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ENGL1102-014

November 15, 2004

The Administration of Fear in the United States

Fear and fright are emotions that have profound psychological impacts on Americans. Some people say that it is fun to be scared and in a controlled setting where the fear is consciously acknowledged, such as a scary movie or amusement park ride, that is true. The unconscious fear that is being driven into most Americans by the much loved media, the trusted government and the celebrated religious organizations is fear of the harmful sort, not only harmful to the person experiencing the fear, but also to the rest of the general population and perhaps to democracy itself.

Psychological conditioning is the primary reason that fear is dangerous. When humans are repeatedly exposed to situations in which they are scared, feel in danger, or are otherwise psychologically aroused to react there is a mental tenancy to make that a part of the daily thought process, even after the offending stimulus is removed. This conditioning also is responsible for converting fear to stress. In most people this conditioning will reverse after a few years of not having an offending stimulus. In other people this becomes a psychological disorder, such as paranoid personality disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder or even dissociative identity disorder. In paranoid personality disorder the fear becomes the most generalized form of fear able to be experienced, there is a general fear and suspicion of all other people, their motives and events they are involved in. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) when derived from a previous conditioned fear response is developed as a coping mechanism and as a



defense for the ego (the rational part of the personality [Carson 51]). To avoid fear and stress of life the OCD candidate begins to create patterns and processes that he/she feels will make life safer. OCD patients often have compulsions that involve checking door locks, verifying that stoves are off, and other things they feel will make their lives safer [Carson 181]. These actions are performed in a set repetition that makes the patient feel safe. Dissociative identity disorder involves a splitting of a single personality or the addition of new fragments of a personality to the cognitive array. Dissociative identity is another of the disorders that is theorized to be a coping mechanism. Long term stress and fear cause the fragmentation to occur to relieve some of the stresses on the ego. People with the disorder escape reality through the other personalities and often have adventures that are opposite to the safe nature of the host personality [Carson 250].

The next danger to a society that is being pumped with fear is the fight-or-flight response system. Any time psychological arousal occurs due to a stimulus the natural fight-or-flight system becomes active. The system will cause either a physical flight, with the person affected running away from the stimulus or finding some way to avoid the stimulus. The flight component only becomes dangerous when a fugue state is reached. A fugue state results in a person entering an amnesic state and having "flights" in a situation similar to dissociative identity disorder, except without the residual personality fragments [Carson 249]. In the most severe cases linked to fear and panic people from large cities escape to places they identify as being safer. The fight component of the flight-or-flight system is the most dangerous is what causes the general threat to society. When a human can not remove itself from a situation where there is a threat, such as



daily life, then the fight response is used to manage the threat [Carson 264]. This fight response could be anything that resembles a physical defense and gives the human a feeling of security. This can be the purchase of weapons, the approval of a war or just generally being more reactive to day-to-day threats. The common advice given to people when approaching wild animals is to avoid provoking them or trapping them. This is because the animals will react violently. When fight-or-flight is fully active it bypasses the conscious mind and humans have the same natural instinctive reactions as scared animals.

People in this society want to always be informed and as such they turn to the media to provide them with an accurate overview of what is happening in the world around them. Instead of getting that overview, they are being given an assault of coverage of violent events and reasons to fear the world they live in. The media is giving a false impression of what life is really like in the United States. Positive news does not sell anymore. If there is not a threat to personal safety, directly or indirectly, or some great health risk, then it is highly unlikely that anyone is interested. The media has conditioned its audience to be interested in those topics and to respond accordingly. The addictive pattern is dangerous to human psychological health. The media is abusing the natural human fight-or-flight response mechanism, causing humans to react mentally and in turn commercially. Almost every news story provides some hint to an action that can be taken to prevent situations from occurring; most of them are via commercial means. After any major home fire where there is a loss of life there is a reminder that smoke detectors are important safety devices. While this is true, most people know this and it is not necessary to give additional reminders. In a recent



