**Anxiety Disorders**

***Anxiety Disorder-***Distressing, persistent anxiety or maladaptive behaviors that reduce anxiety. The main types of anxiety disorders are:

1. **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**-thepatient is tense and in a state of autonomic nervous system arousal.

2. **Phobia**-a persistent, irrational fear of a specific object or situation.

3. **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder**-this disorder ischaracterized by unwanted repetitive thoughts (obsessions) and/or actions (compulsions).

4. **Panic Disorder-**this disorder ismarked by a minutes-long episode of intense dread in which a person experiences terror and accompanying chest pain, choking, or other frightening sensations.

5. **Post-traumatic stress disorder**- the patient has haunting memories and nightmares, and experiences social withdrawal, anxiety or depression.

**Explaining Anxiety Disorders**

***Biological Perspective (nature)***

* *Genetic Link:* Research shows that if one identical twin has a particular phobia then it is likely that the other has a similar phobia.
* ***Physiology:***Research shows that there is over-arousal indicated by brain activity in frontal area above the eyes especially in those people diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder.
* ***Survival of the fittest****:* Evolutionary psychologists feel that compulsive acts typically exaggerate behaviors that contribute to survival especially things like washing, grooming, checking territorial boundaries (repeatedly checking the lock on a door).

***Learning (Psychological) Perspective (nurture)***

* *Observation:* Just as monkeys in the wild learn to fear snakes by observing what happens to others and by how other monkeys react to seeing a snake, we also are capable of developing similar fears as our parents or those around us simply by being brought up observing these reactions.
* *Stimulus Generalization:* If fear a particular stimulus you may also develop one to a similar stimulus. For example, if you have a fear of heights because of a major fall you may also fear flying.
* *Reinforcement:* Some compulsions are reinforced and hence, self-perpetuating. For example, constant hand washing reduces anxiety (the stress of being covered with germs) and therefore reinforces the behavior.
* *Fear Conditioning:* When a person is conditioned to fear a certain stimulus because it is associated with a particular anxiety-causing situation. (Recall Classical Conditioning in the unit on Learning.)

***Somatoform disorder***(\*not found in the Myers text): These disorders are marked by the patient complaining of physical symptoms (pain, itchiness, shortness of breath, etc.) but once investigated it is found that there is no tissue damage or physical reason for the symptoms. In other words, these disorders have \**physical symptoms and a* *psychological cause*. They include the following:

1. ***Pain Disorder****:* The patient experiences significant pain in the absence of medical reason for the pain.
2. *Body Dismorphic Disorder:*The patient has a preoccupation with an imagined or exaggerated defect in appearance. Anorexia Nervosa is an example a type of body dismorphic disorder.
3. *Hypochondriasis:* A hypochondriac has an exaggerated concern with bodily processes and fear of physical illness.
4. *Conversion Disorder:* The patient has an alteration in physical function in the absence of physiological cause. For example, if the patient is unable to speak after witnessing a traumatic event.

The onset of such disorders has been linked to psychological stress and anxiety. Treatment for these disorders, as with anxiety disorders, includes systematic desensitization (see unit 14), anti-anxiety drugs such as Valium or Librium and family therapy.