

Teaching and mentorship are my passion and my reason for choosing an academic career. Although grants have funded much of my time, reducing my effort in formal instruction, I have continued to teach two core courses at the University of Utah: Lifespan Psychopathology (graduate) and Child Abnormal Psychology (undergraduate). My approach to these courses embodies my teaching philosophy, which is to increase understanding of clinical psychological science, reduce stigma and biases surrounding psychopathology, and challenge students to become critical thinkers by nurturing their capacity to craft arguments, both orally and in writing. I demonstrate my commitment to teaching through carefully designed and updated syllabi, engaging content, and thoughtful assessments of learning. My effectiveness as an instructor is reflected in exceptional teaching evaluations. More importantly, I measure my success through student comments about the ways in which their understanding of psychopathology has shifted, including their understanding of their own psychological struggles.

As a mentor, my work was recently recognized by the Graduate School at the University of Utah when I received the competitive “Distinguished Mentor Award of Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Scholars.” My mentorship philosophy is multifaceted and reflects the complexity of the crucial relationship between a mentor and student. Briefly, I strive to be present, consistent, reliable, genuine, and fiercely devoted to each student’s professional development. For 48 weeks of each year, I see each of my students at least twice per week outside of the classroom. This has allowed my students to thrive professionally, obtain tenure-track, medical center, or postdoctoral positions, build strong publication records, and receive prestigious awards and fellowships. I prioritize my doctoral students for publication opportunities and provide multiple venues for them to receive high-quality feedback on their work.

I am attaching responses from the last in-class writing assignment for my undergraduate Abnormal Child Psychology course to the prompt “What did you learn in this course?”

### **PSY3250 Fall 2019**

I know I didn’t have to come to this class everyday to still get a good grade. But I chose too, which is rare, because I really enjoyed you as a teacher. I felt inspired to ask questions(also rare). But it really help put things into perspective. I deal with MDD and substance abuse and it really made me feel like I’m not some weak-willed individual. Removing stigma is possibly the most important thing I think for mental health as a whole. I’ve worked with kids as a Youth Counselor for 4 years now and all this information has helped me do better work there, looking at their outbursts less like they are bad kids and more like they may be going through something.

Your class kept me physically going to all my other classes too. And in turn made me smarter and healthier.  
so thank you.

This class was really hard for me, not academically, but emotionally. I have taken MANY classes with topics that are hard to swallow; murders, genocide, sex trafficking, etc. but this was more about awareness of something that is so common, yet so deep behind closed doors and not all over the news. It will be used to strengthen my knowledge in order to help those that don't have anyone else. I sit here and write my response, quite literally in tears, reflecting on what I have learned and the lives I will be able to impact. Not only that, but I also learned about myself! The perspective itself, I think is THE MOST IMPORTANT thing I learned. I

grew up around mental illness and having a very close loved one in and out of the psych ward growing up but mental WELLNESS was never addressed. Out of all classes that have these "sensitive topics" this was probably the one that touched me the most because I work with this population and see these issues that break your heart, then to reflect and be triggered from my own childhood was unexpectedly a positive experience because I was able to finally get help for something I have avoided for so long for the exact reasons discussed. I appreciate the acceptance that was encouraged because mental health was always a hidden secret.

Not to be all cheesy, but truth needs to be told. This has been one of the most substantial, even core fundamental, class i've ever taken. Perhaps unconsciously i found myself nodding and internalizing all of the concepts, especially the viewpoint that all psychopathology lies along a spectrum and that things simply are much more complicated than what they seem. However, this is fantastic news because it motivates and fosters understanding, empathy, etc. That can lead to positive change. I guess what i'm really taking away from class is the magnitude of the importance of perspectives, especially when it comes to the overall human condition. I cannot wait to bring out the best in me for it in my professional life. Thank you.

