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# **Making Fearality More Sexy: Intersections With Foucault**



R. Michael Fisher, Ph.D.  
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**Technical Paper No. 45**

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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## Making Fearuality More Sexy: Intersections With Foucault

- R. Michael Fisher,<sup>1</sup> Ph.D.  
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**Abstract:** This paper gives the first brief overview of the author's creation and use of the term *fearuality*, with attention to its development and implications. An overview of Michel Foucault's study of the history of sexuality is provided for purposes of creating intersections in the study of fearuality. The basic radical methodological approach of Foucault's opus three volume work, offers a significant contribution to our conceptualization of a relationship with our fearual-identity, both individually and collectively.

### Introduction

The new term I created in *fearuality* sets the stage for an entirely different attention to the topic and a search for better fear education than any of us have ever had.... (Fisher, 2012, p. 17)

To speak of sexuality in this [new] way, I had to break with a conception that was rather common. Sexuality was conceived of as a constant. (Foucault, 1984/90, p. 4)

In my new book (Fisher, 2010), I briefly introduced "fearuality" (not the first time) and defined it as "*the domain of animal and human experience related to fear and how it is managed (analogous to sexuality or spirituality)*" (p. xxv). I wrote, "Fearuality, like fearology, is a very recent conceptualization of a field of knowledge for scholarly inquiry" (p. xxv). Today, I would include that it is a domain of human experience for human inquiry, whether one is a scholar or not. It is basic to understanding human nature, the human condition, and our fateful capacities to develop our human potential.

I also, like Michel Foucault, have taken a particular powerful aspect of the human affective repertoire and placed it under a critical lens. What do we

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher is co-founder of In Search of Fearlessness Project (1989- ) and Research Institute (1991- ) of which archives can be found at <http://www.feareducation.com> (click on "Projects"). He is also founder of the Center for Spiritual Inquiry & Integral Education (<http://csiie.org>), and is Department Head at CSIIIE of Integral & 'Fear' Studies. He is a consultant, coach and teacher and principal of his own company (<http://loveandfearsolutions.com>). He can be reached at: [r.michaelfisher@yahoo.com](mailto:r.michaelfisher@yahoo.com).

mean when we consider the human beings relationship in a holistic-integral way with sex or fear? And like Foucault, I was immediately challenged with the over-dominating popular and common perceptions of what is *fear*, as he was challenged by similar perceptions of what is *sex*. We both came quickly to a conceptualization, I call postmodern and historical and socio-political, where it is evident that sex and fear are not "constant" by any means. I'll explore this dynamic, constructionist and contextualist reading, and evolving nature of sex and *fear*, whereby Foucault and myself tend to gravitate toward. I'll also later share more on who Foucault is and was in history and philosophy as a scholar and activist.

In my latest fearanalysis guidebook (Fisher, 2012), I also defined it (slightly differently) and made a more extensive foray into communicating its domain and relevance:

***Fearuality*** - is everything in one's existence that relates to fear and how we use it, manage it or transform it.

Today, I would include in this definition of *fearuality*, "how we produce it." Continuing in that fearanalysis guidebook I wrote:

In this methodology of fearanalysis, it is assumed that "*fear*" is not merely an emotion or set of feelings as defined in standard dictionaries and encyclopedias. It is a complex phenomenon labeled 'fear' as well as fear, of which both are essential concepts in what is called human *fearuality* (analogous to, and as important as *sexuality* or say *spirituality*).

The premise is that any relationship we have to fear is not value-neutral. The living organism is always attempting to manage fear, whether we know it or not. The existentialists claim that because the living organism fears death biologically and psychologically (especially its "ego"), it is always trying to shield itself off from death, and thus is managing fear (often called "death-anxiety"). Ultimately, any such management is of ourselves not just fear but our relationship with it. The new term I created in *fearuality* sets the stage for an entirely different attention to the topic and a search for better fear education than any of us have ever had—which means, everything to do with fear has to be put under the lens of critique<sup>i</sup> and critical learning—in part, this process or methodology is called *fearanalysis*....

Fearanalysis is a unique global perspective on fearuality as fear relations, which is inherently political because *fear is power*. How that fear-power-knowledge gets distributed (*via* education and/or propaganda) in a society is important to analyze at the collective and individual levels. Without a good analysis, our interventions (fear management<sup>ii</sup>) will be less than good and we'll suffer further for it.

