

'Anxiety'

also known as

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

A Counselling perspective...Working with Anxiety
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1 in 4 Kiwis have experience of Anxiety, Panic Attacks and Phobias

[Anxiety NZ]

Abstract

This paper considers the origins of anxiety from an evolutionary perspective. While it considers a Psychologists view, a New Zealand Counsellors eclectic therapeutic approach is the preferred treatment method. It will suggest, by remodeling a sufferers thinking about their physical response to real or emagined trigger stimulas, anxiety is manageable and can be eliminated.

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Intro: Counselling Vs Psychologist

The Writers philosophy

To take the position that the outcome will be richer than any single theoretical approach alone and that “*all human beings are spiritual, physical, emotional, social and mental beings with agency*” [Ataranagi].

Therefore, treatment considers total wellness and as such, life is a balance of important well-being factors including; physical, social, emotional, spiritual and psychological. The writers work operates through the philosophical lens of a *lifespans developmental* [Life-Span] stages perspective.

Counselling

Counselling focuses on client’s concerns and difficulties and includes understanding people’s patterns of thoughts, behaviours, feelings and the ways in which these may be problematic in their lives. Studying counselling involves learning how to assist people to develop understanding about themselves and to make changes in their lives [Couns V Psyc].

Psychology

Psychology studies the human mind and behaviour. Studying psychology provides students with a comprehensive understanding of behavioural and mental processes [Diff Couns Psyc]. Psychologists tend to rely on The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) [GAD] to assist their work.

There are disadvantages in using the DSM including; generally its centred around standards of a Western middle-class white males, it's too cut-and-dry, it does not take into account factors like a person's past, personality, and culture, there’s a subjectivity of diagnosis, there is no clear line between normal and abnormal, its based on symptoms, not causes and diagnostic labels are powerful and may hurt people [DSM].

In New Zealand, psychologists are trained in more short-term symptom-focussed treatments for acute mental health problems. Counsellors, on the other hand,

specialise in helping to deal with specific issues in specific areas like couples counselling, addictions counselling or vocational counselling [NZ Couns. V Psyc]. The writer feels this is more in-line with who they are and is a reason why they choose to be a Counsellor.

Anxiety Defined

One understanding is that anxiety is a future- oriented mood state associated with preparation for possible, upcoming negative events; and fear is an alarm response to present or imminent danger (real or perceived). This view of human fear and anxiety is comparable to the animal predatory imminence continuum. That is, anxiety corresponds to an animal's state during a potential predatory attack and fear corresponds to an animal's state during predator contact or imminent contact [Anxiety].

Video clip demonstrating the mechanics of how anxiety operates in your brain...

Your Brain on Stress and Anxiety

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmwij6ghLIM> [Video]

Video clip of an actual panic attack occurring to a news reader on ABC Television...

Panic Attack on Live Television | ABC World News Tonight | ABC News

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_go4uPxhUzU [Video 2]

How to identify anxiety

1 in 4 Kiwis have experience of Anxiety, Panic Attacks and Phobias [Anxiety NZ].

The symptoms of GAD can vary between individuals and, over time, within an individual. You may notice better and worse times of the day. And while stress

doesn't cause generalised anxiety disorder, it can make the symptoms worse [NZ Mental Health].

People with GAD will usually:

[NZ Mental Health]

- Expect the worst
- Worry excessively about money, health, family or work, when there are no signs of trouble
- Are unable to relax, enjoy quiet time, or be by themselves
- Avoid situations that make them anxious
- Are irritable
- Have constant worries running through their head
- Have difficulty concentrating or focusing on things
- Feel edgy, restless or jumpy
- Suffer from stomach problems, nausea, diarrhoea
- Suffer from poor sleep
- Need to know what's going to happen in the future

Mental & Emotional Symptoms include:

Although the primary symptoms of anxiety disorders are excessive fear and worry, there are other common emotional symptoms that can affect you [Wellington Anxiety].

- Feelings of apprehension or dread

- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling tense and jumpy
- Anticipating the worst
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Constantly watching for signs of danger
- Feeling like your mind's gone blank
- Feeling like you are losing control or going crazy

Physical Symptoms:

Anxiety activates the body's fight-or-flight response and therefore involves a variety of physical symptoms. These symptoms are often mistaken for a medical illness and can include: [Wellinton Anxiety]

- Pounding heart
- Sweating
- Upset stomach or dizziness
- Frequent urination or diarrhoea
- Shortness of breath
- Tremors and twitches
- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Insomnia

Preferred treatment method

To assist explanation we will use a case study (BRIAN) to think about the application of the model

Who is Brian?

