

Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety

By Daniel Smith

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A wildly acclaimed *New York Times* bestseller, this uplifting, smart, and funny memoir provides hope and understanding to the 40 million Americans who suffer from anxiety disorders.

Daniel Smith's Monkey Mind is the stunning articulation of what it is like to live with anxiety. As he travels through anxiety's demonic layers, Smith defangs the disorder with great humor and evocatively expresses its self-destructive absurdities and painful internal coherence. Aaron Beck, the most influential doctor in modern psychotherapy, says that "Monkey Mind does for anxiety what William Styron's Darkness Visible did for depression." Neurologist and bestselling writer Oliver Sacks says, "I read Monkey Mind with admiration for its bravery and clarity. . . . I broke out into explosive laughter again and again." Here, finally, comes relief and recognition to all those who want someone to put what they feel, or what their loved ones feel, into words.

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Editorial Review

Review
“I read *Monkey Mind* with admiration for its bravery and clarity. Daniel Smith’s anxiety is matched by a wonderful sense of the comic, and it is this which makes *Monkey Mind* not only a dark, pain-filled book but a hilariously funny one, too. I broke out into explosive laughter again and again.” (Oliver Sacks *bestselling author of The Mind’s Eye and Musicophilia*)

“*Monkey Mind* does for anxiety what William Styron’s *Darkness Visible* did for depression.” (Aaron T. Beck, father of cognitive therapy)

“You don't need a Jewish mother, or a profound sweating problem, to feel Daniel Smith's pain in *Monkey Mind.* His memoir treats what must be the essential ailment of our time—chronic anxiety—and it does so with wisdom, honesty, and the kind of belly laughs that can only come from troubles transformed.” (Chad Harbach *author of The Art of Fielding*)

“Daniel Smith maps the jagged contours of anxiety with such insight, humor and compassion that the result is, oddly, calming. There are countless gems in these pages, including a fresh take on the psycho-pathology of chronic nail biting, an ill-fated ménage a trois—and the funniest perspiration scene since Albert Brooks’ sweaty performance in *Broadcast News*. Read this book. You have nothing to lose but your heart palpitations, and your Xanax habit.” (Eric Weiner *author of The Geography of Bliss*)

“I don’t know Daniel Smith, but I do want to give him a hug. His book is so bracingly honest, so hilarious, so sharp, it’s clear there’s one thing he doesn’t have to be anxious about: Whether or not he’s a great writer.” (A.J. Jacobs *author of Drop Dead Healthy and The Year of Living Biblically*)

“Daniel Smith has a written a wise, funny book, a great mix of startling memoir and fascinating medical and literary history, all of it delivered with humor and a true generosity of spirit. I only got anxious in the last part, when I worried the book would end.” (Sam Lipsyte *author of Home Land and The Ask*)

“In this unforgettable, surprisingly hilarious memoir, journalist and professor Smith chronicles his head-clanging, flop-sweating battles with acute anxiety. . . . He’s clear-eyed and funny about his condition’s painful absurdities.” (*People (four stars)*)

“This book will change the way you think about anxiety…. Daniel Smith's writing dazzled me….. Painful experiences are described with humor, and complex ideas are made accessible…. *Monkey Mind* is a rare gem.” (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*)

“*Monkey Mind* is fleet, funny, and productively exhausting.” (Ben Greenman *The New York Times Book Review*)

“Superb writing [and] marvelous humor . . . If you're chronically anxious and want to better explain to a loved one what you're going through, hand them *Monkey Mind*.” (*Psychology Today*)

“You’ll laugh out loud many times during Daniel Smith’s *Monkey Mind*. . . . In the time-honored tradition of leavening pathos with humor, Smith has managed to create a memoir that doesn’t entirely let him off the hook for bad behavior . . . but promotes understanding of the similarly afflicted.” (*O Magazine*)

“The book is one man’s story, but at its core it’s about all of us.” (*Booklist*)

“[Smith] adroitly dissects his relentless mental and physical symptoms with intelligence and humor. . . . An intelligent, intimate and touching journey through one man’s angst-ridden life.” (*The Star Tribune (Minneapolis)*)

“A true treasure-trove of insight laced with humor and polished prose.” (*Kirkus Reviews (starred)*)

“*Monkey Mind* is a perfect 10…. Hilarious, well-informed and intelligent, Smith conveys the seriousness of his situation without becoming pathetic or unrelatable, and what’s more, he offers useful information for both sufferers and non-sufferers…. He gives us a reason to stay with him on every page.” (*Newsday*)

“Here's one less thing for Daniel Smith to worry about: He sure can write. In *Monkey Mind*, a memoir of his lifelong struggles with anxiety, he defangs the experience with a winning combination of humor and understanding.” (Heller McAlpin *NPR.org*)

“For fellow anxiety-sufferers, it’s like finding an Anne of Green Gables–style kindred spirit.” (*New York magazine’s Vulture.com*)

“[*Monkey Mind*] will be recognized in the years to come as the preeminent first-person narrative of the anxiously lived life.” (*Psychiatric Times*)

About the Author
Daniel Smith is the author of *Muses, Madmen, and Prophets* and a contributor to *The Atlantic, New York* magazine, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Slate*. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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Monkey Mind

1.

genesis

The story begins with two women, naked, in a living room in upstate New York.

