# **Anxiety 101**

Chapter 4 – What are the Origins of Anxiety?

7eidner & Matthews (2011)

# Where Does Anxiety Come From?

- A sizable proportion of the population suffers from anxiety disorders
- Distal factors biological givens and early environmental factors that impinge on children
- Proximal antecedents specific to the stressful situation and more directly responsible for anxiety reactions in specific settings

#### **Basic Issues**

- Typically, psychologists are concerned with individual differences in trait anxiety
- In other words, is the child the father/mother to the man/woman?
- Focuses on developmental changes in anxiety

### Temperament in Children

- Children can be observed in standard conditions, and behaviors observed and coded systematically
- Extraversion, negative emotionality, and effortful control are key
- <u>Temperament</u> is often seen as closer to basic biologically formed dispositions than personality

Rothbart ( 2009)

# Longitudinal Research

- General conclusions are:
- 1. First, there is continuity between childhood and adult personality
- 2. Second, childhood temperament predicts adult personality, but the association is not very strong
- 3. Third, personality becomes more stable as the person becomes older

Asendorpf (2008); Lewis,(2001)

# Stabilizing Personality

- As physical brain development ceases, the influence of genetic factors on personality becomes constant
- Adolescents and adults tend to gravitate toward environments that reinforce their personality characteristics
- People develop a stable identity and sense of self that filters through their life experience
- People tend to become more resilient with age

Asendorpf (2008)

### **Generational Effects**

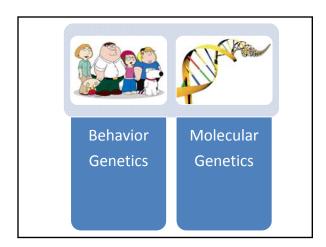
- Surprisingly strong association between a person's date of birth and trait anxiety
- A later study confirmed a similar generational effect on clinical symptoms, as well as increased self-esteem in later generations
- Social disconnectedness to blame?

Twenge (2000); Twenge & CampbellL (2008)

# Heredity & Environment

- Behavior genetics collects data on individuals differing in kinship, investigates how similarity in trait anxiety varies with similarity in genes
- Molecular genetics—the aim is to find specific genes that vary across individuals ("polymorphisms") that relate to anxiety

Arnold, Zai, & Richter(2004).



#### **Behavior Genetic Studies**

- Emphasize role of diathesis-stress models
- Anxiety influenced by the *interaction* of genes and environment
- Genes may also correlate or covary with environment

### **Molecular Genetics**

- Studies have implicated the neurotransmitter serotonin (or 5-HT) in anxiety and depression
- There are two "alleles" of the gene, one long (I) and one short (s)
- Shorties tend to be more anxious, but is only a small part of variation in genetics

(Zuckerman, 2005)

### **Environmental Influences**

- Roughly equal contributor to trait anxiety
- Consists of the shared and the unshared family environment
  - Unshared is actually most important!
- Another extrafamilial source of anxiety is the surrounding culture

### Anxiety = Genes X Environment

- The environment functions via the learning mechanisms, including basic conditioning to threat and social modeling
- Genes and environment typically covary and interact, so that development reflects their joint influence, even at the level of brain development

#### How to Raise an Anxious Child

- Early childhood experiences play a major role in determining individual differences in trait anxiety
- Potentially important environmental factors:
- Maternal uterine environment,
  - Family climate
  - Child-rearing patterns
  - Modeling
  - Specific conditioning episodes
  - Acute and chronic stressors

(Krohne, 1992; Rapee, 1997)

#### Prenatal Material Environment

- Antenatal maternal stress and anxiety (cortisol levels) are related to the child's anxiety
- May affect the development of fetal brain structures involved in arousal and emotion regulation
  - HPAC axis, limbic system, prefrontal cortex

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#### **Attachment Processes**

- Bowlby's thought the child's mental health depended on forming a secure and stable attachment to the primary caregiver in infancy
- The "secure attachment" is characterized by warmth, intimacy, and stability, to the satisfaction of both mother and child

Rowlby (1960, 1969, 1979

#### **Attachment Processes**

- Secure children remain calm during the separation seek proximity to mother when she returns
- Anxious-avoidant children distance themselves from the mother when she returns
- Anxious-resistant children react more expressively to separation with negative emotions (anxiety and anger)
- Tested using the strange situations test

Ainsworth et al. (197)

# **Child-rearing Practices**

- Two distinct dimensions of parenting may impact the development of anxiety
  - Acceptance and support versus rejection
  - Psychological granting of autonomy versus excessive psychological control
- Empirical studies have supported the view that parents of anxious children are overrestricting, more rejecting, and less intimate

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# **Child-rearing Practices**

- Strategies parents may employ to raise anxiety:
  - Be cold toward the child
  - Model anxious behaviors
  - Find fault with the child often
  - Give him or her no help in finding solutions to challenging problems

# **Anxiety & School**

- Social evaluative situations in school contexts are more frequent and with higher stakes than practically anywhere else during childhood and early adolescence
- The most obvious source of anxiety is failure (or anticipated failure) in academic work

#### 2x2 Model

- Mastery approach (I want to learn as much as I can from this class)
- Mastery avoidance (I am concerned that I am not smart enough to understand this class)
- Performance approach (I want to get the top grade in this class)
- Performance avoidance (I don't want to flunk this class)

Elliot (2005)

#### Classroom Climate

- Highly competitive and evaluative classrooms may foster an unhealthy orientation
- Students who don't perform well in these a) see themselves as failures and b) ruminate about their performance deficits rather than focusing on the task at hand

Church, Elliot, & Gable, (2001)

### **Evaluative Orientation**

- Teacher's mode of evaluating performance impacts motivation and self-perception
- Children evaluated in terms of individual reference norms showed less fear of failure, more realistic goal setting, and less low-ability attribution

Boggiano & Ruble (1988

# History of Failure

- Children who succeed in tasks learn to approach new tasks as challenging and cope effectively with evaluative situations
- Children who have experienced continued failure in academic tasks will approach new tasks with considerable anxiety

(Hill & Eaton, 1977)

