

Lisa Kent  
Interdisciplinary Studies paper  
Fear: A discussion over a coffee

*Driving home after the IS conference at Kings, pushing all the information to the back burner of my mind for processing while I let my mind wander (and concentrate on driving of course!)*

**[Enter into the inner deepness that is my mind!]**

*[“Oh coffee, my friend-the thing which sustains me and pushes me forward into the next class, the next paper, the next clear and concise train of thought! How I long for you....but where do I get you? Stuck in traffic...which isn’t really such a bad thing since the beauty of fall is upon us-oh look, a cute little bunny! Focus Lisa! Coffee is your mission....but where do I find a Starbucks?! Eyes out....Found you!!!! Now to essentially “elbow my way over” ...Outta my way people! Woman on a mission!!!”]*

*All you really need to know is that you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone....*

*[Good song!]*

“Hi! Welcome to Starbucks, what can I get started for you today?”

*[Oh lady, you are a life saver!]*

“Can I get a very big Venti half sweet, sugar free, fat free pumpkin spice latte please? And can you make it Strong!!”

“Sure, no problem. Is that everything for you?”

“Sure is! Thank-you!”

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“No problem- that will be your right arm and your first born child please!” – *[okay, she doesn't say this, but I imagine this as I hand her over five dollars for a cup of coffee- albeit wonderful coffee that completes me- but it's still crazy!]*

As I am about to sit down to process all that I have learned I turn, bump solidly into someone, spilling both of our hot beverages and break my heart as I had not even had a sip of that wonderful golden liquid! I want to yell, I want to cry, I want to avenge the caffeine friend I just watched fall to its destruction at my feet and all over my new shirt....all of this passes through my mind in about two seconds and as I look up to pin my human wall of destruction with accusatory eyes. But as I look up, I see my old Taylor friend! Its amazing how seeing someone you haven't seen or heard from in two years can wipe away the anger and heartbreak of a spilled coffee!

“I am so sorry!! Did you burn yourself? Are you okay? Can I buy you another coffee?” she says before she looks at who I am.

“Nicole?!”

“Lisa?!!! Oh my gosh, how are you??”

We sorted out the small talk of quick catch up and quickly decided we would buy each other a cup of the coffee we were now wearing and sat down to catch up on life! Eventually, our conversation turned to the new direction my life was taking- becoming a student once again after a two year “break”.

I eagerly described the impact of starting a new school had on me- anxiety, excitement- essentially fear! I told her that before this week, I was dealing with my fear in a different way than I could see myself endeavoring to in the future.

“Fear- tell me about it!” She interjected, “I was reading the news the other week, and there is just *so* much to be afraid of in this world! I have actually started to have nightmares and wake up feeling so anxious that I couldn’t actually get back to sleep. I have tried everything, even watching a movie to try to put me to sleep, but the only movie that was within reach of my bed was the “Saw” movie. I know what you are going to say ‘why on earth would you watch this?’ but I was just desperate. And now I am just done for at this point!”

Clearly this discussion was important and needed to be addressed, so I took a side step from my story to share with her some of my new knowledge about fear!

“You are right, I do wonder at your sanity for wanting to watch the “Saw” movie to begin with, but why don’t you tell me what is going on for you? Maybe just talking about it can help!” I didn’t want to give her the knowledge that I had an ace in my pocket: an entire IS conference that was centered around the topic of fear! I figured that if I told her right off the bat where my information came from she might be less inclined to hear me out!

“Well, I am fearful for our society. It seems you can’t read a news paper without some kind of story about white women our age going missing, some kind of illness, extreme religious views that lead to violence or just plain bad things happening to people all around us! I am having a hard time reconciling this with my faith and I am afraid for people, myself, my family!”

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As she spoke I could see her anxiety rising. So, before unpacking what she had said, I wanted to know just how fear was manifesting itself within her.

“Nicole, I hear what you are saying, and before I respond to it, can you explain how you experience fear?”

“Well...my heart starts pounding, I start to feel tense; I feel stressed essentially!”

*[Interesting, just as Leanne said...hmm]*

“You remember I am a psychology major right?”

She nods.

“So you know that fear is something we sometimes talk about. Do you want to know why your body responds like this?”

“Sure, it would be interesting to learn why our body reacts like this. And it might help me to know more about my fear in general”

“Wonderful. Well, our ancestors would face stressors that were acute physical stressors- think saber tooth tiger who leaps out to surprise the hunter. This requires a fast physical reaction. Some things that can happen once our fight or flight reaction kicks in would be things like our body recognizing the need for quick energy, so our body pours energy from our organs and muscles into our blood stream. Our circulation speeds up and our heart rate increases along with our respiration and blood pressure. You said that you would wake up feeling really anxious- I take that to mean that you might have been breathing as if you had been running for a while and that your heart was beating a mile a minute. Is that about right?”

