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# Females and Fear: Contributions and Challenges



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**Technical Paper No. 49**

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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## Females and Fear: Contributions and Challenges

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**Abstract:** Over the past 25 years of systematic research on fear and fearlessness, I have been interested what anyone has to say, write, or teach about what ought to be our relationship to fear and love. I've been curious what different disciplines say, and what different ages, races, and genders have to say. This reflective paper, long overdue, winds its way through a messy territory of femaleness, females, and all the variations (of which I am sure to miss some, my apologies). I write as a man in body, as a wo-man in soul. I speak for myself, and I wish to offer a few of the many contributions females have made to fearology and challenges I desire females to take up in the future so as to offer a powerful contradiction to the oppressive forces of the ever-growing Fear Empire we all live in. For the most part, females have said nothing too new or radical in reconceptualizing the nature and role of fear. They seem to have repeated what males have been saying. This is an area that requires refreshing challenge, a point I will conclude this paper with via some concrete suggestions.

### Introduction: Fearological Reflections

As a postmodern fearologist, one who studies fear across disciplines, it is important to attempt to collect information from all sectors of humanity in regard to our relationship with fear and how it could be improved. My other publications cover much of that territory but for some reason, in 25 years of this work I have not written on females and their relationship to fear, individually and collectively. It is overdue.

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This is not as technical of a paper as I often write with all the citations and logical arguments and flow. There will be more rambling here. I feel the topic is so enormous in scope that such a technical paper would amount to a paper too long and not focusing enough on the few major points I want to share with females on our planet right now. Yes, there is certain urgency I and others sense that we have to unravel Fear's Empire and the soon the better, and my thesis is that women, girls, feminists, womanists, and those of a feminine persuasion will be major players, if not the best leaders, for this unraveling. It won't be easy. Fear's Empire has a lot of reasons to exist and it has millenia of history in humanity's evolution. It won't just disappear fast.

To set the stage for this reflection I turn to my own fearology library around me as I write. I'm looking for inspiration, memory-jogging, and evidence. I look to my files and folders of quotes on fear and fearlessness. I look for the category Female or some equivalent to see what I have collected. In the earliest years (1989-1998) my collection of quotes had many categories but none related to gender distinctions. In my graduate school years as I scoured the university libraries (1998-2003) I created a folder entitled "Feminist, Body, Pagan" as my first attempt to keep mostly women's voices on fear and fearlessness in a unique place for future reference and publications. I have not summarized that data.

Beside the folder on women's voices I have 15 other folders of quotes and notes on fear and fearlessness. And it makes me think of a quantitative ratio that reflects and inequity of voices, thought and wisdom from females in general in the published literature (at least in academia). When women are 51% of the world's population, this is a concern not to be taken lightly, yet, I know this ratio would be found equally inequitable across many subject matters and disciplines. The silencing of females remains a fact, though it is good to see this changing slowly.

I look at all my shelves of books on fear and fearlessness. Same ratio. Of 50 or so books, I have 8 or so by female authors. I have no books on women and girls and fear specifically, for example. Males publish more. Which means males have dominated by a vast proportion what has and is being taught about fear and fearlessness. I've found the same thing with all the new scholarship on emotions in the past two decades as well. That is really bothersome because it was radical feminists who were first to tell us overtly (thank you Andrea Dworkin) that the patriarchy is glued together by fear. Females and males are glued into that 'Fear' Matrix as I call it. Unfortunately, that is not our true feminine Matrix (thank you Bracha L. Ettinger). We live in a false, phallic, corrupted and very oppressive paranoid culture (especially in the West)—many critics call a "culture of fear."

What kind of male-biased knowledge is being produced, as power, as curriculum, for all the rest of us? The above situation is unethical, untrustable, and is killing us and Life slowly and quickly. This needs to change and transform dramatically and the sooner the better.

In my own book (2010), summarizing a good deal of my 25 years research, entitled *The World's Fearlessness Teachings: A Critical Integral Approach to Fear Management/Education for the 21st Century*, I found that a handful of women leaders on "fearlessness" were showing up in the last decade or so. In order to give them voice at the front end of my thick book (of mostly men's voices) I created a performative fictional drama in Chapter 1 "Do We Really Want a Fearlessness Revolution?" I did this by pretending to be a moderator of the global conference entitled *Re-Visioning Fear Management for a New World*. The panel I assembled as focus were all women today (for real) who are calling for some overt "fearlessness revolution" and using that language. I think that language is important because there are few males I know calling for that in the same way. The five contemporary women I chose to give voice to on this panel in this chapter were (in no particular order) Ms. Ericka D. Jackson, Reverend Bernice Powell Jackson, Arianna Huffington, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Susan Griffin. Some out and out feminists, some more womanists, and some do not identify as either. But all spiritual and political. They are inspirations to me and many others.