In the living room, the blinds have been drawn. The coffee table, which is stained and littered with ashtrays, empty bottles, and a tall blue bong, has been pushed against the far wall. The couch has been unfurled. It is a cheap couch, with no springs or gears or wooden endoskeleton; its cushions unfold flat onto the floor with a flat slapping sound: thwack. Also on the floor are several clear plastic bags containing dental dams, spermicidal lubricant, and latex gloves. There is everything, it seems to me, but an oxygen tank and a gurney.

I am hunched in an awkward squat behind a woman on all fours, a woman who is blond and overweight. Her buttocks are exposed and her knees are spread wide—“presenting,” they call it in most mammalian species. I am sixteen years old. I have never before seen a vagina up close, an in-person vagina. My prior experience has been limited to two-dimensional vaginas, usually with creases and binding staples marring the view. To mark the occasion, I would like to shake the vagina’s hand, talk to it for a while. How do you do, vagina? Would you like some herbal tea? But the vagina is businesslike and gruff. An impatient vagina, a waiting vagina. A real bureaucrat of a vagina.

I inch closer on the tips of my toes, knees bent, hands out, fingers splayed—portrait of the writer as a young lecher. The air in the room smells like a combination of a women's locker room and an off-track betting parlor, all smoke and sweat and scented lotions. My condom, the first I've had occasion to wear in anything other than experimental conditions, pinches and dims sensation, so that my penis feels like what I imagine a phantom limb must feel like. The second woman has brown hair done up in curls, round hips, and dark, biscuit-wide nipples. She lies on the couch, waiting. As I proceed, foot by foot, struggling to keep my erection and my balance at the same time, her eyes coax me forward. She is touching herself.

Now the target vagina is only a foot away. Now I feel like a military plane, preparing for in-air refueling. I feel, also, like a symbol. This is why I am here, ultimately. This is why, when the invitation was extended ("Do you want to stay? I want you to stay"), I accepted, and waited who knows how long in the dark room for them to return. How could I have said no? What I had been offered was every boy's dream. Two women. The dream.

Through a haze of cannabis and cheap beer, I bolster my courage with this: the dream. What I am about to do is not for myself. It is for my people, my tribe. Dear friends, this is not my achievement. This is your achievement. Your victory. A fulfillment of your desires. Oh poor, suffering, groin-sore boys of the eleventh grade, I hereby dedicate this vagina to—

It is then that the woman coughs. It is a rattling, hacking cough. A cough of nicotine and phlegm. And the vagina, which is connected to the cough's apparatus by some internal musculature I could not possibly have imagined before this moment, winks at me. With its wild, bushy, thorny lashes, it winks. My heart flutters. My breathing quickens. I have been winked at by a vagina that looks like Andy Rooney. I feel a tightness in my chest and I think to myself, Oh dear lord, what have I gotten myself into?

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shirley Daniels:

Book is definitely written, printed, or highlighted for everything. You can learn everything you want by a e-book. Book has a different type. To be sure that book is important matter to bring us around the world. Next to that you can your reading expertise was fluently. A reserve Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety will make you to end up being smarter. You can feel considerably more confidence if you can know about everything. But some of you think this open or reading the book make you bored. It is not necessarily make you fun. Why they may be thought like that? Have you looking for best book or acceptable book with you?

Helen Arnold:

Spent a free a chance to be fun activity to try and do! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or their very own friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, likely to beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your personal free time/ holiday? Could be reading a book might be option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of publication that you should read. If you want to try out look for book, may be the guide untitled Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety can be very good book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

Dianne Haire:

The reason why? Because this Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety is an unordinary book that the inside of the guide waiting for you to snap that but latter it will jolt you with the secret that inside. Reading this book next to it was fantastic author who also write the book in such awesome way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining way but still convey the meaning fully. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of advantages than the other book get such as help improving your talent and your critical thinking method. So , still want to delay having that book? If I have been you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

Richard Jimenez:

What is your hobby? Have you heard that question when you got college students? We believe that that concern was given by teacher with their students. Many kinds of hobby, Every individual has different hobby. And you know that little person similar to reading or as examining become their hobby. You need to know that reading is very important and book as to be the factor. Book is important thing to increase you knowledge, except your own teacher or lecturer. You discover good news or update with regards to something by book. A substantial number of sorts of books that can you take to be your object. One of them is actually Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety.

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