

## Constructive Potential of Anxiety and Approaches to its Study

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### Abstract

**Introduction.** Today there is a tendency towards reduction, medicalization and pathologization of the phenomenon of anxiety, caused by the increased focus of research interest mainly on destructive manifestations of anxiety. However, it is the constructive aspects of anxiety that potentiate the development of personality and the formation of subjectivity, being a driving force that plays a significant role in the transformation of the objective world. Despite the presence of many voluminous and multifaceted studies devoted to the issues of anxiety and its various characteristics, modern theoretical ideas about this phenomenon are scattered and mosaic in nature, which determines the need for additional comprehension and systematization of the accumulated knowledge.

**Theoretical justification.** Constructive anxiety (adaptive, normal) implies the ability of a person to respond adequately to stimuli that lead to the solution of actual problems, causing the experience of anxiety, as well as the ability to differentiate real threats from phobic and obsessive tendencies. The constructive aspect of existential anxiety consists in maintaining an optimal level of intrapsychic tension of the subject, playing the role of a necessary adaptive resource of the personality in a stressful situation. The level of anxiety, effective from the point of view of the implementation of activity in general, is in the zone of the nearest development of the personality, while being potentially beneficial in relation to the success of intellectual activity in particular. **Discussion.** The systematization of the analytical base allows us to introduce a generalizing definition of the constructive potential of anxiety: an individual personality characteristic reflecting the maximum accessible level and unique pattern of anxiety experience, contributing to effective development, self-actualization and subjective well-being. The problem of humanity and the expediency of revising traditional approaches to understanding

anxiety, reassessment of established normative thresholds, the dilemma of primacy of occurrence and causal uncertainty are serious challenges for contemporary researchers of anxiety and personal anxiety. Attention to the constructive potential of anxiety in scientific, practical, educational and outreach activities may be one of the key resources in the course of humanity's adaptation to the rapidly changing, poorly predictable and highly stressful conditions of the modern world.

### **Keywords**

anxiety, personal anxiety, constructive anxiety, normal anxiety, situational anxiety

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### **Introduction**

R. May referred to the second half of the twentieth century as the "age of anxiety", while defining anxiety as a natural part of human life (Ratner, 2019). Numerous clinical and statistical grounds suggest that the "era of anxiety" continues, being probably at a new peak (Dzhafarova, Ivanova, Shabanova, 2020; Merkin et al., 2021; Koretskaya, Denisov, 2021; Trukhan, Kravchenko, 2022; Ebzeyeva, Polyakova, 2022; Kovalev, 2022). The tense epidemiological, political, economic situation of recent years, accompanied by a constant background fear of possible threats to life and health, inevitably actualizes existential experiences, among which anxiety comes to the fore. The information environment in which modern man is immersed actively induces anxiety not only due to the abundance of aggressively and disturbingly colored content, but also because of the high speed, invasiveness and enormous volume of incoming data (Tarabrina et al., 2017).

There is some fragmentation of theoretical understandings concerning anxiety and worry, caused by the uncertainty and multivalence underlying the phenomena themselves. However, the fundamental understanding of the essence of anxiety is universal enough to allow specialists of different theoretical views to reach a certain mutual understanding and outline a recognizable cross-disciplinary contour (Prikhozhan, 2004). Clinicians and researchers are more often interested in the negative side of anxiety, a non-specific response to a stress factor (Uvarova, Kedyarova, 2014). A colossal number of studies are concentrated in the field of studying the level of anxiety in the context of various comorbid conditions and psychopathological phenomena. However, the comprehension of the very nature of anxiety, aspects of its non-biological genesis, its value for the subject beyond the socially useful function is still located mainly in the philosophical plane and somewhat reduced in psychological

## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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science. There is also a certain bias towards the study of the quantitative expression of anxiety, while the strength of anxiety carries real diagnostic value only taking into account the context reflecting the nature and commensurability of the experience with reality (May, 2001).

Anxiety disorders are often underdiagnosed despite their high prevalence in the population, as a result of which patients are not always able to receive timely and adequate psychotherapeutic and pharmacological support (Banushi et al., 2023). The described trend may be associated with the multifactorial and ambiguous nature of anxiety, the high proportion of simultaneous course of anxiety disorders with other psychopathological processes, as well as the potency to somatoform expression, which in some cases disorients patients themselves and significantly complicates the process of diagnosis at the stage of primary health care.

