

Hello, class.

So when faced with stress and anxiety, and all these harmful sorts of things, the human brain is not defenseless, by any means. There are different ways that it protects itself from harm.

Today we're going to go over several of these defense strategies that it uses, as well as how these can go wrong, and how can they affect people in negative ways.

One of the first ways that psychologists identified the brain protecting itself, was identified by Sigmund Freud, who you remember from psychoanalytical theory, in the late 1800s. Freud said that over time, the brain develops these unconscious, learned patterns of protecting itself from anxiety. He called these things defense mechanisms. In other words, these defense mechanisms allow a person not to think about, or deal with, things that are mentally or emotionally harmful, particularly to your sense of self, and who you are. These are the kinds of things that it protects a person against.

So while they're not necessarily the healthiest way to avoid problems, they're tended to push away, or protect the person from, things that are harmful. From stress or anxiety that affects them, especially at the core of their self. At least until there's a better time to deal with those kinds of things. Or, if it's something that's unnecessary to deal with all together, then it can just push that out of the way, and allow the person to move on to more important or crucial things to themselves.

There's a long list of defense mechanisms, and we're going to go over just a few, as a sample, so you can get a sense of what their like. But this is definitely an area of further research on your own.

One of the most well known defense mechanisms is denial. It's probably the first one that everybody thinks of. Denial means refusing to accept something that's unpleasant. In other words, instead of facing a problem, you just say, what problem? There's no problem that I see. And so you essentially ignore anything that's bothering you, or that can cause you any kind of stress or anxiety.

Another type of defense mechanism is compensation, where you counter some weakness, or some threat to yourself, by emphasizing a strength that you have, instead. So, whereas somebody might say that you're not necessarily as good or intelligent in a certain area, you might say, well, I'm really great at being a basketball player. Something like that. To emphasize something that you are really are good at. To reinforce your sense of self and self-worth.

Another defense mechanism is intellectualization, where you take a situation, and separate it from its emotional

component. So instead of thinking of it, or when you're thinking of something, you don't necessarily have to feel the kinds of harmful emotions that are attached to those kinds of things. For example, if you're a history teacher, you might say that Hitler was a great leader. And you might look at in a very intellectual sense, detaching Hitler from the emotional component of all the terrible things that he's done to other people.

Similar to intellectualization is rationalization, which is to say, you justify a bad choice with logic, or rationale. So you're backing something up, by giving some kind of reason. It doesn't necessarily justify it, but in your mind, it does. So if you say, if I didn't do something bad, someone else would have done it. That's a rationalization. It doesn't necessarily mean that you should do it, but in your mind, you're thinking, well, I should take advantage of it, because somebody else would.

Another defense mechanism is called projection, where you see the negative things, the feelings or abilities that you have about yourself, in other people. So, if you look at somebody and say, that person doesn't know what he's talking about, it may be, in fact, that you don't know what you're talking about. But you're taking those emotions, and pushing them away from yourself. Again, protecting your sense of self.

And one last defense mechanism that Freud found was what's called sublimation, where you channel unacceptable energies or desires that you have-- things that you can't necessarily do because of either society, or other people, telling you it's wrong-- and instead, channel those energies into acceptable activities. For example, instead of talking about something, here you might be allowed to sing about it. So instead you express your energies and those kinds of ways.

Another easy example of that is, if you were to take a cold shower, instead of having an untoward feelings towards other people.

There are other psychological defense mechanisms that others have found. And these are things that are probably familiar to you, as well. Things like passive aggression, or humor, even, as a defense mechanism, as well as altruism, itself. So there are lots of different lists of these kinds of ways that we defend our sense of self.

So while defense mechanisms are a way of unconsciously protecting yourself, you can also consciously learn about ways to protect yourself, over time. You can find situations, people, and work, that we find are healthy and acceptable to our sense of selves, and reinforce positive psychological ideas.

However, some people can find themselves in negative situations so often, they can think that those situations are unavoidable. In other words, they learn, in a negative way, how to defend themselves. And they can just come to accept those situations as being true, and unavoidable. This is what we call "learned helplessness." When a person learns, over time, that they're unable to overcome, or escape, certain obstacles. And they learn to accept

those kinds of things. A good example of this is what we call battered wife, or battered person, syndrome. Which is where a person learns, in an abusive relationship, to just stay in that relationship. Even though common sense, from outside of that situation, tells other people, that person needs to get out of that situation. But the person within it has learned, over time, that that's a situation that they feel is unavoidable. So they just come to accept it.

This also applies to when a child thinks that they're stupid in a subject. For example, if a teacher, or a parent, or other people at school, constantly reinforce this child's idea that they can't succeed, or they're not intelligent in that idea, eventually the child might come to accept it, and they don't try to get any better at that subject.

Learned helplessness is very closely related to depression, where a person experiences feelings of hopelessness, and helplessness. They have decreased energy levels, and activity levels. And they have less pleasure, or desire to eat, or things like that. This is something that goes along with learned helplessness, as well as depression. This is because a lot of those reoccurring thoughts, and feelings, and behaviors, just like in depression, can help to perpetuate this cycle, or this problem, that this person is having.

So learned helplessness can help to explain why many cases of depression actually do occur. This is one of the root causes of depression.

Treatment for things like learned helplessness, and the depression as a result, involves helping people to understand their own abilities, and that they aren't necessarily helpless. So they find things that they're good at. They find some kind of mastery, and reinforcing those kinds of things. So they create, essentially, these feelings of hope, which allows them to overcome these helpless situations that they find themselves in.