

Preface

Research has been accumulating on the prevalence and nature of the co-occurrence between various forms of anxiety disorders and problematic health behaviors as well as physical illness. This research has significant implications for both those interested and affected by anxiety as well as physical health factors. Yet, it is striking that there has been little systematic integration of this health-oriented research in contemporary science and practice on anxiety and its disorders. This relative neglect is unfortunate given that the co-occurrence of anxiety and health problems is a major public health priority when measured both in human and financial terms.

The overarching aim of this book is to provide a single resource that offers current theoretical perspectives and cutting edge reviews of scientific research on health behaviors and physical illness in relation to anxiety and its disorders. A critical analysis of this emerging literature is needed to help move this field forward, making this proposed volume timely. The specific objectives of this edited book are to (1) provide a review of the literature on the link between anxiety and certain health behaviors and processes as well as physical illness; (2) present contemporary theories of their co-occurrence and interplay (e.g., onset, maintenance, and relapse); and (3) provide an analysis of recent research in regard to therapeutic models for targeting these problems.

The book is organized into two general sections. In the first part of the book, prototypical health behaviors – smoking, alcohol, illicit substance use, exercise, and sleep – are discussed in relation to anxiety and its disorders. In the second part of the book, the association between anxiety psychopathology and physical health conditions – chronic pain, cardiovascular disease, asthma, HIV/AIDS – and their treatment are covered. In this same section, the potential role of puberty and the menstrual cycle in the onset and maintenance of anxiety psychopathology are discussed.

Inspection of the excellent and comprehensive works has yielded a number of broad-based conclusions relevant to informing research and practice for anxiety disorders. First, there is consistent empirical evidence that medical problems and poor health behaviors are overrepresented among persons with anxiety disorders, and vice versa. Thus, there is a pressing need to marshal information on anxiety-health processes to better serve this population. Second, as each

contribution makes clear, there is uniform evidence that both health behaviors and physical illness can, and do, affect the nature of anxiety psychopathology. Yet, the exact nature of these associations depends on the specific disorder and health factor in question. And finally, a variety of the chapters make clear that persons suffering from anxiety psychopathology and poor health behaviors or medical illnesses may need specialized interventions to prompt clinical change. That is, traditional interventions may not be ideally suited or maximize clinical benefit for this population.

For us, the present book offers the opportunity to appreciate the importance and complexity involved with the study of anxiety disorders. For many years, health behaviors and medical illnesses have been a neglected facet of anxiety disorder research and practice. The contributions in this book help drive home the message that such neglect is unwarranted, and that by working to better understand the enigmas between health status and functioning and anxiety psychopathology, significant clinically-relevant strides can likely be achieved. We hope the present book helps move such work forward and bring a better quality of life and reduced morbidity to persons with anxiety disorders in the future.

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Michael J. Zvolensky, Ph.D.
University of Vermont
Jasper A. J. Smits, Ph.D.
Southern Methodist University

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Zvolensky, M.J.; Smits, J.A.J. (Eds.)

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