

## POINT–COUNTERPOINTS

### ANXIETY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

ROY F. BAUMEISTER AND DIANNE M. TICE

*Case Western Reserve University*

This article elaborates a view of anxiety as deriving from a basic human need to belong to social groups. Anxiety is seen as a pervasive and possibly an innately prepared form of distress that arises in response to actual or threatened exclusion from important social groups. The reasons groups exclude individuals (incompetence, deviance or immorality, and unattractiveness) therefore should all be linked to anxiety, and events that implicate the self as incompetent, guilty, or unattractive should create anxiety. This “exclusion theory” of anxiety can be considered a broader revision of separation anxiety theory and is distinguished from theories that base anxiety on fear of death, fear of castration, and perception of uncertainty. Current evidence from multiple sources is reviewed to show the explanatory power and utility of exclusion theory, and implications of this theory are developed in relation to culturally changing standards of sexual behavior, the motivations underlying the Oedipus complex, and the formation and functions of the self.

The purpose of this article is to articulate the theory that one major cause of anxiety is exclusion from social groups—that is, the fact or threat of the breaking of social bonds. We shall suggest that the fear of being excluded from social groups is deeply rooted and quite possibly has some innate basis; that this fear associates readily to many events or symbols representing social exclusion; and that much current research on anxiety can be understood as reflecting this fundamental fear of exclusion.

The term *anxiety* is commonly used in psychology as well as in ordinary speech. The experience of anxiety, broadly defined, is extremely common. More Americans visit physicians for anxiety than for coughs and colds, and anxiety disorders are more common than depression (Barlow, 1988). One careful study concluded that between 30% and 40% of the population suffered from anxiety to the point where clinical in-

Address correspondence to Roy F. Baumeister, Department of Psychology, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland OH 44106.

tervention would have been desirable (Shepherd, Cooper, Brown, & Kalton, 1966). Within psychology, the term *anxiety* is commonly used to refer to states including fear, panic, responses to stress, helplessness, phobias, evaluation apprehension, and more. Some usages of the term seem so broad as to refer generically to all negative affect; other usages are quite specific, even distinguishing between anxiety, fear, and panic. Empirically, anxiety is correlated with broad proneness to negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988), yet anxiety cannot be equated with emotion in the conventional sense (e.g., Barlow, 1988).

In view of the wide prevalence and assorted usages of anxiety, it seems highly plausible that anxiety is a heterogeneous category. We are therefore reluctant to suggest that a single cause or process applies to everything that comes under the rubric of anxiety. Our intention is to propose social exclusion as one major cause of anxiety. It may be the most common cause, but it is probably not the only cause.

Goodwin (1986) has suggested that innate fears include snakes, falling from heights, darkness and dark woods, and dead or mutilated bodies. Our suggestion is that social exclusion may be another of these innately prepared fears. If exclusion is such a basic fear, it may be a more important cause of anxiety than the others, for it is far more pervasive in ordinary, daily life. The typical modern individual faces some form or possibility of rejection almost daily, whereas snakes rarely cross one's path.

The definitional problems associated with the term *anxiety* therefore do not concern us greatly here. The central argument is that human beings are prone to experience strong doses of negative affect, akin to fear and panic, in connection with the prospect of being excluded from important social groups. Precise definitional boundaries are irrelevant to that argument.

## OVERVIEW OF THEORY

Recent evolutionary theories about human nature have suggested that people are biologically adapted for life in small groups. Indeed, this assumption is the cornerstone of Hogan's (1983) socioanalytic theory. It is consistent with what evidence is available about the conditions of primitive life, and it is also far more plausible than the alternatives. Survival under adverse conditions would be greatly facilitated by membership in a tribe or group, which could offer cooperative work at difficult tasks, increased chances of detecting threats and opportunities, sharing of resources, and protection against danger. Large groups may have been impractical because of limits imposed by ecological carrying capacities

and difficulties of social organization, but small groups probably flourished. Thus, people who were predisposed to be together with others would have been more likely than loners to survive and reproduce.

If there is any validity to socioanalytic or sociobiological views, it seems likely that there must be some mechanism to motivate people to be together with others. This would take the form of a biologically based *need to belong* that may underlie many features of human nature. Considering the importance of belonging, there may well be several such mechanisms. The present concern is with one of these: a tendency to experience distress in connection with being separated, rejected, or otherwise excluded from social groups. Thus, although it is quite plausible that the need to belong is also linked to the system of positive affect, our emphasis is on the system of negative affect.

Our central point is that people will naturally tend to feel a strong dose of negative affect in connection with being excluded from social groups. This should arise at the moment the person is separated from the group or, more precisely, at the moment the person discovers that such separation has happened or is likely to happen. Although exclusion anxiety is primarily a reaction to the event of being excluded, it is plausible that chronic aloneness may make the person increasingly vulnerable to occasional, periodic experiences of anxiety. The distress associated with solitary imprisonment may be one manifestation of this. Affective distress may also be triggered by certain cues, such as darkness, seeing others together when one is alone, or reminders of past exclusions.

Human beings are intelligent, and this intelligence may often be used in connection with powerfully aversive experiences, such as anxiety. The experience of anxiety may therefore not be confined to the actual moment of social exclusion. People may learn to anticipate what actions might bring social exclusion. Anxiety thus can be felt in response to any event that contains the threat of social exclusion. These might include an unkind word from a lover or relative, criticism of one's work by a superior, any suggestion that one is unattractive or losing one's looks, and almost any sort of candidacy or application for membership.

Because of the importance of being included in the group, the individual personality may crystallize in part around the need to be defined and recognized in a socially acceptable fashion. In other words, the self may evolve partly as a means of avoiding anxiety (cf. Sullivan, 1953). Anxiety may therefore result when events contain some implication about the self that increases its perceived likelihood of social exclusion: the construction of self makes it possible to explain anxiety arising even in the absence of any *immediate* or direct threat of social exclusion. People seem to internalize representations of significant others and anticipate how these others might react to their behaviors (e.g., Baldwin & Holmes,

1987). If the self is shown to have some traits that generally might lead to exclusion, one will feel anxiety even if there is no imminent danger of rejection. Gray hairs or bad grades, discovered in private, may bring anxiety because they carry the implication that in the future one will be more vulnerable to social rejection.

Why do groups exclude individuals? Three principal reasons may be suggested, and they correspond to major foci of anxiety. First, groups exclude individuals who fail to make adequate contributions to the group's survival or welfare. Hence, anything that defines the self as useless, incompetent, or inadequate may bring anxiety, for it raises the possibility that the group might reject one as incompetent. In modern life, this fear may underlie the fear of losing one's job (or not being promoted), fear of failing to gain credentials for admission to desired positions, and even the fear that potential romantic partners may spurn one because one lacks adequate wealth or prestige. Evaluation apprehension, fear of failure, and performance anxiety are all familiar manifestations of this concern to appear competent. They all involve a fearful, panicky response to the possibility that the self might lack important abilities. Likewise, test anxiety is a familiar and acute form of the fear of failure and incompetence (see Sarason, 1981; Wine, 1971).

