



Psychodynamic explanations of anxiety disorders

PSYB2: Individual Differences – Anxiety Disorders

This activity will help you to...

- Analyse case studies of anxiety disorders
- Apply psychodynamic theory to behaviour

Conflicts in the unconscious

In psychodynamic psychology, the unconscious mind is made up of three parts: the **Id** (Instincts – “I want”), the **ego** (reality – “I will”) and the **Superego** (morality – “I should”). Remember that in psychodynamic theory, everything we do (thoughts and behaviour) is actually a product of our unconscious mind. So anxiety disorders all present behaviours which are caused by something unconscious, usually related to something that happens in childhood. The actual manifest behaviours are produced through ego defence mechanisms, our unconscious mind protecting us from the ‘real’ (and harmful) thoughts.

Read through the following case studies and for each one suggest:

- What is the underlying cause of the anxiety?
- How could you explain the manifest behaviour in terms of ego defence mechanisms?

Mandeep is a primary school teacher. She likes the children to develop their motor skills, particularly with things like cutting out shapes neatly. However, when she uses scissors in a lesson she becomes incredibly anxious about them and has to make sure the children are all using them safely. When she collects them in she likes to check that they have all been returned and are placed in the rack in a safe position; she often does this several times. She then puts them in a cupboard, repeatedly locking and unlocking the door to make sure they are safe.

Mickey has an embarrassing problem. In the presence of women, he can't stop looking at their breasts and often has urges to grab them. He also has developed a habit for chewing gum. He finds that if a woman is around and he hasn't got any gum to chew then he feels very anxious.

Gary has a very particular problem. Whenever he sees a man wearing a hat he starts to sweat, shake and his mouth goes dry.