They are also not all that well known in general mainstream culture, and in fact no female is who is overtly leading with the language of a fearlessness revolution on this planet. That person and voice has not yet fully appeared and my book was an attempt to show females that they are important to fill that position of leadership. Very important, because males have been leading long enough, have had their turn with dominating fear management and the education processes of that fear management. Time for a change, because in my view, and these five women's views, males have not done enough or haven't done it well enough on the fronts. Fear's Empire has grown not diminished, and the post-9/11 era has proven that with spades.

The last point, is that I have been a leader of a conscious community for several years past, and have watched how girls and women give up their power and leadership continually. They are so conditioned to "save" males. Males hook them into it. I challenged the females over and over to unhook from this oppression of sexism. They largely could not do it. The males didn't help either. It takes both (all) sexes and gender-identity types to make this liberation process work, to unhook from feeding the 'Fear' Matrix. I learned in that community, and in my other intimate relationships, marriages with women, and raising two Gen Y girls, that there is an enormous fear-energetic pattern that hold like glue this fear-based patriarchy together. We have barely begun to see how to take it apart effectively. And, sad to say, but all my reading and study as a fearologist, has left me with little

enthusiasm (not none) of what females have published on the topic of fear and fearlessness. For the most part, they have said nothing too new or radical in reconceptualizing the nature and role of fear. They seem to have, more or less, repeated what males have been saying. This is an area that requires refreshing challenge, a point I will conclude this paper with *via* some concrete suggestions.

### **The Female Contribution to Knowledge About Fear**

As I mentioned above, my book has Chapter 1 devoted, more or less, to pivotal female (women's) voices on the revolution of fearlessness, and some claims about fear. I do not want to repeat that information, suggesting you read that chapter. I now want to reflect, rather randomly on what I think have been some interesting or not so interesting contributions females have made to the discourses on fear management/education in the last several decades (most of this is Western-focused).

My all time favorite quote by a woman (thank you Jeanne Segal) is "We are not bad, we are frightened." Coming from a therapeutic and spiritual (transpersonal or 'new age') lens, this quote offers an entirely different way to make-meaning of all the "bad" things that people and their systems do on this earth. Some traditions call it "sinful" or "evil" instead of being "frightened." Some call it "immoral" instead of being "frightened." The moralism is really shifted however, when we see "sin" as due to being frightened, and when we see a rape as due to being frightened (both for the oppressor and victim). Same with war. There is something so humane in that woman's recognition of the nature and role of fear in what humans do that is hurtful and oppressive. All such 'bad' things can be categorized as fear-based. That's a message that I have found in many of the wisdom and religious teachings around the globe and through time, but the simplicity and clarity of "We are not bad, we are frightened" is beautiful in cutting through a lot of extra fear that has been created because we believe human nature is sinful, evil, and violent. Compassion, in the true sense, has to begin on that quote, otherwise, we will only use punishment and moralism to condemn the 'bad' people of the world. And such punishment and moralism (holier than I) is going to breed violence of some kind, and more fear in the end.

Immediately, the patriarchy, based in fear, and worshipping fear as a weapon against the 'bad' so-called, will reject the quote and idea behind it. There is no chance for compassion in that patriarchal worldview, even if it wants to celebrate itself as having created "justice" and "law" and so on. All in the name of protecting the weak and vulnerable--and protecting the State--or whatever the structures and ideologies are that it wants to preserve with its power. But what about the power of compassion, based on understanding? How would we restructure discipline and punishment, if we

understood that all 'bad' things are done because we are frightened? That could be a revolutionary exploration of great worth. Women are contributing, albeit, in very minor ways yet, to this direction. Now, we still have the research and theorizing and practices to do, to 'prove' this quote and claim of truth is valid.

