A PROPOSED EXPANSION OF THE DANGER SERIES: ANNIHILATION AS PRESENT OR POTENTIAL THREAT

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Pre-circulated paper for January 2003 Mid-Winter Meetings of The American Psychoanalytic Association

In this paper I will provide justifications for adding annihilation apprehensions to the basic danger series. Annihilation fantasies and apprehensions constitute, like the other dangers, anticipations of potential threat. Annihilation experiences can also reflect present danger: what Freud called a traumatic moment, viz., apocalypse now! It is maintained that these two emphases, viz., present and potential threat, are justified on clinical and theoretical grounds, and make the psychoanalytic theory of anxiety more complete and more responsive to the range of anxiety experiences seen in the consulting room and beyond. These formulations are closer to Freud’s 1926 theory of anxiety than are the currently most popular conceptualizations. The latter downplay traumatic anxiety, raise signal anxiety to virtual iconic status, do not include annihilation apprehensions, and are silent on the relationships between signal anxiety and traumatic anxieties.

There is an apparent paradox here: annihilation-survival anxieties are widely found in the psychoanalytic literature and have been written about by a host of major psychoanalytic theorists (Hurvich, 2002), but are rarely conceptualized in major theoretical textbooks. The related concept of psychic trauma is included in clinical
and theoretical texts. It is here claimed that annihilation content is a major residue of psychic trauma, the taking account of which increases the clinical usefulness of the trauma construct. I will propose annihilation-related psychic content as a bridge between a traumatic and a danger situation. This is a step toward an integration of the psychoanalytic theory of anxiety, and the psychoanalytic theory of psychic trauma, areas that are formulated separately in psychoanalytic dictionaries (Moore & Fine, 1990) and theoretical texts (Moore & Fine, 1995; Nersessian & Kopff, 1996). The point is underscored that annihilation anxieties are central in psychoanalytic formulations of severe psychopathology, both for adults and for children.

Additionally to be explored and expanded is the formulation that internally triggered danger situations are initiated only by sexual or aggressive conflictual wishes. I will re-examine the relation between fear and anxiety and show how the neat distinctions claimed to differentiate them do not hold, in many situations. Also underscored is a more central role for aggression in anxiety theory. It will be illustrated how defenses against annihilation anxieties may underlie the widespread character trait of negativism. This understanding is compared with formulations based on fears of abandonment, loss of love, genital injury and superego reproach. I will touch on how taking account of annihilation anxieties sheds light on some recalcitrant resistances, and plays a key role in some transference-counter-transference difficulties. In the space available, none of these topics can be discussed in the detail they deserve.
A point enumerated by Compton (1972a&amp;b; 1980) in his comprehensive reviews of the literature on anxiety focus the basic issue underlying this paper: "the traumatic state has always remained at the heart of Freud's anxiety theory" (1980, p. 760). This view is different from the most widely accepted conceptualizations on the psychoanalytic anxiety theory today, and I will demonstrate the need for expansion of these current formulations.

A few underlying assumptions: no attempt will be made to deal with Freud's conjectures on psychic energies in this presentation. I do believe that we need to consider quantitative issues (high and low anxiety). It is when the level of anxiety is high that disruptive regression and disorganization are more likely. I agree with Ben Rubinstein, as elaborated by Bob Holt and Morris Eagle (Holt, 2000), that psychoanalytic clinical concepts are best understood as probabilistic rather than as universal. That is, formulations may be valid under one set of circumstances but not under others. And the principle encourages a specification of relevant conditions and variables. For example, it is possible to agree with Anna Freud (1977) on the importance of distinguishing between fear and anxiety in relation to phobias, while maintaining that in many situations, the relation between fear and anxiety is an individual difference variable, and often there are substantial interrelationships and mutual potentiation. More about this later. Finally, for now, in agreement with others, I emphasize that psychoanalysis can gain from taking seriously, in addition to psychoanalytic evidence, relevant replicated and reliable evidence from psychology, sociology, biology and neuroscience. This utilization of non-psychoanalytic data can
strengthen psychoanalytic concepts. In this regard, while acknowledging the old saw that there’s nothing so practical as a good theory, here underscored is the value of striving for a balance between theory driven and data driven positions. Consider Darwin’s view that theory should rest lightly on data.

WHAT ARE ANNIHILATION ANXIETIES.

They are associated with concerns about survival, the ability to function and to maintain a sense of self. Here are some examples:

1). Terror over being imminently killed or destroyed. Fears of the disintegration or loss of the sense of self and of identity. Fear of being negated in one’s own existence (Lichtenstein, 1977).

2). Apprehensions about being overwhelmed or overstimulated, associated with rising tension which eventually can be experienced as intolerable, at the extreme, leading to a fear of being about to explode.

3). Concerns over being devoured (Heilbrunn, 1955), absorbed, engulfed (Mahler, 1968).

4). Fears of smothering (Evans, 1964), choking, drowning, being buried alive, or feeling trapped when others get too close.

