

Addendum to “High Functioning Anxiety: Why Everything Feels Like Panic (It’s Not)”

IDENTITY PANIC

“Who am I if this is taken away?” This is the thing underneath: job loss, failure, not making the team, being rejected, getting older, health limitations, a relationship ending. And suddenly it’s not just sadness...it’s: “What does this say about me?” We often marry our identity to things that cannot carry the weight, and then when they wobble... we wobble.

BELONGING STRESS

“I need them to get me.” Sometimes anxiety is really: I need this person’s approval. I need this group to accept me. I need to feel chosen. I need to not be misunderstood. And when you don’t get that... your nervous system goes: DANGER. REJECTION. EXILE. Sometimes the problem isn’t “anxiety.” It’s that you’re trying to get belonging from someone who isn’t safe. Or you’re trying to be understood by someone who isn’t curious. Or you’re in a season of loneliness that needs community, not self-blame.

FEELING UNSEEN

“Why do I feel invisible?” Sometimes what you call anxiety is actually a felt experience of being unseen. And there are a bunch of reasons for this: Different love languages. Different communication styles. Different stress loads. This might not be an anxiety problem. It might be a communication skill problem. Or a boundary problem. Or a “you’re in the wrong room” problem.

COMPETENCE GROWTH PAIN

“I’m terrified of looking stupid.” This shows up in: new jobs, new leadership, new parenting phases, new seasons of marriage, new responsibilities. You don’t feel “anxious”...you feel exposed. Competence comes from reps. Trying, failing, learning, repeating. Which means the discomfort doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with you—it means you’re learning. Anne-Laure Le Cunff talks about this as shifting from a life script to an experimental mindset. Instead of: “I must get it right...” it becomes: “I’m running an experiment. I’m gathering data. I’m learning.”

GRIEF

Loss isn’t anxiety. But grief can absolutely trigger anxiety. You lose a person. A season. A dream. A version of your life you thought you’d have. And your nervous system doesn’t just feel sad... it feels unsafe. Grief requires grieving. Not moralizing yourself for having feelings.

REGRET

“I hurt someone I love.” Sometimes what you call anxiety is really: guilt, regret, the fear you damaged trust, the fear you can’t undo it. This often requires humility, repair, and time. Not vague spiralling.

EXTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL

“I need them to affirm me.” When your stability is dependent on: their mood, their approval, their praise, their text back... you’re going to live on a roller coaster. Henry Cloud emphasizes personal responsibility a lot— you control your choices and behaviour, not outcomes and other people. So if you’re trying to control the uncontrollable, you’re going to call it “anxiety.” But the real issue is: you’re living outside your lane.

CONTROL AND CERTAINTY ADDICTION

“If I control it, I’ll be safe.” This is huge. Some of us don’t want peace. We want certainty. We don’t want calm. We want guarantees. Life comes with risk. Always. And if your goal is “no risk,” you’ll always feel anxious. Because you’ve chosen an impossible target.

PURPOSE AND MEANING

Silence triggers big questions. Sometimes the reason you can’t sit still isn’t because you’re anxious... it’s because stillness confronts you with: Why am I here? Does my life matter? Is there more than this? Distraction doesn’t answer meaning questions— it just delays them.

MONEY AND PROVISION

Financial pressure triggers survival responses. Debt. Cash flow. Job insecurity. Of course your nervous system gets loud. Some of this needs budgeting tools. Some needs a plan. Some needs support. Some needs honest conversations. Not self-condemnation.

UNDEALT-WITH CHILDHOOD MESSAGES

This one matters. Kids and teens are incredible meaning makers. They take moments and turn them into messages. And if the message was: “I’m too much,” “I’m not enough,” “Love is conditional,” “I have to perform,” “I can’t trust people,” then adulthood will feel anxious— even when nothing is “wrong.” Sometimes the anxiety isn’t about today. It’s about the story your body learned back then. And this is where therapy can be incredibly healing.

RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT

Some people call it anxiety...but it’s actually: you’re in conflict and you don’t have the skills. John and Julie Gottman’s research is so helpful here. They’ve shared that a big portion of couple conflict is perpetual— meaning: it doesn’t get “solved.” It gets managed. So anxiety decreases when you stop trying to eliminate personality differences and start learning skills like: repair attempts, turning toward bids, time-outs when flooded, and self-soothing.

PROBLEM TO SOLVE VS TENSION TO MANAGE

This one is one of my favourites as it is encountered in leadership frequently. Sometimes anxiety is the sign you’re trying to permanently solve a tension that has no permanent solution. Excellence vs efficiency. Structure vs flexibility. Independence vs intimacy. Intensity vs recovery. If it’s a tension, not a problem...you’re not failing when it returns.

Many of these topics are also talked about in my masterclass video: The Hidden Reason People-Pleasers Are So Hard on Themselves (and How to Get Free) linked here: https://youtu.be/MQd5_V2w46M