

The Murder of Julia Kraft

By Alan Karbelnig, PhD, ABPP

Yesterday afternoon, while shopping at Whole Foods, Julia Kraft, a senior partner at Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher, had her first panic attack. She was flooded by profound anxiety at the precise moment she dropped the Green Giant frozen peas into the shopping cart, while trying to decide between the Hanover's Golden Niblets and the 365 Everyday Value Supersweet Yellow Corn. Her breath caught in her throat, a tight knot formed in her chest. She barely remembers the drive home in her Mercedes SUV, but she recalls speeding, spilling her Starbucks latte onto her Apple iPad II on the passenger seat, and then feeling furious as well as terrified.

As soon as she got home, Julia took a Xanax, a mild tranquilizer manufactured by Pfizer. Her husband John greeted her with concern in his Calvin Klein jeans and a Rag-and-Bone casual shirt that emphasized his muscular frame. He walked her to their patio. They sat down on their Brown and Jordan patio furniture and talked, looking out at their Pottery Barn planters and the Smith and Hawkins decor. Julia didn't have a clue what had set her off. At John's suggestion, they searched the internet, first Web MD and then Wikipedia, where they read the DSM-IV criteria for a panic attack. They located a psychotherapist using Psychology Today online. Ernest Jones, PhD, PsyD, ABPP, a psychologist specializing in CBT and DBT, quickly returned her message, giving her an appointment time for the next morning. Julia used her Verizon cell phone and her Gmail account to cancel her morning appointments.

In an effort to soothe her, John suggested that they go to dinner. The Xanax had taken effect, Julia felt better, and she agreed. They got into his Ford F-150, drove to Houstons and had the special, sharing a bottle of Grgich Hills Chardonnay. On the way home they picked up dessert from the La Brea Bakery. Julia's anxiety returned by then; she took another Xanax. When she struggled to fall asleep that night, her husband gave her Ambien, made by Pfizer's competitor, Sanofi-Aventis.

Next morning, Julia prepares for her appointment thoughtfully. She showers using L'Occitane soap and Nexxus shampoo. She next smoothes Neutrogena light sesame formula body lotion onto her legs and arms, and massages Origins Plantscription anti-aging serum and

Clinique Moisture Surge Gel onto her face. Next she applies Lancome Maquicake UV Infinite Everlasting Compact Foundation. Wearing her Felina underwear, Julia puts on her Ann Taylor slacks, her Anthropologie top, and her Nine West heels. She leans over and kisses John, still nestled in their Ralph Lauren sheets, exits their Kaufman-and-Broad house, and uses her Genie remote to open the garage door.

As Julia drives the few miles to Dr. Jones' office at San Marina psychiatric, passing a Chevron station, a Jack-In-The-Box, a Jiffy Lube, and a Marshall's Department Store, she feels terror again. She realizes that she has ceased to exist as an *individual*. Not only have her desires for her material possessions been implanted through the media, but she realizes that outside influences – social, cultural, institutional – account for virtually all of her life choices, from her university degree, to her career, to her current family lifestyle, to her recreational pursuits, to the kind of future she imagines for her children. By the time she enters Dr. Jones' office, well-appointed with Ethan Allen Furniture, Julia is in the grip of acute panic.

Dr. Jones greets her in the waiting room with a warm smile, clutching a handbook entitled *Structured Psychosocial Interventions (STI)*. He escorts her into his office and, peering through his Belinsky prescription eyeglasses, has her take the Beck Anxiety Inventory on his Hewlett-Packard desktop which he purchased with his United Airline Chase Bank credit card. (The results are instantly scored by Pearson Assessments utilizing his SBC Global DSL line).

Dr. Jones informs her that panic attacks are the result of biological factors, ways of thinking, and social stressors, and that upwards of 20 percent of Americans suffer from them. Although this fact also resides somewhere in the far reaches of his mind, he fails to tell *that the average American is exposed to tens of thousands of brand names each day*. As he hands her an Avery-Dennison notepad and instructs her, with a click of his Waterman pen, to begin writing down her automatic thoughts, Julia runs screaming from his office—ripping off each piece of clothing, every accessory—and into the neighboring woods. She has not been seen since.