The phenomenon of anxiety is not only socially significant, but also "politically charged", having a pronounced transformative potential both at the constitutional-subject level and on the scale of sociopolitical reality (Zevnik, 2021). At the same time, in modern society there is a high demand for the formation and development of a personality capable of effective adaptation, having formed skills of social competence (Tserkovsky, 2011), in this regard, the study of the driving forces of personality, among which constructive anxiety plays an important role, acquires high relevance and practical significance.

**The purpose** of this study is to systematize an analytical framework that includes descriptions of the essence of a number of concepts that, to a greater or lesser extent, reflect the constructive potential of anxiety in the most used contexts, as well as its processual dynamics.

In the course of achieving the goal, the following tasks were solved, each of which determines the logic of the narrative:

- Outlining the current problems in the field, among which are the over-medicalization of anxiety, the predominant neglect of its positive aspects and the questioning of the relevance of existing norms;
- Synthesizing and structuring knowledge defining the place of normal, helpful, constructive anxiety in theoretical representations of different approaches;
- Description of constructive aspects of existential, separation anxiety, outlining the role of constructive anxiety in the framework of stress coping, psychological safety, activity, creativity and adaptive potential of the subject;
- Introduction of a definition of "constructive potential of anxiety" based on the comprehension and systematization of the above material.

## Theoretical justification

### *Anxiety, worry and fear*

In most relative studies, anxiety is described as a systemic process responsible for mental regulation, and anxiety is usually labelled as a personality trait that performs an adaptation-orientation function (Sidorov, 2013). According to A. M. Prikhozhan (2000) anxiety is considered as an emotional state, and anxiety is considered as a personal formation of a stable character, including emotional, cognitive and operational components. Anxiety can also be interpreted as forecasting, anticipation of a threatening future, accompanied by insufficient awareness and high level of uncertainty, unawareness of potential threat (Khabiev, 2020). Both frequent experience of situational anxiety and psychological, psychophysiological determinants are called predictors of persistent anxiety. Individual experience of the subject, accumulating the intensity and frequency of experienced anxiety episodes, determines the formation of anxiety as a constant property of personality (Sidorov, 2013). Being located in the structure of integral individuality, anxiety is a parameter of individual differences (Solovieva, 2012). The question concerning the identification of anxiety caused by different reasons remains debatable (Prikhozhan, 2000).

From the point of view of clinical psychology, the core element in the structure of anxiety can be considered to be the cognitive component, which is revealed in the tense expectation of undifferentiated threat. At the same time, anxiety is a continuous concept affecting both the conditionally healthy part of the population and the contingent of patients belonging to the subclinical and clinical sample (Pogosova, Koltunov, Yufereva, 2010; Bobrov, Usatenko, 2021).

Located in the unconscious core of the personality, anxiety regulates orientation in the world of object relations, the way and nature of contact with the unconscious, participates in the formation of the subject's authenticity (Kabanova and Neznanova, 2003) and prompts the search for and identification of the threatening object (Solovyova, 2012). From the point of view of V. M. Astapov, correct assessment of the current situation and subjective evaluation of the possibility to cope with it quite effectively is an important function of anxiety. The process of assessing a potential threat has a multicomponent structure, including perceptual functions, retrieval of memories, and the use of abstract thinking (Astapov, 2001; Nehoroshkova, Gribanov, Jos, 2014).

Fear is distinguished from anxiety to a large extent by the presence of a specific potentially dangerous object (Krichevets, Solodushkina, 2014). Thus any anxiety, according to P. Tillich (1995), tends to transform into fear, but existential anxiety is indestructible. Since anxiety, unlike fear, does not have a specific object of application, the associated increase in intrapsychic tension can find an outlet in irrational migrating phobias, the isolated psychotherapy of which does not have a systemic effect. However,

## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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the discussion of whether anxiety really has no object, or whether it is beyond awareness, has not been finalised to date.

