

Detecting emotional contributors in chronic pain presentations

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Learning Objectives

- Describe unconscious anxiety and defense patterns
- Describe a way to activate and monitor unconscious emotional responses

Anatomy and Physiology of Unconscious operations



BOND
With
Parents

Trauma



PAIN

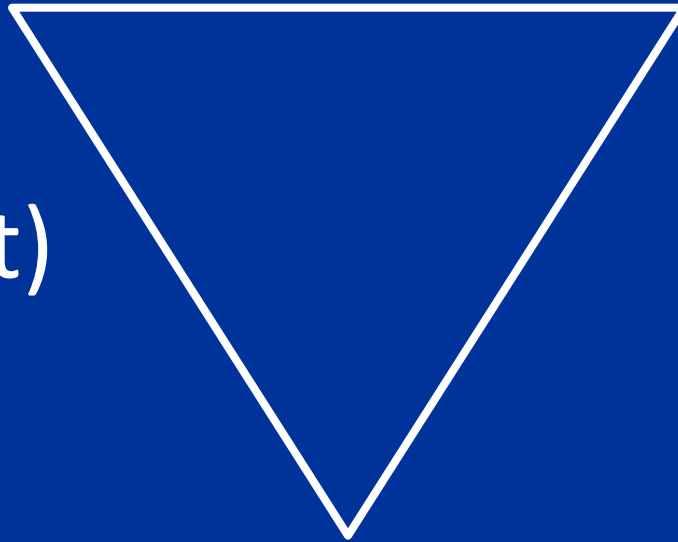


Rage, Guilt
about the Rage



Feelings
Avoided
Self-destruct
Symptoms

Transference
(Therapist/
Doctor/Dentist)

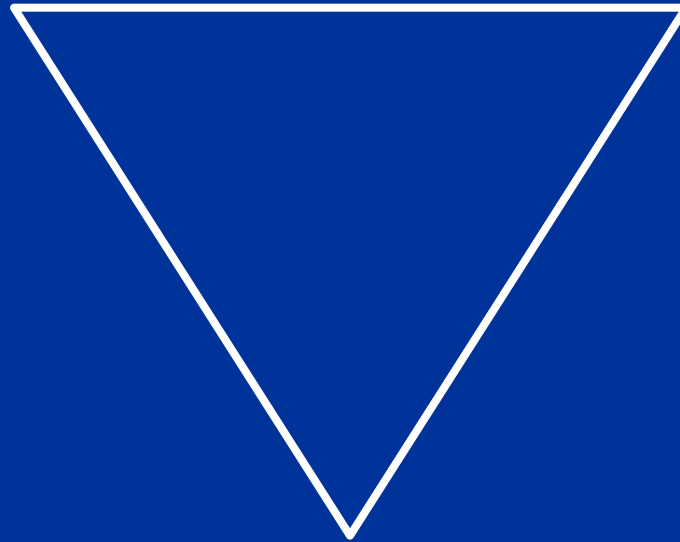


Current
person

Past
person

Unconscious
Defense

Unconscious
Anxiety



Unconscious
Impulses & Feelings

What do we do?

- An interview method to:
 - assess the presence of unconscious feelings and *if* there are any such emotions present:
 - Assess the visceral anxiety patterns that these emotions produce
 - Assess the defences that these emotions activate
 - Try to determine *whether* the emotions and the anxiety / defences are factors in causing or worsening any physical complaints