A second reason that groups exclude individuals is that groups maintain certain rules and conventions regulating interpersonal behavior, and people who violate these rules may be recognized as disruptive insofar as they jeopardize the group's system for living together. Individual rule-breakers may therefore be rejected or ostracized. To avoid this exclusion, people may try to be consistent with the moral and normative standards of the group. Any event with a contrary implication could trigger anxiety, which would perhaps most commonly be felt as guilt (or occasionally as fear of detection [see Schachter, 1971]). The affective component of guilt may therefore be derived from exclusion anxiety.

A corollary of this second point is that morality and conformity are in an important sense means to the same end. Both moral behavior and conformity minimize anxiety by keeping one within the group's norms and standards. The risk of distress that is associated with deviance (in either immorality or nonconformity) may well be based on the danger of social exclusion. It may therefore be much easier to reject conformity if one does so with a group rather than alone (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). The collective nonconformity of the hippies of the 1960s may be a good example of this pattern (O'Neill, 1971; Weaklund, 1969). Likewise, the guilt of immoral action may seem to be reduced if one is part of a group of others who are doing the same thing (e.g., Lifton, 1986; see also Tavris, 1974).

The third reason that groups exclude individuals involves unattractiveness. Physical ugliness and dislikable personality traits make a person less desirable as an interaction partner. Many manifestations of social anxiety—body image worries, fear of aging, and so forth—seem to reflect this fear that one is unattractive, which may cause others to reject and avoid one. Attractiveness may be especially important for small groups such as dyads; unattractive people, for example, may well have fewer options for marrying.

The organization of the group may be conceptualized in terms of how inclusion and exclusion are determined. Sometimes the group may act in concert, such as when rule-breakers are imprisoned or exiled. Other times, the group may act as a collection of individuals, such as when no one wants to marry a particular person. And other times, a leader or powerful individual may be able to decide who should be excluded (see Becker, 1963). It seems plausible that these different organizations will result in different orientations; that is, the anxiety may be focused either on maintaining attachment to a powerful figure, on forming links to various individuals, or on making oneself appealing to the group as a whole.

## FUNCTIONS OF ANXIETY

A central problem for anxiety theory is the question of what uses or functions it might have. Theorists have groped in various ways to understand the advantages or benefits of anxiety (e.g., Barlow, 1988; Harris & Snyder, 1986; Snyder, *in press*; Snyder, Smith, Augelli, & Ingram, 1985). It is generally accepted that anxiety impairs a wide range of performances, ranging from speaking in public to taking a test to having sexual intercourse. But what positive value could such impairments have?

The typical value of fears is that they help the individual avoid dangers and threats. Thus, a fear of snakes motivates the person to avoid snakes, which might improve chances for survival. Anxiety, as fear of social separation, might help save the individual from being cut off from the life-sustaining group (e.g., Bowlby, 1969, 1973).

A useful model was proposed by Simon (1967). His goal was to provide a model of the cognitive control of behavior, but he recognized that a purely cognitive account would be inadequate. In particular, he observed that people are capable of interrupting their activities and then reassessing them, abandoning them, or resuming them, based on this reassessment. A simple cybernetic model would portray the organism

as persisting at one task until completion (i.e., until goal attainment), but human behavior obviously fails to conform to this model because people do change and abandon tasks before completion. They also maintain multiple goals at any given time.

Simon (1967) suggested that the human mind must therefore contain some *interrupt mechanisms* that can break into the middle of a behavioral or performance sequence and prompt a reassessment. He believed that emotions served this function. Although not all emotions seem to fit Simon's hypothesis equally well, anxiety appears to fit it quite well. Indeed, the performance impairments caused by anxiety seem well suited to serve as interruptions, for they prevent successful completion of many tasks. If a person is saying or doing something and suddenly realizes that the consequences of the action could include social exclusion, this realization may trigger a dose of anxiety that stops the person from successfully completing such dangerous behavior.

If anxiety serves as an interrupt mechanism, the central benefit of anxiety is not the performance impairment per se but the fact that anxiety prompts cognitive reassessment. Hence, anxiety should have strong effects on attention, for it must take the mind out of its current task focus and somehow prompt it to reevaluate the project from a different perspective. Recent evidence has confirmed that anxiety causes important shifts in attention (MacLeod, Mathews, & Tata, 1986). Indeed, the evidence has led some researchers to characterize these effects of anxiety as a "preattentive bias" (Mathews & MacLeod, 1986). In any case, the outcome of this bias is to direct attention to the threat. The suggestion that anxiety effects may precede conscious processing (Mathews & MacLeod, 1986) is compatible with the view that they are deeply ingrained in the cognitive system.

Current research evidence is compatible with the view of anxiety as an interrupt mechanism. Anxiety appears to cause people to think of possibilities and situational aspects associated with dangers or problems (Goldfried, Padawer, & Robins, 1984). Thus, anxiety directs attention to problem areas, and this shift may be a powerful and effective way to get people to stop doing things that may jeopardize their inclusion in the group. The fact that anxious people spontaneously think of problems complements the evidence that anxious people shift their attention toward threatening stimuli (MacLeod et al., 1986), for both suggest that anxiety might help interrupt behavior sequences that carry risks of social exclusion. It is noteworthy that nonanxious individuals do not direct their attention toward threats; if anything, they tend to shift attention away from threatening stimuli (MacLeod et al., 1986). Moreover, it is not the case that anxiety simply makes people dwell longer on unpleasant things. Memory for threatening material is not improved under anxiety. Indeed, anxious

people may be less prone than others to *recall* threatening information (Mogg, Mathews, & Weinman, 1987), even if they are more likely to notice it (MacLeod et al., 1986). Anxiety thus directs only current attention to current threats and dangers (see also Malow, West, & Sutker, 1987). An interrupt mechanism would require just such effects on attention rather than on memory.

Further evidence has shown that socially anxious people tend to experience increased cognitive activity reflecting concern over evaluation when they are in a social situation that could involve evaluation (Smith, Ingram, & Brehm, 1983). Thus, again, anxiety produces a shift in attention toward the threat or problem, which would serve a function of interrupting or preventing acts that could lead to social rejection.

If anxiety does function as a motivational aid to self-regulation, then it would be plausible that some people might actively use anxiety as a means of motivating themselves to succeed. There is indeed some evidence that certain people employ a self-regulation strategy of ruminating about possible negative outcomes; these thoughts of failure cause the person to try harder to succeed, leading to improved performance (e.g., Norem & Cantor, 1986).

Implicit in our discussion is that anxiety can serve an important preventive function, especially if anxiety arises in response to advance warnings of dangers. Some evidence suggests that an important distinction between anxiety and depression is that anxiety is more strongly linked to just such warnings. Thus, although both anxiety and depression are found *after* negative life events occur, only anxiety is found in response to *threats* of loss (Rholes, Riskind, & Neville, 1985). In other words, actual losses produce both anxiety and depression, but the mere possibility of loss elicits only anxiety. Anxiety thus begins before the loss is finalized. Presumably, this would often happen in time to enable the person to alter events so as to prevent the worst possible outcome from occurring. Whereas depression may be part of the cognitive response to a loss that has already occurred (e.g., Klinger, 1977), anxiety may be suited to help the person take preventive action before the loss occurs.

