Anxiety and the New Generation in College: What Can a Professor Do?

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ABSTRACT: The generation currently attending universities, the iGeneration, is unusually fearful and anxious; the paper explores anxiety in relation to these students. We first examine anxiety using the psychology and management literature as well as Scripture and then relate this to major characteristics of the iGeneration. The final section discusses classroom implementations.

KEYWORDS: iGeneration, GenZ, anxiety, fear, management

INTRODUCTION

The millennial generation has moved into the workforce and the next generation is going to college. This generation, variously called the iGeneration (Igel & Urquhart, 2012; Twenge, 2017) or Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Stuckey, 2016), was born between 1995 and 2010 (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; Seemiller & Grace, 2016, 2017) and experienced its own identifying social events, most notably growing up with the iPhone, which was introduced in 2007. By 2012, roughly a decade ago, most middle school students and many elementary school children had a personal smartphone and were spending significant amounts of time on it, a trend that has only accelerated (Barna Group, 2018; Turner, 2015). This generation has also been influenced by violence during their formative years as well as the recent shutdowns due to Covid (Aguas, 2018; Gabriel et al., 2021). As a result, this generation is different from the millennials in many significant ways. For a recent summary, see Smith and LaShaw (2021). One of the sadder differences is that, according to many measures, the iGeneration is even *more* anxious than millennials (e.g., Asfaha, 2018; Bethune, 2019, Twenge, 2017).

Fear and anxiety are common to humanity, but the iGeneration appears to be unusually fearful and full of anxiousness (Gabriel et al., 2021; Shellenbarger, 2019). This manifests itself in many ways, such as unusually high rates of self-harm, clinical depression, and suicide (Gabriel et al., 2021; Mojtabai et al., 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the issues of anxiety as it relates to the current group of students at faith-based universities. First, we will examine the construct of anxiety using the psychology literature, the management literature, and Scripture. This will then be related to major characteristics of the iGeneration. The final section will discuss classroom implications for professors.

ANXIETY

What is Anxiety?

Fear and anxiety are among the most common of human emotions (Minirth & Meier, 1978; Todd et al., 2015). Some psychologists consider fear and anxiety to be contained in one idea—that is, anxiety includes fear (e.g., Todd et al., 2015)—but most see a distinction between the two.

Fear is commonly understood as a natural human response to a specific *present* danger involving a novel or threatening situation (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018; Moxnes, 2018). In contrast, anxiety is a response to *anticipated*

danger in future situations that might have the potential for negative outcomes (McCarthy et al., 2016; Todd et. al. 2015). Anxiety is fear that cannot be identified with any *specific*, *current* object or cause (Chaplin, 1985).

Both states, fear and anxiety, create adrenalin in the body, and the adrenalin triggers the fight/flight syndrome (Borkovec & Roemer, 1995; Calderwood et al., 2018). When adrenalin is triggered, the blood supply flows to the skeletal muscles, causing a decreased flow to the brain, especially to the frontal cortex where most thinking occurs (Hanscom, 2019). However, since anxiety does not have an identified present cause, the situation cannot be directly resolved; the unfocused fear does not seem to be relevant to what is really happening (Elliot, 1999; Wang et al., 2018). This unresolved anxiety leaves the person with residual adrenalin in the body, which often results in feelings of confusion, not being in control, and anger.

Besides adrenalin, physical manifestations of anxiety include high blood pressure, palpitations of the heart, tightness of the chest, trembling, faintness, and frequent illnesses (Borkovec & Roemer, 1995). Psychological symptoms include confusion, moodiness, and delusional thinking (Calderwood et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018). A common result of a high level of anxiety is that a person is unable to focus on much except his or her delusional thinking track (Elliot, 1999; Hong, 2007).

At extremes, the anxiety becomes chronic; an anxiety neurosis can affect major areas of a person's life (Borkovec & Roemer, 1995; Chaplin, 1985). For example, people become frightened to leave their room, to meet new people, or to try new ideas. Anxiety neurosis is often linked to depression, a state of despondency that can lead to delusions of inadequacy, hopelessness, and thoughts of suicide (Comer & Kendall, 2007; Minirth & Meier, 1978).

Positive and Negative Anxiety.