According to G. Ammon, the study of anxiety as an isolated stable trait or a reactive new formation allows some eclecticism and impersonality in the understanding of this phenomenon (Kabanova, Neznanova, 2003), therefore the material of this article is presented in the logic of synergy of the designated concepts (anxiety and anxiety) and has a contextual colouring corresponding to each of the considered approaches, at the junction of which the definition of the constructive potential of anxiety is introduced.

### ***Constructive aspects of existential anxiety***

According to C. G. Jung (1938), people fear contact with the fear of the irrational content of the unconscious, having weighty, self-preserving motives. A significant part of mass culture fulfils the function of distraction from living existential anxiety (Leontiev, 2003). G. Crystal believed that the accumulation of hope and "effective denial" of one's own mortality are necessary for normal life, which, in turn, confirms the importance of faith for every person (Starovoitov, 2015). However, a respectful, accepting attitude towards fear and anxiety contributes to the search for answers to existential questions, while avoidance of these experiences, on the contrary, distances us from a deeper comprehension of being (Mackler, 2003). In P. Tillich's understanding, existential anxiety is associated with the fragility of human life, with the unattainability of spiritual perfection and the lack of ultimate meanings of existence (Krichevets, Solodushkina, 2014). Accompanied by a specific sense of fear from the realisation of the finitude of the life path, as well as the horror of the probable meaninglessness of life and deep loneliness, existential anxiety serves as a stable background reminder of existential givenness (Akimova, 2015). At the same time, the fear of death and the anxiety associated with it naturally prompts a person to be more careful with time, opportunities, and relationships (May, 2001). Gradual comprehension of existential anxiety is probably a significant stage in the formation of subjectivity (Makushina, Borisova, 2021).

In recent years, there has been particular interest in the study of fear of death and its role in the broader context of psychopathology. It has been suggested that fear of death plays a role as a transdiagnostic factor underlying various mental illnesses (Rachel & Ross, 2023). However, the extinction of existential anxiety becomes a suicidal state; a blunted or absent sense of fear generally sets a superficial dynamic, reducing the possibility for emotional intimacy (Kabanova & Neznanova, 2003). Distress, including existential distress, is a frequent symptom in severe somatic illnesses. The current support methods for palliative patients and patients with a negative prognosis for the underlying diagnosis have limited effectiveness, which is a critical shortcoming in end-of-life care (Ross et al., 2022). The load of the system of life meanings with cognitive categories determines the desire for rational cognition of oneself, the world, and understanding the causality of what is happening, which naturally increases thanatotic anxiety. Reduction and reduction

of the specific weight of cognitive categories in the structure of life meanings, in turn, reduces anxiety associated with mortality and finitude of one's own life (Kulik, Dontsov, 2020).

There is no reason to believe that we need special strategies for coping with existential anxiety, but we need a certain resilience to withstand this anxiety and live with it. From the point of view of S. Muddy, the acceptance of existential anxiety consists in choosing the future, that is, in accepting the anxiety of change (Krichevets, Solodushkina, 2014). "Courage to be" is P. Tillich's view, which implies the ability to recognize existential anxiety, accepting its inevitability and maintaining it at an optimal, non-destructive level (Tillich, 1995). According to Kierkegaard, risk is accompanied by anxiety, and deliberate risk-taking is accompanied by loss of self. Thus, true courage lies in the ability to live and develop by feeling, recognizing and enduring one's own anxiety, moving as it were through it (May, 2001). In talking about the formation of subjectivity, it is important to address the experience of separation anxiety as an integral component of different stages of development.

### ***Constructive aspects of separation anxiety***

The experience of isolation experienced by the population during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the intensification of the telecommuting of organizations and life support systems were catalysts for experiencing not only existential but also separation anxiety. In his concept of dynamic psychiatry, G. Ammon suggests that constructive anxiety is formed in early relationships with mothers and other significant figures (normal symbiosis), underpinning the vital skill of seeking help from others in situations of threat, as well as accepting help and support (Kabanova, Neznanova, 2003). Early experiences characterised by developmentally inappropriate weakening of control by parental figures potentially contribute to a higher likelihood of the child incorrectly interpreting various stimuli as out-of-control events, which may induce increased vulnerability to anxiety and subsequent difficulties in undergoing normal separation (Chorpita et al., 1998). The intense experience of separation anxiety in adulthood is accompanied by disturbances in object relations homeostasis, personality, mood and anxiety disorders (Milrod et al., 2014). Adults who are used to their anxiety often do not perceive separation anxiety as a problem, but those who develop pathological anxiety and mood disorders respond worse to pharmacological and psychotherapeutic interventions. This poorer response may reflect patients' difficulties in forming and maintaining attachments, including therapeutic relationships (Milrod et al., 2014).