Such a re-visioning of moral direction (education) for society can be found in another area of research in the social sciences by women. I found it fascinating while reading a doctoral student's dissertation in 2007 (thanks Elizabeth VanderWeil for finding this) to find her citing a piece of research on fear that added a whole new category to what male researchers have been saying for as long as I remember. The males have told us about "fear" and defined it for us (thanks to biopsychology especially) as part of what allows us to defend ourselves from threat, so that fear is often made meaning as "fight or flight" and sometimes as "freeze"--all three of these are strategies that have naturally evolved in living creatures for survival. Humans are thought of no differently, from this perspective. But the new woman-centered (if not feminist) researchers found that if you observe female humans, not males so much, you'll see a fourth strategy and it actually dominates in the world of girls and women. This strategy they called "tend and befriend." In females, and perhaps males if they were brought up differently than in patriarchal world values, they tend the fear shown by another. They gather. They befriend. That, say these women researchers is what you find much more prevalent than fight, flight, or freeze strategies. My 30 year old daughter responded to me telling her about this research just now, and said, but also part of the shadow-side of the "tend and befriend" is that women never really learn well how to do conflict and admit they are competing with each other and their overall strategy to handle fear is to not stand-up and be seen to take a stance and default to "cute" child-like patterns of "making people like me." They'll use their charm and bodies and sexuality to do that if needed, and if they feel their survival (and self-esteem) depends on it. Good point!

This finding, even if a hypothesis at this point, needs to be researched further, and challenge the dominant male way of seeing fear and its strategies of survival value(s). The above finding ties into the next piece I want to share, specifically coming from feminist researchers, and that is the raising up of the problems of male-protection in contemporary society. The discourse of safety and security for women is a big issue of late, especially since the 1960s when crime rates and violence in cities was increasing, as was there an even faster growing "fear of crime." Then when females were being depicted as primary "victims" by the dominant male (and often female) researchers in this area and in public media and governments--it became problematic because most everyone was concluding (from surveys) that girls and women were more afraid of crime than men. The issue of rape of girls and women arose with that, and so on. But the feminist re-

searchers (e.g., thank you Hille Koskela, Rachel Pain, among others) were very critical of this construction of the poor little victim female that male power/authority/police/military had to protect. That biased construction was not woman-made, not feminist-made, not female-made, but male-made. That's the problem. And that's the same problem with how fear is made.

Of course, some women, mostly young and mostly urban Gen X-Ys went on their own campaign to get themselves out of this classification of being the most victimized, and most afraid, as well as challenging the old feminists that didn't want women being exploited sexually in media and advertising. These new punk, urban chics, took up the "Fun, Fearless, Female" slogan that *Cosmopolitan* magazine (run by mostly women) rolled out into popular culture in the early 1990s. This had great appeal for girls and young women in the West. It was attached to sexuality and freedom of expression, a roll over from the Love Generation 1960s and 70s but showing itself in more extreme flaunting of "Girl Power" as it became to be known, something old feminists cringed at. For example, in my Fear and Feminist folder I have a newspaper clipping of an ad from 2004 in *Shared Vision* magazine which is for holistic health and spiritual young people in cities in North America. The ad shows a scantily drawn busty sexy figure of a young woman holding a native drum under her arm, and the text reads in big letters "Freestyle Drumming: Fearless & Feminine" and then a holiday celebration event called "Wild Woman Within!" and a person's name (Pamela) and phone number to contact, with all the prices given for these events.

A recent example of the downside (if not distortion and pathological shadow) of the "fearless" sexy (whorish) "girl power" movement is found in the recent confession speech given by Sera Beak, one of the Gen X leaders of this movement into the spiritual dimensions of the "Feminine Divine." It is worth listening to her journey of delusions of fame/power/money and the need to be liked and successful (<http://vimeo.com/81465358>). The good sign, it shows that some young so-called "fearless" women can admit their deep socioculturally conditioned fear underneath all the bravado (again, these young women have taken on the masculine bravado cover-up of their deeper fear and vulnerability).