5). Fears of being invaded, impinged on (Winnicott, 1960) or penetrated-perforated (Bonaparte, 1934). Can include a sense of being invaded mentally, such as by the therapist’s questions and interpretations.

6). Apprehensions over disappearing, leaking out, evaporating, melting away (I Bick, ), and nothingness.
7). Falling, or falling forever, one of Winnicott’s primitive agonies, falling into a “black hole,” emphasized by Grotstein (1990) and Tustin (1981).

8). Apprehensions of falling apart (Steele, 1986), fragmenting or disintegrating (Frosch, 1983).

9). Fears of being cut off, disconnected from others (the terrors, for many, of solitary confinement)

10). Fear of regression, including loss of control of aggressive or sexual urges, of bowel and bladder functions, of bodily equilibrium as in vertigo, of the mind, including of going insane.

11). Fears of world destruction: catastrophe, of fire and brimstone, the apocalypse (Ostow, 1986), the twilight of the gods, [the Gotterdammerung], doomsday; Relevant here is the story of Chicken Little. Strolling along on a sunny day, Chicken Little feels something hit her head from above. She believes the sky is falling, and summons all her friends to go tell the Queen. The fable illustrates a catastrophic mentality. It also underscores a major response to anxiety: run to [Queen] mother for protection and reassurance.

The term annihilation content or anxieties in this presentation refers to these kinds of phenomena. In a given clinical instance, the meaning and implications for underlying annihilation concerns is most accurately determined by exploring the fears in context. It is relevant to point out that data from both college and clinical samples show that individuals who are preoccupied with being overwhelmed, intruded upon, unable to cope, and destroyed are found to have underlying annihilation
apprehensions and also, notable ego weaknesses. (Hurvich et al, 1993; Benveniste et al, 1998).

Such concerns are regularly found clinically, and are not encompassed by the famous four dangers, i.e., loss of the object, loss of love, genital harm and superego abandonment/reproach, but are often triggered along with them. In line with the probabilistic assumption, three conditions are here proposed as germain to the likelihood that annihilation fantasies will be triggered with any of the famous four. First, early in life, where any danger situation can be a traumatic one, the organismic residue may be preverbal, what has been called pre-ideational anxiety (Jones, 1927/1948), organismic distress (Mahler 1968), somatic memory (J. Frosch, 1983), and preconceptually organized emotion (A. Frosch 1995). A second condition is when the anxiety associated with one of the other dangers reaches a sufficient intensity. A third circumstance is when one or more of the other dangers is associated with ego function or self-representation disorganization. Specific and non-specific ego function weaknesses, and prior traumatic history are relevant to the last two examples. Each of these conditions may result in an anticipation of a traumatic situation, or the actual occurrence of a traumatic situation, the latter most clearly indicated by a panic attack.

ANNIHILATION APPREHENSIONS AND THE BASIC DANGER SERIES

In this section two justifications are presented for including annihilation fantasy apprehensions in the basic danger series: substantial clinical evidence, on the
one hand (Hurvich, 2002), and, congruence with Freud’s theories on the other.

Consistency with Freud’s theory is not a sufficient justification for including annihilation apprehensions as a basic danger, but I will demonstrate that Freud’s 1926 view has advantages over today’s most popular mainstream modifications, which carry significant liabilities. These have deleted, insufficiently emphasized and/or failed to develop important aspects of the 1926 theory. This has been responsible for the theories of anxiety and of psychic trauma being more separate and uncoordinated than is clinically optimal. It is also true that the 1926 theory needs some modifications, clarifications and elaborations based on subsequent clinical experience.

I will now briefly review Freud’s dual anxiety theory, which is a central pillar of this presentation. He most comprehensively yet succinctly stated his revised theory of anxiety at the end of his 1933 *New Introductory Lecture* on Anxiety, which was a summary of the 1926 position from *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*:

“We shall no longer maintain that it is the libido itself that is turned into anxiety in such cases. But I can see no objection to there being a twofold origin of anxiety— one as a direct consequence of the traumatic moment and the other as a signal threatening a repetition of such a moment‖ (1933, pp. 94-5).

Here, Freud is distinguishing between the response to a psychic catastrophe associated with an experience of overwhelmed helplessness, and an anticipatory signal of a possible repetition of the catastrophe. The potential threat is the return of the situation of helplessness, viz., the traumatic moment. This is the basic framework
for Freud’s two-fold anxiety theory of 1926: the traumatic situation and the danger situation.

But wait a moment, you might be thinking. Current textbooks of psychoanalytic theory maintain that the basic danger situations are loss of the object, loss of love, genital harm and superego reproach. I agree with you on that. And I would also agree that each of these constitutes a significant psychic danger. These famous four danger situations are correct as far as they go. But they do not include a major source of danger featured by Freud in 1926, viz., the anticipation of the return of a traumatic moment.