The thrust of our discussion has linked anxiety to the actual event of exclusion. That is, anxiety may be a response to the process of being excluded rather than to the chronic state of being alone, although the *thought* of being chronically alone may cause anxiety. Put another way, anxiety is associated with the breaking of social bonds, not the absence of such bonds. This view of anxiety is consistent with the attentional shifts we have discussed, and it also fits an arousal model, for arousal states by definition are temporary, transitory response states rather than stable conditions. Even when the anxiety becomes part of an ongoing pattern of psychopathology, it may focus on specific events of brief

duration. Evidence suggests, for example, that the cognitive content of anxiety neuroses and anxious fantasies tends to focus on a specific experience of rejection rather than on the thought of simply being alone and being ostracized by everyone (Beck, Laude, & Bohnert, 1974).

The chronic lack of social bonds might leave the person more vulnerable to anxiety because the person has no social ties to comfort him or her during threats of rejection and exclusion. Still, this chronic lack should not necessarily cause anxiety. One implication of this argument is that sometimes being alone may be preferable to approaching others, especially if the latter carries the risk of possible rejection. This appears to be what happens in the case of shyness and social anxiety. The avoidant behavior of such individuals has been characterized as self-defeating (Baumeister & Scher, 1988) because it seems irrational to remain alone rather than approach others. Interacting might bring an end to loneliness, and at worst, rejection would leave the person no more alone than before. Yet rejection might carry the risk of anxiety, which may be worse than loneliness to these people.

Research fits the view that shy people are motivated mainly by the avoidance of anxiety. Socially anxious people withdraw from others, minimize interactions and self-disclosures, maintain interpersonal passivity, and otherwise seem to sustain an interpersonal style that is best calculated to protect them from rejection (e.g., Schlenker & Leary, 1985; Snyder et al., 1985). When interacting, they apparently seek to avoid any risk, for their interaction styles include focusing the conversation on the partner rather than on themselves, avoiding controversial topics, avoiding topics that might reveal their ignorance, agreeing with whatever the partner says, smiling, and so forth (Leary, Knight, & Johnson, 1987). These strategies enable the socially anxious person "to remain engaged in the conversation while contributing as little substantive information as possible" (Schlenker & Leary, 1985, pp. 182–183). This interaction style appears to resemble a self-protective orientation (Arkin, 1981; Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989), for it reduces the risk of conflict or rejection, although it also reduces the opportunity to make a positive impression and to initiate a meaningful relationship.

Thus, the socially anxious or shy person avoids the anxiety of rejection but at the cost of a chance of forming social bonds. As a result, shy people tend to have fewer dating partners than others (Maroldo, 1981), and they report less sexual experience than others (Leary & Dobbins, 1983). The shy person ends up alone but not rejected—thus, vulnerable to chronic loneliness but safe from acute anxiety.

In general, then, the impairments caused by anxiety might have functional and adaptive benefits, insofar as they may prevent the person from carrying out some act that might lead to social exclusion. If the



person is saying something that might alienate or provoke others, a dose of anxiety might stop the person from saying it, for anxiety does interfere with fluent speech (e.g., Leary et al., 1987). If the person is about to commit a sexual act that could bring recriminations, a dose of anxiety (perhaps in the form of guilt) may reduce arousal and prevent consummation. If the person is at risk of exclusion for not carrying out duties and obligations, a dose of guilt or other anxiety may mobilize the person to work harder and succeed (Norem & Cantor, 1986).

To be sure, anxiety does not always make things better. Fear of saying the wrong thing may make the socially anxious person afraid to say anything at all (e.g., Schlenker & Leary, 1982). This may have been good enough in primitive life, where group membership was set by birth; but in modern life people must constantly form new social bonds, and so socially anxious, withdrawn people run the risk of isolation and loneliness. Likewise, sexual guilt and anxiety might help people avoid sexual misdeeds, but these responses may also impair sexual success when it would have been desirable. Broad, biologically based mechanisms (such as an innately prepared fear of social exclusion) are perhaps inevitably imprecise and may often have difficulty adjusting to changing social conditions. Anxiety may be an excellent illustration of this general principle.

Still, the fact that anxiety is often unhelpful does not discredit the notion that anxiety may once have had important and adaptive functions. Indeed, anxiety may still be adaptive under some circumstances, such as by keeping people vigilant in a threatening situation. The key point here is that anxiety evolved as a mechanism designed to interrupt behavioral sequences, focus attention on threats and dangers, and possibly initiate reassessment of ongoing courses of action, all of which would be quite functional. It appears further that anxiety continues to serve these beneficial functions, despite its unappealing side effects and inopportune manifestations.

## RELATION TO OTHER THEORIES

The psychology of anxiety has long been influenced by Freud's (1926) definition of anxiety as fear without a specific feared object. The implication that anxiety is fear of something outside of consciousness is often invoked today, for people often report anxiety that lacks, or at least is out of proportion to, a clear external threat (e.g., Barlow, 1988).

The fear of separation from mother has received increased attention in work on anxiety subsequent to Freud. Most notably, Bowlby (1969, 1973) has explored the nature, forms and consequences of separation anxiety. Bowlby pointed out the survival value of the infant's attachment

to the mother. If separation from mother were to produce anxiety, the infant might begin to scream and cry, causing the mother (or others) to find the infant and ensure that it is not abandoned and vulnerable. Bowlby also suggested that darkness might trigger such anxiety, which would have survival value because many predators hunt mainly at night.

In our view, exclusion theory is an extension or revision of the theory of separation anxiety (see Baumeister, *in press*). The main difference between the two is that whereas separation anxiety focused on the mother-child bond, exclusion theory holds that almost any social bond could produce anxiety if threatened. Of course, Bowlby recognized that many people, especially adults, experience anxiety over things that do not directly involve their mothers, but he suggested that these events threaten attachments that are symbolic derivatives of the link to mother. Thus, the danger of separation from mother may be symbolically reenacted in the threat of romantic rejection or divorce. The threat of losing one's job, in Bowlby's view, may produce anxiety because one is attached to one's supervisor or the organization's leader, who is a symbolic mother. Exclusion theory differs from this view by suggesting that the symbolic link to mother is unnecessary.

Exclusion theory encompasses separation theory, for the bond between the mother and infant is undeniably a strong and important one. From the perspective of exclusion theory, the threat of separation from mother is simply a special and important case of a more general pattern.

Exclusion theory is thus broader and simpler than separation theory. The need to find a symbolic link to motherhood is abandoned in exclusion theory, for the individual may feel anxiety at a threat to any important social bond. The chance of losing one's job may produce anxiety even if one dislikes one's supervisor and has no feelings toward the organizational leader, because job loss still represents exclusion from a very important social group. Indeed, exclusion theory would predict that people may feel anxiety even about speaking in front of strangers for two reasons: First, the audience may reject the individual in some way, and second, the audience may define the person's self as incompetent or unattractive, a definition that carries the implication that others will reject one in the future.

