
CRITICAL INTEGRAL 'FEAR' STUDIES: Basic Organizational Framework (BOF)

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Introduction

[Note: there are many “definitions” required in a systematic study of *fear* (“fear”) and even in this document I have not defined the way I use all terms (e.g., “fearologist” or “critical integral” or “fear” and so on, connected to the topic of *fear*, because much of that is available elsewhere in my writing (see particularly Fisher, 2006, “Invoking ‘Fear’ Studies” in *The J. of Curriculum Theorizing*, 22(3), 3-34.)]

I make it no secret I am pushing an agenda to “systematize” (and “universalize”) the study of the topic *fear* (for reasons that ought to be revealed, in part, in this document). The purpose of this document is to map some of the necessary territory, theory and concepts for carrying out a critical (and/or integral or holistic) inquiry (study) on the topic *fear*. In particular, this document is an introduction to the first design of a Basic Organizational Framework (BOF) as a guide for ‘Fear’ Studies (although the focus here is for researchers, it is also intended for educators and practitioners—albeit, with a focus on adult/higher education). The BOF here has come from 16 years of systematic inquiry, experientially and theoretically, into the nature and role of *fear* in the human experience. This has all been part of a larger initiative I co-founded in 1989 entitled the In Search of Fearlessness Project. This project is a counterhegemonic “movement” intended to challenge the *status quo* hegemony of our ways of understanding and teaching about *fear* (and fearless, courage, etc.) and the management of *fear*.

A Few Core Assumptions

[Note: these core assumptions are only a few from my research and theorizing and hypothesizing and ought not to be read as ‘carved in stone’—they are meant mostly a heuristic devices although they also are meant to reflect our current reality of the human-planetary condition, albeit, they require much more nuance than given here]

1. There is a huge human problem: the Fear Problem. How to conceptualize a complex notion like this is not easy, nor will it ever likely have one fully satisfying definition or meaning for all. It still ought to be pursued as a way to find ‘common ground’ for the huge human problems

like environmental deterioration, wars, peace, poverty, disease, and so on (i.e., all the big 'ism' dis-eases).

2. Arguably, *fear* itself, and/or the agenda to cope with *fear* effectively (i.e., to create safety and security), is likely the most powerful current capable of "uniting" the world in a positive way.

3. It is best to study the topic *fear* critically with an intention to increase the level of and development of a critical literacy (for everyone: leaders and followers) around this topic (i.e., our fearfulness). This criticality is essential to undermining the very nature of "fearism" which is arguable to source below all other 'ism' dis-eases and the Fear Problem itself.

4. To pursue any kind of research on the topic of *fear* is politically contentious and highly charged not only with affect and emotion but with fear itself. In other words, there are many contested and contesting discourses and stakeholders throughout human history which (who) battle for the "best" way to *know fear* and concomitantly to *manage fear*. This conflict has virtually been unrecognized and/or denied by those stakeholders and those who study the topic of *fear* academically. It seems, to our demise, we overly fear the conflict over understanding fear (it all overwhelms most of us in its scope) and thereby we tend to lack a critical way to inquire into this topic as researchers and to acquire a more "objective" or "synthetic" (integral or holistic) and balanced understanding of the topic.

5. The public as consumers (and (re-)producers) of knowledge about *fear* and how best to manage it (and ourselves) have a right to understand the ideologies (biases) that construct what they learn about *fear* and its management. Leaders, researchers and educators have to be held accountable to the quality of their own "fear education" as well as what they deliver to others re: "fear education." A management agenda and an educational agenda are often at odds, and a solution would be to have a critical model (theory and praxis) for a "fear management education" curriculum that could be as "universal" as possible, based on the best research from critical 'Fear' Studies. Everyone has to ask if *fear education* is illicit in the best pedagogical (andragogical) sense, or is it propaganda for training/conditioning narrow, rigid and unquestioning servility—and this is critical to distinguish in any true modern democratic initiative to develop freedom and civic citizenship.

6. I agree with integral philosopher Ken Wilber that a "fearless shallowness" (a pathological postmodernism) is everywhere today the most serious "threat" to the gains of modernity and evolution of consciousness and human ethics; yet, the good news is there is considerable evidence that evolution is driven by and toward an impulse

of true fearlessness—albeit, it is critical to distinguish between “individual fearlessness” and “historical fearlessness.”

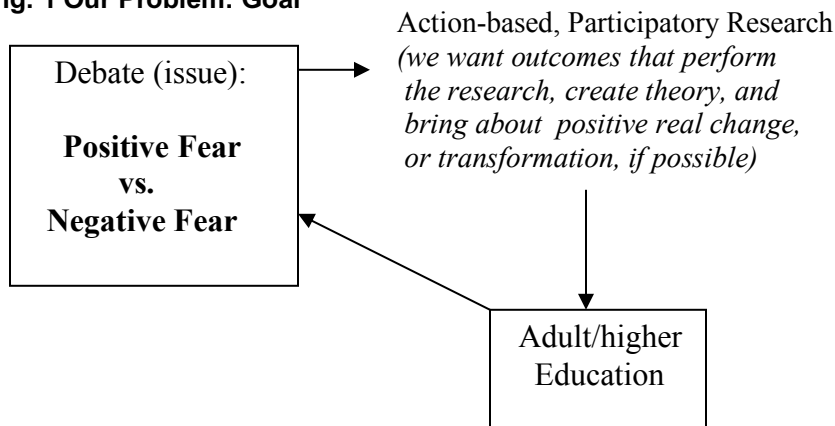
Basic Organizational Framework (BOF)

A Practical Problem In A Working Framework

Drawing out the BOF came as I and a colleague¹ wished to pursue a problematic sub-topic in the general area of fear and adult education. We wanted to write an article about the educational politics that is beneath and surrounds notions of “negative fear” and “positive fear” and their many variant terms. The way humans value-bias “bad” (negative) and “good” (positive) fear is critical to better understanding the way we understand fear and how we manage it and ourselves. As far as we could tell no other researcher or educator had taken up this valuing issue on the topic of fear before. From this practical issue, I derived an overall BOF to place and give reference posts as we entered the practice issue (problem) further. I wanted to apply an umbrella “structure” to the positive vs. negative fear debate and see if it would help our process of thinking critically through a practical problem. This experiment is still going on. Perhaps the BOF could be applied to any issue or problem and debate about fear, and to guide fear inquiries and research in general.

Below are a few figures which will build on one another to finally show the full set of basic relationships to the BOF and the practical issue above.

Fig. 1 Our Problem: Goal



¹ Elisebeth Vanderweil, a doctoral student in the leadership program at Gonzaga University, Washington, entered a dialogue on issues around fear and adult development/education in late 2005.