Freud repeatedly asserted that a danger situation is an anticipation of a traumatic situation. The famous four are tagged by Freud as basic dangers, but as displacements from the original danger which is: apprehension over the possible return of a traumatic moment, an experience assumed to be universal, and beginning very early. Here are a few of the statements from Freud that buttress this point. First, his major definition of a danger situation: “a recognized, remembered, expected situation of helplessness “ (1926, p. 166). Helplessness in this context, means the inability to deal with overwhelming stimulation by oneself, a hallmark of a traumatic situation. A danger situation involves a fear of its return. And Freud hypothesized that progressive developmental periods entailed different dangers. As he put it:
“If we dwell on these situations of danger for a moment, we can say that in fact a particular determinant of anxiety...is allotted to every age of development as being appropriate to it. The danger of psychic helplessness fits the stage of the ego's early immaturity; the danger of loss if an object (or loss of love) fits the lack of self-sufficiency in the first years of childhood; the danger of being castrated fits the phallic phase; and finally fear of the super-ego, which assumes a special position, fits the period of latency. (1933,p. 88) (see also, 1926, p. 146).

And again: “But a moment’s reflection takes us beyond this question of loss of object. The reason why the infant in arms wants to perceive the presence of its mother is only because it already knows by experience that she satisfies all its needs without delay.

The situation, then, which it regards as a 'danger' and against which it wants to be safeguarded is that of non-satisfaction, of a growing tension due to need, against which it is helpless...It is this factor, then, which is the real essence of the 'danger' (1926, p. 137). [italics added].
These considerations show that for Freud, concerns regarding being overwhelmed represent psychic danger, and that his developmental sequence of danger situations begins with overwhelmed helplessness. I believe this would hold even if a primary object connection (Balint) were assumed.

Building on this framework, I am adding the view that annihilation apprehensions constitute an ideational marker of an anticipated traumatic state of overwhelmed helplessness and belong in the basic danger series. Both Schur (1953) and Rangell (1955) came to the conclusion that traumatic overwhelming is a key danger to the organism. By including the annihilation-survival dangers delineated earlier, I am putting in place what Freud repeatedly and decisively claimed was the key basic danger. The traumatic moment as a danger to the organism was obscured by Freud’s distinction between a traumatic situation and a danger situation. But we can be clearer now: the apprehension here proposed to be added to the danger series is the anticipation of being overwhelmed, penetrated, fragmented, destroyed, etc. These are potential survival-related dangers that are the content of unconscious and conscious fantasies.

It is a clinical fact that for relatively well functioning adults, the famous four dangers regularly are anticipated and dealt with in a manner that does not lead to the traumatic situation. In the 1926 formulation, the movement from passively experienced massive anxiety to a controlled, low amplitude signal anxiety is based on a displacement from the danger of being overwhelmed to the experience of the mother as a safe haven against the danger, and then, as development proceeds, to
the other dangers. Even so, clinical experience shows that the fear of a return of the traumatic situation remains a potential for all individuals, and is widely elicited in situations like the 2001 World Trade Center disaster, and in less dramatic situations.

Mentioned earlier was that some revisions of Freud’s 1926 formulations are justified. For one, Freud assumed that the traumatic moment was free of mental content, as he did concerning anxiety in the 1895 libidinal transformation theory. Today it is generally recognized that traumatic events may be accompanied by psychic content. Clinical evidence can be cited for the presence of mental content accompanying a panic attack (Hurvich, 1991; Hurvich, 2002), an experience that involves overwhelming stimulation to the patient. This excessive stimulation need not come from the outside: it may be from the patient’s own aroused emotions, especially terror, anxiety and aggression.

But wait, someone may object. By putting traumatic-annihilation anxieties in the basic danger series, aren’t you blurring Freud’s valuable distinction between traumatic and signal anxieties? On the contrary: what is being underscored here is that traumatic anxiety and overwhelmed helplessness, i.e., the traumatic moment, can subsequently be anticipated, and associated with psychic content. Annihilation content may thus be connected with a traumatic moment, but it may also be the anticipation of a traumatic moment. As an anticipation, annihilation fantasies meet all the requirements Freud specified for a danger situation (viz., a recognized, remembered, expected situation of helplessness) as noted above.
Currently, one position is to emphasize the essential similarity between traumatic and other anxieties (Brenner, 1986). Another view is that the substantial regression and disorganization that often accompany traumatic anxieties lead to an outcome that is consequentially different from that of non-traumatic anxieties. And the difference is worth noting. Defenses against traumatic anxieties include dissociative, catatonoid, paranoid or compensatory mechanisms (e.g., identification with the aggressor). Traumatic experiences may shatter fantasies of invulnerability and the person’s sense of safety in the world (Zetzel, 1948). These reactions do not tend to be found in non-traumatic anxiety responses.

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TRAUMATIC AND SIGNAL ANXieties

In this section, I point out how, in the controversies over the relationships between Freud’s two-fold view, mainstream psychoanalytic theory veered away from this conception, with a downplaying of traumatic anxiety, emphasizing signal anxiety, and deleting fears of the return of a traumatic situation.