Barlow (1988) has treated anxiety as a diffuse pattern of response to various threats. In his view, anxiety is caused by uncertainty, especially unpredictability, and it essentially involves a state of high self-awareness (indeed, he describes self-focus as a principal difference between anxiety and mere panic). Whereas exclusion theory is broader than separation theory, it is narrower than a view suggesting that any form of uncertainty or unpredictability can cause anxiety. This difference in narrowness may be appropriate because, unlike Barlow, we are not trying to offer a single

or general theory of anxiety. Exclusion theory can also avoid the problems of the uncertainty hypothesis, such as the fact that uncertainty does not always generate anxiety and may even be positively appealing or desirable in some circumstances (as in gambling, spectator sports, new romantic relationships, adventure, suspense, and so forth).

Another important theory of anxiety has focused on the existential fear of nonbeing, as epitomized in death. Becker (1973) has proposed that human beings are unique among species in the knowledge of their own mortality and that this realization that they will die produces deep fears that are peculiar to the human condition. Becker went on to propose that human culture is essentially designed to defend the individual against this anxiety, as in self-esteem. By defining the self as a worthy participant in the ongoing drama of culture, the person's concept of self can overcome the threat of mortality and its attendant anxiety. Becker's views have recently been revived and insightfully elaborated by Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986), who have viewed the relentless human struggle for self-esteem as motivated by the desire to avoid the anxiety-filled threat of death.

There is considerable overlap between the death and exclusion views of anxiety. First, we have suggested that one evolutionary cause for a link between anxiety and social exclusion is that such anxiety would have had great survival value. Under primitive conditions, separation from the group might increase the risk of death, so the threats of death and exclusion are linked. Second, death generally represents a separation from the world of the living, and the threatening nature of conceptualizing one's own death may derive partly from the aversive thought that everyone else will go on living, excluding only oneself. Thus, the concept of death may entail separation.

Becker (1973) himself blurred the distinction between death and social exclusion. At several points he grappled with the vexing problem of how children could feel and show anxiety before they have any understanding of their mortality. After all, if anxiety developmentally precedes the conception of death, it is illogical to argue that the conception of death is the primary cause of anxiety. Becker handled this problem by saying that the child's fear of separation is itself a fear of annihilation. In other words, he equated death and social exclusion by defining them loosely. Nor is this equation unique to Becker; indeed, ancient civilizations treated death and exile as equivalent, interchangeable punishments.

To the extent that death and exclusion can be distinguished from each other, there appears to be evidence that each causes anxiety. It is, of course, quite possible that both factors are causes of anxiety; death and exclusion may each be sufficient but not necessary causes of anxiety. In this connection, it is noteworthy that an influential study of anxiety

neuroses by Beck et al. (1974) found two main types. One type was concerned with social rejection, such as loss of job, social ostracism, rejection by peers, disgrace and humiliation, and so forth. The other type involved physical harm and death. These two categories encompassed essentially all of the themes of the anxiety neuroses among their sample. Likewise, Kendall's (1978) analysis of anxiety-producing situations found that physical danger and personal evaluation were the two main kinds of stressful threat that produced anxiety. Clearly, physical danger suggests the possibility of death, and evaluation suggests the possibility of rejection and exclusion. There is thus some empirical basis for considering death and social exclusion as the two most common causes of anxiety.

Although we agree with Becker (1973) and with Greenberg et al. (1986) that people may indeed experience distress, even ontological anxiety, at the prospect of their own mortality, we cannot accept the assertion that death is the sole or even the most common underlying cause of anxiety (unless one extends the concept of death to encompass social exclusion). In our view, the theory of self-esteem, culture, and anxiety proposed by Becker and by Greenberg et al. would benefit from frank recognition of social exclusion as a potent source of anxiety. The following are several reasons for our preference.

First, the threat of social exclusion may be far more pervasive than that of death. The threat of death is relatively remote in modern life. Few people think about death on a regular or daily basis; death is largely confined to hospitals and nursing homes; and the experience of bereavement is much rarer than in past centuries, at least through most of the life span (e.g., Aries, 1981). In contrast, social exclusion is a daily, pervasive threat. Many activities contain some possible threat of social exclusion, whether by offending or alienating some significant other person, by jeopardizing one's chances of retaining one's job, by experiencing social rejection, or by defining the self in some way that others might potentially dislike. It seems excessive and implausible to suggest that 40% of the American population is chronically and seriously worried to the point of panic about the possibility of their own existential nonbeing (cf. Barlow, 1988). It is plausible, however, that such a proportion is indeed worried about the possibility of either losing their jobs, being rejected by potential or actual romantic partners, losing ties to family and friends, or breaking some other social bond. Becker (1973) recognized that most people rarely think about death or rarely are aware of fearing it, so he was forced to propose that the fear of death lurks in the unconscious, constantly trying to burst forth into consciousness. This problem can be avoided by recognizing exclusion as a cause of anxiety.

Second, it appears that fear of social exclusion appears earlier in life than does the recognition of mortality. Bowlby (1973) records that infants

cry at separation from mother within the first months of life, long before they can be supposed to have formed a conception of their own mortality or considered the existential implications of nonbeing. Social bonds, however, form very quickly, and separation from familiar others is acutely felt. If anxiety is recognized as a natural result of social exclusion, then this central anxiety of childhood can be understood without postulating innate unconscious knowledge of death and without diluting the concept of death to include social separation (as Becker [1973] did).

Third, some findings regarding anxiety raise problems for the more narrowly defined versions of the death view. Literature on phobias has established clearly (if unsurprisingly) that people avoid things that cause them anxiety. Agoraphobics, for example, tend to remain in the house to avoid the anxiety they experience in public. If one applies this reasoning to death, one must conclude that death anxiety should motivate people to avoid death at all costs. And if all anxiety is death anxiety, then highly anxious people should in general be highly motivated to avoid death. Yet suicide research shows the opposite finding: Highly anxious people are *more* prone than others to attempt to commit suicide (e.g., Bhagat, 1976; Mehrabian & Weinstein, 1985; Tomlinson-Keasey, Warren, & Elliott, 1986; see Baumeister, 1990, for review).

A particularly relevant study by Parkes and Weiss (1983) examined responses to bereavement. This study is important because it implicates both death (in the spouse's death) and social exclusion (the loss of the most important relationship). Its results linked anxiety and death in a way that is difficult to reconcile with Becker's hypothesis. Parkes and Weiss found two consequences of an unexpected death of one's spouse, as opposed to a foreseen death. First, these widows of unexpected bereavements reported higher anxiety levels than did other widows, and second, they were more likely to agree with the statement "I wouldn't care if I died tomorrow." (The latter item was specifically designed to examine indifference to death, rather than desire to die.) The high anxiety in this group is consistent with the notion that the loss of an important relationship causes anxiety, but this group's greater indifference toward death seems to contradict the view that anxiety arises from fear of death. A causal relationship between fear of death and general anxiety would entail that the two should be positively correlated, but these results suggested a negative correlation. In other words, the finding of higher anxiety despite lower fear of death is difficult to reconcile with the theory that anxiety is mainly fear of death.