“Physical” Examination of Emotions

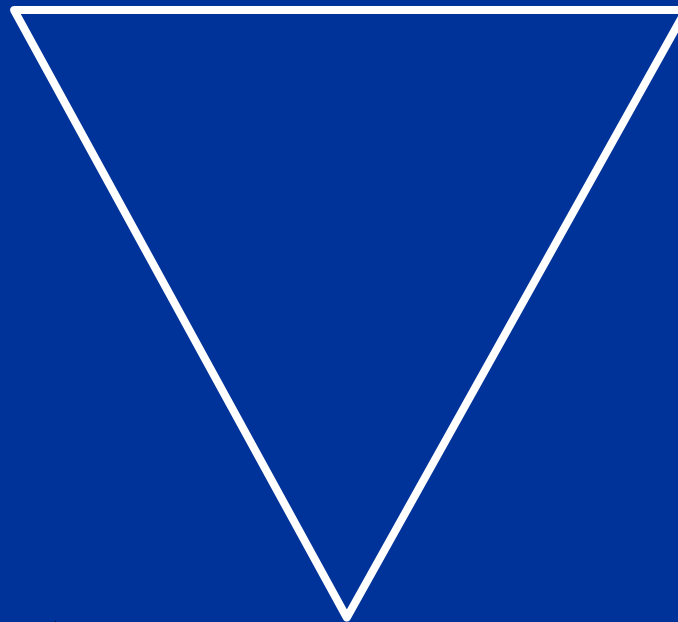
- Observation
 - Signs of unconscious anxiety and defence
- Palpation and Percussion
 - Focus on underlying avoided feelings
 - Observe physical responses
- Patient needs to cooperate!
 - Handle defences against being open and against experiencing feelings
- Recapitulation to bring down anxiety