Many researchers distinguish between positive and negative anxiety (also called adaptive/affective, warm/cold or light/dark anxiety (e.g., Gabriel et al., 2021; Moxnes, 2018). *Positive* or *adaptive* anxiety can help a person break through the paralysis caused by fear and adapt to the anxiety-inducing situation (Manassis et al., 2014). For example, job search anxiety can encourage a person to learn more about how to find a job, or the energy created by performance anxiety can be used to improve the performance (Gabriel et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2018). Moxnes (2018), for example, suggests that adaptive anxiety plus an additional shock (such as finding one left one's speech notes at home) can bring a performance to an unusually high level.

This seems at odds with the behavior that was described as resulting in depression, feelings of helplessness, delusions and even thoughts of suicide. However, like many emotions, different people can have vastly different responses. It is *negative* anxiety, also called *affective* anxiety, that results in the negative side effects described above.

Worry and rumination. At root, anxiety is an effort to control a situation and cope with it (Hanscom, 2019; Todd et al., 2015). However, the anxious person is necessarily frustrated in this because he or she is attempting to control a *potential* situation, not a tangible, real one (Calderwood et al., 2018). Therefore, the anxious person often amplifies and deepens the affective or negative anxiety through worry and its sister, rumination.

Worry is "focused on the possibility of *future* negative events" (Rogers et al., 2019, p. 276). The worrier thinks repeatedly and negatively about the future event in the unconscious hope that focusing on the event will help them prevent or cope with it. Rumination is repetitive thinking about negative things that have happened in the *past*. The ruminator unconsciously hopes that thinking repeatedly about the past event will change it or will help him or her find a way to control it should it occur again (Minirth & Meier, 1978; Rogers et al., 2019).

However, neither worry nor rumination can control a situation that only exists in potential. Therefore, the repeated mulling of the non-existing situation only results in frustration and high levels of adrenalin, which, as mentioned earlier, unbalances body chemicals and induces sleeplessness, fatigue, irritability, negativity, bias thinking, and ever more severe affective anxiety. All this tends to spiral down into delusional thinking, depression, and thoughts of suicide (Hong, 2007; Todd et al., 2015). Thus, the anxious person's attempts at control only exasperate the results of anxiety.

Interventions

There are numerous ways to mitigate anxiety. Breathing exercises, for example, have the potential to decrease stress and anxiety by acting on the autonomic nervous system. The physiological effect of deepening the breath and lengthening the exhale shifts the nervous system from sympathetic to parasympathetic function, meaning that this exercise moves the nervous system away from the fight-or-flight mode, reduces adrenalin, and increases relaxation (Jerath et al., 2016; Madeson, 2022). Further, the necessity to be mindful of and count breaths gives the mind a space to free itself of negative thoughts (Hong, 2007; Madeson, 2022).

Another mitigation is simply gratitude. Gratitude to others or to God has been clinically tested as an antidote to anxiety and has a proven ability to reduce or eliminate

anxiety (Minirth & Meier, 1978; Schimmel, 1997). This is particularly pertinent for Christians, who are repeatedly enjoined in Scripture to praise God.

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). Possibly the most common intervention for extreme anxiety is Cognitive Behavior Therapy or CBT (Manassis et. al. 2014; Minirth & Meier, 1978). A key mechanism of CBT is repeated exposure to the anxiety-inducing situation. The intent is to lower the anxiety level by desensitizing the person to the stimuli and help him or her gain control over the situation by learning "brave behavior" (Manassis et al., 2014; Moxnes, 2018). The person is also taught techniques to reduce worry and rumination, such as those discussed above (Gabriel et. al., 2021; Hong, 2007). Some CBTs train people to change affective energy into adaptive energy by focusing on trying to fix the problem rather than worrying about it. Classroom analogs for CBT treatments will be discussed in the final section of the paper.

ANXIETY AND THE MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

Affective or negative anxiety has extensive management implications. For example, work anxiety, defined as nervousness and worry tied to work conditions or tasks (McCarthy et al., 2016), can lead to lower job performance, unpleasant interactions between employees and bosses, depletion of energy and enthusiasm for the work, and lower helping behaviors (Calderwood et al., 2018). The tensions created by work anxiety can spill into other domains of life, for example, negatively affecting the family, and can deplete the anxious person of energy (Krannitz et al., 2015). Worry and rumination take time away from normal interactions with others and deepen the negative reactions to work, which in turn means that the person finds his or her self unable to recover adequate equilibrium during the time away from work, and all this leads to a negative downward spiral (Calderwood et.al., 2018; Krannitz et al., 2015).