According to one point of view, separation anxiety and the distress it causes are normative developmental experiences before the age of five (Bovin, Kokurin, Trubetskoy, 2010). However, according to O. Rank, separation anxiety is adequate not only at an early age, but throughout life. Successfully passing through each round of this experience contributes to the development of autonomy and the ability to intimacy (May, 2001).

## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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Constructive anxiety serves as an important factor in critical understanding of losses of different levels and adaptation to them, healthy attitude to existential givenness and normal sensitivity to boundaries (Kabanova, Neznanova, 2003). Also, according to E. Fromm, every person faces the anxiety of loneliness, but the shades of its experience differ in accordance with characterological features (Levchenko, Kravtsov, 2011). Speaking about freedom in the context of achieving a certain personal maturity, E. Fromm describes the accompanying anxiety and loneliness, which must be managed in order to "act and live" (Fromm, 2006).

### ***Stress and coping strategies in the context of constructive anxiety***

From the point of view of physiology, the activation potential of anxiety as a reactive response to a stimulus is to trigger psychophysiological processes that promote, in a broad sense, survival, in a narrower sense - attack or escape (Aleksandrova, 2014; Kashapov, Kudryavtseva, 2021). Anxiety, which is a response to stress, is associated with a wide range of ways of compensation, the originality of which depends on the individual characteristics of the subject (Khodos, Chukhrova, Pronin, 2021).

Effective management of everyday stress is the most important criterion of psychological health and well-being (Burkova, Marina, 2019), with each person needing a certain level of stress for subjective comfort (Sellier, 1979). In the concept of G. Sellier stage of anxiety is the first phase of the adaptation syndrome, which has a configurational identity with the Yorks-Dodson curve (Tserkovsky, 2011), arising at the moment of the appearance of the stressor. The normal course of a number of vegetative and somatic processes is temporarily disrupted, being replaced by resource mobilisation and activation of self-regulation mechanisms, the efficiency of which choice determines the speed of the subject's return to a normal state (Vodopyanova, 2009). Eustress and distress according to G. Sellier - impacts on the organism, differing in their duration and "usefulness" (Sellier, 1979; Kitaev-Smyk, 1983), are probably concordant with the experiences of constructive and destructive anxiety, respectively. Just as eustress can be transformed into distress, constructive anxiety can be transformed into destructive anxiety. Being by nature an adaptive and mobilising reaction, in conditions of constant or excessive stress, normal anxiety can be modified, developing features of a maladaptive process (Zaitseva, Plaksina, 2018). The cycle of reactive anxiety is gradually integrated into the structure of "protective-coping behaviour", so, anxiety begins to take part in the subject's self-regulation. The resulting tension can bring discomfort and form the need for justified use of psychological defences. Probably, in adolescence, anxiety is gradually built into the system of defence mechanisms of the personality, ending with sufficient assimilation in the period of late adolescence (Antonovsky, 2010; Gabdreeva, 2012). Personality anxiety plays a significant role during the choice of coping strategy and correlates with avoidance, as well as with persistent and systematic problem solving (Lvova, Mitina, Shalyagina, 2015). At the same time, constructive anxiety acts as a regulator

of coping behaviour and participates in the process of experience integration (Kabanova, Neznanova, 2003).