2. Monitor Anxiety & Defense responses

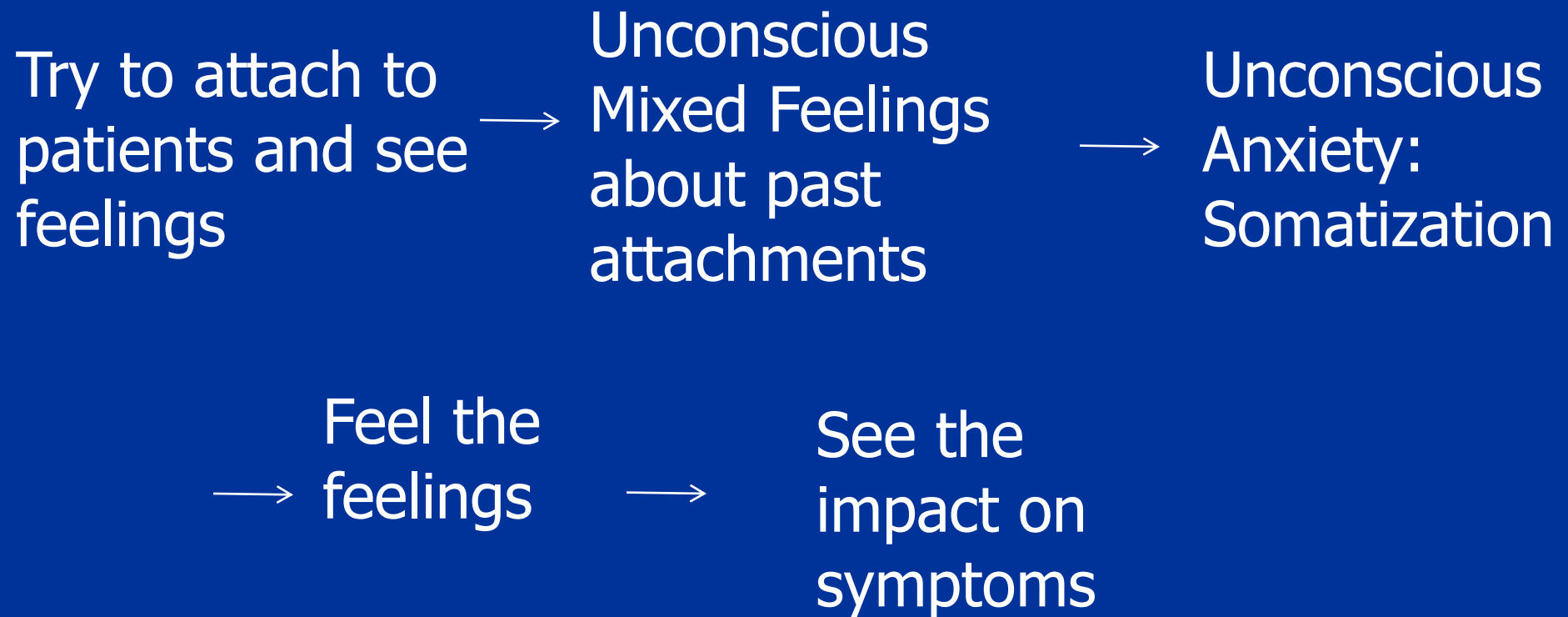
Unconscious
Defense

Unconscious
Anxiety

*1. Focus on
Feelings
or Defenses*

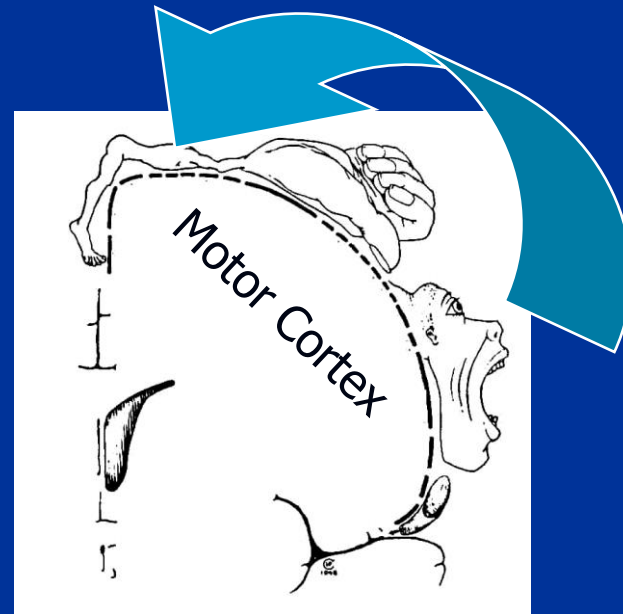


Unconscious
Impulses & Feelings



Striated Muscle Unconscious Anxiety

- Hands Clench
- Arms, Shoulders, Neck
- Intercostal: Sigh
- Abdomen, back
- Legs and Feet

