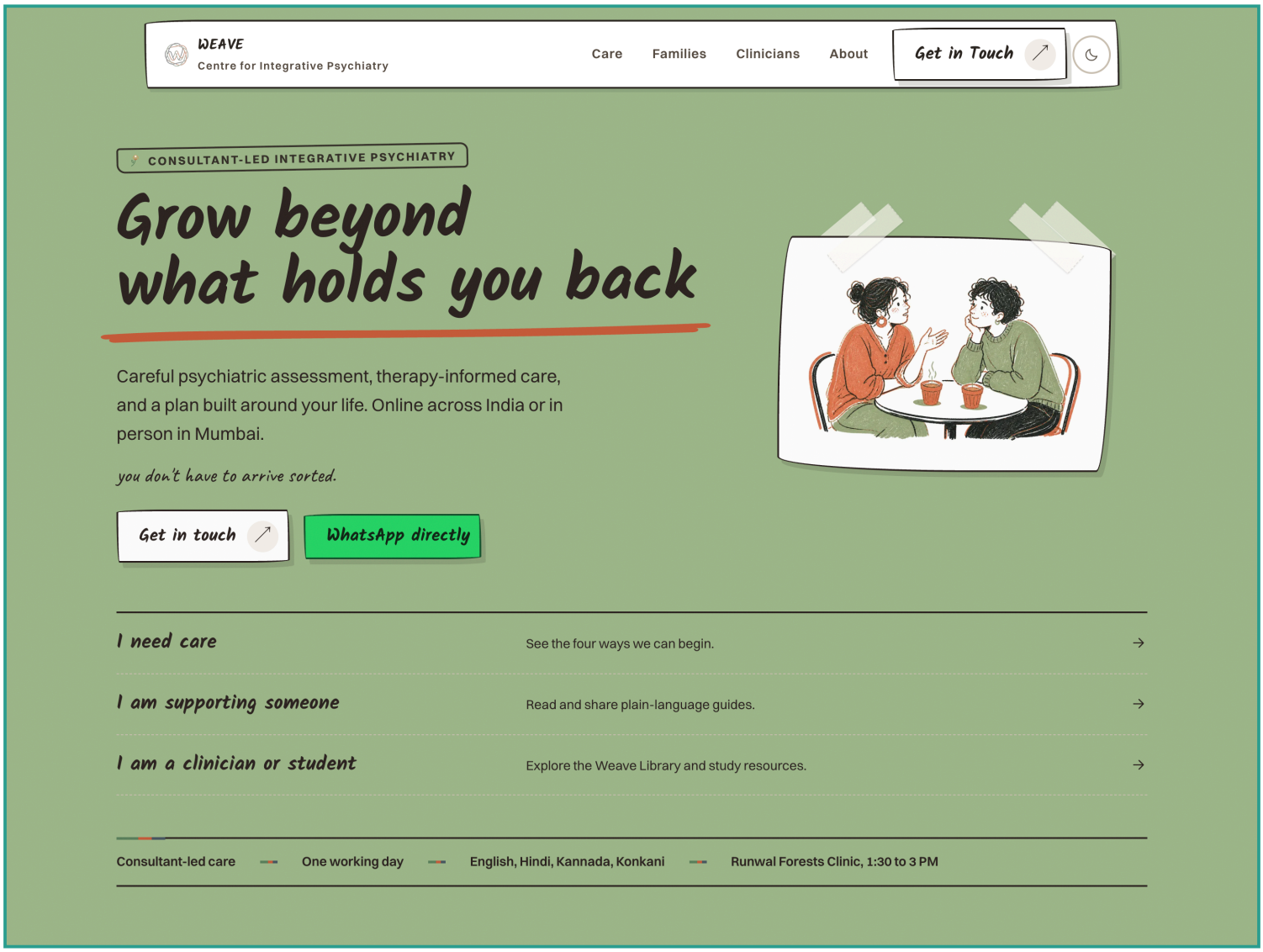
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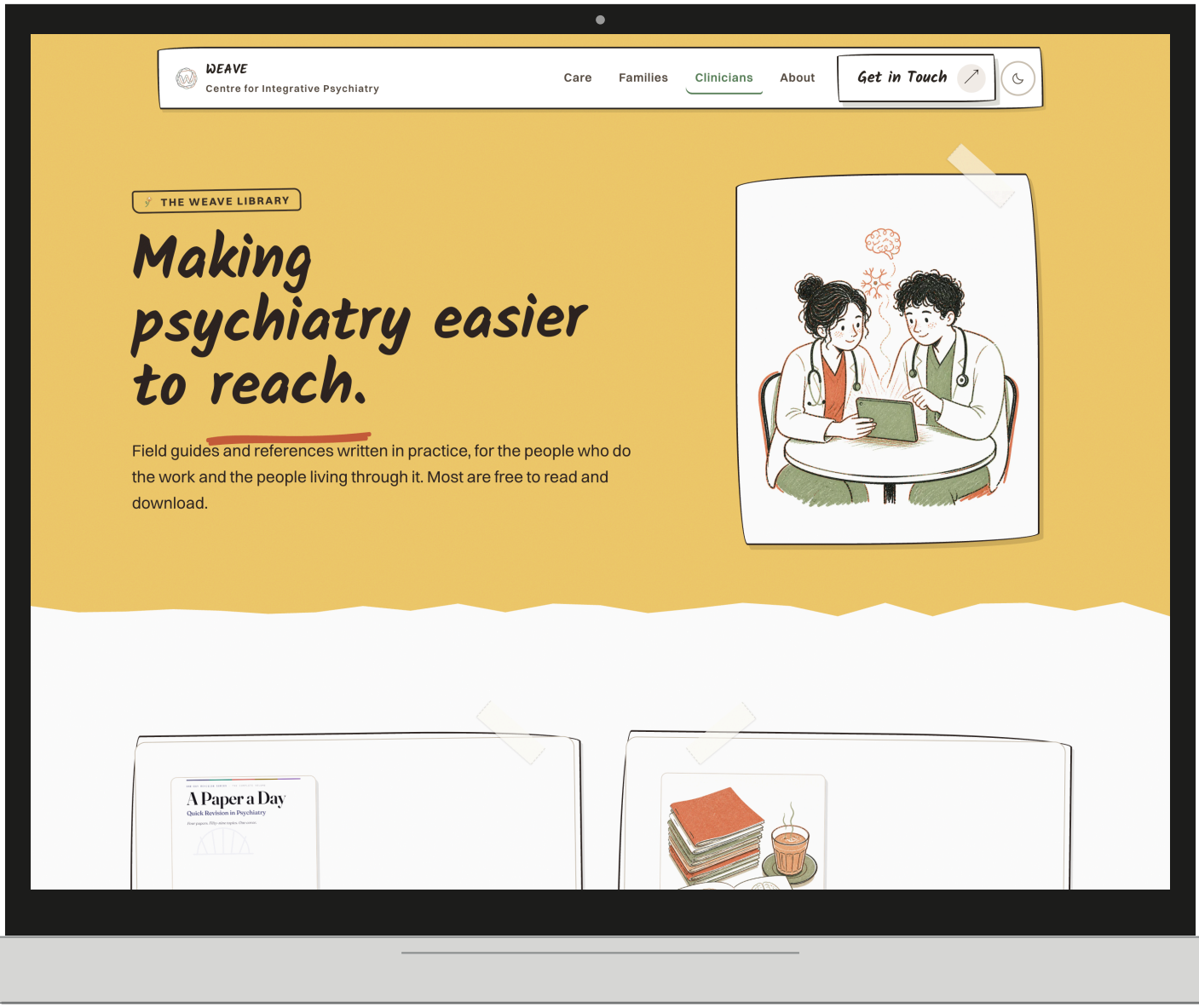