An optimal level of anxiety is a necessary adaptive resource of a personality in a stressful situation (Uvarova, Kedyarova, 2014). People with high levels of personality anxiety are significantly better at processing emotions associated with threat, but such selectivity of perception in the long run may deplete the ability to process other stimuli and lead to certain social maladaptation (Heffer, Gradidge, Karl, Ashwin & Petrini, 2022). In situations where anxiety fulfils a natural signalling function, increased vigilance to threatening stimuli is warranted. Attention deficits, which are consequences of abnormal anxiety, are widespread (Notebaert, Tilbrook, Clarke & MacLeod, 2017). High levels of anxiety may potentiate greater vigilance to perceived threats, but it remains an open question whether this is a consequence of increased focus on subjectively suspicious objects and general alertness, or whether this type of response favors overreaction to irrelevant stimuli (Savitskaya & Merzlyakov, 2022). As a rule, such difficulties in differentiating stimuli in terms of realistic danger have a complex disorganizing effect on personality and are characteristic of subjects experiencing post-traumatic stress (Lopatkova et al., 2018; Soldatkin, 2015).

Along with the symptom complex of psychopathological disorders, posttraumatic stress is accompanied by increased anxiety, vulnerability to new stressors; there are changes in the subject's implicit perceptions of himself and the world (Kharlamenkova, 2016). In different subjects at certain stages, identical experiences accompanying posttraumatic states can acquire both destructive and constructive forms. The latter is a phenomenon of posttraumatic growth, which implies retrospective rethinking and revision of values in connection with the traumatic experience (Magomed-Eminov, 2009) and changes the subject's ideas about psychological safety.

### ***Constructive aspect of anxiety in the context of psychological safety***

Psychological security is experienced as a comfortable, balanced state. The antipode can be a feeling of anxiety that distorts the perception of the surrounding reality (Kharlamenkova, 2015). The basis of anxiety is not the situation of uncertainty itself, but its subjective assessment and some additional factors (Kharlamenkova, Bykhovets, Dan, Nikitina, 2020), so it is important to consider the difference between evaluative and interpretive perception, in the sense that the interpretive process is an impartial reflection of reality, unlike the evaluative one (Vasilyuk, 1984). Being in conditions of uncertainty, the personality spends a significant amount of resources on controlling the emotional state and coping with natural anxiety (Suvorova, 1974), decreased tolerance to this process (coping) can lead to the development of destructive forms of anxiety, up to generalised anxiety disorder (Dugas et al., 2005). High-intensity anxiety, provoking disorganisation and panic states, carries an independent danger (Pogosova, Koltunov, Yufereva, 2010).



## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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Normal anxiety is rooted in an adequate, realistic perception of danger, whereas the prerequisite for the development of neurotic anxiety may be a disregard for one's own capabilities, the sense of potential for which is associated with the natural experience of anxiety. In such a case, anxiety may be experienced as "flooding", an experience from which it is impossible to dissociate, as it engulfs the central structures of the personality, jeopardising the intrapsychic security system itself, and causing a sense of powerlessness in the face of an uncertain threat (May, 2001). The main goal of neurotic drives masking compulsive anxiety, C. Horney calls the achievement of a sense of security (Horney, 1945).

The inability to differentiate the source of anxiety determines the painfulness of experiencing this state, while the search and realisation of individual meaning of anxiety helps to adapt to it more successfully (Norina, Pavlova, 2011). Increased attention to constructive ways of coping with anxiety and weak interest in the nature of constructive anxiety as such may be a reflection of attempts to resolve the tension of existential anxiety at the behavioural level bypassing the deeper value and meaning structures of personality.

### ***Semantic connotations of row definitions of constructive potential of anxiety***

Anxiety is an important criterion signalling the presence of intrapersonal conflict, intrapsychic tension, and this is its significant role for both introspection and external diagnosis (May, 2001). In our culture, the very term "anxiety" has a rather negative connotation, characterising the subjective experience of tension and anxiety, accompanied by non-specific physiological reactions (Nehoroshkova, Griбанov, Jos, 2014).

To describe the constructive potential of anxiety, a certain range of concepts is found in the literature. Let us dwell on the most frequent of them.

Normal anxiety is adequate to the actual threat, is not accompanied by activation of mental defence mechanisms, is of moderate intensity and does not interfere with effective activity and awareness (May, 2001). Normal anxiety can be used as an impulse to explore oneself and the world, as well as a means of maintaining an optimal level of alertness and tone (May, 2001). Adaptive anxiety, with sufficient adaptive potential, should be at an optimal, normal level (Kenwood, Kalin, Barbas, 2022; Soshkin, Belov, Zabrodsky, 2020; Prikhozhan, 2000). K. Horney emphasises the inseparability of normal anxiety from life itself, which involves unpredictable threats and, ultimately, death. The dissociation of normal anxiety can have a disorganising effect and manifest as neurotic anxiety, reflecting the individual's desire for integration and development (May, 2001).

