The Categorical Model vs A Dimensional Model

Overview of Categorical Model (Widiger & Trull, 2007)

- DSM-IV and the ICD -10 are both based on the idea that an illness is either present or it not.
  - DSM criteria for a mental illness are either met, and the illness is present or not met, and no illness is present.
- The predictive power of the categorical model used in DSM-IV-TR is the reason for its use (First & Tasman, 2004).
  - Clinicians can expect similar behaviors and treatment results from individuals who meet the criteria.

- The Problems with Categories (Ruscio, 2008)
  - Diagnosis
    - Some clinicians and researchers have found that symptoms of a mental disorder may be present, but may not meet the criteria for the disorder, and thus according to DSM-IV, the diagnosis cannot be made.
  - Treatments
    - Treatments researched and approved for individuals who meet the full DSM criteria.
    - There is little or no research done on treatments for individuals who have only features or symptoms of a disorder.

Overview of a Dimensional Model (Widiger & Trull, 2007)

- A dimensional model is based on the philosophy that disorders consist of a complex interaction of factors over a period of time.
- Several factors are used to describe an individual’s profile
  - Multifactorial profiles emphasize the unique characteristics of individual symptoms.
- A dimensional model would have to include provisions for comorbid symptoms that are not concurrent with the main personality type.
- Dimensional models have been suggested for use in the diagnosis of personality disorders.
  - The Five Factor Model (FFM)
  - Some personality measures have also been developed
    - Dimensional Assessment of Personality Pathology (Basic Questionnaire)
    - Schedule for Nonadaptive and Adaptive Personality (SNAP)
    - The NEO – Personality Inventory NEO-PI is based on the FFM
Problems with Dimensional Models (Ruscio, 2008)

- Reliability
  - Research shows that humans can weigh approximately 6 variables reliably

- Communication
  - Because insurance companies are often paying for treatment, it is necessary to communicate the need for treatment.

- Defensibility
  - No thresholds have been established that will facilitate if a person has a disorder, or does not

- Research
  - It is unclear how research will be conducted on constructs that are not clearly defined.

NOTE: Although dimensional models are gaining some attention in the mental health community, it is unclear, and improbable that DSM-V will shift to a dimensional approach to diagnosis.

References

