
The 'Fear' Matrix Revisited



R. Michael Fisher

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In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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The In Search of Fearlessness Institute is dedicated to research and publishing on fear, fearlessness and emotions and motivational forces, in general, as well as critical reviews of such works. Preference is given to works with an integral theoretical perspective.

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- R. Michael Fisher,¹ Ph.D.

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Abstract

Of the hundreds of new terms created over 30 years of my research, there is probably no more important term amongst them than *'Fear' Matrix*. It represents the crux conceptual center upon which all my study of fear, fearlessness, love, etc. revolves. In particular, I have tried fervently to get educators, professional and otherwise, including leaders of all kinds, to take this concept seriously—as, in my view it is foundational to any real progressive reform or transformation of our societies. Indeed, it may be *the* pivotal concept to 'save the planet.' The author re-looks at what has happened in terms of others in the world utilizing this concept, in particular his own version of it. The results of this recent survey show the 'uptake' is less than inspiring and more like human beings are resistant to accept such a concept and reality of the 'Fear' Matrix. The author recommends how this situation can be improved.

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Problem/Task of This Study

When I chose to take on the task to understanding everything I could about “fear” in 1989, it was natural for me to think I had to therefore study fear uniquely in a transdisciplinary way because I saw no one else on the planet doing that. It was all very exciting. I gathered data, interpreted it, taught about it and published on it. The research was very serious from the start. Of course, I also knew that research and technical writing is not always very palatable to people. I had to find various vocabularies and ways of communicating that would improve the exposure and the ‘up-take’ by more and more different kinds of audiences. That’s been very challenging and I’m not feeling today in 2019 I have been very successful.

Though, I also know that radical ‘out of the box’ ideas, theories and philosophies throughout history are riddles with this problem of becoming popular or in some cases of even being heard of while the author of those ideas is still alive. I have one term (a complex concept) that of all the hundreds of terms I have used and created over the decades that is *most* important for understanding my work. That is, the ‘*Fear*’ *Matrix*.

It is not secret if you know me, or read my work, I am often lamenting that people just don’t seem to ‘get it.’ Recently, I asked myself and set forth a problem/task: *Is the term ‘Fear’ Matrix being cited in the world’s literatures, across disciplines?* It has been c. 20 years since I started using it and publishing on it. So what has happened? Is there any up-take? And, from the attempt to answer these questions I began this technical paper.

Methodology

I searched on July 12, 2019 various scholar indexes, not a full complete search, and mostly I used Google Scholar on the Internet to search “‘Fear’ Matrix” (and/or fear matrix) terms. “Matrix of Fear” was not searched even though it could have overlapping definition(s) with ‘Fear’ Matrix, but not likely and R. M. Fisher has not used it.

The focus of selection of works using Fear Matrix (most common use by others is not to use the ‘ marks) in this search was “serious” scholarly work not populist, New Age (esoteric) spiritual authors and genres. The first sur-

vey of the latter (plus the former) types of works was recorded in Fisher (2002)² (2012³) and I did not want to repeat such a survey here.

Based on my ‘quick’ survey in this study, it is best to see it as not complete but indicative of what is really going on. Perhaps, a more intense research study will be done some day on this.

Results

Published documents: there were several pages listed of over 100 hits for the term. Those were 98% written by me (starting c. 2000⁴ but especially after 2003 with my dissertation⁵). The results can be classified in the following five categories:

A. Neurobiological (Scientific) Research

These studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2017)⁶ make up a small handful of researchers who study the neurobiology of the brain and in particular the network of structures and connections and physiology of the psychological reactive “fear” system in the human body (i.e., fear as an emotion). They may infrequently but consistently use “fear matrix” (always with small letters) to refer to the phenomena they are studying, also “fear network” and “neuronal fear matrix” appeared in the scholarly literature (the occurrences were in journals typically in the last 10 years).