At 41 years of age and living in Christchurch, Brian is unemployed because of his constant anxiety, even the thought of working is stressfull. He now lives on his own in a Council Flat and survives off a Government funded Benefit.

- **Work.** *This would affect Brian immensely because he is easilly bullied easily by his workmates.*
- **School.** *Brian felt anxious with tests and school work.*
- **Relationships.** *Very difficult, no relationship with his Father and very disappointed in his Mother. Very few 'normal' physical relationships, largely his circle is made up of acquaintances. These outcomes are attributable to the stress involved with the relationship formation process.*
- **Health.** *Because Brian is dealing with this disorder, his health less than great. He is always tired and his emotional health is affected as well with feelings of laziness and worthlessness.*
- **Financial.** *Brian is realising that if he cannot work, he cannot earn enough money to survive without some form of support. He feels pressure from the 'system supplying his benefit and thinks that it won't last forever and others are more needy. All of these things are considered threats and can cause Brian to worry excessively and are all interfering with his life.*

A typical incident *for Brian occurred while he was about to go fishing with a friend. They had driven to a lake. On arrival Brian stepped out of the vehicle and stood on the shores of the lake. As he started to take in the view, quite unexpectedly and without any obvious triggers, he noticed his chest tightening and his heart starting to pound. He felt sick, out of breath and his head felt like it was going to explode. Anticipating the worst and feeling like he was loosing control, he yelled to his friend, "you better get me outa hear".*

At that moment he also recognised what was occurring, he was having a panic attack. He managed to also consider the A-W-A-R-E acronym which resulted in its application.

A-W-A-R-E Model for Coping with Anxiety.

'A' for ACKNOWLEDGE and then re-frame the anxiety thoughts...DO NOT THINK OF IT AS ANXIETY, RATHER THINK OF IT AS, NERVOUS AROUSAL, NOT FEAR, NOT PANIC. Tell yourself that you are feeling excited (it doesn't matter if that feeling is, be it a pounding heart or a tight chest or a dizzy sensation), whatever it is you are feeling, repeat over to yourself that, 'I am excited by this feeling'. This thinking changes your bodies response to these sensations and shifts you into a more power position....I'm excited by this feeling, I'm excited by this feeling, continue repeating this for the next 30 seconds.

At this stage don't think we are fixed, all that is occurring is that we are changing the feeling of fear into an energy of Nervous Arousal. You are still going to be feeling very uncomfortable. Fear and excitement are very similar nervous arousals. Repeating this process shifts you into this positive state of excitement over fear. In the beginning 'you may have to fake it until you make it' , but soon you'll start to feel your nervous system calm. I'm excited by this feeling, I'm excited by this feeling...Your mind and body is well able to deal with this...You can absolutely handle it. The sense of panic you are feeling will not escalate, it is going to pass.

Let's now talk to your anxiety. Imagine it as an negative internal voice, speaking in your ear about all the terrible things that will happen. Talk to the voice (your fear) and tell it that you want more, that you are excited, whatever is occurring tightness of chest, whatever, tell the voice you want more...Ride the wave of anxiety each time it appears. While you might think this is counter intuitive, remember that you are mentally tricking the body to show it that it can handle this nervous arousal.

'What ifs' will continue to come into your mind and as they do, answer those doubts with, "so what" type response. Its important to close off these doubts. Its important to know that we need to defuse those 'what ifs'. Remembering your current feellings are a temporary change in arousal levels.

'A' for BRIAN:

He **Acknowledged** what was occurring and commenced the re-framing technique. While unsure at that point, what had triggered this episode, he recalled A-W-A-R-E and started repeating over to himself that, 'I am excited by this feeling'. He knew that he was far from ok but trusted enough in the process to continue to at least fake that his fear was actually only nervous arousal and he started to notice a small but significant shift as he started to calm a little.

Brian egged himself on as he remembered to encourage his thoughts to give him **more...** he knew he was better off to do so than any other thing, despite a few doubts to the contrary! He knew enough to know, that this feeling would pass and his body and mind could cope with it.

'W' for WATCH, try to rate the intensity (1-100) over time. No harm is going to come to you, you can absolutely handle this and so much more. Allow yourself to keep riding these waves of anxiety by telling yourself how excited you feel. Pretend you have just paid money for a roller-coaster ride and you want value for your money, bring it on.