One thing I learned, or gained a greater perspective on, is the importance of having good therapists and psychiatrists that work collaboratively together. There are so many psychological disorders that can affect children and adolescents (all of us may face 1 or more of these challenges to a certain degree) and many of those disorders have overlapping symptoms. These disorders also have different treatments which may include therapy versus medication versus therapy and medication. This is why collaboration between therapists and psychiatrists is so crucial. The DSM-V gives specific diagnostic guidelines but isn't adequate to truly diagnose and treat those who are facing these challenges. The challenge of diagnosing and treating children is even more difficult because not all children can describe the way they are feeling. All of these reasons prove that therapists must be empathetic, knowledgeable, ethical, and logical in order to adequately help children, adolescents, and adults. Overall, I learned so much from this class and loved the perspective it gave me on the various challenges people, including myself, face every day. This class has changed the way I view the world and the people that live in that world.

In this class, I learned that suicide puts someone in a box where they're only faced with one decision. This was very enlightening to me because I'll admit, before I learned this I ignorantly believed some people were just asking for attention. Now I know if someone is asking for attention they probably need the attention. I work at a Daycare and I learned to be patient with children because they're small and experiencing the world and it's my job as a role model to teach them how to be kind. I loved what you said in this last presentation about happiness just being an emotion and I'm going to take that and run with it. Thank you so much for the semester, you're one of the sweetest professors I've ever had!

There are many things I learned in this class that changed my understanding of child psychological disorders and struggles. In this class, I came to understand just how complex child psychological disorders can be. Rather than just involving the child, the disorder involves a whole system of people. Thus, management and treatment of the disorder also involve the whole system of people in the child's life and require an effort on more than just the child. I also learned that abnormal is normal, but many people do not understand this. Psychological disorders are far more stigmatized health problems than a physical health problem which prevents people from seeking help and feeling embarrassed.

Hi Sheila, thank you SO MUCH for being amazing!! This has been one of my favorite if not the best class I have taken at the U. I have learned so much and gained such an appreciation and respect for this branch of psychology. You combined both clinical and developmental psych in a beautiful and eloquent way and you were engaging and I absolutely loved learning from you.

This sounds basic, but something I learned is that children HAVE psychological struggles. I knew that kids had their bad days, but I always pictured mental illness as more of an adult problem. I didn't know that children also have psychological ailments and can have serious psychological disorders as well. Thank you again for an amazing semester and being a wonderful professor. I will miss you!

This class really changed the way I see myself and my childhood. It is interesting to learn more about certain things I have struggled with and realize that those struggles are valid. The things I learned in this class have also helped me to have more empathy for others so may be struggling with any of the disorders covered in this class. It really broadened my perspective and has changed the way I think and talk about mental health. As someone who has worked with children before and hopes to in the future as a marriage and family therapist, it has really opened my eyes to the struggles children I have worked with and care about have faced and has made me more inclined to be patient with those children as well as the adults in my life.

I learned quite a bit in this class, one thing being how much I didn't know before. I had ideas and perceived knowledge about disorders, but this class taught me that a lot of those ideas were incorrect. I think this also has a lot to do with social stigma; if we can teach everyone what disorders really look like, they will be more willing to talk about, accept, and help with them. Another interesting thing I learned in this class was that myself and many others fit some of the criteria for multiple disorders. This, among other things, proves that "abnormal" really isn't all that abnormal. We are all human and each of us deserves the assistance and compassion that we need to flourish. You are an empowering and inspiring female and professor, thank you for sharing your knowledge.

While I knew that mental disorders and diagnoses were complicated, I don't think I fully understood how widely the causes and symptoms varied based on individuals. From what I have learned in this class and other classes, I now approach psychology, especially "abnormal" psychology as less of a binary and more of a spectrum and range of experiences. I am less interested in meeting strict criteria for certain disorders and more in investigating wider ranges of risk factors, environmental components, genetics and individual beliefs and experiences. I now feel that this approach is a more accurate and productive way of framing mental disorders and development, and hope to integrate this approach into both my career path and in how I understand myself and others.

I learned how important it is to combat the stigma against mental health and to prioritize early intervention. I think a lot of our problems can be linked to the shame that parents or the children themselves feel when they have symptoms of a mental illness. We need to be teaching parents and children that it is okay to not feel good all of the time and to embrace all of our emotions good and bad. And even if someone has a child with a mental illness, not to shame them for it but to support them in any way that we can.

