

Generalized Anxiety Disorder Across the Lifespan: An Integrative Approach

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New York: Springer (<http://www.springer.com/>)

2009, 182 pp., \$79.95 (Hardcover)

Michael Portman presents this book as an attempt to cover broad themes pertaining to Generalized Anxiety Disorder, with a central focus on lifespan development, integrative treatment, and the need to consider innovative approaches to treatment resistant presentations. The author achieves all of these objectives in a book that is logically organized, well-written, and comprehensive in its coverage of the existing empirical literature.

In Chapter 1, The Nature of GAD, Portman draws attention to the insidious onset, functional impact (on marital discord, work productivity), comorbidity, and chronic and unremitting course of pathological worry. In doing so, he provides extensive rationale for viewing those who experience these symptoms as having a serious illness rather than the prevalent understanding of these clients as the 'worried well'. This chapter also foreshadows the book's later discussion of treatment resistance by suggesting that therapy for GAD should likely extend over the longer term to account for the chronic and recalcitrant nature of the symptoms.

Chapter 2, Diagnosis and Assessment, elucidates several bases for the difficulty of properly assessing and correctly diagnosing GAD. Portman adeptly discusses the current classification and differential diagnosis of GAD, and presents some alternative conceptualizations in the literature (e.g., of excessive worry as a cognitive variant of obsessive checking; Nutt et al 2001; GAD as a personality disorder; Akiskal et al 1998). In response to the 'unreliability' of GAD symptoms, Portman stresses the use of structured assessment tools. By making the reader aware of preferred assessment measures, this chapter is a useful reference for both novice and experienced clinicians.

In Chapter 3, Conceptual Models, Portman provides an excellent overview of six leading models for understanding GAD. The reader is introduced to Beck's model of misperceptions of danger and underlying schemas; Barlow's emotional theory; Borkovec's cognitive avoidance theory; Riskind's model of looming vulnerability; Dugas et al's Intolerance of Uncertainty model; and Wells' metacognitive model of Type I and Type II worry. In keeping with his objective of providing unbiased, integrative coverage of the range of theory and research on GAD, Portman presents the models with impartiality and leaves the reader to draw their own conclusions regarding the fit of each of these models.

Chapter 4 discusses Psychosocial Treatments. Again, Portman avoids a typical bias towards an exclusive emphasis on CBT-based interventions, documenting the less than ideal (50%) rate of response to even this gold standard treatment and emphasizing the need to consider client preferences and clinical judgement in drawing from the range of viable alternative options (including Metacognitive therapy, Supportive-Expressive Psychodynamic Therapy, Integrative Psychotherapy, Emotion Regulation, and Acceptance Based Behaviour Therapy). Without compromising his objectivity, Portman offers some wisdom on the utility of the various approaches, for example suggesting that metacognitive therapy should be elevated to a first line treatment given emerging evidence of positive outcomes, with the caveat that many clinicians may find the approach too abstract, or elucidating the novel contribution of the Emotion

Regulation approach in enhancing mastery rather than simply reducing symptoms. Given Portman's clear command of this literature, an even greater emphasis on this aspect of the chapter would be valuable, particularly to beginning clinicians who may grapple with the question of how to approach treatment planning with clients presenting with a chronic course of excessive worry, or how best to respond in the not unlikely case of suboptimal response to first line treatments.

In Chapter 5, Pharmacotherapy, Portman presents a comprehensive review of evidence-based medication interventions as well as a brief overview of the genetic and neurobiological underpinnings of this disorder. Portman offers a flexible assessment of the contested question of benzodiazepine use to treat anxiety symptoms, stating that despite the recent trend away from BZ monotherapy, this class of medications may still play a role in treating those with chronic or primarily somatic symptoms. He provides a thorough review of the evidence base for first line SNRI and SSRI treatment, the 'favored choice' in both the short and long term management of GAD symptoms. This chapter also discusses the emerging data on pregabalin as the "ideal anxiolytic" (Frampton & Foster, 2006) due to its rapid onset, low side effect profile, and utility in addressing somatic symptoms and secondary insomnia. Into a chapter that would easily lend itself to an exhaustive documentation of the various medication trials, Portman also weaves higher-order concepts, such as the ethical question of administering medications that produce "artificial happiness" but do not address the chasm between current and ideal circumstances. In doing so, Portman challenges the reader to consider not only pharmacological efficacy but also the broader implications of medication use.

Special Populations (Chapter 6) discusses the distinct clinical presentation and assessment, diagnosis, and treatment considerations for children and adolescents as well as older adults. This important chapter alerts the reader to significant differences in the manifestation and effective management of generalized anxiety symptoms across the lifespan. Portman highlights the changing nature of worry content from childhood to older adulthood, and presents evidence suggesting that while psychosocial treatments appear to offer an advantage over pharmacological approaches in younger cohorts, the inverse appears to be true for older adults. Given the evidence presented that GAD is the most common psychological disorder among both of these cohorts, further research is clearly warranted to address the unique challenges of treating worry at different life stages.

In Enigmas and Paradoxes (Chapter 7), the reader is introduced to several areas where significant gaps in the literature exist. Portman correctly identifies the paucity of literature on prevention of GAD, and suggests the need for more conceptual models and evidence-based education in this area. In his exploration of cross-cultural considerations, Portman highlights the difference between somatic and psychological presentations of excessive worry, and puts forward the novel perspective that perhaps given the prevalence of somatization among worriers, it is Western, rather than non-Western cultures, that require explication. Finally, the book comes full circle to discuss the issue of treatment resistance that was first raised in Chapter 1. This section focuses largely on medication (atypical antipsychotic) augmentation given the relative absence of psychosocial treatment studies that address this topic, but also presents yet-to-be addressed options including family involvement, couples therapy, the use of community or religious resources, self-help, and exercise. Portman does justice to this chapter despite the current lack of empirical literature that addresses these important questions.

In the final chapter, Future Directions and Recommendations (Chapter 8), Portman provides a vision of the future of GAD treatment and research. There is a brief discussion of the

much-debated topic of necessary changes to how Generalized Anxiety is currently diagnosed, as well as a review of the current move towards a unified approach to emotional disorders. In perhaps the most innovative and interesting segment of his closing remarks, Portman highlights the potential benefits of a shift towards a strengths-based approach to GAD symptom management, which emphasizes not only the elimination of illness but also the development of wellness through fostering attributes (autonomy, self-acceptance) that will enhance overall wellbeing.

This manual represents an objective and thorough review of the topics of central importance to the conceptualization, assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and is equally useful to clinicians and researchers at various levels of expertise. Given the many unanswered questions that remain to be addressed by the literature, a second edition of this manual will doubtless be necessary; future revisions would benefit from more illustrative case examples drawn from Portman's expertise with this topic. In its current iteration, this book provides both a solid grounding in the current state of the art, as well as timely and cogent suggestions for innovation and future research.

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