A final point is that exclusion theory greatly augments the power of Becker's (1973) and Greenberg et al.'s (1986) argument that culture and self are defenses against anxiety (Baumeister, in press-a). Culture and self-esteem, after all, do not really save the person from death. But

if the primary cause of anxiety is social exclusion, then culture and self both emerge as highly effective adaptations. Culture enables people to live together and to feel they belong to a social unit. The self is in many respects a socially created structure that enables the person to maintain a place in society and to carry on relationships with others (e.g., Baumeister, 1982, 1986; Schlenker, 1985). Even self-esteem often refers primarily to one's perceived capacity to maintain good relationships with others (e.g., Janis & Field, 1959), it is based heavily on how the person believes he or she is regarded by others (e.g., Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979), and it may be closely tied to interpersonal patterns and motives (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1989). Recent evidence has confirmed that high self-confidence reduces people's anxiety in a given situation (Goldfried et al., 1984).

In short, high self-esteem arises from believing that one possesses the traits that should maximize one's chances for being included in social groups: One regards oneself as competent, socially skilled, and attractive. Self-esteem thus emerges as a highly plausible counterforce to the fear of social exclusion.

## INNATENESS OR PREPAREDNESS OF ANXIETY

We have already suggested an evolutionary perspective on anxiety. In that view, a tendency to feel distress upon separation or exclusion from social groups would improve the survival chances of human beings, especially under primitive conditions. One implication of this view is that there is some innate or biological basis for anxiety. In view of the extensive learning and variation associated with anxiety, it seems unlikely that anxiety itself is inborn, but there may be some innate or biological preparedness to feel anxiety in response to social exclusion.

One source of evidence for this view concerns its cross-cultural distribution. In general, factors that are constant across cultures are more plausibly innate than factors that are absent from some cultures. A recent review of cross-cultural evidence by Barlow (1988) concluded that "the experience of anxiety exists in nearly all cultures," although he found substantial variation in how anxiety is perceived, felt, expressed, and interpreted. Thus, anxiety appears to show some fundamental consistency across cultures, especially in regard to being present in some form, but its manifestations vary. This seems most consistent with the preparedness view: There is some innate basis for anxiety, but its expression depends on environmental factors.

Another form of evidence comes from studies of learning. The concept of preparedness suggests that organisms are biologically prepared to

make certain associations by conditioning more easily than others (e.g., Garcia & Koelling, 1966; Seligman, 1970, 1971; see Seligman & Hagar, 1972, for summary). Previous research has produced findings conforming to this pattern of preparedness. Thus, one line of work has shown that differential skin conductance responses to some stimuli extinguish less readily than do responses to others (e.g., Fredrikson, Hugdahl, & Ohman, 1976; Hugdahl, Fredrikson, & Ohman, 1977), suggesting that we may be prepared to make and retain connections between certain stimuli and a physiological affective response.

There is some support for the suggestion that we may be biologically prepared to experience anxiety in response to the threat of exclusion or social rejection. Nonverbal communications of negative affect such as angry or fearful facial expressions may be biologically prepared to condition to anxiety. Dimberg and Ohman (1983) and Ohman and Dimberg (1978) found that differential skin conductance responses extinguish less readily to pictures of angry human facial expression than to neutral or happy facial expressions. (Pitman and Orr [1986] found differential resistance to extinction in angry versus neutral faces only for subjects with a clinical diagnosis of anxiety disorder.) These results suggest that angry facial expressions are "prepared" for conditioning with an aversive unconditioned stimulus (UCS), whereas neutral and happy expressions are not (see also Orr and Lanzetta [1980] for similar results with fearful faces). Although Gray (1982) has questioned the role of conditioning and preparedness in explaining the results of Ohman and his collaborators, he has suggested that nonspecific social stimuli are more relevant to most human neurotic disorders than are nonhuman stimuli. Thus, the learning literature lends some support to the suggestion that we may be biologically prepared to experience anxiety in response to the threat of social exclusion.

## ANXIETY AND LEARNING

It has long been axiomatic in behavior therapy that anxiety becomes attached through conditioning to various stimuli, resulting in many common experiences of anxiety, including pathological patterns (e.g., Mikulas, 1972). Specific behavior therapy procedures are often explicitly designed to use learning theory to overcome the learned patterns of anxiety (Mikulas, 1972).

Despite Sullivan's (1953) belief that anxiety is a poor means of education, there seems to be little doubt that anxiety itself can quickly become associated with other stimuli. Bowlby (1973) observed that during the first year of life, children cry when the mother leaves the room. Soon after this, the child will start to cry when the mother puts on her

coat, for the child has apparently learned that putting on the coat is a prelude to leaving. Thus, anxiety is associated to stimuli that anticipate the feared event, and this learning begins quite early in life. By the time the person reaches adulthood, there is an almost infinite variety of possible stimuli or events that can have become associated with anxiety.

It is hardly novel or controversial to suggest that people feel anxiety in response to anticipatory stimuli or that anxiety can become associated with a wide range of events or stimuli. Our point is simply that the fear of social exclusion may underlie many of these connections. In other words, social exclusion may be the major UCS that initially provokes anxiety.

The suggestion that social exclusion is often the core or underlying UCS in many forms of problem anxiety is consistent with current research evidence. Thus, the childhood disorder labeled "school phobia" has more recently come to be understood as fundamentally a fear of leaving home. Indeed, DSM-III renamed school phobia "separation anxiety disorder" (see Goodwin, 1986, for discussion). Thus, the child is not fundamentally afraid of school but rather is afraid of being separated from its parents.

Likewise, there is increasing evidence that the anxiety in sexual problems is linked to fear of social rejection and exclusion. One recent review concluded that "all evidence suggests that sexual dysfunction falls quite neatly into the category of social phobia" (Barlow, 1988, pp. 246–247). Thus, the core of anxiety in sexual problems is not death nor castration nor abstract moral issues, but rather it is social belonging.

Social exclusion may also be central to agoraphobia. Indeed, some recent evidence suggests that agoraphobia may be a special case among the phobias, for it resembles the anxiety state disorders more closely than simple phobias (Turner, McCann, Beidel, & Mezzich, 1986). One influential view has portrayed agoraphobia as the result of misattribution of arousal deriving from interpersonal conflicts (Goldstein & Chambless, 1978). According to this view, agoraphobia often begins with relationship problems or conflicts that cause distress, including anxiety. This arousal is then relabeled as "fear of being on the street alone" (p. 511). This fear of going out alone may be symbolically expressive of an inner conflict between staying and leaving the relationship. Thus, this major category of pathological anxiety may be a symbolic expression of the fear of breaking a social bond. It would be premature to consider this view proven, but its merits further investigation, and it does fit currently available evidence of a link between domestic stress and anxiety attacks among agoraphobics (see Hallam, 1985).