*Our current general ignorance about human sexuality 100 years ago is where the current knowledge about fearuality is today. (pp. 17-18)*

In 2003 I wrote the last statement for provocative purposes on my first website for archiving my research. I meant it, even if a gross generalization. It tells us that we are well behind the 8-ball so to speak, as the human Fear Problem is well ahead of our knowledge and capacity to manage it well, and to facilitate the healthy integration of fearuality in human life.

I know that is a hard pill to swallow. A notion of *fearual*, or *fearual-identity* are also hard to swallow. One of my colleagues, a long-time student of my work, recently wrote editorial comments in this regard when I asked the question in the fearanalysis guidebook:

(2) How did we construct our fearual-identity? [and she responded:] "[what is a fearual-identity? I'm having some difficulties with this term & its use. Is it my fear? Dunno!](#)"

All my work, focusing on the practical side of fear management/education (FME) for the 21st century, is covered under the umbrella concept FME, as a way to bring some interest, if not legitimation, to the value of sub-concepts like *fearuality*, *fearology*, *fearosophy* and so on. In my new book I use the term *fearuality* occasionally, without going into much detail, but it is implied in the entire book and my work as a whole. I'd like people, including academics, to start using it more. I think that would normalize its existence, its value, and create the domain of cohesive-integral collective study around it as a catalyzing notion. It is a brand new notion, and it will take time to 'catch,' as it only began since I conceived it around 2000.

### **Making Fearuality a Little More Sexy**

Alas, all my desiring and prodding will have some, but likely little, effect until the concept of *fearuality* is sexy enough to grab people's attention like sexuality is as a topic these days (at least for many). I've always known that 'selling' the fear-idea was going to be hard. People, in general, would rather not think about something negative, and rather focus on something positive—even though I myself do not make such dichotomous divisions in the study of fear (or 'fear') as a rule.

People also tend to like a lot of color, flashy slogans, sugar-coating, and promises of hope and relief from suffering, or grand identifications with the immortal (e.g., the victorious hero), if they are going to have to look into the dark and the negative side of human nature, as one is having to do, more or less, by learning about fearuality. I always wondered if I could make the topic sexy enough for them to be interested,<sup>2</sup> at least, for a while, until they

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<sup>2</sup> I acknowledge the problems and my own ambivalence to make fearuality or anything to do with my fearwork sexy for marketing purposes.

saw it was as fascinating of a subject as any other, and for me, is subject more interesting than sexuality. Later below, I explore my artistic-creative means of creating ways to interest people toward fearuality.

Fearuality is newer than *sexuality*, but even the term sexuality was not conceived and published as a domain and concept until the early 18th century, according to the postmodern historical philosopher Michel Foucault.<sup>3</sup> That topic I'll return to later in this technical paper. My book pointed out that people are afraid of fearuality like they are afraid of sexuality. It is not that they are so afraid of fear or sex not to partake in them, that's obvious. And it is not like there is not fear and sex going on without a concept of fearuality or sexuality, nor do the latter concepts need to be existent for fear or sex to go on.

The issue is that fear and sex go on and on for lots of reasons, but in the history of consciousness, at some point, the terms were created for a particular need, desire, or mere curiosity to shape a domain of human experience that a human being could now begin to have a more "objective" distance from and yet, potential conscious relationship to, and thus, actually consciously build an identity (self) that develops a subjectivity that is directly dependent on the conception of fearuality and/or sexuality. And it is this subjectivation process re: fearuality that is most of the focus here in this paper, and similarly as it was of most interest in Foucault's three volume opus on *The History of Sexuality*.

For the record, I published on my blog a series of pieces (titles below) linking sexuality, fearuality, and spirituality, a combination that I have thought since around 2005 would be a good "integral" combination to ensure we develop all three of these with good critical education and literacy. Unfortunately, the blog was hacked and all my work erased. I have only hard copies.