Though adaptive or positive anxiety has not been studied widely in management, some researchers have utilized the construct to better inform and train managers. One of the more striking examples of this is found at the business school at the University of Oslo, Norway, which has a leadership program focusing on the use of adaptive anxiety as a source of energy and, thus, a resource (Moxnes, 2018). Supporting this view, students take a series of interactive classes, where they learn about and experience all types of anxiety and, by confronting their limitations, learn to transcend them.

Affective anxiety has been studied as a moderating variable in goal orientation, which is the ability of employees to develop new skills and cope with new situations. Elliot (1999) found that high anxiety people tended to sabotage managerial attempts to encourage their goal orientation in the workplace. However, Wang et al. (2018) found that though high-anxiety managers were fearful of stretch goals; facilitator support and an intervention program could create positive change in goal orientation for these people.

Anxiety has also been studied in relation to decision-making. Todd et al. (2015) found that a high-anxiety person who was in a high-power role and under pressure to respond quickly is more likely to focus on themselves (ego) instead of on the common goal. The person's anxiety-induced need for control means that he or she is more likely to frame the situation using his or her personal perspective rather than attending to the perspectives of others, thus limiting possible solutions.

Other implications of anxiety involve managerial attempts to create low anxiety contexts in the workplace. There is evidence that too *much* structure in job situations can create anxiety for some people and that too *little* structure can create anxiety in other people (Moxnes, 2018). Thus, managers need to find a balance between job structures and situations. Allowing a variety of structures or letting employees choose job variables that suit their personality can help free some people from a certain level of anxiety.

Interventions

Managers who can quickly identify work, goal, or structural anxieties in employees have more chances of intervening positively. In some cases, the anxiety-inducing situation can be fixed or alternatives can be created. In others, modified Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) techniques can be used, such as a gradual exposure to the anxiety creating situation. Other interventions could include teaching employees about positive and negative anxiety and giving them techniques to reduce worry and rumination (Gabriel et. al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2019). Workshops that teach employees to engage affective anxiety and use that energy positively can also be beneficial (Moxnes, 2018).

However, the limited portfolio of suggestions above is not the only source for handling anxiety. Anxiety is a spiritual as well as a psychological phenomenon.

ANXIETY IN SCRIPTURE

The message of the Bible regarding affective, negative, anxiety can be summed up in four words: "Do not

be anxious." Depending on the English version, there are only 12-15 total references to "anxiety" or "anxiousness" in the Bible, and all but two come with an implicit or explicit injunction: "Do not be."[1] "Do not be anxious" is a direct command; therefore, anxiety is under the control of the Christian. The antidote to anxiousness, repeated over and over in various ways, is to focus on the Lord, walk in His ways, obey Him, and trust Him to take care of the situation (e.g., Psalm 94:19; Matt. 6:25; Phil 4:6). To reduce anxiety, says the Scripture, follow the directions in the old hymn, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way…" (Sammis & Towner, 1887).

There are some subtle differences in how Old and New Testaments deal with anxiety. The discussions of anxiety in the Old Testament tend to emphasize that the remedy is obedience to God. Overcoming anxiety is action-based in that it requires following His commandments and walking in His way. The discussions of anxiety in the New Testament tend to emphasize that the remedy is trust in the Lord, which would obviously include following His commands but is more attitude-based than action-based. In this way, the Bible allows for two emphases: the Old Testament of "Trust and OBEY," and the New Testament of "TRUST and obey."

Old Testament: Trust and OBEY

Anxiety and the way of righteousness: Psalm 139:23 and Psalm 94:19. These two well-known Psalms talk about anxiety in personal terms and are the only two places in the Old Testament that use the Hebrew word *sarappay*, meaning "disquieting thoughts," translated as anxiety (*Strongs Exhaustive Concordance*, nd).

Several principles emerge from these Psalms. First, the psalmists imply that disquieting thoughts, anxiety, is common to humankind. The author of Psalm 94 talks about anxious thoughts multiplying until his foot almost slipped, as is the tendency when a person worries or ruminates. Psalm 139 ends with David's clear statement that he has anxious thoughts. However, in both cases, the anxious psalmist immediately turns his thoughts away from the anxiety-creating circumstances and turns them towards God. "Your love, O Lord, supported me…your consolation brought joy to my soul," says Psalm 94:19. In Psalm 139, David goes even deeper and asks God to root out his anxious thoughts, which he expresses as sin, and asks that God will instead lead him into the path of obedience. Matthew Henry ([1708], 1976) observes that the psalmist "had a multitude of perplexed, entangled thoughts within him concerning the course he should take and what was likely to be the issue of it…He found succor and relief in God, and in

Him only" (p. 681). Thus, the psalm writers acknowledge that anxiety is a fact of life but that the people of God are called to remove their thoughts from the anxiety-causing event and turn them toward God.