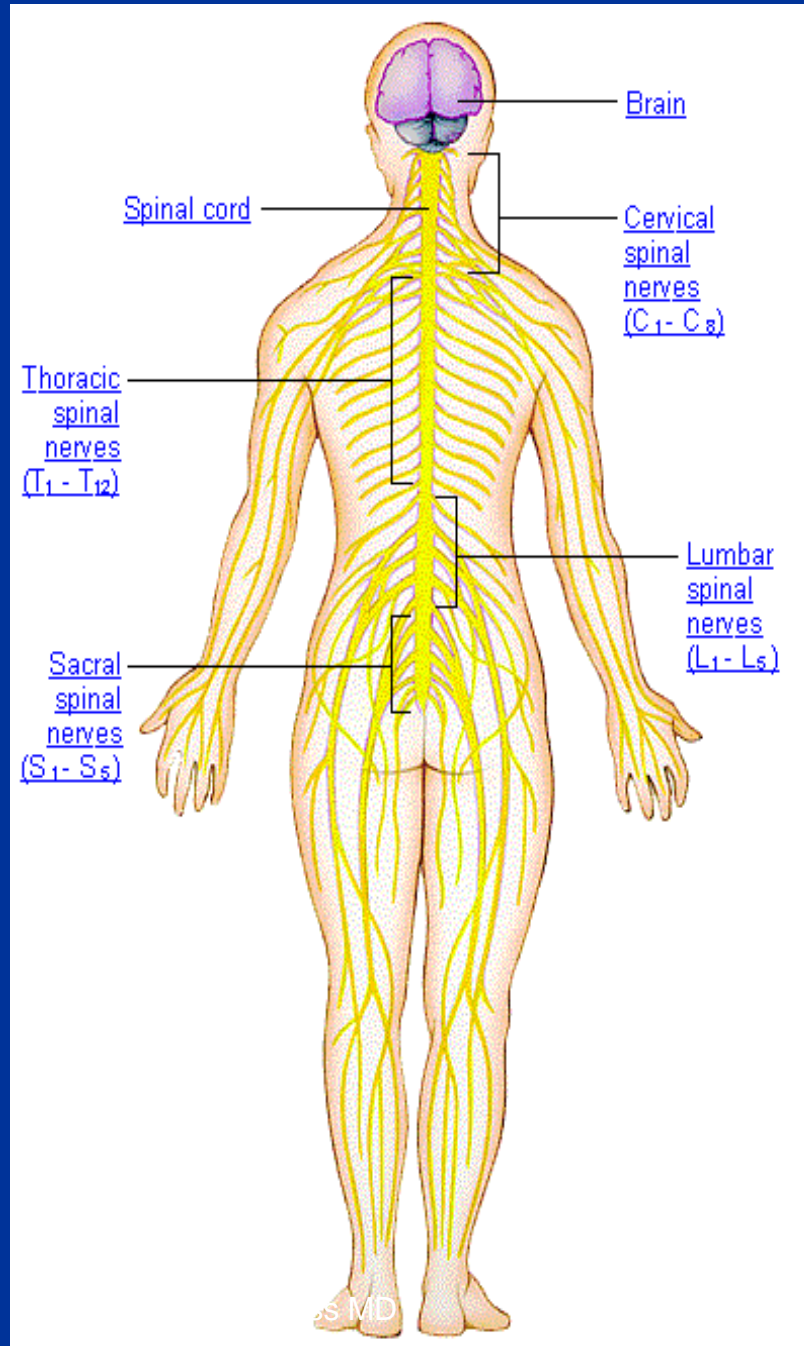


→ Hyperventilation, Fibromyalgia, headache, chest pain, abdominal wall pain

- See with Intellectualization of feelings
- Process: pressure to experience the feelings