Useful anxiety is a natural state and, in addition to the signalling function, contributes to the mobilisation of personality resources (Nehoroshkova, Griбанov, Jos, 2014). Useful anxiety appeals to a level that promotes personal development without being a way to ignore intrapsychic conflict (Miklyaeva, Rummyantseva, 2004; Afonina, 2021). An intense increase in the level of anxiety reflects some aspect of subjective disadvantage, while

an individual level of useful anxiety is an obligatory attribute of an active personality (Polshkova, 2013). Such anxiety can act as a predictor of some aspects of emotional well-being (Sidorov, 2013). An important useful function of anxiety also consists in coded informing the subject about the need for careful preparation for the upcoming activity (Abakarova, 2010).

According to G. Ammon, anxiety is the central function of the Ego, in its constructive hypostasis being responsible for mobilising the creative potential of human functions (Bovin, Kokurin, Trubetskoy, 2010; Kabanova, Neznanova, 2003). Constructive anxiety can be characterised as concentrated tension, a state of wakefulness and excitement, during which curiosity is able to overpower fear; signalling, evaluative, orienting and protective functions are included in the concept of constructive anxiety (Kabanova, Neznanova, 2003). Constructive anxiety is a normative egosyntonic state, the manifestations of which, as a rule, do not cause subjective discomfort (Uvarova, Kedyarova, 2014). The constructive aspect of anxiety was also studied by S. Muddy (1983), who described making vital decisions as a dilemma of two choices: in favour of the past, accompanied by guilt, and in favour of the future, bringing with it inevitable anxiety. S. Maddi considered the choice of the past as a refusal to realise, while the choice of the future as an opportunity for a new stage of personal development, accompanied, respectively, by constructive anxiety (Maddi, 1983).

A. M. Prikhozhan says that in adolescence the personality develops cultivated anxiety, a personal quality of subjective value in terms of regulation of activity and achievement of goals, the manifestations of which can be deliberately intensified in order to increase motivation (Prikhozhan, 2000). According to L. I. Bozhovich, adequate anxiety serves to stimulate creative activity and successful self-realisation, while inadequate anxiety, on the contrary, interferes with the process of personality development and disrupts adaptation mechanisms (Bozhovich, 1995). Suggested and imaginary, unrealistic fears can be attributed to inadequate anxiety (Orlov, Orlova, Orlova, 2011).

Despite the fact that adequate anxiety is a natural experience, its intensity can change due to changes in the level of stress (Uvarova and Kedyarova, 2014). Objective, realistic anxiety, described in the psychodynamic approach, is a response to an external threat and is opposed to neurotic anxiety. Its deviation from normal levels reduces the ability to coping with threatening exposure (Festinger, 2018). An important finding is the realisation that an optimal level of anxiety becomes achievable with a non-evaluative, interpretive attitude towards it. Thus, the desire for awareness, learning effective self-regulation and search for individual meanings of anxiety activates personal resources (Kashapov, Kudryavtseva, 2021), contributing to finding a balance of cognitive, emotional-volitional and behavioural spheres, which can be considered in more detail in terms of the issues of activity, creativity, intelligence and personality adaptation.

### ***The useful aspect of anxiety in the context of activity***

Anxiety becomes truly pathological when it transforms into a barrier to activity and the search for ways to overcome obstacles or expediently circumvent them (Malkova, 2014). K. Levin's research substantiated the significance of situation anticipation in terms of how significantly it can determine human activity (Yaroshevsky, 1996). In the context of activity regulation, anxiety fulfils a signalling, anticipatory function, originating at the stage of planning and research of possible options for achieving the desired result, which is especially clearly manifested in dangerous spheres of activity or on the way to especially significant achievements (Pogorelov & Pogorelova, 2005).

