Edited by

Salman Akhtar

Mary Kay O'Neil

ANXIETY

Clarification, Critique and Update



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firing the mind

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We offer this book as a commemorative token of gratitude
at the centenary of the publication of Sigmund Freud's
"Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" (1926)

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mental life. Louis Nagel and Julie Jaffee Nagel illustrated Mozart's music that was discussed among other psychoanalytic topics between the two icons who returned from eternity for the evening. Carol Siegel, then director of the Freud Museum, introduced the program. Dr. Nagel was also recently interviewed in an episode of the Off the Couch podcast with Harvey Schwartz, MD: "Music Sounds the Way Emotion Feels": from the Piano to the Couch with Julie Nagel, PhD. This podcast posted a link for a live recording of the two-piano 39 performance by Julie and Louis Nagel of St. Saens' *2-Piano Variations on a Theme of Beethoven*, julienagel.net/live. She also was interviewed by Gail Saltz, MD, on the podcast, "Psychoanalysis and You Performance Anxiety and the Healing Power of Music." The Juilliard School featured an article in *Juilliard Connect* (October 2024) about her career since graduating from Juilliard. Additional recent articles, presentations, and media events are listed on her website: julienagel.net. The Juilliard School has hosted Dr. Nagel for book signings and discussions of her three books. Dr. Nagel has received awards and grants for her interdisciplinary work, presentations, and writing which include grants from the American Psychoanalytic Association, the Gertrude and Ernst Ticho Award, the Karl A. Menninger Memorial Award, the Nathan Segel Award (twice), Continuing Education for Women Scholarship at the University of Michigan, and the Irving S. Gilmore International Piano Competition: Program on Stage Fright. Dr. Nagel's three books are receiving acclaim from professionals in the fields of music, psychology, psychoanalysis, education, and mental health. Her first book, *Melodies of the Mind: Connections Between Psychoanalysis and Music* (2013), explores how music itself evokes and expresses affects and how music and psychological ideas are present in everyday life. Her second book, *Managing Stage Fright: A Guide for Musicians and Music Teachers* (2017), offers questions for thought for music (and other) teachers who work with anxious students and performers. Her latest book, *Career Choices in Music: Beyond the Pandemic: Musical and Psychological Perspectives* (2023), explores the intersection between one's career and mental health from the psychological, musical, and social challenges and opportunities brought on by the pandemic. Her interdisciplinary work has been endorsed by academics, musicians, and general readers. "This is a definitive study that is a must-read for musicians young and old as

well as general readers interested in the music profession. Julie Jaffee Nagel's carefully researched work combines the perceptions of a musician and psychologist dealing with post-pandemic challenges involving musicians' contributions to our society"—Joseph W. Polisi, president emeritus, The Juilliard School. Dr. Julie Jaffee Nagel is in private practice in Dexter, Michigan. Additional information is available at julienagel.net.

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Introduction

Putting aside "the unconscious," "anxiety" is perhaps the most central concept in both the theoretical and clinical foundations of psychoanalysis. The dysphoria of vague apprehension has been variously regarded as the result of symptoms, cause of symptoms, or the emotional overflow left over despite the formation of symptoms. Its origins have been traced to accumulation of sexual tension, insufficient psychical working over of somatic excitements, and real or imaginary dangers associated with the expression of unruly id wishes. Attempts to create an ontogenetic hierarchy of the forms and intensities of anxiety have led to the concepts of psychotic and neurotic anxiety. Also related are the notions of annihilation, separation, and castration anxieties, with the latter receiving a vehement push-back from feminist psychoanalytic perspectives. Yet another development noticeable in this realm is the mushrooming of the lexicon pertaining to this emotion, with myriad prefixes (e.g., abandonment anxiety, performance anxiety, separateness anxiety) getting attached to the core concept. The study of anxiety—be it through its checkered history, or its connections with various developmental phases of childhood, or its role in embellishing natural fears into phobias, or its mobilization of ego defenses, or its acting as a force driving an individual to seek treatment—is, in effect, the study of psychoanalysis itself.

Our book makes a painstaking and earnest effort to cover this challenging terrain. It opens with two chapters that lay out the groundwork for things to come; one elucidates Freud's changing views of anxiety, and the second offers succinct definitions of the plethora of psychiatric and psychoanalytic terms pertaining to this emotion. These chapters are followed by independent discourses on separation anxiety and castration anxiety that attempt to describe, critique, and update these well-established notions. A section on cultural matters follows and includes essays on performance and climate anxieties. The book then moves on to the clinical process and provides three pithy discourses on the entanglement of anxiety with enactment, aging, and trauma. Rounding off these contents are the two pieces on the analyst's clinical and professional anxieties.

The book's scope is panoramic, and its approach arises from a multiplicity of perspectives. Its aim is to strengthen theoretical moorings, enhance clinical empathy, and help sharpen technical skills of all psychoanalytically oriented therapists.