There is no challenge here to the importance of signal anxiety in psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, a key part of this paper involves a proposed addition to signal anxiety that has annihilation fantasy content. But signal anxiety is token anxiety, not anxiety proper. And uncontrolled anxiety deserves a more delineated place in psychoanalytic theory, as does the sense of the relation between traumatic and signal varieties.
As already pointed out, Freud distinguished between these two forms of anxiety and also postulated important links between them. He attempted to unify the two, but came to believe he was unable to do so. "Non liquet" (it is not clear), he wrote (1926). A recurrent feature of the history of the literature on anxiety theory following Freud is the attempt to define the relationships between the two forms of anxiety. Some of the main contributors to this issue were, Schur, Rangell, Zetzel, Brenner Waelder and Arlow and Gediman.

Schur (1953, 1958) and Rangell (1955, 1968, 1973), among others, attempted to retain and integrate Freud's two forms of anxiety. Schur emphasized developmental progression and genetic continuity. His aim was to encompass and integrate. His formulations aim to cover the entire range of anxiety phenomena, from traumatic anxiety to minimally disruptive signal anxiety. Schur ‘s 1953 definition is: "anxiety is always a reaction of the ego or its matrix to a traumatic situation, or to a danger, present or anticipated. Its manifestations depend on quantitative factors, on the relation between the precipitating excitation and on the state of the ego." (1953, p.75). The explanatory power of Schur's characterization of traumatic anxiety as uncontrolled anxiety underscores the utility of the two-fold view.

For Rangell (1955), helplessness (which for Freud was the hallmark of a traumatic moment) is the key issue in anxiety. Rangell spells out his definition of anxiety in experience-near terms: viz., the person’s apprehension that the helpless state will continue, get worse, become unbearable, and never stop. This formulation clearly retains the anticipation of the traumatic factor. Schur and Rangell, offered
integrative solutions to the relation between traumatic and signal anxieties as did Gediman.

An approach aimed at removing the place of traumatic moments as part of the psychoanalytic theory of anxiety was offered by Brenner. In his influential 1953 paper, Brenner concluded that Freud’s concept of traumatic anxiety was not justified by the evidence, and therefore should be dropped. He concluded that all anxiety was signal anxiety, and proposed a definition of anxiety as "an emotion (affect) which the anticipation of danger evokes in the ego" (p.22). The concept of a traumatic moment associated with a sense of overwhelmed helplessness was argued away.

In his 1982 book, "The Mind In Conflict" Brenner characterized the basic dangers as "calamites" of childhood. This sounds like the widespread recognition among psychoanalytic theorists of childhood that during early development, any danger situation can constitute a traumatic circumstance for the youngster (Waelder1967; Schur1953). But Brenner's definition of danger situations as calamities collapses and obscures the distinction between a danger situation and a traumatic one, as did his 1953 definition.

Another key contribution to the current view of anxiety is Arlow’s influential 1963 paper on pathogenesis. Dr. Arlow acknowledged the well documented finding that overwhelming anxiety can have disintegrative effects on the ego (1963, p. 16). And that symptoms may indicate defensive efforts against threatened loss of ego boundaries or of identity. But because he believed that such formulations obscure the
function of conflict among id, ego and superego components, he left aside traumatic overwhelming as a phenomenon, and did not include it in his pathogenesis model.

An indication that an important component of current classical analysis has followed the Brenner-Arlow truncation of the anxiety concept is the consensus definition of anxiety in the official Glossary of Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts (Moore & Fine, 1990). There is no mention that a danger situation involves attempts to avoid a traumatic situation, nor are the two forms of anxiety described as interrelated. The definition dichotomizes the two forms rather than recognizing their mutual relatedness in an adult. Panic experience is not described in relation to the traumatic moment. The definition emphasizes the more healthy and developmentally advanced form of anxiety. While the importance of signal anxiety is unquestionable, neither the de-emphasis on traumatic anxiety, or its anticipation, or being silent on its interrelation with signal anxiety is clinically justified. Also in the Glossary, psychic trauma is separately defined, and not explicitly related to the anxiety concept.

It is fair to say that Freud’s 1926 formulation of traumatic anxiety and signal anxiety, and the recognition of their interrelationships, in spite of his inability to unify them, provided a first key step toward the integration of the theory of anxiety with the theory of psychic trauma. In this regard Freud wrote in 1926:: “Anxiety is the original reaction to helplessness in the trauma and is reproduced later on in the danger situation as a signal for help.” (1926, p. 166-7). Schur’s two definitions of anxiety in 1953 and 1958 both include anxiety as a response to a traumatic situation as well as to a danger, consistent with Freud’s view, and the thesis of this paper.
By leaving aside issues of psychic energy, by acknowledging the clinical fact that traumatic experience can be associated with psychic content, verbal and non-verbal, and by taking account of the evidence for the utilization of annihilation anxieties in the psychoanalytic literature, there is a solid basis for the inclusion of anticipations of survival threat as a basic danger. Everything thus far included in this paper could have been said before 9-11, where the anxiety symptoms associated with so many forms of psychic trauma have long come to focal attention. Now, in the wake of 9-11, when a virtual epidemic of anxiety-related fears of annihilation have been so forcefully demonstrated, the need for a psychoanalytic theory of anxiety which is integrated with the theory of psychic trauma is more urgent than ever. And working with one’s own patients, as well as interviewing World Trade Center survivors right after the disaster, as did so many of us in the New York Metropolitan area, has confirmed the widespread presence of annihilation concerns, both as current experience and as anticipatory danger.

