

Understanding Fear and Violence

by

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Fear is one of the most experienced and denied emotions known to mankind. Every living creature experiences fear to varying degrees when faced with violence when there is the perception that injury or death may occur. But humans are different, humans will both experience fear of injury and death but will also experience fear of losing face in front of their peers or even complete strangers. Both types of fear are virtually the same but manifest differently. I often ask students to define fear without (of course) using the word fear in the definition or stating a symptom of that fear. Over the years I have heard many different statements that virtually all use a symptom of fear in the meaning because symptoms are what people experience and understand. We will discuss the symptoms a little later.

I define fear as "A complete uncertainty of future events." Now think about that for a moment. Why are you afraid? You do not know the outcome of what you are facing. That logically will breed apprehension and fear. If you knew with *complete certainty* that you would not get hurt if attacked and that you would completely prevail without so much as a broken nail, you would not experience fear. Ultimately, we do not "know" the outcome, not really. Even when thoroughly confident in your ability to face whatever it is you are facing.

There are five primary emotions:

Love

Hate

Jealousy

Anger

Fear

Which of these emotions is the most powerful emotion?

NOTE: This is not a scientifically generated order just my recall of what people generally say when asked these questions in my 35 years of teaching.

Most women will say, Love, as they are the nurturers and caregivers. Followed by Jealousy, Anger and Hate run close, followed by Fear.

Most men will say Anger as their physical makeup lends itself to aggression. Followed by Jealousy or Hate then Love and Fear to come in last.

So, how do we determine which of the five emotions is the most powerful? Some may read the above statements and claim that is it obvious. For women, it is love, and for men it is anger! Both would be incorrect. Which of the five emotions do NOT take time? It is fear. Falling in love takes time. Hate also takes time to manifest. Jealousy requires recognition of an act, a photo or an email, etc. to spur a response. Even the shortest tempered person in the world will not get angry enough so fast to manifest into action as quickly as fear will grip the body. People may argue the subtler points of the first four and the order in which they fall, but that would be irrelevant to this discussion. Fear, fear hits you like a lightning bolt; no one will dispute that.

What happens "physically" when you experience fear? This is what people will recognize as fear. Starting from the ground up. Legs are feeling shaky and weak. Some state a need to urinate or defecate, nausea, difficulty breathing, heart pounding, lightheadedness, dry mouth, sweaty palms. No one, I mean no one will say that any of those symptoms feel good. In fact, if you went to the doctor and the doctor enters the exam room and asks what seems to be the problem, and you then respond with that list of symptoms, it is very likely the doctor would order a large battery of tests because there is something wrong and you and you are sick. Everybody knows this! Most people will reason, "If It Feels Bad, It Must Be Bad."

What most people don't know, is as bad as those symptoms feel they are a perfect thing when it comes to surviving a violent assault. Starting in the extremities. Your legs and arms feel weak and shaky due to a Parasympathetic (or automatic) physical response called "Vassal Constriction." This forces the blood in your limbs to the core of your body by restricting blood to the extremities. This would protect your extremities from excessive bleeding if that were to occur. It also serves to lessen the feeling of pain in your limbs. Think of it this way, when you sleep in an odd position, and your arm falls asleep, and it is completely numb. That is due to lack of blood supply.

All this blood restriction causes your blood pressure to increase as your heart attempts to do its job and supply the arms and legs blood. Elevated blood pressure causes slight restrictions in breathing because of the increased presence of blood in your core. Think of post-Thanksgiving meal. However, the presence of adrenaline and more specifically norepinephrine causes bronchial dilation which will help your breathing for the duration.

The Adrenal Glands are located right on top of the kidneys and when adrenaline is released the physiological and metabolic changes are dramatic. Very basically, insulin secretion is inhibited, the pancreas secretes glucagon, a hormone that promotes the breakdown of glycogen to glucose (sugar) in the liver, which in short feeds the muscles and blood fuel for the extreme physical excursion that is to follow. Both strength and endurance dramatically improve.

Like they say, knowing is half the battle. Once you realize that your body is preparing itself to run or fight, you "mentally" should be able to cope with these physical changes. How do we do this? The first step is to accept the fact that you are going to experience these physical changes and there is nothing you can do to stop it. Secondly, accept that these changes and feelings are a good thing, that you are stronger and tougher because you are (it's science). Thirdly, accept that you can channel this physical "supercharge" into action. What I encourage my students to do is say to themselves "Thank You, Now I'm Ready." I have used this many times and so have many of my students.

In closing, everybody experiences fear. If someone says, they are not afraid of anything; they are either lying, chemically altered or a sociopath. There is nothing to be ashamed of admitting you experience fear. I have been in many fights, and I can assure you I experienced fear in every one of them.

An excellent way to develop this ability to channel these physical changes into action is to participate in a Fear Management or Fear Inoculation program. In a controlled environment, you can experience fear and learn how to manage how these physiological changes affect you. The more you experience it, the less dramatic it will seem. These training programs are sometimes called "Adrenal Stress, Scenario-Based Training." In these programs, you are placed in a scenario where you are caused to experience the adrenaline release and must function.

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