Anxiety 101

Chapter 3 –
Theories & Perspectives on Anxiety

Zeidner & Matthews (2011)

Theories & Perspectives

- Typically grouped into three categories:

- Theories that have been historically influential
  - Freudian psychoanalysis
  - Learning theory
  - Drive theory

- Psychobiological theories

- Cognitive theories

Psychoanalytic Model

- One of the earliest and most influential models

- Freud considered anxiety to be one of the cornerstones of psychoanalytical theory

- Seen as the fundamental symptom in clinical practice

- He distinguished three types of anxiety

Reality Anxiety

- The kind of fear you experience when there is a realistic danger present, of various kinds

- The danger impinges on the ego and its ability to deal adaptively with the environment

Neurotic Anxiety

- Arouses when the ego feels it is going to be overwhelmed by libidinal urges and impulses stemming from the basic impulses of the id (sex, aggression)

- Involve fear of punishment that may result from expressing the id's urges

Moral Anxiety

- People's experience when they are about to violate, or when they have already violated, internalized values or moral codes

- Is generated by the conflict between the biological urges of the id and the moral and ideal standards of society represented by the superego

Shifting Conceptualizations

- Freud initially conceptualized anxiety as a way of relieving libidinal energy that had been blocked up from direct release

- He revised his theory to the reverse: Anxiety is the cause of repression and leads to suppression of unsavory thoughts

Learning Models

- Involve long-lasting changes in cognition or behavior due to environmental experiences

- Anxiety is best viewed as behavioral response tendencies learned as a result of the person's cumulative experience with environmental threats over time

Hill (1972); Pekrun (1985)

Classical Conditioning

- The "Little Albert" view of fears

- Previously neutral stimulus comes to serve as a signal for a fearful unconditioned stimulus

- Let's watch it!

Modeling

- Particularly promising mechanism for understanding anxiety
  - Examines relationship between interpersonal relations and behaviors and the development of anxiety proneness and reactions in social contexts

- Much social learning is made possible by exposure to real-life models

Modeling

- May in part explain gender differences in anxiety

- Cross-cultural differences in emotional expression may also reflect modeling

- Learning theory is more soundly based than psychoanalysis

- Learning is important in anxiety, but we cannot satisfactorily explain human anxiety

Drive Theory

- Based on Hull's learning theory
  - Concerned with how motivation influenced the execution of learned responses

- Began with the point that conditioned behaviors are more likely to be performed if they meet an immediate motivational need

Drive Theory

- Drive (D)—various need states of an individual that combine to determine his or her total level of motivation at a particular time

- Habit strength (H)—the strength of the tendency to make a particular response to a specific stimulus, based on frequency of past reinforcement

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Drive Theory

- Excitatory potential (E)—the statistical probability that a particular response or set of responses will occur

- Response strength = motivation × strength of conditioning of the response

- Excitatory potential = Drive × Habit strength

Drive Theory

- Spence & Spence's version of drive theory broadly equates anxiety with Hull's concept of drive - anxiety is essentially motivation

- Drive theory sees the anxious person as being in a kind of hyperactive state, spraying out responses of various degrees of relevance to the current situation

Yerkes-Dodson Law

- Proposes that there is a curvilinear relationship between arousal and performance

- Moderate levels of arousal are best; performance is impaired when arousal is low (e.g., sleepiness) or high (e.g., emotional agitation)

- Excessive arousal is particularly damaging to difficult tasks

Modern Motivational Theory

- Separates positive and negative motivations sharply

- Retains the idea of a system dedicated to regulating the impact of punishment stimuli on behavior

- Anxiety is related not to "drive" but to escape and avoidance motivation

Evolutionary Theory

- Communication and expression of emotions has considerable survival utility

- Emotional expression signals others in the social group so that behavior and action can be coordinated and imminent danger avoided or circumvented

Charles Darwin (1872)

Modern Evolutionary Psych

- Emotions are universal hard-wired affect programs designed to serve as barometers of ego functioning

- Basic fears and anxieties reflect evolutionarily shaped behavioral systems

- Social anxiety is hypothesized to originate in a dominance-submissiveness system

Ohman (2008); Panskepp (1998); Rachman(2004)

Fear Classes

A. Interpersonal events
B. Fear related to physical injury
C. Fear of animals
D. Fear of open spaces

- Anxiety disorders may reflect an extreme case of the "better safe than sorry" principle