EXTENDING AND DIMENSIONALIZING THE DEFINITION OF PSYCHIC TRAUMA

The question of how to define a psychic trauma has preoccupied psychoanalysts for decades. The volume Psychic Trauma edited by Sidney Furst (1967), includes much knowledge and wisdom, but cannot be dealt with in detail here. Still, I will point out that Anna Freud concluded that by traumatic she means “shattering, devastating, causing internal disruption by putting ego functioning and ego mediation out of action” (p. 242). This is a clear and valuable formulation of full-blown psychic
trauma.. But what to do about strain trauma and the related cumulative trauma? The solution proposed here is that a danger situation and a traumatic situation may be seen as opposite poles, but they can also be conceptualized as dimensional, where there are degrees of a traumatic reaction. I am proposing that the ideational marker for a traumatic event may be designated as the presence of annihilation fantasies and experiences. Since similar annihilation-related contents are here proposed as a danger situation, criteria are needed to differentiate annihilation content that is part of a traumatic situation from such content that is part of a danger situation. The following criteria are stated in a dimensional, probabilistic frame:

The degree of uncontrolled or of controlled anxiety; the relative preponderance of primary or of secondary process functioning, the extent of disruptive regression, degree of desymbolization, fear of return of past traumas, or apprehensive remembrance of them, degree of secondary anxiety, degree of somatization, and the presence of reflective awareness. In addition to these formal factors, also relevant to the distinction between annihilation content that reflects a traumatic moment is the presence of terror, dread, feelings of depression, mistrust, aggression, fear of fear, loss of control, interference with thinking, memory, attention-concentration, organized action and preoccupation with safety. Here, I underscore the idea (Schur, 1953) that in attempting to understand the anxiety response it is necessary to take into account. not only the content of the danger, but also the ego reaction to this content. This set of relationships can be represented as follows:
The Relation Between Traumatic and Signal Anxieties

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<th>TRAUMATIC ANXIETY</th>
<th>SIGNAL ANXIETY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Uncontrolled</td>
<td>Controlled</td>
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<td>Disorganized</td>
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<td>Somatized</td>
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<td>Primary Process</td>
<td>Secondary Process</td>
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<td>Desymbolized</td>
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- ---------------Reflective Awareness--------------
- ---------------Anger-----------------------------
- ---------------Regression------------------------
- ---------------Secondary Anxiety------------------

< Arousal of Previous Traumatic Memories >
When annihilation fantasies are accompanied by markers characterizing the more pathological, maladaptive and primitive pole, the more likely the reaction would qualify as a traumatic response. Conversely, when the markers found along with annihilation content are on the more adaptive side (controlled anxiety, presence of reflective awareness, etc) there is a greater likelihood that it is an anticipation of a traumatic situation. The important issues of time for recovery and residuals or sequelae, including the possibility of a traumatic neurosis or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can only be mentioned here now.

Fear and Anxiety

This has been an important distinction in psychoanalysis. Freud’s recognition that anxiety functions similarly to fear (1917) served as a bridge that led from the toxic theory of 1895 to the 1926 revision of the anxiety theory. By 1926, Freud formulated the differences as realistic vs. fantasy, and conscious vs. unconscious, expedient vs. inexpedient. Anna Freud (1977) made a good case for the importance of the distinction in differentiating neurotic phobias from realistic fears.

But other psychoanalytic evidence can lead to a different conclusion. When a patient brings into analysis a report of a realistically based fear, and continues to report what is on his/her mind, unrealistic anxieties are regularly reported. I would hypothesize that realistic fears trigger anxieties in a large number of cases. This hypothesis can be checked by any psychoanalytic clinician.
The relation between anxiety and fear differs in different situations. The realistic fears which are underlain by anxieties may be accompanied by a different set of psychic arrangements than phobic fears. These differences can be specified. In traumatic situations, fear and anxiety are mingled, and key issues influencing the outcome are the ability to maintain reflective awareness, to contain uncontrolled anxiety tendencies (and the other markers delineated above), in spite of alarm signals and anticipations of harm and doom. The latter capacity is importantly associated with ego strength. In line with the probabilistic postulate, each of these findings may be valid under given conditions.

