

# Understanding Anxiety Disorders: Freudian/Psychodynamic Perspective

- Sigmund Freud felt that **anxiety** stems from **repressed** childhood impulses, socially inappropriate desires, and emotional conflicts.
- We repress/bury these issues in the unconscious mind, but they still come up, as anxiety.



# Classical Conditioning and Anxiety

- In the experiment by John B. Watson and Rosalie Rayner in 1920, **Little Albert** learned to feel fear around a rabbit because he had been conditioned to associate the bunny with a loud scary noise.
- Sometimes, such a conditioned response becomes overgeneralized. We may begin to fear all animals, everything fluffy, and any location where we had seen those, or even fear that those items could appear soon along with the noise.
- The result is a phobia or generalized anxiety.

# Operant Conditioning and Anxiety

- We may feel anxious in a situation and make a decision to leave. This makes us feel better and our anxious avoidance was just reinforced.
- If we know we have locked a door but feel anxious and compelled to re-check, rechecking will help us temporarily feel better.
- The result is an increase in anxious thoughts and behaviors.

# Observational Learning and Anxiety

- Experiments with humans and monkeys show that anxiety can be acquired through **observational learning**. *If you see someone else avoiding or fearing some object or creature, you might pick up that fear and adopt it even after the original scared person is not around.*
- In this way, fears get passed down in families.



# Cognition and Anxiety

- **Cognition** includes worried thoughts, as well as interpretations, appraisals, beliefs, predictions, and ruminations.
- **Cognition** includes mental habits such as **hypervigilance** (*persistently watching out for danger*). This accompanies anxiety in PTSD.
- In anxiety disorders, such cognitions appear repeatedly and make anxiety worse.



# Biology and Anxiety: An Evolutionary Perspective

## 1. Human phobic objects:

Snakes  
Heights  
Closed spaces  
Darkness

## 2. Similar but non-phobic objects:

Fish  
Low places  
Open spaces  
Bright light

## 3. Dangerous yet non-phobic subjects:

We are likely to become cautious about, but not phobic about:

Guns  
Electric wiring  
Cars

- Evolutionary psychologists believe that ancestors prone to fear the items on list #1 were less likely to die before reproducing.
- There has not been time for the innate fear of list #3 (the gun list) to spread in the population.

# Biology and Anxiety: Genes

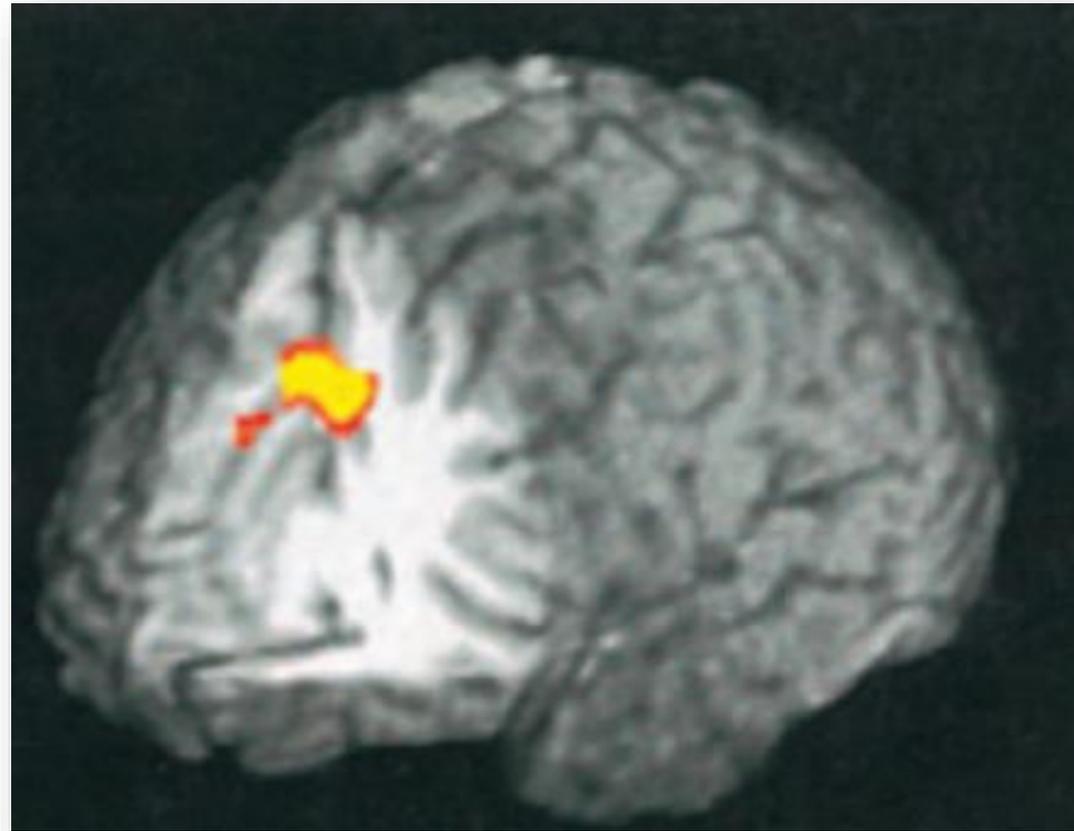
- Studies show that identical twins, even raised separately, develop similar phobias (more similar than two unrelated people).
- Some people seem to have an inborn high-strung temperament, while others are more easygoing.
- Temperament may be encoded in our genes.

## Genes and Neurotransmitters

- Genes regulate levels of neurotransmitters.
- People with anxiety have problems with a **gene** associated with levels of **serotonin**, a *neurotransmitter involved in regulating sleep and mood*.
- People with anxiety also have a **gene** that triggers high levels of **glutamate**, an *excitatory neurotransmitter involved in the brain's alarm centers*.

# Biology and Anxiety: The Brain

- Traumatic experiences can burn fear circuits into the amygdala; these circuits are later triggered and activated.
- Anxiety disorders include overarousal of brain areas involved in impulse control and habitual behaviors.



The OCD brain shows extra activity in the ACC, which monitors our actions and checks for errors.

*ACC = anterior cingulate gyrus*