Key Terms

**somatoform disorder** physical symptoms for which there is no apparent physical cause (page 461)

**conversion disorder** changing emotional difficulties into a loss of a specific voluntary body function (page 461)

**dissociative disorder** a disorder in which a person experiences alterations in memory, identity, or consciousness (page 462)

**dissociative amnesia** the inability to recall important personal events or information, usually associated with stressful events (page 462)

**dissociative fugue** a dissociative disorder in which a person suddenly and unexpectedly travels away from home or work and is unable to recall the past (page 462)

**dissociative identity disorder** a person exhibits two or more personality states, each with its own patterns of thinking and behaving (page 462)

**Drawing From Experience**

What kinds of unusual psychological problems have you seen in television dramas? Have you seen shows about someone with multiple personalities? The last section discussed different types of anxiety disorders. In this section, you will learn about two other categories of disorders: somatoform and dissociative.

**Organizing Your Thoughts**

Use the diagram on the next page to help you take notes as you read the summaries that follow. Think about the differences between somatoform and dissociative disorders. Name the categories of disorders described in the diagram, and list the types in each category.
1. Physical symptoms with no physical cause

4. Loss of memory or identity

Types of

2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.

Read to Learn

Introduction (page 460)

Sometimes psychological distress can bring on a variety of physical symptoms that have no physical cause. For example, a person may be unable to walk even though there is nothing wrong with his legs. This is called a somatoform disorder. Although nothing physical is wrong, the person is not faking. He really cannot move his legs.

8. How might suddenly being unable to walk actually help a person reduce stress?

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Somatoform Disorders (page 461)

Two types of somatoform disorders are conversion disorder and hypochondriasis. A person with a conversion disorder changes or "converts" emotional difficulties into a loss of a body function. The person might suddenly be unable to hear. Many people experience mild conversion reactions. For example, you might be so frightened that you cannot move. This brief loss of function is not a disorder. A conversion disorder can be a long-term disability. For example, a man might wake up one morning and find he is paralyzed. Most people would panic. However, he takes it calmly. This calmness is one sign that the problem is psychological rather than physical. People with conversion disorders invent physical symptoms to avoid some unbearable problem. For example, a woman who lives in terror of blurting out things she does not want to say may lose the power of speech. This "solves" the problem. Conversion disorders are rare.

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Hypochondriasis is a disorder in which a person in good health becomes obsessed with imaginary illnesses. The person spends a lot of time looking for signs of serious illness. He or she thinks any minor pain is a sign of a fatal illness. In spite of medical reports showing nothing is wrong, a hypochondriac will continue to believe a disease exists. Like conversion, hypochondriasis is a physical expression of emotional distress.

9. Suppose a person makes an appointment with a doctor once a month to check for cancer, even though her tests are always negative. Which somatoform disorder does this behavior suggest?

Dissociative Disorders (page 462)

A dissociative disorder is a breakdown in a person's normal conscious experience, such as a loss of memory or identity. Memory loss that has no physical explanation is dissociative amnesia. This may be an attempt to escape problems by blotting them out. People with amnesia may keep their other knowledge, but may not know who they are, where they work, or who their family is. It often results from a terrible event, such as witnessing a serious accident. Since it has no physical cause, amnesia is not the same as memory loss due to brain injury.

Dissociative fugue is a combination of memory loss and physical escape. The person may suddenly disappear and "wake up" three days later 200 miles away, not knowing who she is. She may establish a new identity—take a new name, get a job, and so forth—in the new place. The fugue state may last days or decades. When she wakes up, she will have no memory of what she did in the new location. Fugue is sort of a traveling amnesia. It serves as an escape from unbearable anxiety.

In dissociative identity disorder, a person seems to have two or more personalities, each with its own ways of thinking and behaving. These different personalities take control at different times. Some psychologists believe that dividing a personality is a person's attempt to escape from part of himself that he fears. People with this disorder usually suffered severe abuse as a child. This disorder is very rare.

10. Suppose a person saw someone murder her mother. She could remember nothing about herself from then on. Which type of dissociative disorder does this suggest?