The suggestion of these psalms is that anxious thoughts are common to humankind, but that patterns of affective anxiety thinking—worry and rumination—are not part of following God's way of righteousness. The person who desires to follow God's way will stop worrying and ruminating, turn his mind to God, and ask for God's help to be led in the right paths, the paths that lead to righteousness.

Anxiety as a curse for sin: Deuteronomy 28:65, Lamentations 3:65, Isaiah 51:17, Ezekial 4:16, 12:19. The psalm writers suggested that it is necessary to remove anxious patterns in order to follow God's righteous ways. In support, the passages cited above describe excessive anxiety as a direct punishment for sin and rebellion.

When God renewed His covenant with Israel at the border of Canaan (Deuteronomy 27-30), the tribes on Mt. Gerizim recited the blessings God would give if Israel obeyed Him, and the tribes on Mt. Ebal recited the curses that would fall if they disobeyed and left Him. Among the curses for abandoning the Lord is the following:

> The Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning, you will say, "if only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!" (Deuteronomy 28:64-67)

The Hebrew words translated here as "anxious" are *raggaz lêb̠. Raggaz* means quivering or quaking. *Lêb̠* is the Hebrew word for the heart/feelings/will/intellect—the center of the person's being (Strongs Exhaustive Concordance, nd). The result of abandoning the Lord is a *raggaz lêb̠*, a quivering center, full of constant suspense, dread, and adrenalin, night and day— no rest for the wicked. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel use the same words *raggaz lêb̠*, a quaking heart, to describe what happened during the siege of Jerusalem. Because of their sin, the people in rebellious Judah experienced excessive anxiety, and it went down to the center core of their being and churned there.

The suggestion from these passages is that anxiety is not a part of God's path of righteousness and that rebellion against the Lord will leave a person open to excessive anxiety— a quavering heart. There is a positive correlation between following God in obedience and reducing anxiety and a positive correlation between sin, rebellion, and high anxiety.

New Testament: TRUST and obey

Do not be anxious because God…. Matthew 6:25-34, Luke 12: 22-34, Philippians 4:6. In the Matthew 6 portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states that a person cannot serve both God and money and then launches immediately into a lengthy discussion about anxiety (Matthew 6:25-34). "Don't worry about everyday issues," He says. "God feeds the birds, and you are far more valuable than birds. Worry accomplishes nothing and worry is what the pagans do. God knows what you need, so focus on His kingdom."

The Greek word translated here as "worry" is *merimnate*, which conveys the idea of being over-anxious about or distracted by something (*Strongs Exhaustive Concordance*, nd). In the cognate form, *merízō*, "divide," the word describes being apart, separated from the whole, suggesting that anxiety divides and fractures a person's being into parts and separates them from reality (*Strongs Exhaustive Concordance*, nd). Reality, stated by Jesus, is that God is in charge and is taking care of the person.

Paul echoes Jesus when he says in Philippians 4:6, "Do not *merimnate* about anything, but in everything…make your requests to God." Jesus and Paul are both encouraging followers to focus fully on the reality that God is in complete control and not be divided in their mind by thinking they are in control. "Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" asks Jesus. "Of course not" (Matthew 6: 27).

As an aside, many commentators observe that in this passage, Jesus is not saying that people should not prepare for the necessities of daily living but rather that they should not be over-anxious about such things, divided in their mind between self-sufficiency and God. Jesus did not command us not to work. As Jerome (nd/2014) wryly remarks, "The command is therefore, 'not to be anxious about what we shall eat.' For it is also commanded, that in the sweat of our face we must eat bread. Toil therefore is enjoined, carking forbidden." Individuals do need to make reasonable efforts to handle the minutiae of daily living but are commanded not to focus on it to the exclusion of becoming divided from God.

Interestingly, Jesus and, for that matter, Paul do not forbid anxiety in God's people; all people are fearful at times. What both expressly forbid is over-anxiety. The Christian is not to focus on the anxiety-creating circumstance using the mechanisms of worry and rumination, whether it is physical needs today or possible situations in the future. Rather, he or she is to focus on God. Jesus says, "For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 32-34, NIV).