observation of television news reports there was an average of 3.5 security system ads in a single half hour of news [Eyewitness], [WBTV]. This volume of that type of advertising is not present in other forms of television during the same time span. Everything in commerce is carefully marketed to its target audience at just the right time. If immediately after a news report of a home break-in with an associated murder an ad for a security system ad is presented, the viewer is more likely to purchase the system than if the ad had not been preceded by the report. The media abuses its audience's psychological weaknesses and creates its own vulnerabilities in the ego by making it feel threatened. The best analogy for this type of attack is the common computer virus such as the Trojan. Much like this virus, the media makes itself appealing (opening stories with a lot of interest) and gets the audience hooked. Once the media is inside the mind of its audience it has open access to input whatever it wants (similar to how the virus delivers its payload and begins replicating). This all happens very covertly and often goes unnoticed by the audience. In addition to using fear to create commerce that fear also has an impact on the psychological condition of some viewers. One of the most commonly linked psychological traits with fear is stress, followed by anxiety. Psychological studies have shown that this additional stress can cause things such as paranoid personality disorder and dissociative identity disorder (previously known as multiple personality disorder) [American 546].

Another important aspect of fear in society is the fear that is caused by government. The government's façade is one of ultimate protection and always wanting to do what is best for all citizens. The important thing to realize with government is that it is not a single entity; it is many micro-organizations with individuals driving them.



Individuals mostly do what is best for their selves. Government officials have gone from being individuals who serve the public in government to being individuals who control the public. September 11, 2001 was a perfect day for both the media and government. The media provided coverage of the event, introducing the fear and getting its passed. Once the media had begun reaping the benefits of the day, the government began its role by using the media as its proxy to the people. President Bush's approval rating increased from 50% [Bereke 1] to 90% following his multiple addresses to the public [Raasch 1]. During the weeks following the events of September 11, 2001 it was nearly impossible to purchase an American flag, stores were selling out of them faster than they could be produced [Tourists 1]. The population was propelled by the overwhelming media coverage to obtain symbols of patriotism. If the media had continued on a normal coverage schedule and not covered solely the hijackings, then there would likely have been a dramatically decreased effect on the level of fear and the level of patriotism among the population. The United States has developed a quite effective device for controlling the fear of the American population; it is called the "Homeland Security Advisory System", usually referred to as the Terror Alert Level. This utility can be used to make Americans fear their own shadows and peek around every corner they turn. This type of device should not exist for the public to see because of its impact on the behavior of the masses. Americans should always feel safe in their country while the government works behind the scenes to make that illusion of safety a reality.

While the government manipulates the psychological state of Americans from afar, there is a much closer threat to the level of comfort to the population, religion. Religion has always been a large backing of government for the United States, but has



this gone too far in present-day politics? In the days of the Revolutionary War the country was fighting for its freedom from a great aggressor who had a perceived evil agenda with intent to do harm upon American citizens. Religion backed the nation then and was a source of strength for part of the population while the nation was becoming a free and independent collection of united states. The religious organizations may now feel a non-existent threat and be scared into being fully government friendly to keep their benefits. President Bush has made many references to his religious influences during re-election speeches and other public announcements. His religious beliefs can be seen in his position and decisions he makes. President Bush's extremist Christian views being applied to government can have severe ramifications for many people and cause people in various groups to fear for their freedoms. In particular, President Bush has placed some rights of non-heterosexuals in a situation where they could be limited forever through a Constitutional amendment his supports [Musgrave 1].

Many Christians consider themselves to be "God Fearing". These same Christians consider God to be a forgiving and awe-inspiring being of divine power. This is perhaps one of the only situations where humans both fear and are inspired by something concurrently. All religions are different from each other, but most still condemn anything that is not in their standard template for ideal people. Christian organizations announce their intentions to accept all people equally, however the most common complaint of other religions about Christians is their desire to convert anyone who is not like them [Saiffullah 1].



The ultimate goal of all of these fear sources is to control a population and force a desired resultant action. Media is linked to commercialism, government is linked to ideal citizens and a strong economy, and religion uses fear to attempt to force a population to conform to being ideal people. Humans used to be self-thinkers who were strong of mind and formed their own opinions. Now humans rely on the experiences of others to determine what they feel, what they believe and what they fear. It is time for citizens to remove themselves from the cloudy messages of the media, the government and the religious establishments. Fear created by those messages is a hindrance to productivity. To be human is to experience life and “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” [Roosevelt 1].



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