



Treatments for psychological disorders: better A01 descriptions

Module 4 all atypical topics

This activity will help you to...

- Identify the features of a good description of a psychological treatment
- Write more effective descriptions of treatments in your Unit 4 exam

What makes a good description?

Below are two descriptions of a treatment for anorexia. Read both and decide which is better and why. Based on your conclusions, list the features of a good description.

The psychoanalytical model suggests that eating disorders are caused by unconscious conflicts in the psyche. In psychoanalytical therapy for anorexia the psychologist tries to uncover the unconscious conflicts and helps the client to deal with them. The therapist may use free association, dream analysis, word association and projective tests. They want to bring about transference. Once the repressed material has been brought to the surface the therapist and client can work through it together.

In psychoanalytical treatments for anorexia, the analyst will use a variety of techniques to uncover the repressed conflicts or memories that are causing the client to want to starve themselves (e.g. an unconscious desire to remain in a pre-pubescent state). To do this they may use free association, dream association and projective tests. They interpret the client's responses, so the client can begin to understand their own hidden motives for being anorexic. Eventually, the therapist aims to bring about transference, where the client projects onto them the relationships that led to the anorexia (e.g. a highly interdependent relationship with the mother). Once this happens, they can start to unravel and work through the developmental issues that underlie the disorder.

NB: you don't need to know how psychoanalytical therapy for eating disorders is done; this is just for illustrative purposes.

Here are four more descriptions of psychological treatments for eating disorders. Using what we have decided about the characteristics of a good description of treatment, rewrite them so they would get a higher mark in the unit 4 exam.

The behavioural model of psychological disorders says they are caused by abnormal learning experiences. Treatments for bulimia would use reinforcement and punishment (operant conditioning) to get the person to unlearn the maladaptive behaviour and learn better ways of eating.

The cognitive theory of anorexia says it is caused by faulty thinking. Cognitive behavioural therapy for anorexia gets people to change the way they think. This helps them change the way they behave. The client's beliefs are treated like hypotheses and they are given homework to challenge what they believe.

The cognitive model of eating disorders and bulimia says they are caused by irrational thinking. Fairburn's treatment for bulimia forces bulimics to change the way they think. This stops them from bingeing and purging.

Behavioural treatment for anorexia would aim to reinforce some behaviours and cause other behaviours to be extinguished possibly through the use of punishment. The aim would be to get the person to eat normally and put on weight.