Further evidence has confirmed the link between agoraphobia and social exclusion. Agoraphobics are most prone to suffer anxiety attacks



when they are out alone. The presence of a trusted companion will reduce and even prevent these attacks (Goodwin, 1986; Hallam, 1985). Apparently agoraphobics themselves are well aware of this link, for observations suggest that most of them make sure to have a close friend or relative whenever they venture outside (Hallam, 1985).

Thus, various learning processes are implicated in anxiety. If people are indeed biologically prepared to experience distress at separation from social groups, then a wide variety of stimuli or events could come to elicit anxiety because many things can become associated with the possibility of social exclusion. These associations might arise from multiple pathways, including classical conditioning (such as when demands for sexual performance raise the threat of failure and rejection), anticipation (such as when the child cries when the mother puts on her coat), misattribution of arousal (as has been suggested for agoraphobia), and symbolic expression (as when children's fear of separation is manifested as fear of school). Even if there is some innate basis or preparedness for anxiety, it is quite clear that learning is extremely important.

## ANXIETY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

Thus far, we have argued that social exclusion may lie at the core of much anxiety. If this view is correct, studies of interpersonal interaction should show that threats of rejection, ostracism, and other forms of exclusion would elicit anxiety. This section will briefly examine some relevant evidence.

Empirical evidence has confirmed that interpersonal rejections can cause anxiety. As noted above, the content of anxiety neuroses is often explicitly focused on fears of ostracism, rejection, and the like (Beck et al., 1974). Social exclusion is likewise a cause of anxiety among nonclinical individuals. Craighead, Kimball, and Rehak (1979) had normal, healthy subjects imagine various scenes, and those involving social rejection reliably caused increases in self-reported anxiety (indeed, more reliably than any other scenes). Recent unpublished data collected by Wegner (1989) have found that one of the most reliable causes of arousal is the thought of a previous intimate relationship, whereas a current relationship often does not have that effect. Although only suggestive, these data are consistent with the hypothesis that reminders of a broken social bond may continue to generate distress and arousal for some time thereafter.

Exclusion theory predicts that anxiety should increase proportional to the risk of social exclusion in any given interaction. Thus, situations based on interpersonal evaluation are highly prone to cause anxiety

(Kendall, 1978; Smith et al., 1983). Some evaluations, of course, can be subtle and implicit. Anxiety may therefore also arise merely because one is interacting with a partner who may be predisposed to reject one. A systematic statement of this tendency has been proposed by Stephan and Stephan (1985). According to them, people will generally experience *intergroup anxiety* when they interact with someone from a different social or ethnic group. Apparently, anxiety arises when people encounter social boundaries that exclude them, even if this exclusion is not contingent on any particular performance.

Evidence consistent with the intergroup anxiety hypothesis was provided in Ickes's (1984) well-known study of interracial interactions. Ickes found that many whites seem predisposed to avoid blacks; and when these individuals interacted with blacks, they tended not to engage in initiating behaviors such as smiling or making eye contact. These avoidant dyadic interactions led to elevated anxiety in both partners. Thus, it appears that the recognition of mutually exclusive interpersonal boundaries is an important source of anxiety.

More generally, other people who are different seem to pose more of a threat to anxious than to nonanxious people. Smith (1972) found that highly anxious people showed a greater tendency than others to dislike people who disagreed with them. Anxiety also increased subjects' favorable response to people who agreed with them. Insofar as agreement strengthens social bonds and disagreement threatens them, these findings fit the exclusion theory.

Other evidence indicates that anxiety can be reduced by positive social bonds. As already noted, agoraphobics are often calmed by the presence of familiar others (e.g., Goodwin, 1986). Likewise, anxiety in children can be calmed by the presence of a familiar or trusted companion (Bowlby, 1973). In particular, experimental work by Sarason (1986) showed that administering a supportive intervention improved task performance—but only for highly anxious people. Parallel effects were found among people whose social support networks were deficient. Thus, offering social support to people who lack it will tend to counteract anxiety.

To be sure, some studies have seemingly found that the presence of others can increase anxiety (e.g., Friedman, 1981; Sarnoff & Zimbardo, 1961). These studies, however, have operationalized anxiety as the threat of embarrassment, and the "other person" was not an intimate but a stranger. Thus, the subject expected a stranger to observe him sucking on various items or submitting to a measure of sexual arousal in response to homosexual stimuli. It is not surprising that people might prefer to do such things alone rather than in the presence of others who might form a negative impression of them. To be seen in an unfavorable light

would probably produce anxiety, for it increases the likelihood of social rejection. In fact, other research has shown that the expectation of future interaction heightened the threat posed by embarrassing tasks (Brown & Garland, 1971). All of this is consistent with the general implication that highly anxious people are often mainly afraid of making a bad impression on others (e.g., Schlenker & Leary, 1982, 1985). They even worry that their anxiety itself will be seen by others and will make a bad impression. Recent evidence suggests that this worry often reaches irrational lengths, such that highly anxious people overestimate how visible their inner distress is to others (McEwan & Devins, 1983).

In general, then, it seems safe to conclude that anxiety arises from interpersonal interactions in proportion to the perceived threat of exclusion. A positive sense of social inclusion, created perhaps by the presence of a trusted or intimate partner, can be an effective antidote to anxiety. The recognition of impassable social boundaries, threats of evaluation and rejection, the prospect of embarrassment, and other warning signals of social exclusion appear to increase anxiety.

## SEXUAL ANXIETY AND CULTURAL CHANGE

We turn now to examine several implications of the exclusion theory of anxiety. The preceding sections have elaborated both natural and cultural determinants of anxiety. More precisely, anxiety appears as a deeply rooted tendency to experience distress upon exclusion from a social group. People then learn to feel anxiety whenever some event, or even some implication about the self, raises the threat of social rejection or interpersonal failure. People therefore learn and conform to the standards, rules, and norms of their culture because these embody the criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

One implication of this argument is that when cultures change so that the basis for interpersonal exclusion is altered, patterns of anxiety will also alter. For example, if personal wealth or education is converted from a mark of positive social status into a stigma of disgrace, as often happens with Communist revolutions, then exclusion theory would predict that the levels of anxiety among the wealthy and well-educated should increase (cf. Becker, 1986; Conquest, 1986; Thurston, 1987).

Unfortunately, Communist revolutions can scarcely be regarded as unconfounded tests of the exclusion hypothesis. Wealthy and well-educated people have often been beaten, terrorized, imprisoned, and even executed during such upheavals, and such treatment is ample reason for them to feel fearful in such circumstances. The exclusion theory

predicts that similar increases in anxiety should occur simply as the result of changing patterns of social inclusion, even in the absence of physical oppression and institutionalized terror. In view of the dangers and uncertainties associated with political revolutions, an alternate source of evidence is needed.

Sexual behavior is one potentially valuable source of information, and several factors make it appealing as a way of testing the exclusion hypothesis. First, cultural norms and standards of sexual behavior do change, and these changes have been studied and documented (e.g., Bullough, 1976; Tannahill, 1980). Second, the penalties for sexual misbehavior have rarely included death, although in some other cultures adultery has occasionally been a capital offense (Lawson, 1988). Third, sexual misbehavior is often punished by social exclusion, ranging from physical ridicule to spatial separation to interpersonal ostracism (e.g., Friday, 1977; Morris, 1965; Shorter, 1975). Sexual misdeeds thus invoke the threat of social exclusion without (usually) invoking the threat of death.

