
These three text books are designed specifically for students taking undergraduate abnormal psychology at North American universities. Two focus predominantly on adult abnormal psychology, while Mash and Wolfe’s text is exclusively about abnormal child psychology. All three would serve as useful resources for undergraduate psychology courses on this side of the Atlantic. However supplementary reading would be essential to add a European or British dimension to these volumes which are distinctly North American in the conceptual frameworks they use and the empirical research to which they refer. For example, all three texts give descriptions of psychological disorders based on the fourth edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) or the text revision of DSM-IV published by the American Psychiatric Association. Little or no reference is made to diagnostic descriptions given in the tenth edition of World Health Organization’s International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). This is unfortunate because ICD-10 is widely used in the UK and Europe for research and practice in abnormal and clinical psychology. In all three books important developments in evidenced-based practiced from the UK, Ireland and elsewhere in Europe get little or no mention, e.g., Cognitive Analytic Therapy in the UK, the Maudlsey family therapy model for treating eating disorders, the UK Early Bird programme for autistic children, the Irish Parents Plus programme for disruptive behaviour disorders and so forth.

Having noted these reservations, it is only fair to say that the three volumes achieve their stated aim: to provide an overview of abnormal psychology or abnormal child psychology in an interesting and informed way to undergraduates.
All three volumes have between 14 and 16 chapters and are each about 500 pages. All three texts open with a consideration of theories about abnormal behaviour from the earliest times to the present with due regard being given to those which emphasize biological, psychological and social factors in the aetiology of psychological difficulties. In all three volumes an integrative bio-psycho-social approach is advocated. The three books deal with research methods in abnormal psychology from a scientist-practitioner model which has gained ascendance in both the US and the UK. There is also a section in the opening chapters of each of the three texts which addresses tissues of assessment, diagnoses and treatment of psychological difficulties.

Against this backdrop each of the three texts provides good coverage of common psychological difficulties. In two of the texts (Barlow & Durand and Comer’s) the focus is predominantly on adult presentations of anxiety and mood disorders, psychoses, somatic disorders, sexual disorders, addictions, and personality disorders. The are also specific chapters on psychological problems in childhood and older adulthood. In Mash & Wolfe’s text, behavioural, emotional, developmental and health-related psychological problems in childhood and adolescence are covered. The chapters that make up the main body of each text have a similar structure. Most open with case studies followed by a description of the clinical features of the disorder. Then the results of epidemiological studies are given. Multiple theoretical explanations are then outlined followed by a consideration of available evidence and an integrative bio-psycho-social state of the science summary.

All three volumes are well laid out and contain chapter overviews, summaries and glossaries. Also these texts have numerous ancillaries including CD ROMs, web access, study guides, instructor’s guides, and banks of test items.

Compared with the last editions of these three books, current editions contain reference to up-to-date research findings and recent theoretical and practice developments. Libraries would be well advised to include a recent edition Mash & Wolfe’ and either Comer or Barlow and Durand in their Abnormal Psychology section.
Brief Biographical Note