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Book Review

Good Anxiety: Harnessing the Power of the Most Misunderstood Emotion

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Suzuki, W., & Fitzpatrick, B. (2021). Good anxiety: Harnessing the power of the most misunderstood emotion. Atria Books.

This book should appeal to a broad audience of readers since anxiety is an emotion that everyone of us experiences from time to time in one way or another. Moreover, those of us who are involved in English language teaching and learning (as teachers or learners) should find its opinions and ideas particularly pertinent. For various language learning, assessing or testing experiences may tend to evoke a mild, moderate or intense experience of this emotion in learners. However, our perception of anxiety as language teachers and learners need not always be negative. In this book, Dr. Wendy Suzuki and Billie Fitzpatrick offer a toolbox of strategies to help regulate anxiety and turn it into what they refer to as a ‘superpower’ that works for rather than against you.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part of the book defines anxiety, compares everyday anxiety to clinical disorders then moves on to consider how the brain’s plasticity offers us the opportunity to regulate our emotions and thereby better cope with anxiety in life. Case studies exemplify how negative ways of coping with anxiety can be ‘unlearned’ and replaced with positive ways of living with anxiety. In other words, self-awareness is a key for unlocking the possibility of regulating our emotions by reframing negative

perceptions of situations into positive ones, thereby changing bad anxiety into good anxiety.

The second part of the book focuses more on the ‘superpowers’ that can help us overcome bad anxiety. A summary of a review by Gang Wu et al (2013) lists seven characteristics associated with building resilience to bad anxiety: optimism, cognitive flexibility and reappraisal, social support, humour, physical exercise, altruism, and mindfulness such as meditation (Suzuki & Fitzpatrick, 2021, pp. 67–69). Dr. Wendy Suzuki also shares her own story about how she has successfully overcome stress and anxiety in her own life. She did this in part, by improving her diet, exercising more regularly, doing a daily tea meditation, and making sure to always get enough sleep. These lifestyle changes not only improved her mood but also helped her move on from simply surviving to thriving. She notes that anxiety can take us either to a ‘good’ or ‘bad zone’ largely depending on how we perceive and manage it.

A noteworthy concept, the roots of which the authors trace back to Yerkes and Dodson (1908), is that an optimal level of arousal (and anxiety) maximises performance (Suzuki & Fitzpatrick, 2021, p. 83). The trunk and branches of this concept are also somewhat contemporised through reference to the more recent work of Csikszentmihalyi (1991) and Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009). Their concept of *flow*: “a deeply engaged state where high skill/performance accompanies a seemingly relaxed, almost effortless state of mind, one of intense enjoyment and immersion . . . when the right combination of cognitive, physical and emotional features almost magically align” (Suzuki & Fitzpatrick, 2021, p. 83) is well worth reading about.

The third part of this book provides an array of what it calls “Tools to Calm, Flip, and Channel Your Anxiety”. This includes several surveys to ascertain how anxious you are through interpretative score guides. Many more strategies for managing anxiety are included in this part of the book. A description of Dr. Wendy Suzuki’s tea meditation is included on pages 238 and 239 of the book.

While the book's narrative has been written in a highly accessible colloquial style that should appeal mostly to a general non-specialist North American audience, it is nevertheless underpinned by an extensive survey and deep understanding of relevant research literature. Superscript numbers throughout the text do not link to footnotes on the same page but rather to a notes section near the back of the book. An index section follows this. These final two sections should prove useful for English language teaching specialists and researchers who wish to further explore this book's academic foundations by reviewing relevant academic research literature. Just under half of the citations noted were relevant academic and research literature published in the last 10 years or so from 2012 onwards. Finally, I must say that it was not my intention to attempt to summarise the entire rich narrative of this book in this review but rather to give an overview of some of its main brushstrokes along with a few of its more interesting details. Overall, I would recommend this somewhat insightful book to English language teachers and researchers who are interested in reappraising their views about anxiety and who also wish to find new ways of turning it to their own and all students' advantage.

The Author

Martin Murray worked as an English Language Instructor at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute during the latter part of 2005. He has a Bachelor of Education (Languages/Asian Studies), a Master of Applied Linguistics, a Master of Educational Administration, Diploma in Theology, and Doctor of Education. In 2013–2014, he was editor-in-chief of *The Newsletter* of the International Language Centre at Da-Yeh University, Taiwan and in 2014–2015, he worked as an Assistant Professor in the Applied English Department of Hsin Sheng College of Medical Care and Management, Taiwan. He has many years of experience teaching English to secondary and tertiary students in Asia. He is currently a native-speaking English Teacher within the NET Scheme in Hong Kong.

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