

THE HISTORY OF ANXIETY

A decorative graphic element consisting of a series of overlapping, curved bands in various shades of blue, ranging from a very light, almost white blue to a deep, vibrant blue. These bands sweep upwards from the bottom left towards the top right corner of the page, creating a sense of movement and depth.

INTRODUCTION

- **Anxiety has developed through time from prehistoric to contemporary society.**
- **Anxiety is common within modern life.**
- **Therefore, it's vital to understand it from a historical lens.**
- **Let's begin this journey through time!**

The understanding of anxiety has developed over time, from prehistoric to contemporary society. I will be evaluating how this has changed, and the impact it had.

Anxiety is a common feeling many of us go through therefore it's important to understand it from a historical context. Let's begin this journey through time.

PRE-HISTORIC

- **Evolutionary forces influenced the reaction of the 'fight or flight response'. Shyness was used as a defence mechanism from predators, to protect themselves and the tribe. This has transpired into contemporary society, without the imminent risk (Robert, 2009)**
- **In Ancient Mesopotamia anxiety was documented onto tablets in symbols. High emphasis on spiritual possession, and the use of psychosomatic treatments (Collyer, 2023)**
- **Hippocrates' four humours (Black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm) go together to create a balance.**
- **Anxiety stems from an excess of black bile which causes tension (Lloyd., et al)**



Anxiety stems from the innate ability to survive. It dates back to evolution, where the primary focus was to protect the tribe. It's not a surprise that anxiety is highly widespread, and indicates a 'fight or flight response'. This is due to attitudes including shyness that were used as a means of protecting themselves from predators. These traits have been carried into society today, except they are not viable anymore because there is not an elevated threat. The inability to rationalise thoughts provokes anxiety, and is something people struggled with back then, and still do now (Robert, 2009)

In Ancient Mesopotamia anxiety was documented onto tablets in symbols the use of observations. Anxiety did not have a distinct classification, it was identified within other illnesses. It was explained by spiritual possession, from demonic forces. Treatments were therefore designed to eradicate it, with a high emphasis on psychosomatic interaction (Collyer, 2023)

Hippocrates' four humours theory stands upon the belief of a balance of humours to achieve a healthy physical and mental state. The four humours are black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. An example of how this may have explained anxiety is by the lack of black bile. This may provoke a state of fear or worry, with a range of irrational thoughts (Lloyd., et al)

MEDIEVAL PERIOD 5TH - 15TH CENTURY

- **Medieval Persia – anxiety could be treated, from a holistic approach. This parallels from Western beliefs (Abdollahi, 2024)**
- **Folktales to provide direction on anxiety which provided hope – The Moth and the Flame (Jackson, 1916)**
- **Visiting places with religious significance to heal anxiety.**
- **Sin of acedia is a movement away from God – 'Spiritual Sloth'**
- **Exorcisms used to eradicate the Devil and witch trails (Crawford et al., 2010)**



In medieval Persia, an emphasis on a fair approach to mental illness was at a forefront. The idea that illness could be treated by essential oils etc, which parallels the different views of Western society.

Use of psychodynamic approach. (Abdollahi, 2024)

The use of folk tales provided wisdom, and a hope for people dealing with anxiety. An example of one they used was the tale of 'The Moth and the Flame' This folktale explains anxiety by the moth being attracted to the flame, even though it knows it will hurt them (Jackson, 1916)

Anxiety, referred to as melancholy, was associated with spiritual beliefs. It was said that visiting places of religious significance including shrines and tombs would heal the person. The idea that people faced the sin of acedia - 'spiritual sloth' was prominent as a belief as it represented an individual being away from God, and captured by the devil. This led to the use of exorcisms.

ENLIGHTENMENT PERIOD



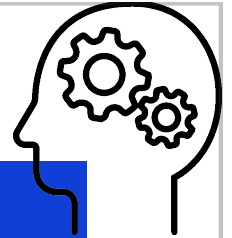
- **Locke stated that feelings of anxiousness arise from not feeling protected, and being limited in the surroundings (Tuckness, 2005)**
- **People are born as a blank slate, the environment around them is what shapes their personality.**
- **Explanation for anxiety, is due to increased exposure in the environment (Duschinsky, 2012)**



As we move into The Enlightenment Period, it is important to highlight the work of John Locke. He proposed that anxiety stems from the belief that you are not protected in the environment you are in, whether that be from the legislation or society. This leads to people feeling unfulfilled, and in fear so this leads to anxiety.