Both passages forbid over-anxiety. High levels of affective anxiety narrow a person's thinking so that all he or she can focus on is the negative circumstances. Over-anxiety divides a person from reality and fractures a person's mind into pieces that focus only on the anxiety. As a result, it distracts a person from the proper focus, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Jesus discusses the common needs of living in each use of His commands to "not be over anxious" (Matthew 6). Don't love money, love God. Don't be over-anxious about what you will eat or drink or wear. God knows you need such things and He will take care of you as He does in nature. You are precious to Him. Trust Him. He will supply your needs according to His riches in Christ (Philippians 4:23). If we trust God, we will not need to be fractured but will be able to focus on righteousness and the things of the Kingdom of God.

In Philippians 4:6, Paul goes into the details of the mechanisms to use to focus the mind on God. "Do not be *merimnate* about anything but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." The person who desires the righteousness of God will rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4) and petition God for needs with thanksgiving. The result will be peace; "the peace of Christ will guard your emotions and mind in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from this discussion.

1. While anxiety is common to humankind, God does not want His people to be anxious or to focus on the anxiety-creating situation using the mechanisms of worry and rumination.
2. The level of anxiety is a matter of individual choice. The Christian has the decision whether to focus on the anxiety or focus on God. He or she can ask God for help in this.
3. There is a negative correlation between level of anxiety and level of righteousness. As affective anxiety, worry, and rumination begin to consume our time and thinking, the things of the Kingdom of God will necessarily receive less focus and attention. Anxiety fractions our attention and moves us away from God. Moving away from God can open us to over-anxiety.
4. One of the key ways to lower levels of affective anxiety is to turn our mind to God, ask His help and trust Him to give it, be thankful, and focus on His kingdom.

In summary, anxiety is common but can be managed, and God calls us to manage it. Refraining from worrying about the future or dwelling on the past is an individual

choice, and God is willing to help if asked. There is a negative correlation between anxiety levels and God's way of living. To increase righteousness levels and reduce anxiety levels simply requires refocusing on God, asking Him for help, trusting that He will do it, and thanking Him.

ANXIETY AND THE iGENERATION

By many measures the iGeneration, born between 1995 and 2010 (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015), is a fearful and anxious one, possibly the most anxious generation alive. National surveys of high school and college graduates show that between 2012 and 2015, the symptoms of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and anger rose exponentially in young adults (Twenge, 2017). For example, 56% more teens reported a major depression in 2015 than in 2010, and suicide and self-harm is still on the rise (Bethune, 2019; Haseltine, 2021). The number of college students who seriously considered suicide jumped *60%* between 2011 and 2016 (Mojtabai et. al, 2016). Employers report that this generation is more anxious than any they have seen before (Shellenbarger, 2019). There are reasons for this; primary among them are the random violence in much of society, and the impact of smartphones and social media.

Random, Secondhand Violence

As outlined by Smith and LaShaw (2021), the iGeneration has experienced a large amount of random secondhand violence in their young lives, beginning with the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center when they were in their first weeks of kindergarten and continuing through the recent riots, i.e. "mostly peaceful" demonstrations in major cities. For a summary, see Smith and LaShaw (2021) or Aguas (2018). As a result, researchers suggest, this generation suffers from "secondhand terrorism" (Barna Group, 2018; Comer & Kendall, 2007), which amplifies trauma and leads to numbness and a pervasive but unspecific fear, which is also the definition of anxiety.

In addition, the social isolation caused by the recent coronavirus pandemic has increased depression. The iGeneration, particularly, had difficulty maintaining a positive mental outlook during the isolation, and its members faced the additional sadness of missing important early adult life milestones, such as graduations, proms, and weddings. As a result, many iGens experience daily mental health challenges (Haseltine, 2021).

Smartphones and Social Media

Smartphones, introduced in 2007, have been an enormous part of the iGen's life, consuming untold hours of their time. The social media accessed by smartphones has had a large impact on this generation's psyche. In 2015, 87% of high school girls and 77% of high school boys self-reported using social media sites almost every day (Twenge, 2017; Woo, 2018). By 2016, the average daily time that boys spent playing video games was self-reported at about two hours a day, though about ten percent admitted they played more than 40 hours a week (Twenge, 2017). Since 2016, the use of social media has only increased. In 2018, Woo, for example, found that 95% of teens own a smartphone and go online at least six times an hour, or roughly every 10 minutes.

