Annihilation Anxieties are found most clearly in panic attacks, nightmares, psychic trauma, fulminating psychoses, suicidal crises and temper tantrums. These catastrophic anxieties constitute the vocabulary of panic, psychic trauma and the other conditions just enumerated. The basic danger involves a threat to psychic survival, to the sense of self and the ability to function. Such apprehensions may be felt as a present menace or as an anticipation of an imminent catastrophe. The experience entails fantasies and/or feelings of helplessness in the face of inner and/or outer dangers against which the person feels he can take no protective action. Such anxieties are found across the psychopathological spectrum, and are especially consequential in all psychopathology beyond the neurotic range. Both descriptive features and therapeutic implications will be illustrated and explored. Case material will be provided by the instructor and invited from the class participants.

A major goal of this course is to sensitize the class participants to these frequently found primitive anxieties and their handling psychoanalytically. There will be ample opportunities for questions and discussion.

New developments regarding Annihilation Anxieties included in this course are:

1. A detailed clarification of how Annihilation Anxieties can be seen to constitute a fifth Psychic Danger, and how the inclusion of Annihilation Anxieties in the Danger Series increases the clinical usefulness of the psychoanalytic theory of anxiety;

2. How a specification of the psychostructural component of Annihilation Anxieties compliments the fantasy content aspect that is usually found in the literature;

3. A further delineation and refinement of levels of AA described earlier (Hurvich, 1991);

4. The relationship between Annihilation Anxieties and what I call the Overwhelmed/Disorganized Conditions referred to above;

5. A survey of 30 years of empirical research measuring AA.

**Week 1: Annihilation Anxieties as mental apprehensions/fantasies**

- I will delineate seven interrelated Dimensions of Annihilation Anxieties and sub-dimensions (in parentheses). A key Dimension is of being Overwhelmed (smothered, flooded, overstimulated, loss of control, inability to function). A second Dimension is of being Merged (devoured, absorbed, fused, incorporated). A third is a fear or experience
of being **Fragmented** (falling apart, shattered, disintegrated, going insane, melting). A fourth, feeling **Invaded** (intruded on, penetrated, persecuted/tortured). A fifth, of being **abandoned** (cast out, excluded, rejected, falling). A sixth is feeling **Trapped** (cornered, ensnared, fenced in, confined, blocked). And the seventh, feeling **Destroyed** (killed, immobilized, poisoned, demoralized, crushed).

- **Annihilation Anxieties Modified by Psychostructural Considerations.** Major structural factors are the extent to which the apprehensions delineated above are Desymbolized or Symbolized, Uncontrolled or Controlled, experienced as Intolerable or Tolerable, Disorganized or Organized, Somatized vs. Desomatized, reflect Primary Process or Secondary Process characteristics. And how much they demonstrate Reflective Awareness, Affect Tolerance, Anger, Regression, Secondary Anxiety, Trust, and/or Assimilability of the Experience. And, are there indications of Arousal of Previous Disturbing Memories and Fantasies. And, apprehensions over Loss of Self and Inability to Function.

**Readings** *(No readings are required. The items are suggested)*


**Week 2: Instructor Clinical Case Illustrations**

- Material from a range of patients in psychodynamic psychotherapy/psychoanalysis will be presented to illuminate ways in which annihilation anxieties occur, clinically and how they may influence the clinical process.

**Week 3: Annihilation Anxieties as formulated by key psychoanalytic theorists**

- Here, there is a comparison and contrast of Freud’s Traumatic Anxiety, Klein’s Persecutory Anxiety, Winnicott’s Primitive Agonies, Bion’s Nameless Dread and the views of other psychoanalysts who have described related apprehensions. The contributions of each of these theorists to the instructor’s formulation of Annihilation Anxieties will be highlighted.

**Readings** *(No readings are required. The items are suggested)*


Weeks 4 & 5: Levels of AA: Central Issues related to Psychic Trauma, Panic and Nightmares are here considered

- The features that distinguish levels of AA are the issues of subjective intolerability, obligatory efforts to escape those unbearable feelings, regression/disorganization in key ego functions, sense of self and levels of object relating. Components of reality testing such as reflective function and blurring of the distinction between past and present are found to varying degrees, as well as relative failures of integrative functioning.

Readings (No readings are required. The items are suggested)

Week 6: Major Defensive Efforts against Annihilation Anxieties

- Major Defensive Efforts
- Regression of functioning
- Dissociation/splitting
- Encapsulation (Hopper)
- Spatial Defenses
- Primitive Defenses

More generally

Readings (No readings are required. The items are suggested)
Week 7: Annihilation Anxieties in Psychopathology

- I will review the clinical manifestations of annihilation anxieties in Psychotic conditions, Borderline levels of functioning, Eating Disorders, Perversions, and in the various Overwhelmed/Disorganized Syndromes (Panic, Nightmares, Psychic Trauma, Temper Tantrums)

Readings: (No readings are required. The items are suggested)

Weeks 7 & 8: Matriculants Case Presentations (to be scheduled in advance)