Also, he spoke about 'tabula rasa' (blank slate) which is what humans are born with, and then shaped by the external environment. An increased exposure to an environment which is troubling, may impact on the development of anxiety.

18TH - 19TH CENTURY



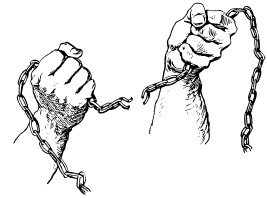
- **Post Enlightenment – Reinhold holds the idea that freedom and the self conscious provokes the feelings that people with anxiety would experience.**
- **Kierkegaard developed this theory and focused directly on anxiety.**
- **A 'normal' experience many of us go through – work, school, etc.**
- **This should not be looked down upon (Cohen, 1955, as cited in Lader, 2014)**



Moving into the Post Enlightenment, Reinhold preaches the concept of freedom of choice and the self conscious. It causes anxiety due to the fear of making the right or wrong decision.

Kierkegaard then developed his theory and focused directly on addressing anxiety. He stated that anxiety is a normal, everyday, feeling that everyone goes through from situations including work and school etc. And so, he highlight that it should not be looked down upon.

18TH - 19TH CENTURY



- **Pinel introduced a kinder approach to disorders, and destigmatised this to aid societal acceptance and improve treatment effectiveness (Hashemi et al., 2020)**
- **Key event – Liberation of the mental ill by the removal of chains in Bicetre (Flis, 1995)**
- **Freud stated that an internal conflict with the id, ego, and superego caused tension and anxiety. The use of the ego defence causes unresolved conflicts.**
- **Realistic, neurotic, and moral anxiety (McGrath, n.d)**

Philippe pinel introduced a kinder approach to mental illness. He described symptoms of anxiety, and stated that it could be cured. Through evaluation, he destigmatize this disorder from an early point of time and improved societal acceptance. Therefore, treatments rates were more successful, and less people were undermined by the pre conventional system.

ANXIETY THROUGH ART



(Bacon 1953)

- **Francis Bacon**
- **Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X**
- **He was able to illustrate the intense feeling of anxiety, through his thick brush strokes.**
- **The lines over the Pope portray a feeling of helplessness, which relates to the struggles of the artist himself.**
- **Important to capture anxiety from a creative medium (Kilgore, 2023)**



20TH CENTURY

- **Watson identified classical conditioning from 'Little Albert'. They found that you are able to induce phobias by fear.**
- **This provokes an anxiety response, and so it shows that anxiety can be conditioned (Carver & Scheier, 2013)**



Watson conducted an experiment known as the “Little Albert” study. In this he found that you are able to induce phobias just by fear. Therefore, this provoked an anxiety response, and showed that anxiety was able to be conditioned. This was groundbreaking.

MODERN DAY PERSPECTIVE

- **Holistic approach – healthy eating habits, exercise, and getting enough sleep.**
- **The use of mindfulness, and self help apps (e.g headspace) – change their perspective on their thoughts.**
- **Medications to balance neurotransmitters.**
- **Popularity of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), to help redirect thoughts (Mental Health Foundation, 2022)**



Finally, we move into our modern day perspective on anxiety. Overall, a holistic approach is encouraged by healthy eating habits, exercise, and getting enough sleep. This can be reflected within Hippocrates prehistoric views.

Also, mindfulness and self help guides (e.g headspace with guided meditation) play a part in modern day treatment and help people change the perception of their thoughts.

Also, medication is used to balance neurotransmitters including serotonin. Cognitive behavioural therapy is used to redirect thoughts.

CONCLUSION

Who?

I encourage you to take a moment, and evaluate whether you have faced anxiety in your life before.

What?

If your answer is yes, it highlights why destigmatisation and education through mediums is vital.

Why?

**From the various time periods it is evident that anxiety has developed from spiritual understanding, into scientific knowledge.
Improved quality of life.**



I encourage you to take a moment, and evaluate whether you have faced anxiety in your life before.

If your answer is yes, it highlights why education and destigmatisation for anxiety through mediums like this is so vital.

From all the time periods I have discussed it is evident that the spiritual understanding has shifted into scientific knowledge.

Overall, our quality of life has improved due to the mass of knowledge gained.

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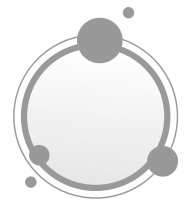
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