**2012** Sexuality, Fearuality, Spirituality: Lens of Matrixiality (3)

**2012** Sexuality, Fearuality, Spirituality: The Power of Religion (2)

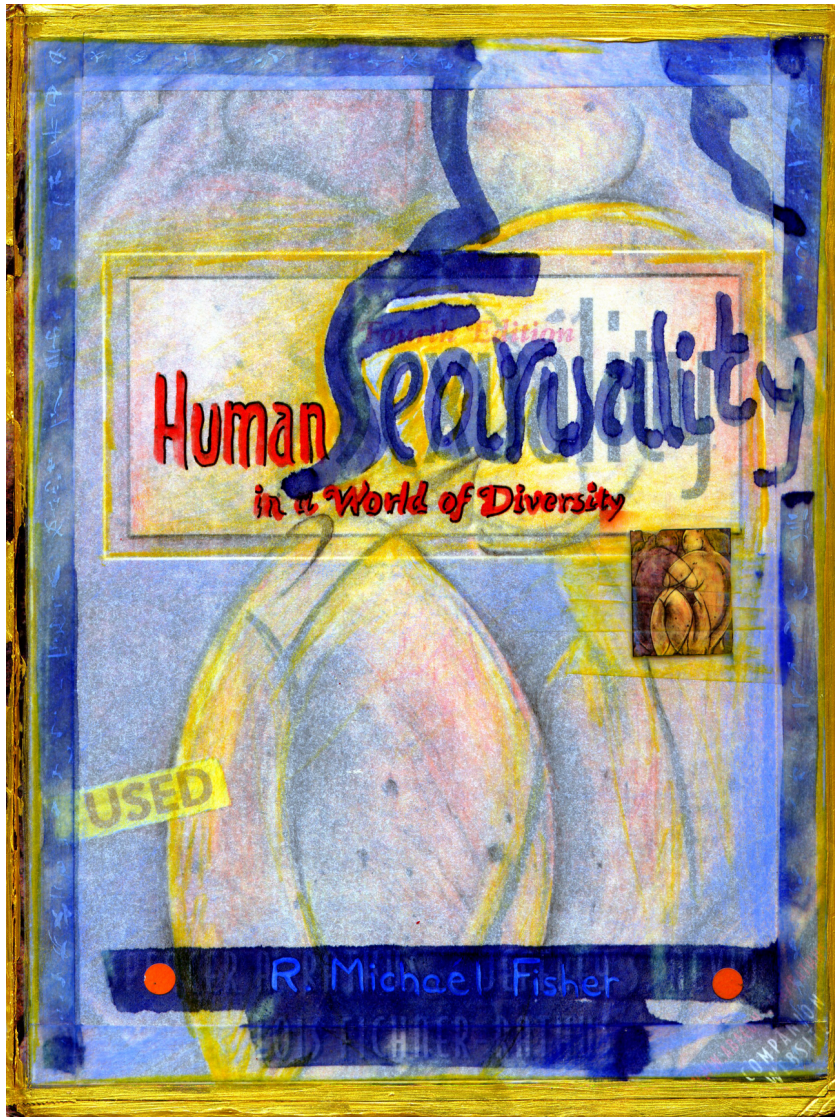
**2012** Sexuality, Fearuality, Spirituality: A Fearless Standpoint (1)

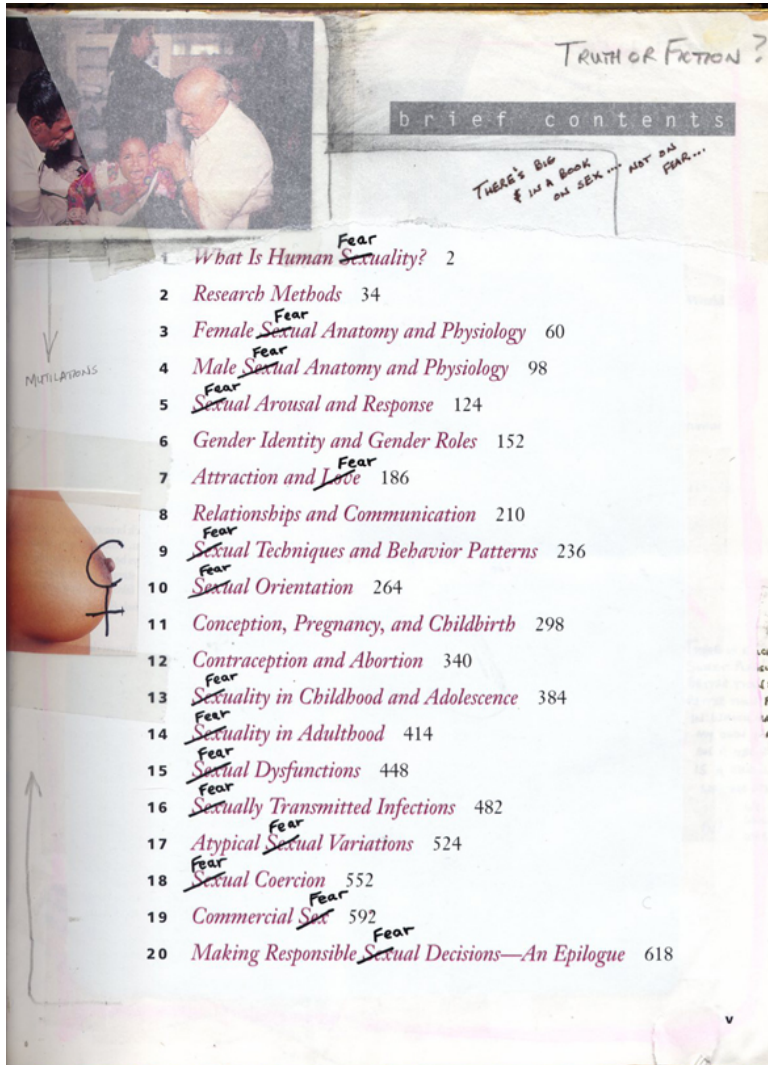
During my dissertation (c. 2002) I put up an art installation in the student campus gallery, and placed a first course university textbook I bought on human sexuality. I had redone the cover using art materials and did several manipulations of cutting, pasting, drawing, and crossing out "sexuality" and replacing it with "fearuality." I left the book in the gallery for people to look