ANNIHILATION ANXIETIES & PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Another buttress for the inclusion of annihilation anxieties in the danger series comes from psychopathology. Annihilation anxieties can be shown to play a significant role in all the major forms of severe psychopathology: panic, nightmares, phobias, borderline, narcissistic and psychotic conditions, dissociative states, perversions and psychosomatic disorders.

Formulations in the literature of severe psychopathology utilize annihilation anxieties centrally in descriptions of fragmentation, overwhelming, merger and loss of the self. Frosch (1967) for example, sees survival-annihilation anxieties as the central basis for the fixity of delusions.

Robert Bak (1970) characterized anxiety in schizophrenia as associated with apprehensions over harm to the ego functions and erosion/disintegration of the self.
In these formulations, annihilation anxieties may or may no be found to accompany other dangers. Whether they do or not, they add a unique and consequential component. In acute psychotic states, the anxiety may be so overwhelming that it markedly interferes with reality testing and often even compromises psychic structure. This means that in acute psychosis, anxiety is no longer under ego control. It is not signal anxiety but a traumatic anxiety that can be handled only by the most primitive defense mechanisms like dissociation, projection, encapsulation and incorporation.


ANNIHILATION ANXIETIES AND AGGRESSION

In 1920 Freud placed aggression on a par with libido. And he further elaborated aspects of aggression in his discussion of the superego in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and in other works. In 1926 Freud emphasized that the famous four dangers were related to loss. He gave insufficient weight to aggression in his anxiety theory, a point acknowledged by Compton in his comprehensive reviews of Freud’s concept of anxiety [1972 a]. This is true in spite of the fact that the four dangers can be formulated to be based on retaliation for aggressive as well as libidinal wishes.

It was only in 1930, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, that Freud elaborated on the aggressive-destructive aspects of the superego, and developed the theoretical framework that could shed more light on the relations between anxiety and aggression (Flescher, 1955). There, Freud stated that the development of the superego is centrally influenced by inhibited aggression. It is only a short step to consider the implications of this inhibited aggression as a potential internal danger. It is noteworthy that Freud did not integrate these important theoretical advances regarding aggression with his subsequent summary of the revised anxiety theory in his 1933 Lecture on Anxiety.

In his attempt to unify the two forms of anxiety in 1926, Freud began by considering the issue of frustration. Max Schur maintained in 1953 that Freud was closer to a reconciliation of the two forms of anxiety than he realized, and Schur offered a solution to the problem Freud believed himself unable to resolve: "Anxiety
makes for repression, repression causes frustration, frustration may represent inner danger, and thus cause more anxiety. This closes the circle” (p. 93).

Schur does not specify why frustration might constitute inner danger. It is clear that frustration can cause both painful tension, and reactive aggression. Hartmann, Kris & Loewenstein (1949) had discussed deprivation and interruption as triggering aggression in 1949 ([1964], pp. 79-81). Schur did point out in 1955 that increases in the level of aggression will be experienced by the ego as a danger, and that anxiety not infrequently stirs aggression. But the aggression inherent in the traumatic moment was not made explicit.

Only this brief theoretical background for the important topic of aggression and anxiety is possible now. Here are some clinical findings with more disturbed patients. When a person suffers a panic attack, it is often experienced as a physical assault from without. In addition to feeling overwhelmed, the panic experience tends to call forth high aggressive urges, which tend to potentiate the terror. The response can range from a catatonoid one, with motor paralysis, to overt assaultiveness. The aggression may serve among other functions, prominently defensive ones. This observation is similar to Spensley on Tustin’s work: "When panic and terror threaten to overwhelm and cannot be contained any longer, explosive rage is the final defense" (Spensley, 1995 p. 104). Aggression as a defense against threats to the integrity of the sense of self have also been underscored by Kohut (1972) and by Fonagy, Moran & Target (1993).
Here is an account from Trautman, who worked with concentration camp survivors: "While these people were being persecuted they were angry, but defenseless. When they suffered ferocious assaults, panic necessitated complete suppression of the natural urge for counter-aggression. The suppressed rage became an intrinsic part of the panic. Today, the chronic anxiety is accompanied by paranoid hostility and the spells of panic are paralleled by violence" (p. 130).

War combat studies have shown that men under fire who are able to take some action are less likely to suffer panic than those who, due to external conditions, are unable to do so (Blair, Surgery & Heath, 1944). Relevant here is Paul Federn’s (1952) formulation of anxiety as inhibited motor action.

Aggressive urges following and triggered by high anxiety can lead to anticipated talion punishment for retaliatory wishes toward others, and the defensively motivated identification with the aggressor, especially when the panic is experienced as an assault by negative internalized objects. Also, difficult to control aggressive impulses may constitute psychic danger because they are associated with the fantasy of a threatened shattering of the person’s mind, as well as the danger of external retaliation.

An example emphasizing the danger of loss of the sense of self in a child was described by Shengold (1994): "Feelings of this destructive intensity are more than a young child can bear, leading to what Freud calls traumatic anxiety. That means that, experientially, simply the feeling of such rage amounts to the basic danger situation
of too much-ness which evokes a terrifying expectation of loss of the sense of identity‖ (p. 627).