There is little doubt that public norms and standards of sexual behavior have changed substantially over the last century (e.g., Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs, 1986). The Victorian era shrouded sexuality with guilt and prohibitions. Couples who lived together or engaged in sexual intercourse without being married were ostracized from many circles of polite society (e.g., Rose, 1983). It appears that most women of the middle and upper classes reached their wedding day still virgins and often with almost no knowledge of sex (Mosher, 1980; see also Gay, 1984). For a girl or woman to acknowledge sexual desires would be taboo, and men too were pressured to feel at least ambivalent about their sexual desires. Sexual technique was not a major issue or preoccupation. Victorian women did not fear that their husbands would abandon them if they failed to have orgasms or refused to perform fellatio, and Victorian men could feel comfortably confident that their wives would have no comparative basis for evaluating their sexual performance (if the wives cared at all), so sexual abilities were largely irrelevant to membership in primary relationships.

Today, however, premarital sex has become so commonplace that it scarcely excites comment or discussion. Indeed, chastity and virginity are minority statuses, and some people complain of social and peer pressures to engage in sex. Whereas active sexuality was once stigmatized, now chastity and virginity are sometimes stigmatized. In particular, women, who bore the brunt of the Victorian sexual repressiveness, have come under increasingly strong messages from the culture to accept and assert their sexuality. The sexual revolution has been primarily a change in the sexual attitudes of women (Ehrenreich et al., 1986). Some men

have even begun to complain that they find women's sexual demands threatening.

Thus, this past century has seen a substantial reversal in the prevailing attitudes about sex, especially with reference to the criteria for social inclusion and exclusion. A century ago, the average middle-class man did not have to worry much about pleasing his sex partner, for she was either his supposedly asexual wife or she was a prostitute. The woman, meanwhile, had to fear that if she sought sexual activity, expressed desire openly, or even enjoyed it too much, she would be rejected by others as a bad woman. Even her husband might reject her if she showed too much sexual pleasure or desire.

Today, in contrast, one is supposed to feel sexual desire and to act on it. An absence of sexual inclination is a cause of social exclusion, not an antidote for it. Both men and women may feel out of step with the culture and specifically may feel vulnerable to interpersonal rejection if they do not perform well enough sexually—that is, if they do not desire sex enough, do not please the partner well enough, or do not enjoy sex enough.

Have these shifts in cultural standards been accompanied by a shift in the patterns of sexual anxiety? There is some evidence that they have. The Victorians, especially middle-class women, appear to have felt anxiety mainly in connection with being seen by others as having strong sexual urges. The general tendency to be distant and inconspicuous in public settings arose partly from the fear that others would perceive one as having sexual thoughts (see Sennett, 1974). Freud's patients, many of whom were middle-class women, seemed upon psychodynamic investigation to be struggling to repress anxiety-filled sexual thoughts and desires.

Today, however, the most common form of sexual anxiety is the fear that one does not have enough desire or will not perform up to standards (e.g., LoPiccolo & LoPiccolo, 1978; Masters & Johnson, 1970). Impotence and frigidity have become a major source of presenting complaints to sex therapists (a field that probably would not have flourished a century ago!). The popular press offers an endless stream of books advising hopeful readers on effective sexual techniques.

Cultural changes in sexual norms are complex events, and it would be rash to place too much interpretive weight on them. Still, our purpose is not to explain these recent shifts or to measure them. Rather, the key point is simply that as the culture shifted its standards for social exclusion, the patterns of sexual anxiety shifted along with them. The Victorians risked social exclusion for being too sexual, whereas the modern individual risks rejection for not being sexual enough. As a result, Victorians had

anxiety over the presence of sexual desire, whereas the modern individual has anxiety over its absence.

## THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

The exclusion theory of anxiety offers a new perspective on the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex is one cornerstone of psychodynamic thought and is regarded by many as one of the foundations of personality. The complex refers to the child's desire for intimacy with the parent of the opposite sex, and Freudians have insisted on its ubiquitous and problematic nature. According to Freud's influential theory, the child faces this complex during the phallic stage (around age 5) and resolves it by repudiating sexual attraction to the parent of the opposite sex.

Freud argues that the resolution of the Oedipus complex is motivated by castration anxiety; more precisely, the boy fears that if he tries to possess his mother, his father will castrate him. In contrast, it may be simpler to suggest that the anxiety associated with the Oedipal conflict arises from fear of being excluded from the family because of desire for preferential intimacy. The child fears that if he or she tries to take the one parent away from the other, the parents will stand together and reject the child. Thus, the account of the Oedipus complex might benefit from substituting exclusion anxiety for castration anxiety as the driving motivation in the theory.

Freudians have often focused on bedtime dramas and struggles as reflecting Oedipal anxiety. According to the exclusion theory account, the symbolism of the parents sleeping with each other (but apart from the child) involves social exclusion rather than intercourse and castration. In both the classical and the present account, the boy fears punishment by the father for expressing his wish to marry his mother, but the feared punishment takes a different form in the different accounts.

Competing predictions for future research could be generated from these two accounts. First, one could examine the relative prevalence of young children's fears to see whether boys more commonly fear castration or exclusion (i.e., parental abandonment and rejection). The exclusion hypothesis seems closer than the castration theory to the actual experiential world of the child, although research is necessary. Environmental cues of castration are probably fairly rare; we suspect that the typical child is only rarely confronted with a threat of castration. In contrast, social exclusion might occur on an almost daily basis, even hourly if one counts each time the desired parent goes off to leave the child alone. Also, it is doubtful how often parents make explicit verbal threats of castration to their children, but they do often make threats of leaving the child,

putting the child away somewhere, giving the child away to the police or other strangers, and so forth (Bowlby, 1973).

Second, there may be a social class difference in the distribution of Oedipal concerns. The castration view would presumably predict greater Oedipal anxiety among lower-class men, insofar as their concerns about virility and machismo are more pronounced than those of middle-class men. The exclusion view would, in contrast, predict greater Oedipal anxiety among the middle classes, where the greater individual privacy and separate bedrooms might make separation a more salient issue.

A third difference concerns the female version of the Oedipal complex, sometimes called the Electra complex. In Freud's account, the female is less likely to achieve a full resolution of this complex because she lacks a penis and is therefore relatively immune to the motivating force of castration anxiety. If social exclusion is the motivating source of anxiety, however, this would apply equally well to females—perhaps even more strongly among females than among males because female identity and personality tend to be more strongly oriented toward maintaining relationships (e.g., Block, 1973; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Eagly, 1987; Friday, 1977). Whereas the castration account tends to predict that women will have weaker superegos than men do, the exclusion account would predict equality or even the opposite. In our view, there is little evidence to support the castration theory's assertion that women have weaker superegos than men do. If anything, women exhibit greater self-control and higher moral standards than men do, as reflected in differential rates of crime and violence, juvenile delinquency, extramarital and deviant sexuality, and substance abuse.