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<sup>3</sup> "The term itself did not appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century, a fact that should be neither underestimated nor overinterpreted" (Foucault, 1984/90, p. 3). Foucault, M. (1984/90). *The use of pleasure: Vol. 2 of The History of Sexuality* [Trans. R. Hurley]. NY: Vintage Books.

at, which few did by the way. Here is the book cover image (messy as I wanted it to be) and one page of the inside of the book:





This creative-artistic-aesthetic intervention into the conceptualization of *fearuality* as I myself had been constructing it, was a great disruption and provocation. It got me thinking in a lot of new ways. I thought it might do so for the reader of my work. So, I share them here for that purpose. To discuss any of this further would be beyond the focus of this paper.

### Michel Foucault's "Sexuality" Studies

**Michel Foucault** (15 October 1926 – 25 June 1984) was a French philosopher, social theorist, historian of ideas, and literary critic. (cited in Wikipedia)



There are an enormous volume of texts by Foucault and writing published about his work. To say the least, he is one of the great contemporary French postmodern philosophers (like say Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, or Deleuze), who have had enormous impact on the thinking in philosophy in the West, but more than mere philosophy as a discipline. Their way of asking questions, and focusing their inquiries and critiques has bred a whole new generation of deconstructionist methodologies and critical philosophies. It was a radical way of doing history, when Foucault took on the study of human sexuality in the W. world (mostly in modernity).

To compare his work with my own is risky, not to say a little arrogant. I have no status in the circle of status and achievements he made. What I do have in common however, is a similar imagination of how to study that which is "too dark" (a cultural taboo) for most people to study or to study very deeply. I feel a comrade-ship with Foucault for that reason. I also know that I came to conceive of fear studies and fearuality independently from not having read any Foucault prior, albeit, I had heard of his name through my study of the integral philosopher Ken Wilber.

Foucault makes clear (in Vol. 2 of his opus) that he did not want to create a "history of sexual behaviors nor a history of representations, but a history of sexuality" (p. 3). I too was never interested in studying the history of discourses on fear (and fearlessness) with the aim of documenting a history of fearful behaviors (i.e., fear of x, y, z).

Foucault was after something else that was not so obvious and which no one else had researched systematically. I was too. He says he wanted, first and foremost, to utilize a methodological stance that was not so embedded in the cultural norms when studying the sexual norms over historical time. He wanted "to stand detached from it, bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyze the theoretical and practical context with which it [sexuality as a term] has been associated" (p. 3). In my work, bracketing familiarity, was key to my utilization of 'fear' (with apostrophe marks) as including but distinct from knowledge about *fear*. I wanted to shake fear as it was conceived by the majority around, turn it upside down, and look for something fresh to learn about it (about us). I was most interested in our constitutive relationship with fear (and 'fear') and thus our fearuality.