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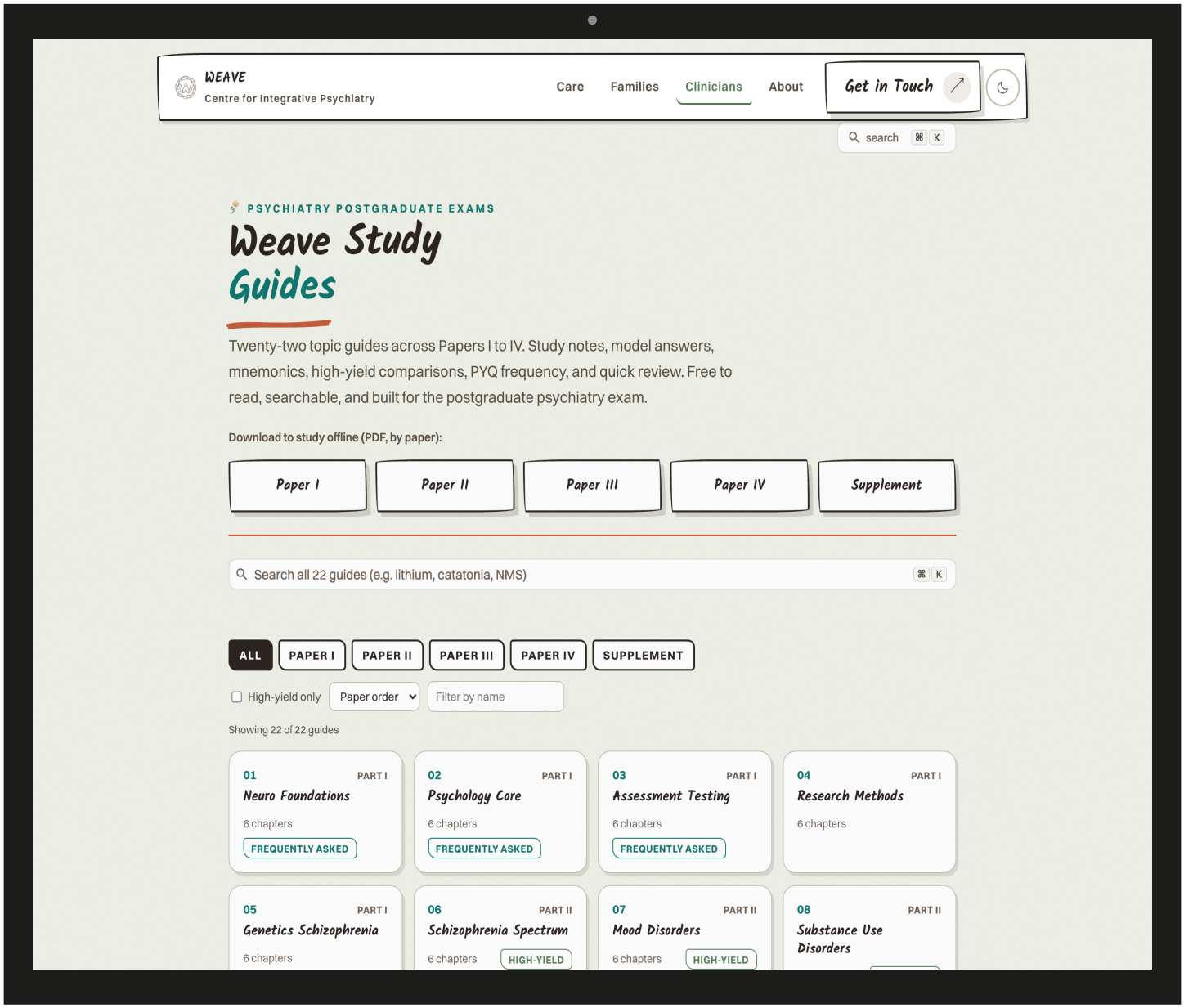