Many speculate that teen vulnerability to and addiction to social media might be a factor in the increase in anxiety and depression of this generation (Barna Group, 2018; Hovitz, 2017; Mojtabai et. al, 2016). For example, the emphasis on the perfect selfie has greatly amplified body image for girls; some take hundreds of pictures to get just the right "spontaneous" one to post (Twenge, 2017). The "likes" and re-tweets on social media ignite the reward centers of the brain in a way similar to a drug habit (Bethune, 2019). Eventually, people who post often create an endless feedback loop where more posting is needed to garner more likes in order to feel as good as he or she did initially. This rapidly becomes exponential, adding substantially to anxiety and depression (Barna Group, 2018; Hovitz, 2017). Psychologists call this Social Media Anxiety Disorder (SMAD) (Hovitz, 2017).

Indeed, the physical presence of the smartphone can be addictive; many people feel like it must always be on their person and are anxious if it is not. A 2018 study found that many iGens (and their parents) experience monophobia, "a feeling of anxiety any time they are separated from their mobile phone" (Barna Group, 2018, p.15). Addictions to cell phones are rising, with increasing numbers of people feeling life-disrupting anxiety and inability to focus if they are separated physically from their cell phone for a short period of time (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; Twenge, 2017).

Slowing Social Development

The enormous amounts of time spent on the smartphone means that the iGens have fewer in-person interactions than other generations at the same age (Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Turner, 2015; Twenge, 2017). Food courts at malls, for example, have fewer teen eaters; teen attendance is down in theaters and clubs (Twenge, 2017). Some of this might be fear of violence, some of it might be "lack of time." Whatever the reason, the iGens appear to be substituting smartphone-mediated interactions for in-person interactions.

The reduction in direct interaction with other people has apparently led to slowing social and cognitive development (Asfaha, 2018; Mojtabai et al., 2016). When compared to other generations, the iGens have lower emotional intelligence (EI), shorter attention span, and a proclivity to engage in negative behaviors, such as looting or pornography (Asfaha, 2018; Bethune, 2019). These are symptoms of being at both a lower cognitive level and a lower social developmental stage.

The iGen are willing to challenge leaders if they perceive an inconsistency, but much of their thinking is emotional rather than reasoned (Bethune, 2019). Many suffer from an "if-it-is-on-the-internet-it-must-be-true" mentality and have a diminished ability to critique the validity of information they are given. Thus the media, particularly social media, has undue influence over them (Shatto & Erwin, 2017).

Further, the constant bombardment of texting and posting encourages short attention spans. One study that installed a program to measure computer use found that students switched between tasks and websites on average every *19 seconds*. More than 75% of the computer windows were open less than one minute (Yeykelis et al., 2014). The iGen has trained themselves to jump rapidly from one task to the next, which makes them adept at switching tasks but does not make them more effective in those tasks. This trend suggests that sustained reading or reasoning is not a strength of this generation.

The iGens and Sex. With the easy access to pornography, even sex has become virtual. In 2014, Weir reported that 50-99% of men and 30-86% of women had consumed porn—and that includes Christians. There is also a high level of promiscuity in our Christian colleges. More than 80% of unmarried young adult evangelical Christians admit to having had sex (McDowell & Wallace, 2019; Tyler, 2011).

The result is weak churches, guilty Christians, adults with no intention to marry and take on responsibility, broken families, and insecure women. And if the Scripture is correct, higher levels of sin relate to higher levels of anxiety.

The iGens and God. But possibly the most troubling thing is the evidence from youth pastors and others that many of the iGens do not see God as relevant to their lives (McDowell & Wallace, 2019; Smith & LaShaw, 2021). Some do not believe there is a God; more see Him as irrelevant. From 1989 to 2004, the percentage of young adults who believed in God remained largely stable, but beginning in 2005, the percentage declined drastically. Recent polls show that 60% of young adults say they do not believe in God and that God and religion are not important in their life. Over 25% said they have never prayed, and 62% said they pray to the universe "occasionally, when they want something" (Twenge, 2017).

However, many of the iGens who have Christian parents have continued religious *practices*, such as going to church, usually because they still live with their parents and do not want to bother with arguments and disputes. It is easier to be publicly compliant and keep one's agnosticism away from the parents (McDowell & Wallace, 2019). These are frightening trends for Christian universities.

CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

It would be naïve to think that these trends have no effects on the students sitting in our classrooms. But what can a caring professor do to assist these anxious, agnostic, and technologically addicted children of God?