Foucault's attempt, as much as is possible, to "stand detached from it" meant he was not going to bow to the hegemonic 'normal' definitions, meanings, notions, and practices that might be called "sexual." He was allowing more options, more lenses of inquiry, that are out in the margins, that may even be seen as abnormal or pathological by the mainstream. Not surprising as he was gay himself and had attractions to S & M. I too was traveling in the marginal circles of society at the time of my interest to devote my life to the study of fear ('fear'). I called myself a visionary, revolu-

tionary, radical and so on. I felt a need methodologically to have a "fearless standpoint theory" which I have articulated in various publishing since the early 1990s. I wanted to study fear without it being fear-based methodology. That is very problematic. I had the sense that this was required because there was some overall (largely unconscious) repression to *really knowing fear* (and ourselves). How would I get around that with a better method, and so I see Foucault also felt up against the taboo of which he called the representations, sets of rules and regulations that were not only imposed on sexual practices but on how a human being is supposed to come to relate to the new term "sexuality" (in the early 19th century). He, like I, was going to be fighting Tradition(s), sacred or secular.

He, like I, found the conceptualization of sexuality (or fearuality), be it spoken and recognized, or merely played out implicitly by a culture, very much based on a rule of "constancy." In other words, it was pre-given and rather fixed as to what sex is and what fear is. There's no need to question that constancy, of which it served for normalcy, and that served as even 'natural' and thus an authority of tradition could be brought to the topics and leave them rather stale and undisrupted. You can guess, in such a condition of constancy assumptions, there was little critical discourse available in the public sphere. Thus, there was little real education (more propaganda) going on re: SME (sex management/education) or FME (fear management/education).

It is not that Foucault nor I were disregarding biological mechanisms and the traditions of the medical institutions we've studied, or observed, and how sex and fear are regulated in regimes or "games of truth" (but also error, see Foucault, p. 8). We were after in our studies "truth"—unabashidly, a "history of truth" (Foucault, p. 6) on these two topics of the affective (if not irrational) side of human nature and culture.

Foucault talks in his intro. to Vol. 2, that he had to make several theoretical shifts, and one of them was to study *desire* and *power*, while describing the relationship of the self-identity to a concept and category of sexuality. He wrote,

... I felt obliged to study the games of truth [and error] in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject, taking as my domain of reference and field of investigation what might be called 'the history of desiring man.' (p. 6)

I won't go into any more details of Foucault's arguments for why he needed these theoretical shifts in his study of the history of human sexuality. I recommend you read his original text. Based on my similar hunches of such a theoretical (holistic-integral and critical analysis) shift for fear studies compared to all I had read on the topic by others, it led me to an investigation

very unique to this day. Fear/self cannot be dis-entangled per se, as I see it. What we can, with discipline, awareness, maturity and good knowledge and methodologies access is better "fearless standpoint theory" for better critical fearanalysis. From there, a more healthy integrated fearuality emerges. That's my theory. But is that sexy enough for people to want to do it. To do all the hard work? Not likely, at least not right now. Who knows what is needed to make fearuality more sexy. Maybe we just have to be so ripped to shreds and terrified that we really see we need a deconstruction and reconstruction of our entire relationship with fear (out of necessity of survival).

It is this notion of (echoing Foucault above) "the history of surviving man" [sic] that is on my mind of late, and a new meta-motivation theory of the role of constructions and contexts of "surviving man" as powerful bridges to understanding our fearuality. The analogy is that Foucault found he had to go deeper to study the discourses of constructions of the notion of "desire" to supplement his study and understanding of sexuality. That makes a lot of sense to me, and I've since come from looking at Foucault's work to see that I have to look at the discourses of constructions of the notion of "survival" to supplement my study of fearuality. I have recently been playing with the idea of an "ecology of fear" study based on the first foundational principle of organism survival. This I realize is not entirely new to fear studies prior, but I'm approaching that deep excavation very differently than prior studies. which ended up in a reductionistic essentialism as their framing (meaning, they create a reified "constancy" problematic of the topic). Again, prior studies have lacked the Foucauldian stand back or my fearless standpoint theory, not that Foucault nor I believed we'd be scientifically removed and "objective" in doing so, but that's a more complex epistemological discussion beyond the scope here.

Foucault mentions his non-conformist approach to not rely on current "tools" for analyzing sex or sexuality, and myself I feel the same way. In my case, the hegemonic field of a biomedical paradigm and its infiltration of psychology as a discipline, both tend to control the nature and meaning of fear, and thus FME. My path is to include that work from those domains of the "scientific" but to pursue rigorous research ("scientific" too) which is outside those tools of the status quo.