As part of our empirical research on annihilation anxieties, my colleagues and I have constructed a Rorschach Annihilation Content Scale based on 6 annihilation dimensions. In devising the scale, I did not focus on aggression as a variable. Since coming to realize how much aggression plays a role in annihilation anxieties, I decided to see how this was reflected in the Rorschach Annihilation Scale. There are a total of 47 categories and sub-categories in the scale, and it turns out that 15 of these, 32% include aggressive implications. When one realizes that the traumatic neurosis of war, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and 9-11 were all about threat to life, the obvious but insufficiently appreciated point of the inter-penetration of psychic trauma, aggression, anxiety and guilt comes starkly into focus. Experience with sexual trauma leaves little doubt about the co-mingling of these same variables. Any serious revision of the psychoanalytic theory of anxiety must take greater account of the ways aggressive issues interpenetrate and potentiate anxiety responses.

Also neglected in the theory of anxiety, and persistently by Freud, is the importance of death anxiety. Death, as a close correlate of annihilation anxiety, needs more theoretical consideration. A good case can be made for a connection in some cases between death anxiety and castration anxiety. But Freud’s view (1923, p. 58) that death anxiety is a development of the fear of castration does not leave enough room for fears of death as a primary phenomenon.
When annihilation anxieties have been conceptualized in current psychoanalytic theory, they have tended to be seen as a primitive manifestation of castration anxieties. For example, Coen (1996) wrote: "... castration anxiety may include preoedipal issues of fears of object loss and of body-self dissolution that will resemble castration anxiety clinically and that are developmentally related in its formation. These latter fears are more profound, less focally delimited dangers than is castration per se; they threaten more global loss, of the object and of the self" (see also Amati-Mehler 1964, for a related formulation). The view that castration anxieties are later versions of annihilation anxieties is consistent with Freud’s developmental hierarchy of danger situations already described above. The formulation of survival -annihilation anxieties as a more primitive component of castration anxieties has not resulted in optimal development of the theoretical and therapeutic potentials of these primitive anxieties. That is more likely to happen as a result of separate consideration, as here proposed.

A CHARACTER DEFENSE RELATED TO ANNIHILATION ANXETIES

Anna Freud (1952) showed how passive surrender to the love object can threaten psychic merger, lead to and/or follow fears of ego dissolution, and trigger the defensive use of negativism. The view that the defensive aspect of many forms of negativism (contrariness, oppositionalism, dissent, rebellion, refusal, uncooperativeness: not yielding) are importantly based on a need to protect the sense
of self from dissolution, can be derived from Anna Freud’s 1952 paper. It is a good example of how the annihilation anxiety construct provides a better explanation of the basis for the phenomenon than apprehensions over abandonment, loss of love, etc. It is an important key to procrastination, and uncooperativeness of many kinds.

This negativistic stance, like all behaviors, is seen as multiply determined, as a compromise formation. And a range of clinical examples reveal a range of underlying fantasies and motivations. Along with these, the underlying fear of merger implied in yielding, saying YES rather than NO is a characterological defensive measure to maintain a separate sense of self. This can occur when the underlying wish is for merger, as Anna Freud pointed out in 1952, or in the service of individuation developmentally, as Spitz (1957) delineated. Other specific underlying dynamic patterns are likely.

An example of the likely sublimation of negativistic tendencies is illustrated in the work of Harold Bloom, the scholar-critic. In his monumental *The Western Canon* (1994), Bloom wrote: “I am your true Marxist critic, following Groucho rather than Karl, and take as my motto Groucho’s Grand Admonition: “Whatever it is, I’m against it” (p. 365).

**CONFLICTED SEXUAL AND AGGRESSIVE FANTASIES AS INITIATORS OF THE ANXIETY-DEFENSE PROCESS, BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY**

The generally accepted anxiety-danger formulation is that a conflictual unconscious sexual or aggressive wish is aroused, most often by an environmental
trigger. The wish/impulse is perceived as a danger threatening abandonment, loss of love, genital harm, etc. Anxiety is aroused, activating defensive efforts. One of various compromises follow, from adaptive resolution to pathological symptom.

A pathogenesis model relevant for annihilation content associated with some regression and psychic disorganization would look as follows: 1. arousal of drive wish, and\or intolerable affect; 2. Perception of danger 3. anxiety response; 4. defensive effort; 5. regression and ego function disruption; 6. additional anxiety, because the ego function disruption constitutes a psychic danger, the danger of the inability to cope, and\or psychic disorganization, leading to the fear of disintegration (Pao, 1979). In this regard, unconscious fantasies can be seen as endopsychic perceptions of the organism’s momentary psychic state (Trosman, 1990; Dowling, 1990) : the fantasy may reflect issues related to fragmentation fears, of being overwhelmed, or of world destruction. Fantasies triggered by sexual intercourse were described by a patient as feeling sucked into a whirlpool, of being devoured by a wild animal-partner (Hurvich, 2002). So if fantasies of fragmentation may constitute danger to the organism (Waelder, 1936; Anna Freud, 1952; Bak, 1970, Frosch, 1969), then the view that only conflictual sexual and aggressive fantasies are involved in the danger-anxiety-defense chain needs to be expanded. Psychic danger can arise from a host of concerns about threats to the sense of self, and to self esteem. (Jacobson, 1067 Lichtenstein 1977, Frosch, 1969; Kohut, 1977, 1984). Again, the probabilistic view is helpful.