Successful realization in any activity depends, among other things, on the subject's anxiety level. From the point of view of the American researcher D. Atkinson, avoidance can be determined by the fear of failure, forming anxiety, which becomes a determining factor for the avoidance motive (Atkinson, 2000), while studies show that anticipatory anxiety can be most effectively counteracted by paradoxical intention (Frankl, 2020).

*According to the Soviet psychophysicologist I. M. Feigenberg, when performing any type of activity in stressful conditions, a person with high anxiety experiences intense mental tension determined by excessive demands on himself, which provokes a shift of motive from activity to self-assessment of the quality of the performed task (Feigenberg, 1986; Griбанov et al., 2019). It can be assumed that the optimal level of anxiety is maintained in the zone of the nearest development of personality, decreasing to demobilizing indicators in the course of performing tasks of insufficient complexity, and increasing to destructive values when it is necessary to carry out excessively complex activities or, on the contrary, falling below the optimum depending on the individual characteristics of the subject and his characteristic style of activity. Thus, for example, in the study of athletes it is noted that the highest rates of anxiety can be observed directly during competitions, when constructive anxiety begins to dominate. Mental tension is induced by conditionally negative states, including anxiety, which plays the role of an activating, mobilizing factor. At the end of the competitive process, the level of anxiety naturally decreases, which entails a natural decrease in resilience (Samoilov, Aleshicheva, 2022).*

### ***Creativity, intelligence and constructive potential of anxiety***

The combination of developed intellectual abilities and above-average creativity increases the chances of successful adaptation, socialization and autonomy, while the combination of high creativity and below-average intelligence is often characteristic of anxious and maladaptive individuals (Druzhinin, 1994). When experiencing anxiety, we deal not only with a sense of danger and disturbance of homeostasis caused by real dangers or difficulties, but also with frustration on the way to the desired (Levitov, 1969). Frustration is a state closely related to anxiety, and anxiety, in turn, reflects the subjective

complexity of the situation, requires increased concentration, mobilization of resources and determines the need for creative search and creative adaptation (Kuznetsova, Kharlamenkova, 2008; Cheng, 2023). At the same time, the "gap" arising between the real and the expected conditions a person's creative endeavor and is invariably accompanied by anxiety commensurate with creative potential (May, 2001).

There is a certain contradiction in terms of the role of anxiety in intellectual productivity: on the one hand, a number of studies show a negative relationship between anxiety and intelligence, indicating the negative impact of anxiety states on the course of intellectual activity, on the other hand, a high level of anxiety contributes to a more successful performance of test tasks assessing the level of intelligence. It can be stated that high personality anxiety has a direct relationship with high intelligence, while, in accordance with the logic of the York-Dodson law, the optimal level of anxiety is potentially favorable in relation to the success of intellectual activity (Gribanov et al., 2019).

The ability to metacognitive thinking, the formation of which occurs on the basis of high intelligence, can both contribute to the reduction of anxiety levels as a result of an expanded vision of the situation and awareness of cause-and-effect relationships, and hinder it due to the need to make multiple choices in the course of solving routine tasks (Gribanov et al., 2019).

### ***Adaptation potential of anxiety in personality development***

The harmonious development of identity and its subsequent affirmation is inevitably accompanied by a certain level of anxiety due to the potential to cope with it (Kabanova, Neznanova, 2003). According to O. Kernberg, the ability to cope with anxiety is an important indicator of mental health and personal maturity, a significant indicator of differentiation of neurotic and borderline structure (Kernberg, 2001), which causes special attention to the process of experiencing anxiety in different periods of adulthood for diagnostic and pedagogical purposes. Each stage of child development, including normative age crises, is accompanied by natural changes in the nervous system, specific manifestations and transfers of anxiety to different objects in accordance with individual characteristics (Eric, Lenze & Julie, 2011; Malkova, 2014). Thus, anxiety is a marker of the child's adaptive tension at different stages of ontogenesis, while acting as one of the leading conditions of mental and personal development (Malkova, 2014).

In the process of search and formation of subjectivity and self-identity, the general level of anxiety naturally increases (Tikhanova, 2008). Adaptation anxiety, potentiating self-actualisation, is of interest for acmeology: in this context, the optimal level of anxiety implies the formation of anti-cypticism and activation of personal resources (Kashapov, Kudryavtseva, 2021).