I'd say the greatest perspective shift I had in this class was that things are complicated. There were a lot of disorders I had never seriously considered and it greatly widened both my perspective on human suffering as well as my compassion toward that suffering. I feel like it inspired greater patience with me toward the complexities that a child might face which I know will be incredibly beneficial for me in my career. I feel more confident now in both addressing the complexities of childhood as well as having meaningful discussions with others about how we can better address these issues.

This class was my favorite class this semester. I took four courses but consistently looked forward to your course! One thing that I learned that stuck out to me is just how multi-faceted childhood mental illnesses can be, and how important it is to view them from a place of acceptance and support. Not only can these illnesses be influenced through genetics, but many other factors can play a role in their development as well. Reducing the stigma that surrounds these issues is so very important, and not only do the children need support, the parents do as well. I believe that as a society, this is something that needs to change, and will change. I also love learning about addiction and substance use disorders because they have affected my life in many ways. Although we only recently talked about these issues, I am fascinated by just how complicated they actually are. I work at a dual diagnoses facility here in Salt Lake City, so learning more about these issues from certain individuals and classes really helps me a lot. Thanks for an amazing course!!

Part of the reason I wanted to take this class was to understanding my own mental health, as an adolescent. (I'm 19, if that counts). Learning about the other disorders is of course necessary too, but the most meaningful part of this course for me personally has been the theory with which you approach these issues. I came into this course at a difficult point in my life and seeing you teach with such sensitivity and simultaneous success was really important for me. You taught me how to approach my own mental health without shame, and how to pass that energy out into the world. You made me feel like there were people out there who were actually invested in my success and well-being. You became a role model for me in how to approach complex issues with thought and kindness. Thank you for that.

I have learned so much about child psychological struggles from this class. The one thing that I really came to realize through all of these lectures is that helping struggling children is something that I aspire to do in my life. I gained a much greater understanding of the complexities of the ways children struggle - and got an appreciation for understanding how many children fall in various places on the spectrum of issues. I also learned to take a holistic look at the problem and understand the child's background and upbringing in addition to their current circumstances in order to best help them - while also keeping in mind that there is often more than one contributing factor or struggle that they are going through. THANK YOU!

There are so many things that I learned in this class, but I think the biggest thing is the complexity of psychopathology. I think it is human nature to want a "simple fix" or to have a desire for an easy solution to a problem. However, mental illnesses have so many factors playing a role in their development that there is really never a simple fix. Genetics, the environment we are raised in, the amount of stress we feel, and many other factors affect the expression of a disorder. It is important to understand that someone with a mental illness has a complex history when interacting with them. This is what stood out to me the most from this class.

The most important thing I learned was that the diagnosis of childhood disorders is not as straight forward as they can seem. It is not a matter of a child just exhibiting some set characteristics like a child with ADD having an inability to focus. There are many disorders that have a lot of comorbidity that can make it more difficult to diagnose, treat, or find a cause. With this, I now understand the complexity of treatment as well. The focus is not always on “curing” something, but rather helping them have a level of “normalcy” in life. I also learned that “normalcy” is not what I thought it was, and instead a lot more broad and ultimately realize that what I thought was “abnormal” is actually normal. Nothing is as straight forward as I thought, which helped me to remove some blame, I didn’t realize I had.

As a personal note, this class helped me to recognize and face a difficult trauma that came up, and I was not afraid to seek the help I needed and express what I felt.

One thing I learned in this class that changed my perspective of child psychological struggles is that we tend to put a lot of blame on the family when something goes wrong when there should be a systemic change. It is not all or nothing and there can be good moments that come along with bad moments. I learned that kindness towards oneself is important for growth and to accept how you are. It’s important to understand that isolation and blaming can make things worse for you and facing your fears is important in order to grow as a person. I felt myself challenging my thoughts and growing as a person.

In this course I have learned many things that have changed my perspective and understanding of child psychological struggles. The most important thing has to do with how I used to consider children the same way that pre-modern psychologists did. Subconsciously, I thought that they were just small adults who don’t really matter until they grow up. However, this course has taught me that children can sometimes be even more important than focusing on adults because then you can catch disorders early. This is such an important lesson because early development shapes the future of individuals and treating children early that have disorders can make a drastic difference in their life.