
Fear And Understanding

The average person ingests eight spiders per year while sleeping. A ridiculous and yet commonly heard myth that continues to spread. It is not a secret that even just the thought of spiders is enough to elicit fear out of people, but many people may not know why society has this automatic response. Many people may also not know why it is that a simple arachnid is able to produce such a large emotion out of the general population. Fear is a common emotion and response that many people “have” but can often be one of the most complex. Researchers have spent years studying the responses of fear, 5 physical aspects, the causes, and how to combat it. Coping mechanisms for fear are hard to navigate when there is little understanding of fear. It is certain that everyone fears something and there are ways to help lower or get rid of that fear.

Everyday people deal with fears. Fear is a natural response. There are two parts to this response; biochemical and emotional. The fight or flight response is one of the most common responses to fear and it also happens to be the biochemical response. In some cases it can be a fight, flight or freeze response. The emotional response is often much more personal. It's almost as if taking a trip on a wild roller coaster. Some people may like the roller coaster and enjoy the ride because they love the feeling of adrenaline pumping through their veins. Others may not like thrilling situations and they avoid them because of their fear of them. Fears could be rational and keep one safe from danger or irrational that cause one to panic, distress or maybe even avoid things that are necessary for one to learn and grow. “Fear is activated before a brain can process or evaluate what is happening. When the brain gets enough information it can realize there is no real danger or react to the danger.” (Fritscher). This process can take a matter of seconds or it can take much longer depending on the person and the situation. There was an experiment done on fear. Simunovic and others explain that In the experiment there were eighty-four students. These students were from Hokkaido University thirty-four females were in 16 sessions of experiments. There were eight females in one session. Thirty-two of the participants were part of a bilateral PSG; 26 of these females were deciders, they were given a red button. Twenty-six of the females were called the predictor. They didn't have a button. They would predict the decider's choice. There was also a confederate. The confederate's choice didn't affect anyone because his/her choice was not told to anyone until the end of the game. The confederates were assigned the role of predictor in the unilateral condition. (Simunovic and others)

In the end many of the participants engaged in attacks preemptively to avoid a potential threat. This happened without incentive. They also developed another game called “the preemptive strike game” or (PSG) for short. This game was to show how people can become aggressive when they are defending themselves. Simunovic and others found out that, “the rate at which participants attacked an individual representing a potential threat was not influenced by their minimal group membership; participants were no less likely to preemptively attack a member of their own minimal group and no more likely to use aggression against members of another minimal group.”(Simunovic and others). Simunovic and others thought that they needed to examine “fear-based defensive aggression, rather than anger-based spiteful aggression, plays in inter-individual and inter-group conflict.”(Simunovic and others)

Fear can produce physical reactions in humans. These reactions include: "...sweating, increased heart rate, and high adrenaline levels that make one extremely alert." (Fritscher). These symptoms are part of the fight or flight response which is part of the biochemical response. The biochemical response is most likely due to evolution. Fear is complicated and learning about it can help society make more sense of the emotion itself and the human brain. According to a website reviewed by kids behavioral health experts called Nemours, When one's brain senses danger they react almost instantly. One's brain sends signals to their nervous system. When this happens it causes a physical response for that person maybe like their heart beating faster, heavily breathing, higher blood pressure. Blood can also pump to certain muscle groups to prepare the body for a physical action (like running or fighting). Skin can sweat to keep one's body cool. Some people might experience sensations in the stomach, chest, hands, legs or possibly even head. These sensations of fear can be strong or mild. (Nemours). Fear doesn't just create one physical reaction, but several. Sometimes these reactions can be small and yet they are still noticeable. The severity of these reactions can reach high levels and in turn cause more harm than help. These reactions can easily lead into a dire situation.

The numerous reactions to our fears can cause a severe amount of stress in one's life. Segal and others (a group of pediatricians) say it is possible that all the stress can lead to some or all of these issues; ...depression, anxiety, sleep issues, autoimmune diseases, digestive problems, skin conditions, heart disease, weight problems, reproductive issues, thinking and memory issues. (Segal and others). To think, all these critical issues are caused by stress which is only one part of exploring fear. This can easily become a quite serious issue, especially for people with preexisting conditions if they have many fears or if they have such a strong negative emotional response to fear. There are several variables that can affect one's stress levels and it is best to start with surroundings. An individual must start with the people they are surrounded by and their support group. Are they positive or negative? What are the outcomes of being surrounded with a positive and negative support group? Segal and others say "A strong network of supportive friends and family members is an enormous buffer against stress. When one has others that they can count on, life's pressures don't seem as overwhelming. On the flip side, the lonelier and more isolated one is, the greater one's risk of succumbing to stress." (Segal and others). If one has a negative support group they can seek out a positive support group. They have the option to seek out a positive support group by going to a therapist or finding an emotional support group where members have similar issues.

One may also need to look at their sense of control, their attitude, and their overall outlook on the world. Being confident and having a good outlook on things can be extremely helpful though one may not be able to do this or it may be just be difficult. However, it is always worth trying to expand someone's perspectives. If one doesn't have a great outlook it can be helpful to talk to people who do, so that person has the opportunity to gain an opposite perspective and possibly adopt some of their views. Parochial view points always play a role in our outlook. Segal gives a fantastic explanation, stating, 'The way one looks at life can usually make a large difference in one's ability to handle stress diligently. It can also affect the inevitable challenges of life. Being optimistic can make a vast difference. Optimism and being hopeful in general. It can even make one less vulnerable. People with lots of stress learn to embrace these inevitable challenges in turn also giving them a stronger sense of humor.' (Segal and others) Of course this isn't always going to be true but it can be quite helpful in some cases. Occasionally our emotions can control the way we react to different things. They can easily make someone more stressed, nervous, scared or agitated. The last example is one's knowledge, experience and preparation

1. "The more one knows about a stressful situation, including how long it will last and what to expect, the easier it is to cope. To illustrate, if one goes into surgery with a realistic picture of what to expect post-op, a painful recovery will be less stressful than if one were expecting to bounce back immediately." (Segal and others)

Fear has many factors. Vytal reads about Phelps' learning and how "Fear can be learned through direct experience with a threat, but it can also be learned via social means such as verbal warnings or observing others. Phelps's research has shown that the expression of socially learned fears shares neural mechanisms with fears that have been acquired through direct experience." (Vytal)

People all over the world fear the unknown. Kristina H, an editor of the mental health and addictions community, says that people base their choices off of experience, mental calculation, intuition, habit, pressure, lack of control, and when others decide (H). Everyone copes with the fear of the unknown in different ways and the decisions that one makes can affect the way that they deal with this fear. At times one may be forced into the unknown because change is definitely inevitable.

Fear is a complex emotion that can elicit several responses out of a person. Physical and emotional reactions are common responses when faced with our fears and it is important that society takes the time to understand the stress involved with these responses. Fear can be a serious issue for some who cannot handle the adrenaline or anxiety that comes along with it. Despite the information already made on studying fear, researchers still continue to explore the implications of it. Understanding the biochemical and emotional responses humans have toward fear brings society one step closer to understanding the emotion and the brain as a whole.

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