Individual experience plays a significant role in overcoming obstacles: for example, the combination of high personal anxiety and low situational anxiety may be due to the

## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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lack of skills to successfully pass relevant situations (Kuznetsova, Kharlamenkova, 2008). In general, the repertoire of events that cause anxiety is very variable, complementary to the subject's lived experience and resource potential (Uvarova, Kedyarova, 2014), but the very assumption of responsibility for personal potential can be accompanied by anxiety (Binder, 2022). In this case, the degree of awareness of the level, nature and origin of anxiety will vary from subject to subject, as well as within the framework of individual development in different periods of adulthood and maturity (Makushina, Borisova, 2021). From the point of view of R. May, destructive anxiety contributes to the triumph of threats, and constructive anxiety contributes to the triumph of values (Lvova, Mitina, Shalyagina, 2015). In a situation when the value of development subjectively exceeds the desire for avoidance, a person can overcome the inevitable anxiety (May, 2001).

### ***Determining the constructive potential of anxiety***

The systematisation of the analytical framework presented in the article allows us to introduce a generalised definition of the ***constructive potential of anxiety***: an individual personality characteristic reflecting an extremely accessible level and unique pattern of anxiety experience that contributes to effective development, self-actualisation and subjective well-being.

## **Discussion**

This review, firstly, describes the problems of overmedicalisation of anxiety in the population in general and devaluation of the constructive potential of anxiety in particular, the day-to-day solution of which is usually implemented in the field by practitioners. Secondly, an attempt has been made to systematise semantically similar definitions reflecting the constructive potential of anxiety, which can serve as an additional point of reference in the diagnostic process. Thirdly, attention is focused on "normal", "useful", "constructive" manifestations of anxiety, which contributes to additional validation of social groups with different levels of anxiety and rejection of self-stigmatization.

One of the most acute challenges of the time faced by anxiety researchers is the problem of assessing the feasibility and humanity of revising the generally accepted standards concerning the boundary between conventional norm and pathology, as well as closer attention to the continuum of the "border zone", which includes a wide range of conditions of different genesis. The issues of anxiety as a way of adaptation to psychophysiological data, to the consequences of everyday, traumatic, post-traumatic stress, as well as the study of anxiety as a consequence of above-normal intellectual, creative and prognostic abilities represent a classic dilemma of causal uncertainty and continue to be discussed in different approaches. Further theoretical understanding

of the constructive potential of anxiety can be extended by a review of research on anxiety sensitivity, which will enrich the understanding of the subjective evaluation of the phenomenon under study.

The exploration of human nature on a meta-level beyond the paradigm of concretism is associated with the experience of anxiety, like any creative process, the constructive passage through which is possible only in a sufficiently mature social environment (vonBulow, 1996). It can be said that in recent years there has been traced an excessive medicalisation of a wide range of human suffering (Svetlichnaya, Smirnova, 2017) and a somewhat reductionist attitude to the phenomenon of anxiety, the popularization of an idealistic view of which is often reduced to the dangerous idea of "life without anxiety" (Cagan, 1966). Excessive concretism and illusions of escape from the "symptom" question the very processuality and multidimensionality of human life, denying the dynamic principle of personality development (vonBulow, 1996), and the desire to abandon anxiety can be interpreted as "abandonment of the future" (Kashapov, Kudryavtseva, 2021).

According to S. Kierkegaard, the inability to escape anxiety makes this experience a more valuable "teacher" for the individual than reality (Grinker, Spiegel, 1945). This position explains the importance of normalizing the experience of different aspects of anxiety, and informing about the causes and functions of anxiety should be included in the system of psychoeducation (Carlson & Siroky, 2017).

Spinoza considered hope to be the antithesis of fear, calling it an "indefinite pleasure" associated with the expectation of fulfilment of what is desired, and fear an "indefinite torment" accompanied by an intense anticipation of difficulty or distress. Spinoza concluded that the existence of these phenomena separately was impossible (Spinoza, 1999). Anxiety and hope are two experiences that have different semantic connotations, but a single vector directed towards the future. And sometimes it is unexplained, irrational anxiety that accompanies the process of self-awareness and development (Orlov, 1991).

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### **Information on conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.