There is also a whole generation of books along the theme of *Way of the Woman Warrior* that came out, of which I read a few. Again, I found their theoretical depth lacking. These "fearless" movement(s) or subcultural tropes were and still are very popular to many girls and women, especially younger Gen-X and Y but not only. If you look for this "fearless" term in the literature, as I have, it has become a 'virus' or 'meme' as they say in culture in the West. And no group has so grasped it with glee as females. Because, if you were around in the 1980s and early 90s, what you saw were publication after publication and ads on television and talks on posters, that

were talking about violence against women and how fear is so pervasive in women's lives. I have a clipping in the same folder from a conference on "Global Visions Festival" I attended in 1997 or so, and the notion of "Without Fear" was palpable in the room I was in showing a video of violence against women. Of course, how to get to "without fear," I found very problematic in their discourses. There was a lot of feminine passion, but not a lot of good theory or rigorous models of human behavior. I wished they had taken up the quote I mentioned earlier on 'bad' things happen because we are frightened. No, that wouldn't have gone over with female victims of crime at the time. They would think that that would let the oppressors (men) off the hook for the violence and crime they had perpetrated (in their fear). Again, what has always been missing for me in these events and even the "fearless" movement as reacting against the construction of the weak fearful female, is the lack of good research and theory about what 'fear' actually is, outside and beyond what males have defined for us. And fearlessness, was never differentiated in that discourse from bravery, courage or fearless (all of this I go into in great detail in my book).

The eco-feminists, and other feminists I found in the last few decades made great strides in calling out the source of men's violence against women, and that was the "fear of women" in men. The fear of female, that has archeological roots back five millenia since the dominator cultures overtook the partnership cultures (thanks to Riane Eisler). It needs to be repeated, that "fear of women" is ground in "fear of Nature" and all of that complex of male fear (which spread into females too), so deeply pathological, is "raping" females and Nature. This is will take us down as a species if it is not reversed. How do we help males admit this fear, and shift it, or management it in healthy ways? Of course, females have, in the patriarchy, colluded to protect males from this fear too. They don't raise it. They don't know how to help them. Males are slowly, through the "Men's Movement" helping men to see how afraid they are and how it causes much of their 'bad' actions toward all relations including their own self-abusiveness. But as a society in the West, we are far far far away from the mainstream admitting any of these fears: (a) femaleness, (b) Nature. Rather, the males tend to focus on fear of death as the (existential) problem to overcome.

#### Some Challenges to Females Around Fear

First and foremost, it ought not be me as the "teacher" for females of what they ought or ought not to do with fear. I speak as a well-disciplined fearologist, and that has its limits. I don't live in a female body in the patriarchy.

Secondly, females need better research, theory, models of what their relationship is to fear, and to do that they will need a "fearless standpoint" that is rigorous, not a cultural popular trope. The critical philosophical, theologi-

cal, psychological and sociological and political work here on the topic fear and fearlessness is essential to females taking charge of the topic. They ought to become experts and ought to also use their own female intuition to "see through" the delusions, pathologies of male-made knowledge about emotions in general and "fear" specifically. As well, they ought to challenge deeply the bravado that goes with "guy culture" and "being tough." That is, to challenge the military mentality behind it all. That is, to challenge just how afraid men are and tell them so when you see it.

This latter, is most important. Women and girls will have to learn the most intelligent and useful ways to confront men's fear. As well, they will have to confront their own around so challenging males. Then, they will have to look at how they have internalized that male fear against them, and how they use it again other women, girls, and especially women and girls that are powerful already. How do females support females to be fearless, in the truest sense?

Key area of research and thinking: *Power-Knowledge-Fear*. Any time anyone wants to talk about fear, fears, managing fears or fearless, etc., you want to check-up and interrupt that focus. My research shows that we have to look at a better more holistic unit of what is operationalized in everyday life and that involves the power related to knowledge creation in general and especially to knowledge about fear and its management. We have to be very critical of these discourses, deconstructing them and reconstructing them, preferably from a fearless standpoint (see my book and other publications on how to do that, e.g., fearanalysis). Never forget "fear is power" and power usually always has something to do with fear in a fear-based culture (patriarchy and its pathologies). Avoid, individualized biopsychologization, in other words, of fear(s). Fear is always interrelated to social, ecological, political and economic relations of the 'whole.'

There's so many more things that could be said, but I think these points are at the top of my list. And to write more will only clutter the field of ideas here. I personally, look forward to any dialogues on this, and more importantly, I encourage females to talk about this with other females. Then publish it. Go public with it. Ask us males whom you trust to stand behind you for back-up if you cannot get females to do the job. Or get us both to be there. You have to have allies to do this work, that I know well. Don't try to do it alone.