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# Points About Anxiety



## 1 FREEDOM

Anxiety is “the dizziness of freedom” (Søren Kierkegaard, 1844)

Anxiety is linked to the very process of self-creation, according to existential philosophers. It arises from the simultaneously exhilarating and horrifying realization that our destiny lies in our own hands.

## 2 DIAGNOSIS

Anxiety is classified as a set of disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual [DSM] of the of the American Psychiatric Association

Since 1980 (3rd Ed), the DSM has promoted a ‘medical model’, equating psychological conditions with physical illness. On this model, anxiety ‘disorders’ (such as Social Anxiety, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder) could be diagnosed according to a checklist of medical symptoms, much like a physical condition.

## 3 DISORDER

The classification of personalities, moods and anxiety states as “disordered” is contested. The United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council affirms that “The crisis in mental health should be managed not as a crisis of individual conditions, but as a crisis of social obstacles which hinders individual rights. Mental health policies should address the “power imbalance” rather than “chemical imbalance”.” (Thirty-fifth session, June 2017.)

This means:

“The relevant question shouldn’t be what’s wrong with you but what happened to you?” (Twitter post: Jacqui Dillon / Eleanor Longden)

“Psychiatric research should begin with the person in his or her situation, and seek to trace the constellation of factors across the life-course that have shaped the ailment as a reality that is both biological and social... patterns within the milieu - a form of life, a location in city or countryside, a rhythm of work, a pattern of interactions - are not merely external to the disorder, influencing its mode of expression - they are constitutive of the disorder and its inscription in body and brain”. (What Is Diagnosis For? Nikolas Rose)

## 4 IN 4

On average, 1 in 4 people experience anxiety as a health issue.

In a 12-month period, over two million Australians experience anxiety; 3 million Australians are living with depression or anxiety. Up to 40% of the population will experience a panic attack at some time in their life; 10% of the Australian population experiences social phobia during their lifetime—and around 12% of Australians will experience post-traumatic stress in their lifetime. (Australian Bureau of Statistics. National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2007).

## 5 STRESS

Most people are stressed at work (if not technically 'anxious'). Stress levels in the workplace are rising with 6 out of 10 workers in major global economies experiencing increased workplace stress; China (86%) has the highest rise in workplace stress (The Regus Group) 91% of adult Australians feel stress in at least one important area of their lives; almost 50% feel very stressed about one part of their life (Lifeline Australia).

Australian employees are absent for an average of 3.2 working days each year through stress. This workplace stress costs the Australian economy approximately \$14.2 billion (Medibank) - (The Global Organization for Stress)

## 6 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a means of managing stress and anxiety. One in two Australians (51% in 2015) visit social media sites to manage stress (Australian Psychological Society FoMO survey 2015)

## 7 FOMO

At the same time, the internet makes us anxious. More than one in ten Australians (12%) report 'issues with keeping up with social media networks' as a source of stress (Australian Psychological Society FoMO survey 2015).



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### 8 21ST CENTURY

Anxiety is the dominant emotional state of the 21st century.

Whereas in previous epochs ordinary working people were condemned to misery or boredom, anxiety becomes pervasive in conditions where free choice is unfettered, and yet at some level illusory. Today, anything and everything is on show, for sale and attainable, but (for too many people) perpetually withheld, out of reach. As a consequence, we are always anxious. (Institute for Precarious Consciousness, Plan B)

### 9 AGE OF ANXIETY

W.H. Auden diagnosed an Age of Anxiety in his post-war poem of 1948.

Our current Age of Anxiety is variously said to have taken hold in the 1990s and/or after 9/11. An “age of anxiety” is generally characterized by social upheaval and material hardship, and/or by the presence or perception of a threat, which is in turn exploited by political leaders and fueled by media.

### 10 INSTITUTIONS

Institutions make us ill—even those that exist to enable us to thrive.

Toxic workplaces, bad bosses, precarious conditions, over-long shifts, bullying and systemic abuse, ‘gaslighting’, discrimination, bad buildings, bad government, immigration policy, oppressive places, relentless noise, poor standards of care, pointless bureaucracy and managerialism....

### 11 DIFFERENCE

Everyone is somewhat anxious in the face of difference

Okay, so you’re not racist. You’re fine with visible disability, neurodiversity and challenging behaviors. You can have a conversation free of cultural bias and neurotypical assumptions. So why is it that some people are vilified, abused, disdained or disregarded in public? #comfortablewithdiversity

### 12 WHY NOT?

65% of those experiencing symptoms do not seek help. (2010 National Mental Health Report, Australian Government Department of Health)

Why not?