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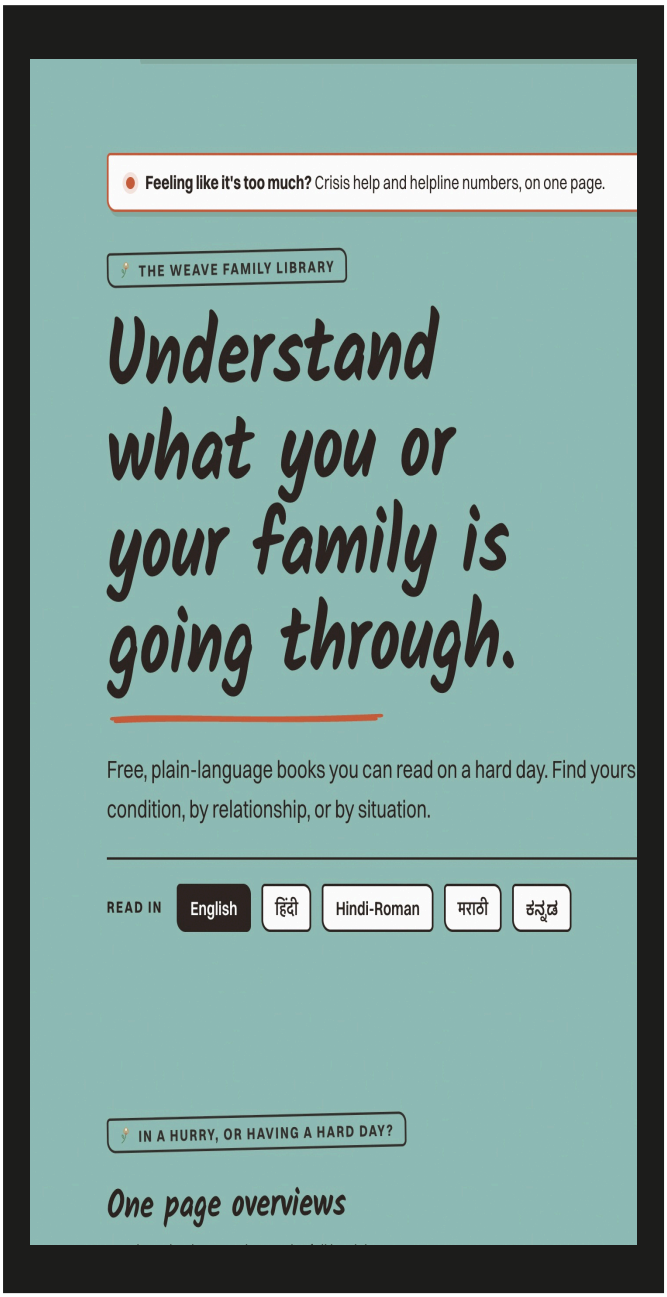
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