Spiritual Implications for the Classroom

As Smith and LaShaw (2021) remarked, the impacts of the smartphone and social trends are significant, but God is more powerful than either. Therefore, they suggest, the first and most important thing is to intervene spiritually within the context of the professor-student relationship. Different professors will intervene differently according to their personalities and situations; one of the key things is to pray earnestly about how to intervene and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit for each unique situation (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

There is hope. The Barna Group, for example, suggests that many of the iGens do not carry negative baggage from bad church experiences, and that such a highly emotional generation might be more open to a personal experience with God. Accordingly, professors must prepare to give reasons for the hope that they have, with gentleness and respect (I Peter 3:15b-16, NIV).

Where to Start?

Pursue theology. The advice from youth pastors who have worked with this generation is to begin with theology, the study of God (e.g., McDowell & Wallace, 2019). It is probable that our classrooms are full of people who do not really believe in God or who see Him as irrelevant. Therefore, emphasizing obedience to and trust in Him might not be helpful.

The recommendation is to begin with theology, who God is, and apologetics, such as the evidence for a God and the truth of the Bible. The purpose is to reinforce the students' understanding of God and strengthen their trust in Him. At the same time, the professor can model

the attitudes that students crave for themselves: love, joy and peace. This allows students to see the outcome of trust in God.

A resource a busy professor might consider is the *Rose Book of Charts* (Rose, 2015). In this book, a group of biblical scholars set out much of the biblical content in colorful graphics and charts. Topics include "100 Proofs for the Bible," "100 Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus," "Four Views of the End Times," and so forth. These can quickly be adapted to the college classroom for devotions or discussions.

Practice and preach thankfulness. Gratitude is a clinically suggested antidote to anxiety (Schimmel, 1997), and this is consistent with the scriptural view that trusting in God with thanksgiving diminishes anxiety (Phil 4:6). It also resonates with the students' desire to be safe. Consider the following:

- Proverbs 29:25-26: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."
- Philippians 4:6-7: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

When professors model thankfulness to God, it is a powerful example to anxious students. Thankfulness can also be an overt part of the classroom pattern, used as a CRT to desensitize anxiety-producing situations. For example, short exercises along the lines of "What are you thankful to God for today?" can be frequently inserted into classes. Ask students to express things they are thankful for that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8-10). Thinking about good things, combined with praising God for these good things, will help many students begin to develop peace.

Peace, gentleness and kindness. An anxious generation responds to a gentle, kind classroom atmosphere. Techniques that worked for previous generations, such as spontaneous debates or in-class challenges, will frighten many risk-averse students, and scolding a class for not reading the assignment or for looking at their phones will be ignored. To handle this new context, faculty must revisit and even abandon previously useful ways of working with students.

Kindness (*hesed*, loving kindness) is imperative in a classroom full of anxious people. This involves being gentle and polite and treating students with what they perceive as respect, which mostly means seeing them as individuals (Schimmel, 1997). However, it should be noted that kindness (*hesed*, loving kindness) is not niceness. A professor need not "dumb down" a class or let students get away with sloppy work in order to be kind. That is merely niceness, and it typically backfires. Rather, kindness involves being peaceful and gentle in the face of irritating classroom issues or repeated anxious questions. This is easier for some professors than for others, and these authors are often imperfect in this. To model genuine attitudes of peace, gentleness and kindness is to daily ask the Holy Spirit to build these things into our lives. This translates into the classroom as responding respectfully to individual concerns and phrasing issues kindly while still holding high standards and keeping students accountable to meet the standards.

Pedagogical Implications for the Classroom.

Technology anxiety. As boomers, we railed for years about smartphones and computers in the classroom, tried to forbid them, tried to monitor them, tried to ignore them, and none of it was very successful. When we finally realized that people were addicted to their phones and that addiction is addiction, we needed to find ways to use smartphones and other technologies appropriately.

The best techniques came from discussions with colleagues from the Generation X and the millennial generations. Incidentally, the question creates great discussion in faculty meetings. Below are some examples of things that were suggested and which we implemented and found to be successful.

Big picture first. Because the iGen grew up with YouTube, their general learning style is to want to see the big picture, the complete process, before they begin. In addition, many iGens tend to be impatient with details unless they are passionate about a topic. Perhaps this is due to the heavy reliance on internet searches; the typical web article is roughly one column long with links to other articles.

Showing the big picture first can be helpful in the classroom. It provides a quick overview of the concepts, and it can be done with technology-mediated venues, which has a halo effort for iGens because they live on the internet. Below are some examples of how we translated this reliance on short overviews using technology into our classrooms.