A last advantage of exclusion theory concerns the mode of resolution of the Oedipus complex. In Freud's account, the boy forms the superego by internalizing the rules and standards imposed by his father. It has never been entirely clear to us how this internalization was supposed to overcome the fear of castration, especially when it involved rules that had nothing to do with sex. Indeed, it seems counterintuitive to propose that people in general want to become similar to someone who threatens them with genital mutilation.

On the other hand, accepting the group's rules seems a straightforward way of overcoming exclusion anxiety. To ensure continued membership in the group, one learns and lives by the group's rules. To prevent exclusion from the family, the boy or girl internalizes and conforms to the family rules, which are established by the parents. Thus, Oedipal resolution may be a powerful socializing force, for the child learns how to accept and internalize external rules as a means of maintaining membership in the group. This would also explain why the Oedipus complex might exert a lasting influence on one's personality, for the need to

conform to a group's standards and rules in order to maintain membership is a recurrent theme in modern life (far more pervasive, in our view, than the danger of castration).

A revisionist movement in psychoanalytic thought has reformulated the Oedipus complex in social-cognitive terms (see Kessler, 1988). In this view, the child wants to marry the parent because the child has learned that males marry females and because the focal parent is the most important member of the opposite sex in the child's life. This view downplays the trauma and anxiety in the Oedipus complex, asserting simply that the Oedipal fantasies gradually fade because of frustration and because alternative attachments are formed. This reformulated view is similar in many ways to what we are proposing, except that our view retains the central role of anxiety as causing and motivating the conflict and as directing the mode of resolution.

Thus, the exclusion theory of anxiety may offer a perspective on the Oedipus complex that has some advantages to the classical version of the theory based on castration anxiety. If the Oedipus complex is indeed a common feature of development and an important force in personality, these implications of exclusion theory may be worth further study.

## FUNCTIONS OF THE SELF

One profound argument by Greenberg et al. (1986) is that the self, and especially self-esteem, is formed as a defense against anxiety. Their argument used Becker's (1973) emphasis on existential anxiety. It is worth reconsidering their position from the perspective of the exclusion theory of anxiety.

The social aspect of self is undeniable. George Herbert Mead (1934) described how conceptions of self evolve from knowing how one is perceived by others. Although the influence of others' social feedback is less clear and direct than Mead may have thought, evidence does support its importance (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Further, people appear to be fundamentally motivated to maintain a positive view of themselves in their own minds (e.g., Darley & Goethals, 1980; Greenwald, 1980; Taylor, 1983; Zuckerman, 1979), as well as in other people's minds (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Jones & Wortman, 1973; Schlenker, 1980, 1985; Snyder, Higgins, & Stucky, 1983).

The social aspect of self goes beyond esteem and reputation, however. Identity links the bodily self to the broader social structure. People interact with others on the basis of their social roles and other societal definitions



of self. Self is thus to a great extent a socially defined node in a network of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Baumeister, 1986). Put more simply, self may be partly a means of relating to others.

Exclusion theory postulates that people are strongly and fundamentally motivated to belong to social groups and that the threat of exclusion from social groups is one central cause of anxiety. Hence, the self's function of relating the person to the social group should serve an important function in preventing anxiety. One guiding principle in the formation and organization of self should therefore be to maximize one's chances of inclusion in desired groups. People should seek ways of defining the self that will make them attractive to others. This motivation may be behind the social origins of self cited above. If the self is supposed to facilitate attachment to others, for example, then it seems rational for the self to form according to feedback received from others.

The quest for public esteem may derive from this desire to be accepted by others. People may feel that if others regard them positively, they have a good chance of maintaining desirable social bonds. Consistent with this view, a recent survey of the history of fame concluded that the widespread desire for fame is heavily based on the simple and ubiquitous "dream of acceptability" (Braudy, 1986).

Anxiety, of course, is an intrapsychic phenomenon, so intrapsychic defenses may be employed against it just like interpersonal strategies. How one regards oneself may thus be a crucial determinant of anxiety. If the person's self-concept suggests that loneliness and rejection are to be expected, then that person may be vulnerable to anxiety. One defense against anxiety may therefore be a view of self as having positive qualities, such as competence, virtue, sociability, and attractiveness, that will appeal to others (even if the positive qualities are unrealistic) (Roth, Snyder, & Pace, 1986; Roth, Harris, & Snyder, 1988; Snyder, 1989). Thus, high self-esteem will prevent anxiety, for it entails a conception of self that should be relatively safe from exclusion.

When a major exclusion does happen, such as divorce or loss of job, one may often experience it as a threat to self-esteem, and successful coping require may entail convincing oneself that one still has sufficient positive qualities that one will be able to attract new job offers or romantic partners (e.g., Newman, 1988; Price & McKenry, 1988). In other words, self-esteem is centrally involved in the intrapsychic process of dealing with anxiety arising from various traumas (see also Janoff-Bulman, 1989; Taylor, 1983).

To summarize: The prevention of anxiety may be one of the main functions of the self and one of the main motivations for its formation. Anxiety is minimized both by maintaining social bonds, as is apparent

in self-presentational motives, which typically involve making oneself seem attractive to others. Anxiety is also minimized by convincing oneself that one is unlikely to suffer social exclusion, which is apparent in intrapsychic efforts to maintain high self-esteem. Exclusion theory thus offers a fertile perspective for examining the role of the self in preventing anxiety.

## CONCLUSION

This article has developed a view of anxiety as arising from a deeply rooted tendency to experience distress upon exclusion from social groups. There is ample reason to postulate that human beings have a basic need to belong to social groups, and anxiety may be one mechanism for this need. This assumption and this view of anxiety appear to fit a wide variety of perspectives on anxiety, including psychodynamic theory, learning theory and behavior therapy, laboratory studies of anxiety, evolutionary theory, and clinical studies of psychopathology.

Social anxiety has long been recognized, as has separation anxiety. The purpose of this article has been to extend those concepts beyond the specific fears of particular social interactions (as in shyness) and particular relationships (such as to one's mother). Any social bond is a potential source of anxiety if threatened. Moreover, any definition of the self that raises the subjective probability of social exclusion can produce anxiety. If groups routinely exclude individuals on the basis of incompetence, deviance (especially immorality), and unattractiveness, then anxiety may arise from linking the self to any of those traits. This broader form of social anxiety may underlie failure, guilt, and insecurity about one's charm and beauty.

In our view, there is ample evidence that social exclusion produces anxiety and that social inclusion minimizes it. Evidence of the innate preparedness of a fear of social exclusion is available but not conclusive. The cognitive aspects and processes of anxiety deserve further study, although present evidence provides encouraging support for the view of anxiety as an interrupt mechanism in self-regulation.

Anxiety is generally recognized as one of the most pervasive forms of distress in life, and the puzzle of its nature has been a challenge to psychology for generations. In our view, social belonging is an equally pervasive and fundamental issue in human life, and its importance makes plausible a link to anxiety. A fresh appraisal of the essentially social nature of human motivation may offer an important key to understanding the nature of anxiety.

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