Striated Muscle
Anxiety
Goes Down Body

Neurobiological
Pathway of
Rage goes up
Same system:
Displacing somatization

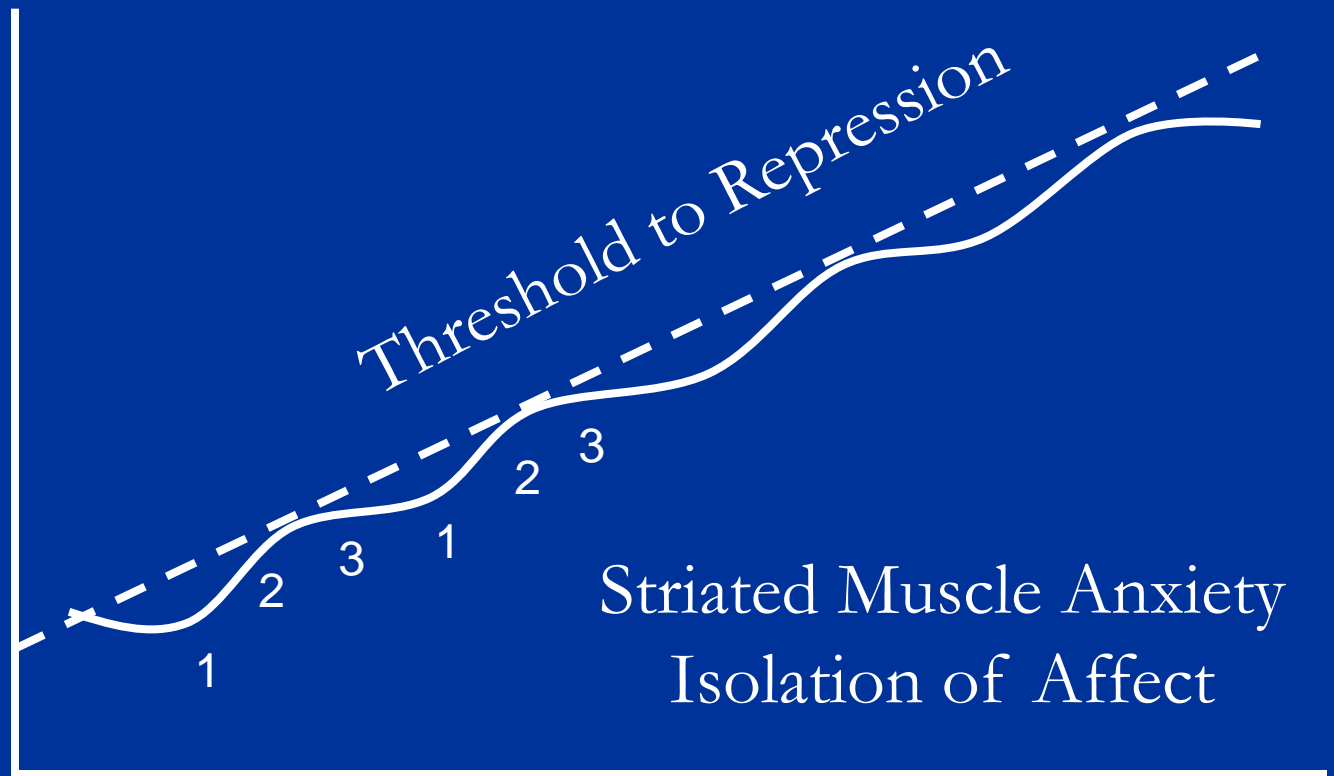


Smooth Muscle Unconscious Anxiety

- Gastrointestinal
- Vascular, Coronary Arteries
- Bronchi
- Bladder
- Abdominal Pain, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Dyspepsia, Migraine, Pelvic Pain
- Mediated by Repression of feelings
- Process:
 - reduce anxiety by intellectual review.
 - Help patient identify and feel guilt about rage

Conscious
Feelings

Unconscious
Anxiety



1. Pressure to feelings or to defenses
2. Rise in complex transference feelings and anxiety
3. Intellectual recap to bring isolation of affect

Cognitive-perceptual Disruption

- Dissociation, losing track of thoughts, poor memory, fainting
- Visual blurring, blindness
- Dysfunction of other senses
- Hallucinations in all 5 senses: Can perceive Pain
- Seen with Projection of feelings and impulses