New topics can be introduced in general terms using a video or a five-minute context lecture, then students can research the details on their phones in three or four phases. Ideally, students would then share what they have found. This can become an in-class or out-of-class exercise as desired. Assignments that require library research should include the links to the databases. Assignments and classroom management can be supplied through course management systems if the institution has one; otherwise, handouts or emails with the urls work.

Textbooks. When textbooks need updating, look for interactive web-based textbooks or textbooks that begin with the big picture and allow students to drill down. Other professors have often found those textbooks; asking colleagues is a time saver.

It is important to know how your bookstore is organized before embracing this technique. Some bookstores now "rent" textbooks to students and online interactive textbooks are therefore not allowed because they may be a one-time purchase and any further use requires a new license. This may mean that you need to require a "flat" textbook and add the internet drill down in other ways.

Another alternative is to search the internet for short articles, videos, Ted Talks, and so forth on specific topic areas and assign these "free" sources to the students using the course management platform at your university. If you feel that there is little chance that all students will read all of the needed updates, then try assigning a "reading" to different students and require a written or oral summary of the new material. Students can present their findings in class (always citing their sources) or on the discussion board using PowerPoint or other presentation software or by making videos with the freeware products on the course management system. Another alternative is to post summary videos on a private YouTube channel and post those links on the course management system or click on them in class as discussion starters. This can also be used for short context lectures introducing a topic.

CBT interventions. With a bit of creativity, CBT anxiety interventions can be developed for the classroom, particularly if there is a practical application to the subject. For example, practicing interviewing techniques can become part of a marketing research class, or role play asking for a raise can be done in HR classes.

The professor can provide ways to desensitize students to anxiety-inducing situations by providing rubrics and examples for major assignments and by letting students practice assignments. Here are several possibilities: create grade rubrics for major assignments, post examples of A papers on the class website, create several small tests rather than one large one, allow students to hand in sections of a paper in drafts, require several short oral presentations before the major presentation, and allow students to seek feedback on their work (written or presentation) through various student help programs.

When you have access to course management platforms, you can also have students post their work in a discussion forum and have other students provide value-added comments and questions. Students can then use this infor-mation to refine and polish their work before submitting it for a grade.

Rubrics and examples. We mentioned the use of freely shared rubrics and examples. One author makes a policy of posting rubrics and example papers for all major assignments. This calms many students' anxieties because they can see what other students have done to get an A. This was initially a great deal of work, so the author did one or two rubrics a semester for a while and looked for good example papers. A serendipitous discovery was that a rubric, once created, could be used for term after term (with occasional tweaking). It also made grading faster, and, best of all, it reduced time-consuming anxiety questions from students ("Why did I get a 98% and not a 100%!!!?). Also, "look at the rubric and example papers on the website," is a fair thing for a professor to say and it saves hours of re-explaining the assignment.

In some classes a rubric does not apply, or examples are not viable. An assignment might be too large or complicated for a rubric. Towards the end of the student's coursework, rubrics might not be desirable.

In those cases, an option might be to create small explanatory videos on portions of the assignment or on necessary processes. Videos can be made on a variety of topics: finding things in the university library, structuring the paper correctly, or using required features in Word, such as the reference tab. One author has found that mini-workshop videos (the most popular YouTube videos range from about 3 minutes to 7 minutes) are well received by the students.

Workshops on anxiety. Short workshops on different aspects of anxiety, where it comes from and how to deal with it, can be beneficial for many students. Particularly in a Christian university, helping the students understand the spiritual implications of anxiety can be of enormous benefit. Showing students how to find ways to turn affective anxiety into adaptive anxiety would also be of value. This can even be done in a series of mini-workshops as mentioned above and placed either in the school's student support area or within the course management system of the class. Faculty from the Psychology Department might be willing to contribute, but certainly a caring business professor could create several short workshops out of this small paper. Any information given to the students would be better than none.

CONCLUSION

As professors who have been placed by God into our vocations, we need to ceaselessly pray for ourselves and our attitudes, for the students, and for creative ways to interact

with and help them. For the current generation entering universities, intervention in their high anxiety state might be one of the best things we can do. Since the recent Covid-19 epidemic forced universities to transition to online courses, many more faculty now have the skills to reach out to our newest students using the technology-mediated sources that they will respond to. Teaching with kindness, respect, and customization to each student is within our skill sets. God does provide.

ENDNOTE

[1] The Old Testament exception is when Saul and his servant are hunting the donkeys and Saul decides to go back home so his father will not be anxious (I Sam 9:5,19). The other possible exception is when Paul talks about his daily pressure of concern for the young churches (II Cor 11:28).

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