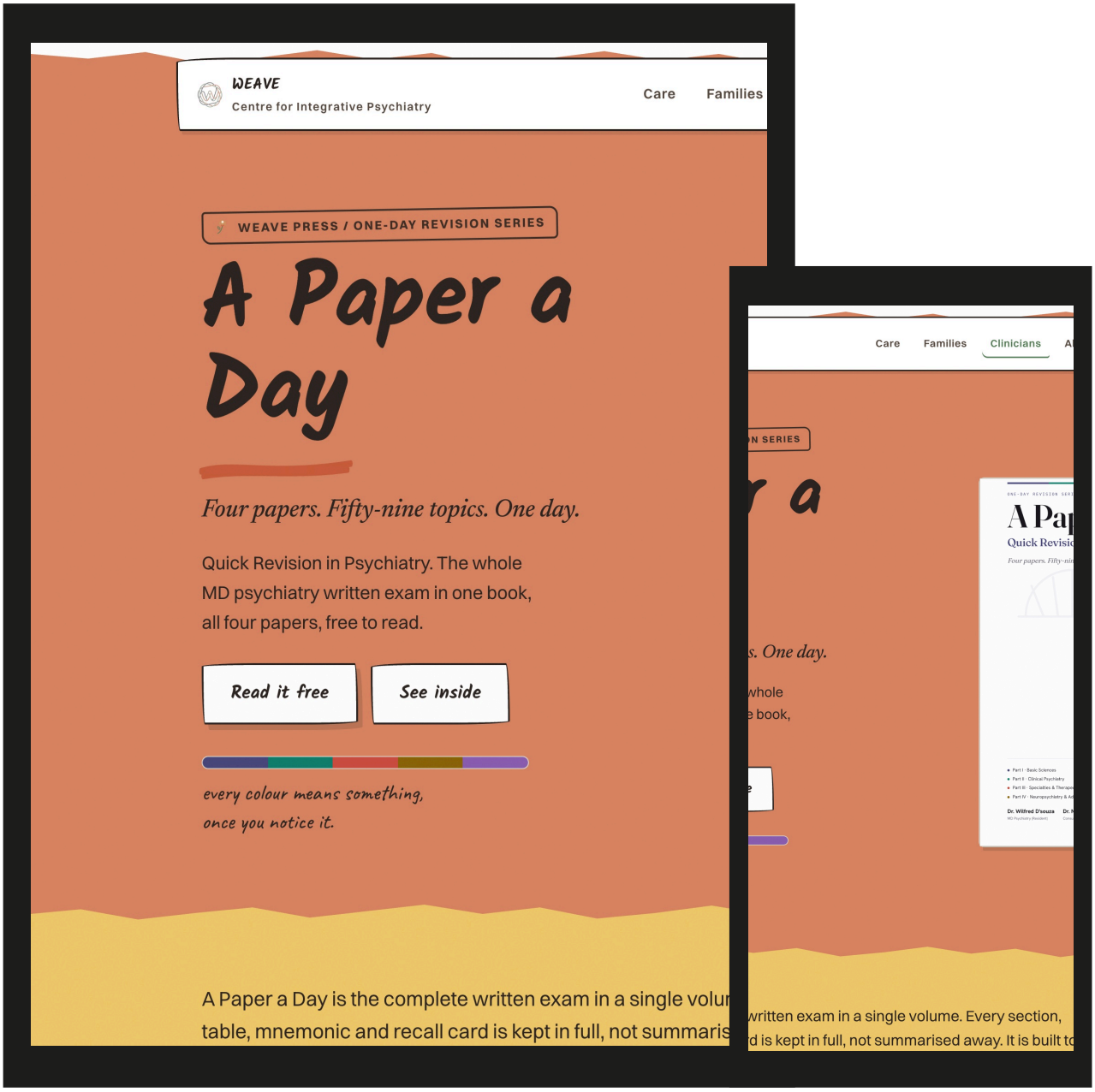


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