Part I

Conceptual terrain

CHAPTER 1

The formidable lexicon of anxiety

Salman Akhtar

The concept of anxiety lies at the heart of psychoanalytic theory and technique. In its "sub-clinical" form, anxiety is the motivator of all intrapsychic defenses. In its "felt" form, it is the catalyst for help-seeking. In its "implosive" form, it is an instigator of formal regression and structural breakdown. All in all, encounter with anxiety is ubiquitous in clinical practice of psychiatry, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis. At the same time, there exists a certain ambiguity about its precise nature. The boundaries between anxiety and related experiences of fear and phobia also remain ill defined. Further conundrum is caused by the plethora of essentializing designations (e.g., separation anxiety, castration anxiety, annihilation anxiety) that have cropped up since the publication of Freud's (1926d) seminal monograph *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* 100 years ago. The bloated nosology has led to marked imprecision in the use of the term "anxiety" by mental health professionals. It has also blurred the fact that the etiologic foundations of anxiety might be far fewer than the rooms in the mansion of its phenomenology. A thorough and critical reconsideration of such matters is thus long overdue.

The nature of anxiety and its distinction from fear

Anxiety is an unpleasant emotion that is generated from within the individual. It is not caused by external events though it can certainly be triggered by them. As a result, the correct psychoanalytic rendering of "I became anxious when my mother-in-law moved into my home" is "I became anxious due to impulses and fantasies stirred up in my mother-in-law moving into my home." The intrapsychic locus of anxiety's origin is pointedly underscored by Moore and Fine (1990) in their statement that anxiety is:

> … an unpleasurable affect or emotional state characterized by feelings of unpleasant anticipation—a sense of danger. Anxiety has both physiological and psychological correlates; common physiological manifestations are acceleration of heart and breathing rates, tremor, sweating, diarrhea, and muscle tension; psychologically, anxiety is experienced with apprehensive self-absorption, as a feeling of being powerless when faced with an impending danger that is vague or *unknown*. The feeling may be accompanied or entirely replaced by the bodily sensations. Anxiety, which is related to a danger that is *unconscious*, should be distinguished from fear, which is a response to a consciously recognized external and realistic danger. (p. 24, italics added)

This last point cannot be overemphasized since anxiety and fear share many characteristics. Both evoke a sense that something bad is about to happen. Both are unpleasant and undesirable experiences. Both can serve as alarms to protect one from harm. However, as noted above, fear is a response to external dangers whereas anxiety is a response to dangers from within. One can run away from fear, not from anxiety. Such surgical distinction is shattered in the situation of phobias, however. A phobia, typically, is formed by the overlay of anxiety upon an external object or situation that is potentially dangerous in itself. For instance, the phobia of heights might combine the actual, hardwired fear of falling from an elevated surface with the anxiety over unconscious, guilt-ridden impulses to jump and commit suicide. Or, the phobia of fear of small enclosures might reflect the intermingling of the animal fear of places that can become traps with unconscious but dreaded longing for being in the maternal womb all over again. And, so on.

On a finer level, anxiety itself might have linkages with actual painful experiences of the early infantile period. Freud (1950a) underscored this as an essential feature of "unpleasure." He wrote:

> If the mnemic image of the (hostile) object is freshly cathected in some way—for instance, by a fresh perception—a state arises which is not pain but which nevertheless has a resemblance to it. It includes unpleasure and the inclination to discharge which corresponds to the experience of pain …. It only remains to assume, therefore, that owing to the cathexis of memories unpleasure is *released* from the interior of the body and freshly conveyed up. (p. 320)

Thirty years later, Freud (1926d) published his major work on anxiety and restated this thesis. However, this time he linked the cathexis of previous traumata and their memories to the specific affect of anxiety. He stated:

> Anxiety is not newly created in repression; it is reproduced as an affective state, in accordance with an already existing mnemic image. If we go further and enquire into the origins of that anxiety—and of affects in general—we shall be leaving the realm of pure psychology and entering the borderland of physiology. Affective states have become incorporated in the mind as precipitates of primeval traumatic experiences and when a similar situation occurs, they are revived as mnemic symbols. (p. 93)

In the same contribution, Freud also delineated the cardinal "danger situations" causing anxiety: (i) loss of a love object, (ii) loss of a love object's love, (iii) castration, and (iv) moral condemnation from within oneself. "Each situation or danger corresponds to a particular period of life or a particular developmental phase of the mental apparatus and appears to be justifiable to it" (p. 146). Some "danger situations" lose their evocative power as the individual matures while others survive by acquiring more up to date meanings. Still others (e.g., the superego's attack) accompany people throughout their lives. "Danger situations" mobilize anxiety and set ego defenses into motion; this level of anxiety is called "signal anxiety." It contrasts with "automatic anxiety," which results from the ego being overwhelmed by threats from within.