

Psychopathology of Rare and Unusual Syndromes

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Liran Razinsky
Frontmatter
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Contents

Preface vii

Section 1 Abnormalities
of Belief and Judgement

- 1 **Delusional Misidentification Syndromes** 1
- 2 **Othello Syndrome** 14
- 3 **Folie à Deux** 31
- 4 **Couvade and Pseudocyesis** 41

Section 2 Abnormalities
of the Experience of Love

- 5 **Erotomania or de Clérambault Syndrome** 57

Section 3 Abnormalities
of Perception

- 6 **Charles Bonnet Syndrome** 69
- 7 **Musical Hallucinosi s** 82
- 8 **Ekbom Syndrome** 90
- 9 **Vulvodynia and Penoscrotodynia** 103
- 10 **Olfactory Reference Syndrome** 111
- 11 **Cross-Modal Perceptual Syndrome (Synaesthesia)** 120

Section 4 Abnormalities
of the Self

- 12 **Depersonalization** 131
- 13 **Autoscopy and Related Syndromes** 141
- 14 **Dissociation** 153

Section 5 Abnormalities
of Experience of the Body

- 15 **Body Integrity Identity Disorder (Xenomelia)** 177
- 16 **Côtard Syndrome** 185

Section 6 Abnormalities
of Memory Function

- 17 **Confabulation** 193
- 18 **Ganser State** 200

Section 7 Abnormalities
of Behaviour

- 19 **Diogenes Syndrome** 207

References 213
Index 254

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[More Information](#)

‘Rare and unusual is often precious. So is this book which contains colourful descriptions of psychiatric conditions and phenomena that are not common in everyday clinical practice but when encountered remind us why we chose psychiatry as a profession and why the study of the human mind is so interesting and challenging.’

Aleksandar Janca, Emeritus Professor, University of Western Australia

‘In *Psychopathology of Uncommon Rare and Unusual Syndromes*, Professor Oyeboode has produced a great masterpiece. Each of the conditions in this book has been comprehensively described and thoroughly researched, each syndrome replete with historical and contemporary case examples, thus enabling vivid impressions to be formed in the minds of the reader. While actual aetiologies are often unclear, the author has integrated philosophical, psychodynamic and biological theories to explain these conditions. What shines through is the author’s immense literary talents, his love for writing, teaching, researching and his enthusiasm in sharing his keen observations of the phenomenology of psychiatric disorders with his readers.

This book is destined to become a classic. I highly recommend it as a “must read” for every student and practitioner of psychiatry. I cannot wait to get hold of a copy for myself.’

Leslie Lim, Associate Professor, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Singapore General Hospital

Preface

This book focuses on psychiatric phenomena that are typically regarded as rare and unusual. These phenomena include the delusional misidentification syndromes, various abnormalities of perception such as Charles Bonnet syndrome, multimodal perceptual experiences such as synaesthesia, abnormalities of the self such as autoscopia and abnormalities of experience of the body such as Côtard syndrome. These phenomena, sometimes termed syndromes, are of great theoretical and conceptual interest to psychiatrists precisely because they are often discrete abnormalities that transcend diagnostic categories but yet allow for the opportunity to carefully examine and elucidate fundamental aspects of abnormal phenomena.

The current preoccupation with nosology, with the categorization of disorders, has resulted in a premature assumption that the only underlying mechanisms worthy of study are those which relate to disease processes to the exclusion of the possibility of carefully studying elemental abnormal phenomena with a view to furthering our understanding of the underlying processes and mechanisms that make these phenomena possible.

In this book, these various and disparate conditions are explored in detail, examining their conceptual value, their relationship to other more common and mundane phenomena, while at the same time discussing what we know about their underlying neuropsychology, the neural mechanisms that are likely to be at play and the neuropsychiatric conditions that form the structural and, potentially, the functional bases of these phenomena.

To illustrate these points, take as an example the delusional misidentification syndromes (Capgras, Frégoli, delusion of intermetamorphosis and reduplicative paramnesia). The inter-relationships between the basic phenomena are described and their neuropsychiatric and functional psychiatric settings explored. The express purpose is to see how the structural and functional brain abnormalities relate to the apparent impairments of face processing and face recognition systems and how these jointly result in psychopathological abnormalities, namely various kinds of delusions.

The aim of this book is ambitious to the degree that the goal is to make the case that discrete phenomena merit our interest and concern – indeed, that a focus on these phenomena to the exclusion of preoccupation with nosology is likely to be fruitful. Underlying and covert brain mechanisms are made more overt and apparent. This model of theoretical psychiatry, built on the foundation of phenomenology and psychopathology, without the prejudices of arbitrary and moot boundaries between so-called disorders, is aimed at establishing and consolidating a different approach to clinical psychiatry.

In addition to the desire to heighten interest in psychopathology, there is also the goal of demonstrating the value of taking an approach that draws widely, introducing and emphasizing the absolute relevance of evolutionary theory to our understanding of jealousy, for example, indicating how fundamental social psychological findings in persuasive communication are to any understanding of *folie à deux*, and drawing on the immense contribution of social anthropology to the theory of possession trance and ultimately to possession states in psychiatry.

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If there is a method to this approach, it is simply to restate the obvious: psychiatry is a subject that inescapably synthesizes knowledge, and it thrives when the fullness of the person is understood as a whole and when the perspectives of the humanities and the social sciences are conjoined with the undeniable incisiveness of the biological sciences in the project of understanding a person. In short, the method speaks to richness and plurality. And my hope is that my exploration of these disparate but nonetheless interconnected abnormal phenomena demonstrates what can be gained from an inquiry that analyzes and disaggregates while at the same time finding connections in the most unexpected places.