B. Hybrid Terms in (Psychological and Social Sciences) Research

A handful of these articles (early 1990s to date) show that “fear matrix” placed in a hybrid combination (e.g., in sociology “risk-fear matrix”, Liebling & Wil-

² Fisher, R.M. (2002). What is the 'Fear' Matrix?: Part I, Failure of cultural. Technical Paper No. 13. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

³ Fisher, R. M. (2012). The Fear Matrix: The making of a revolutionary lived curriculum. A CSIIIE Yellow Paper, DIFS-4. Carbondale, IL: Center for Spiritual Inquiry and Integral Education.

⁴ I acknowledge this started in June 2000, as my daughter Leah had me watch *The Matrix* (no. 1 of the trilogy to come), from The Wachowski Bros. (1999) sci-fi film.

⁵ I consider my serious launch of the ‘Fear’ Matrix notion in Fisher, R. M. (2003). Fearless leadership in and out of the ‘Fear’ Matrix. Unpublished dissertation. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia.

⁶ Kim, M-K, Kim, B., Choi, T., Lee, S-H. (2017). White matter correlates of anxiety sensitivity in panic disorder. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 207, 148-156 (p. 149).

liams, 2018⁷) is a useful and serious way to understand and measure (i.e., indexes) complex inter-relational factors in systems and phenomena under investigation. Although, little explanatory detail was usually given and often only a single mention of the term on one page of the article was found. Other examples included: “peace-fear matrix,”⁸ “greed-fear matrix,”⁹ “hope/fear matrix.”¹⁰

C. Other Research (Across Disciplines)

A few articles: **(i)** one used “fear matrix values” as a construct representing a number of inter-related factors, fears, etc. in order to measure (i.e., as an index) the degree of “fear versus trust” going on in pre- and perinatal psychology¹¹ and **(ii)** on educator used “Fear Matrix” in a Table in an appendix but with no explanation or definition and was using the term to collect certain aspects of “fears” in regard to futures perspectives (and, compared this to hopes)¹² and **(iii)** fear-related images of UFO’s and alien abduction narratives have a psychology of their own, according to the researcher and “constitute a human fear matrix that addresses personal as well as social concerns for their Storytellers and Narrators”¹³ and **(iv)** one researcher with little to no explanation used “fear matrix” to conceptualize one fear from a particular movie to another one and **(v)** one researcher focused on fear of crime (matrix dynamics) in assessment and once used “theoretical fear matrix” but gave no further explanation and it seems more like a slip because the real focus was on fear of crime matrix dynamics specifically and **(vi)** one researcher was interested adoption of the cloud in IT and used “Industry vs. Fear Matrix” as a way to represent what was going on re: cloud adoption and the focus was on how much fear costs an organization

⁷ Liebling, A., & Williams, R. J. (2018). The new subversive geranium: Some notes on the management of additional troubles in maximum security prisons. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 69(4), 1194-1219 (p. 1198).

⁸ Phillips, M. (n.d.). Glimpses of His glory: Towards a working definition of faith development in context. [Chapter 18] in 18Glimpses of His Glory(2).pdf (p. 297).

⁹ Kile, F. (1993). A Review of the IFAC/SWIS workshop at Bolton (Toronto), Canada, September 21-24, 1992. *IFAC Proceedings* (Elsevier).

¹⁰ Greskovits, B. (2008). Hungary and Slovakia: Compliance and its discontents. In K. Dyson (Ed.), *The Euro at 10: Europeanization, power and convergence* (pp. 274-91). New York: Oxford University Press, p. 275.

¹¹ Flores, V. (2018). Fear versus trust: The impact of fear on birth experience and maternal outcomes. *Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology & Health*, 32(3), 220-241.