Motor Conversion: Muscle weakness

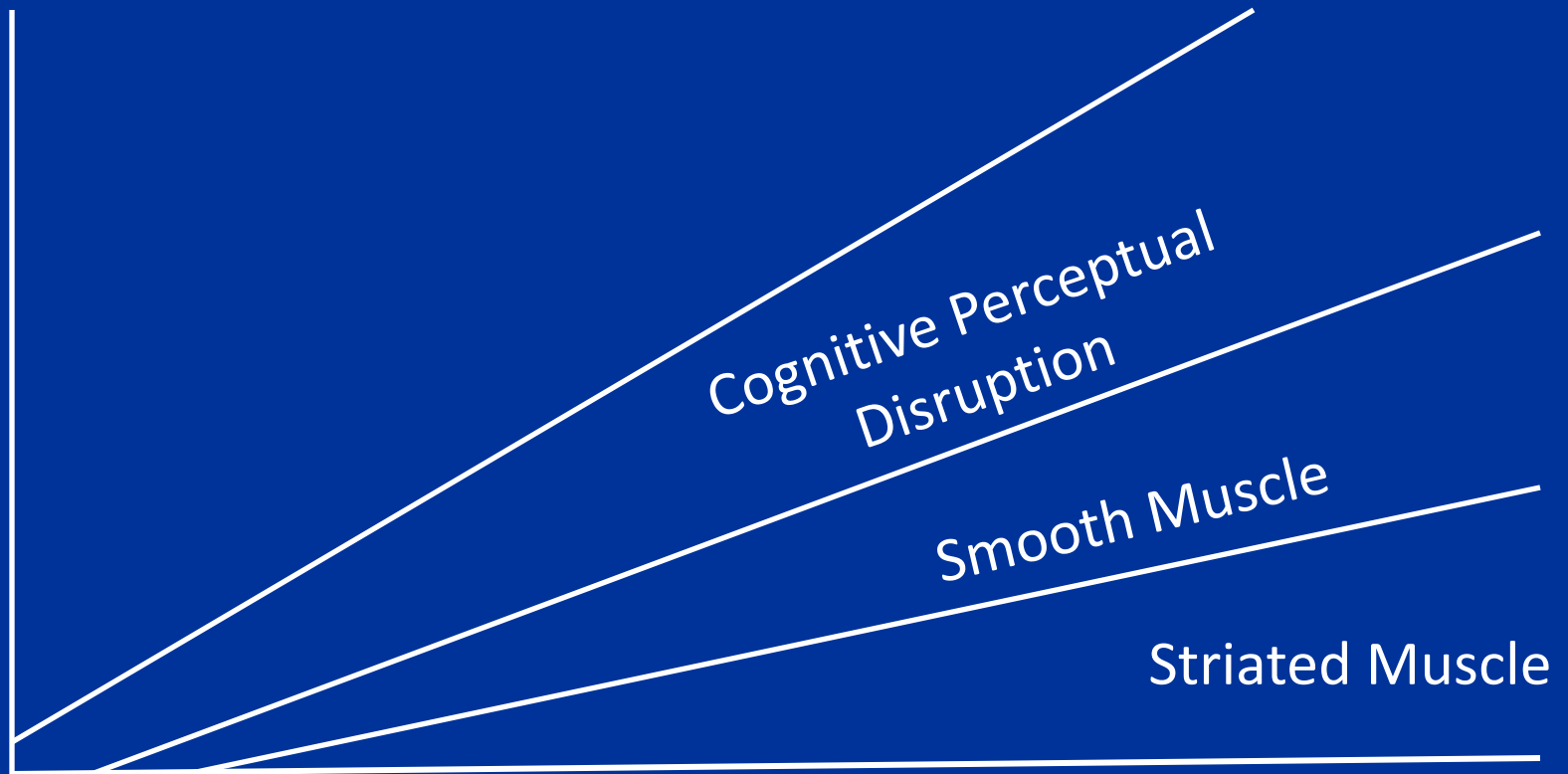
- → Neurology Consultation and Emergency Departments
- Seen with Repression
- Usually not with Pain complaints

Sympathy symptoms

- Guilt about rage causes the same symptoms as a person unconsciously wanted to induce in another.
- Common Examples:
 - Strangling → Choking
 - Head damage → headache
 - Chest damage → chest pain
 - Stabbing Pain → stabbing
 - Tearing/ripping sensations → Primitive rage
- Management: Focus to feel guilt about the rage to remove or reduce pain

Complexity

- Multiple pathways
- Defenses against exploration of feelings
- Mixed causation



Interpretation of Test Results

- 1) No change in active symptoms:
 - Likely not emotional factors → Look for other factors.
- 2) Symptoms increase with anxiety or reduce with lowering the anxiety:
 - Possible role of emotions in worsening/causing symptoms
- 3) Symptoms removed by emotional experience:
 - Highly likely related to emotions
- 4) No unconscious anxiety is mobilized:
 - No anxiety is present, or test not done correctly → repeat test or have series of sessions

Scandinavian Immersion Training in ISTDP

Drammen Norway May 7-9, 2015

Emotion focused treatment for
patients with low affect- and
anxiety tolerance

Contact Roger Sandvik Hansen at
roger.s.hansen@gmail.com
for details

Stockholm Sweden September 10-12

ISTDP for Psychosomatic Disorders

Contact Jennifer at abbass@bellaliant.net
for details