Here are two brief examples of patient material focused on the dread of being overwhelmed and on survival issues more generally where the levels of symbolization
and de-symbolization markedly contrast. In a report by a patient of her experience during a panic attack, there is repetitive somatic, visceral and physiologic imagery, and the patient’s body was used to express feelings in a concretized form. There was evidence for uncontrolled anxiety, and signs of substantial ego function regression (Hurvich, 2002a).

In a second case, while the patient is centrally conveying survival-annihilation anxieties, feelings are expressed in a verbal mode, and there is a sense of an internal life that is differentiated from physiological arousal. While this patient anticipates catastrophe, the anxiety accompanying her report is controlled anxiety, and indicators of ego function regression are limited. There is an awareness of conflict, which implies the presence of symbolic functioning. Additionally, there is an “as if” quality to the narrative, and a sense of cause and effect among events. A detailed report of this material is found in Hurvich (2002).

**Recalcitrant resistances and transference-counter-transference binds**

Finally, just a mention that annihilation anxieties are found to be associated with some particularly recalcitrant resistances. Reported elsewhere is a case where blocked mourning was found to be underlain by annihilation anxieties (Hurvich, 2002). And lastly, that a persecutory and malevolent transference, such as in paranoid characters and psychotic
patients, can be a threat to the stability and the mental integrity of the analyst, and may be experienced in the countertransference as threatening the analyst with psychic annihilation (Wallerstein, 1997).

A patient’s attempt to destroy the analyst’s good feelings about himself/herself can lead to a feeling of being negated in one’s existence (Lichtenstein, 1977). Patient’s violence can trigger annihilation-survival fantasies in the analyst. When uncontrolled anxiety is generated in the therapist, this can threaten therapist’s psychic survival and constitute a challenge to the therapist’s ability to maintain an analytic attitude (Wallerstein, 1997).

Refer to Kohut’s emphasis on self disintegration but also his formulation which contests the connection with the basic danger series-quote here or refer to previous location in this paper***. In all the specific danger situations Freud enumerated, there are some disintegrative components, especially in loss of the objet, and loss of love. Freud, 1920, p. 20 depicts LOL as resulting in a narcissistic injury—we could generalize this to all the dangers.[this Modifier may cause K some problems here, especially regarding his skepticism over integration of his view with that of Freud—use this further along]. But Kohut is skeptical of attempts to integrate his recognition of this structural feature with Freud’s danger series. As he put it:[attempts to] “establish a conceptual equivalence “( ) between Freud’s danger situations and his delineation of disintegration anxiety:...
results in a tour de force with ambiguous results” (1984, p. 16, f.n., p. 213). And Kohut later offered the Proposition that subjects prone to disintegration anxiety demonstrate “a structural deficit in calming structures and soothing functions (1984, p. 30). [Include the reference above re tour de force to his disinclination to attempt an integration with Freud’s]

SUMMARY

Annihilation mental content may be part of a traumatic moment, or may involve the anticipation of a traumatic moment. For Freud, concerns of being overwhelmed constitute psychic danger, and his developmental sequence of danger situations begins with overwhelmed helplessness, though many current mainstream formulations do not reflect this view. I am adding that annihilation apprehensions constitute major residuals of past psychic trauma, are ideational markers of an anticipated state of overwhelmed helplessness and belong in the basic danger series. As an anticipation, annihilation fantasies meet all the requirements Freud specified for a danger situation. In this regard, the widely accepted apprehensions over loss of the object, loss of love, genital injury and superego reproach are considered in relation to distress about being overwhelmed, merged, invaded, fragmented and destroyed. The latter
annihilation dangers, which involve concerns over being unable to function, over loss of the sense of self, over safety and survival, are especially important in severe psychopathology, for adults and for children. Such concerns are universal and regularly found clinically, and while not encompassed by the famous four dangers, are often triggered along with them. These considerations provide the basis for an integration of the psychoanalytic theory of anxiety, and the psychoanalytic theory of psychic trauma, areas that are currently formulated separately. The key role of aggression for all the basic dangers, insufficiently acknowledged in the classical literature (Flescher, 1955) [find Fonagy article on aggression and include if appropriate which I think it is], and particularly consequential for annihilation anxieties, is highlighted, along with a consideration of the relations between fear and anxiety, negativism, and some implications of annihilation anxieties for transference and counter-transference.

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