“Yep! I sometimes wonder how my heart hasn’t popped right out of my chest!”

“Well our body is reacting to that stressor. And note that I am going to use stress and fear interchangeably. So the hormones epinephrine and cortisol are released into our body. The interesting thing about the fear that you described though, is that it is not an immediate physical stressor! Our minds are so creative, and yours has managed to take the stress and anxiety you feel when you are reading the paper and worrying, into a dream that causes you to wake up scared and lose sleep. The thing is, our body can’t tell what kind of stress you are experiencing- our brain can make that distinction, but our body just can’t.”

“I am just sick of this though. Losing sleep isn’t going to be good for me and I hate that I am stressed about this all the time!”

“I understand! Prolonged stress can be harmful- however, stress doesn’t have to be a bad thing!”

“What?!”

“What stress can do is motivate you toward productivity. This could be something as simple as changing how we interact with the world and as complex as taking up a cause to help society in some way. See, we require a moderate level of arousal (in this case stress) to be productive. You can take the things you are stressed out about and try to move in a productive way toward awareness or a resolution. Fred would suggest sublimation: where you take the energy/arousal and transfer it into something beautiful! Maybe you decide to volunteer or you think you want to raise awareness by writing, painting or some other means of transferring that energy into something good.”

“Hmm...that is actually interesting...”

“One popular way to deal with your fear is through positive reappraisal- this involves thinking differently about an object of stress. Maybe this causes you to grow in your awareness about society; it’s looking at a situation that causes you distress as an opportunity for some kind of growth”

“I like that idea! I often find that the more I try not to worry about something the more I actually end up worrying! This way, I can think about my worries, but try to change how I think about them! So I have been having a hard time sleeping because I am stressed. But maybe I needed to be stressed in such a way that it pushes- or motivates- me to reach out within my community in a positive and influential way! I have wanted to volunteer anyways but I was having a hard time finding the courage or drive to get out there and find something I was interested in and would make an impact in!”

“So I have to confess, I don’t just have all of this information in my back pocket to whip out at any time. We actually had a conference at Kings about fear. The reason I say this now is because I want to address your fear about society.

One of the ways that fear was addressed was a way that we can *fear well*. Since we are women of faith, this might be one way to look at fear and the role it can play in our lives. We all know that there are a lot of things that are scary in this world. There is tragedy and there is violence and pain. But spending our lives worrying about it and giving into that fear is going to take up so much energy and take away some of the fullness life can provide. One view that was put forward is that fear is not evil. We don’t have to say ‘out with fear’ entirely, and we have already talked about a potential positive outcome of fear. What might be the answer or part of it is learning *how* to fear. Some ways that good fear might manifest itself would be when we fear because someone

we love is in immediate danger, when it is a big threat, and when the threat is upon you. These lend themselves to be situations where fear is expressed in a healthy way. The point here is that when we fear right it points to love, and when we fear rightly, fears don't keep us from doing good. To spend your time worrying and fearing for the worst is just going to keep yourself in the heightened sense of arousal and is going to cause negative side effects to your body because it is in that fear response for so long. Some things we have to let go of, to give that fear to God and realize that fearing for the might be's in life lend themselves to an unproductive or unhealthy way of fearing and viewing the world."

"Hmm...interesting. I have never actually thought about a right or wrong way to fear...and I suppose you are right. It takes a lot of work to be stressed out or to be afraid all the time. And perhaps I need to realize that news reports the bad for the most part, and for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes being afraid just doesn't make sense. And if I am using the model you just told me when looking at my fear, it doesn't appear to be a healthy way to fear."

"It was a really interesting conference, seriously! Not to say that I enjoyed myself more than I would have if I was in bed catching up on my sleep or hanging out with my friends, but it was an interesting way to restructure just how we approach our fears. Now, you're watching the "Saw" movie- that is just crazy and unnecessary. We actually watched a clip of that movie....i could describe it to you, but it's actually too gross to replicate in words! But we did look at horror movies and juxtaposed the fear of those movies with that of biblical conceptions of fear--- which was quite the interesting concept. We fear differently now than we did then!"

"That does sound like a really interesting conversation, especially since I sat through that whole movie- with my hands over my face I might add. I was pretty grossed out. And it did not lend

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itself to aid in my sleeping- in fact, it is the whole reason I needed to stop off to grab myself some strong coffee and thereby ran into you- literally! I am glad we could catch up, and although we haven't really dug deep into my fears, this conversation was still really enlightening and it will give me some things to consider when approaching my fear. However, I really need to get going. I didn't realize how long we had been talking and I am running behind schedule. I do, however want to hear all about your experience at the new school, since I kinda cut you off there! So...what do you say, run into you for a coffee next week?"

"Sounds wonderful! Have a great day!"