Arrindel, Pickersgill, Merkelbach, Ardon, and Cornet (1991)

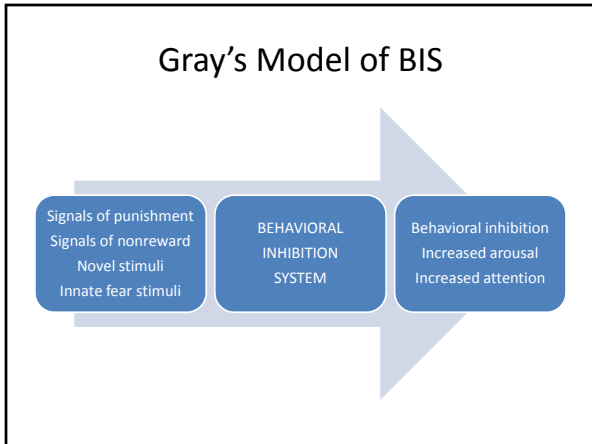## Functional Neurobio Perspectives

- Current research suggests that anxiety is not localized in one specific brain structure
  – Was said to be generated by the limbic system

- Instead, related to the activity of the HPAC (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal-cortical) system activated during stressful encounters

Eysenck (1967); Zuckerman (1994)
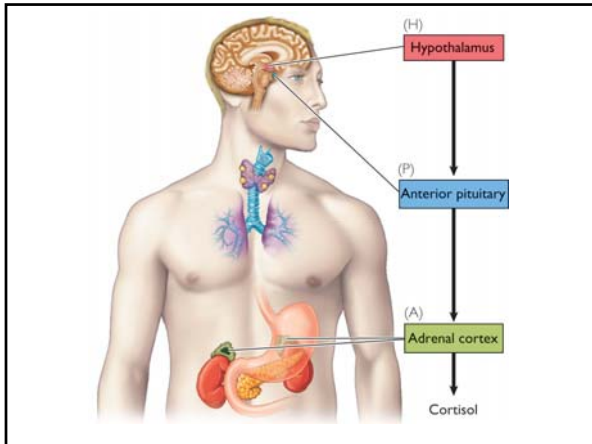
Recent Neurobio Perspectives

- Amygdala is a key structure for anxiety, responds quickly to threats in the environment

- Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory
  – The behavioral activation system
  – The fight-flight-freeze system (FFFS)
  – The behavioral inhibition system (BIS) of the brain

Gray's Model of BIS

Signals of punishment
Signals of nonreward
Novel stimuli
Innate fear stimuli

BEHAVIORAL INHIBITION SYSTEM

Behavioral inhibition
Increased arousal
Increased attention

In Class Exercise!!

- It's time to learn…

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

- You will need to practice this daily, keeping a log (on website) to turn in Friday

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Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Gives people a very simple tool for calming the body and controlling physiological arousal

- Purpose of DB is to breathe as if in a relaxed state

- Eight basic steps in learning DB

DB Steps

1. Offer basic information on breathing
   - Lungs have no muscles
   - Diaphragm controls size/frequency of breaths
   - Breathing is usually automatic, but can be controlled through diaphragm
   - When stressed, diaphragm contracts, causing shallow rapid breaths and chest and shoulders to rise and fall
   - When relaxed, diaphragm is loose, breathing is deep and slow, abdomen rises and falls

DB Steps

2. Client loosens any tight clothing

3. Client places one hand on chest and another on abdomen

4. In DB, as client breathes only the hand on the abdomen should move, shoulders should stay still

DB Steps

5. If DB is not easily achieved, have client relax ab muscles, then expand abdomen during inhalations while chest is still

6. Once client has pattern of DB mastered, have him slow to 8-10 breaths per minute

7. With this established, have clients focus on mentally saying "Re" with each inhalation and "Lax" with each exhalation

DB Steps

8. Client should focus on "Relax" and sensations of relaxaton while letting other thoughts and images go

- Practice is *essential* to master DB, and should be done multiple times a day

Cognitive Models

- The core idea is that feelings are expressions of thinking

- Broadly, anxiety is generated by appraisals of events as personally threatening

- Current cognitive models go beyond identifying anxious emotion with appraisal processes and address the dynamics of cognition

Transactional Model

- A landmark cognitive model, which continues to shape much contemporary research

- Emotions are relational constructs that tell us how the person stands in relation to external demands, pressures, and opportunities

Lazarus (1999)