Anxiety always subsides. It's physiologically how our system works. Your current anxiety is not going to last much longer, it will start to fade very soon. Nothing lasts forever—not pleasant things, not unpleasant things, not panic attacks.

'W' for BRIAN:

He knew also to **Watch** and score how intense the feelings were and noticed they were dissipating.

'A' is for Act, Act through. Don't let anxiety prevent you from living life. Avoiding GAD makes it grow. Think of something you are grateful for in your life, it can be anything at all. What's important is that it elicits a feeling of gratitude. Note that a true feeling of gratitude is felt, you can feel it in your body, often in your chest, it's a warm sensation. The simple things often work best, like the sun on your face or the words someone said to you. It can be anything big or small. The point is that gratitude drops anxiety levels quite dramatically, so focus on something you are grateful for right now...

Engage with something, it can be anything at all, so long as it is something that it

is engaging like, having a conversation or reading a book. As you are doing this, you may note you are still feeling the same feelings. This is ok because it takes a while for these feelings to cool off. Be ok with that don't expect to be feeling calm, the faster you can get comfortable in the greatest discomfort the better. Once you learn to master comfort in anxiety discomfort your anxiety will evaporate faster, not because you pushed it away but because you allowed it to 'be'.

'A' for BRIAN...

*It wasn't too long before Brian commenced fishing. He **Acted** as though that his roller-coaster ride was in the past and that fishing was what he came for and fishing was what he was going to do! He was grateful he was able to be out fishing with his mate and actually said that to him. Brian had not yet rid himself of everything but his intensity had certainly subsided.*

'R' is for Repeat. Repeat the process because it takes lots of practice to get better at increased acceptance of your anxiety. Just by taking the time to read this or listen to me, you will note that your anxiety has subsided. Give yourself some credit, you are braver than you know, please now go and engage with something and if anxiety peaks again, repeat the steps or play the audio again.

'R' for BRIAN...

*Brian has **Repeated** the A-W-A-R-E technique in subsequent 'rides' and continued to improve his skills.*

'E' is for Expect, expect the best. Each episode is a fresh try. Try to notice even small gains. ANXIETY DOES NOT LAST FOREVER...YOU CAN GET THROUGH IT...

'E' for BRIAN...

*Brain did **Expect** that he would overcome that episode and he did. He is unsure if the rides have completely gone yet but did notice that over time, he got better at managing them. He has not experienced anything for some time now.*

Anxiety facts

As discussed in the Intro (1.), purposefully the writer directs themselves away from using the DSM Manual. However, from a total wellness perspective, they maintain that there is value in knowing how western professions might view a culmination of presenting issues. DSM facts that may assist building a picture of the presenting issues includes;

[MHERC]

- 25% of the population will at sometime in their lives, suffer from an anxiety disorder ranging from specific phobias to more debilitating disorders.
- Most common age of onset is late adolescence - mid thirties.
- Anxiety disorders affect women somewhat more than men.
- Anxiety disorders are the most treatable of all mental illnesses.
- Depression often accompanies anxiety disorders.
- Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is reported to be 80-90% effective.
- Alcohol and drugs are often used to self-medicate for anxiety and panic.
- Unresolved, ongoing high stress levels put all individuals at risk of developing an anxiety disorder.

The writer frequently utilises screening tests, which often have been developed using the DSM perspective. While they are not a big advocate of tests per se, they find the tests can be helpful as a starting point for opening the platform to discuss anxiety.

Conclusion

There is a 25% chance that you will have had some experience of Anxiety, Panic Attacks and Phobias. Equally you are likely to know that there is a wide range of professional opinions and treatment options available. This paper has provided a understanding of origin of Anxiety. It states that the Writer views theories and therapeutic modelities as less important and that actually well-being requires a balance of factors. This paper follows a Counselling resolution perspective for Sufferers of Anxiety utilizing the A-W-A-R-E model.

Acknowledge anxiety, try telling yourself "I know my nervous system is working. This is normal."

Watch anxiety, try to rate the intensity and learn to realize the emotion is time-limited.

Act through. Don't let anxiety prevent you from living life. Avoiding it makes it grow.

Repeat process. It takes lots of practice to get better at increased acceptance of anxiety.

Expect the best. Each episode is a fresh try. Try to notice even small gains.

The culmination suggests that Anxiety is manageable and can be eliminated.

"Every time you are tempted to react in the same old way, ask if you want to be a prisoner of the past or a pioneer of the future." ~Deepak Chopra

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