¹² Harkin, M. (n.d.). Developing a futures perspective in teaching practice: From rhetoric to reality. HarkinMichaelPAPER.pdf

¹³ Scribner, S. R. (2003). Alien fears: Toward a psychology of UFO abduction. [self-published book]. MicrosoftWord-00atitle.doc

D. Researchers citing R. M. Fisher’s Research¹⁴

Only one article cited Fisher’s 2003 dissertation but had no details at all in it, and no discussion of ‘Fear’ Matrix.¹⁵

E. Fisher’s Research

Near 80 articles (c. 2000 onward) are published online and/or citations are in books all written by RMF—and, often reciting his own work that mentions ‘Fear’ Matrix¹⁶

Discussion

In 20 years of using the most important concept in my work ‘Fear’ Matrix¹⁷ the up-take by other serious writers and scholars across disciplines is zero. This does not mean people aren’t reading my work, for they surely are,¹⁸ but for reasons (see below) they are not utilizing in their publications ‘Fear’ Matrix. All the other uses of “fear matrix” typically with small letters found in this study have no reference to my work. They use the notion of an inter-related set of measures and phenomenon re: fear(s) in various research studies, and theoretical conjectures, but they are only interested in a very restricted use, which is also found in the B. Hybrid categories and especially pronounced in the A. Neurobiological category. Clearly, it is not impossible to find my work on the Internet (98% of the hits in the searches). It is very visible, if one looks.

¹⁴ This category does not include me citing myself.

¹⁵ Hamilton, M. (2006). Integral metamap creates common language for urban change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 19(3), 276-306.

¹⁶ Note, for various reasons, I have rarely used “Fear Matrix” and “fear matrix” but always they remain located under the umbrella of the meta-context of the original ‘Fear’ Matrix conception and complication.

¹⁷ Note: I originally used ‘Fear’ Project (1989) through the 1990s and in all likelihood the up-take would be no better than ‘Fear’ Matrix. Only after mid-2000 did I often use both terms, often interchangeably, albeit they are not quite the same (see my other writings, and especially Fisher 2002, see definitions in Fisher & Subba, 2016, p. 156). Fisher, R. M., & Subba, D. (2016). *Philosophy of fearism: A first East-West dialogue*. Australia: Xlibris.

¹⁸ Some of the best evidence of the numbers of readers (via downloads) recorded online in PRISM at the University of Calgary Library, shows a surprising number are accessing (if not reading) my uploaded Technical Papers in the last four months. E.g., “Fear Matrix” (2012) pdf has 20 downloads as of July 12, 2019.

I used ‘Fear’ Project for years to explain my theory of a meta-context that overtakes all human activities (inner and outer) and makes them fear-based (i.e., hurtful, oppressive). Little was happening in up-take with that technical language; but with The Wachowski Bros. brilliant critical film of civilization/society in 1999, with the production and massive showing of success for the film worldwide—it seemed a good strategy to rename (somewhat) to make my big critical meta-construct simply the ‘Fear’ Matrix. I believed that ought to have really been the name of the first film by The Wachowski Bros. and I was somewhat ticked off they left it out—because fear (‘fear’) is clearly ruling all the narrative and characters—virtually all the time—Machine World is a Fear World, in other words. I won’t say more but I have written lots of about this in other publications. So, ‘Fear’ Matrix ought to have caught on in popular culture at least, and then leaked into academia—so I thought. Not so.¹⁹

The reality of non-up-take of my conception of the ‘Fear’ Matrix, although disappointing, is one that requires some theorizing and conjectures. First off, it surely represents the *resistance* (mega-denial) in our societies (around the world) to engage with potent concepts (projects) that are intended to reveal (liberate) what is wanting to not be revealed. The ‘Fear’ Matrix is oppression itself (some would call ‘evil’). This latter theory of the toxic ‘hidden curriculum’ of the ‘Fear’ Matrix operations is well discussed in my works and I will not repeat it here. I am convinced that the ‘Fear’ Matrix is so controlling (mostly invisibly) of nearly every aspect of human life—especially in the modern and postmodern world *via* hypermediation of fear (and ‘fear’)—that there is a built-in design in societies more or less to not see through the design frame of power and control (i.e., the architecture of the ‘Fear’ Matrix). Note, I also in 1998 began publishing my work using a meta-context of “culture of fear” because that was showing up across the disciplines and was well researched often—bringing out the same kind of idea as the ‘Fear’ Project and ‘Fear’ Matrix—although, they were using “culture of fear” and not citing my work nor was their conceptualization and theory of “culture of fear” near as deep and wide as my own—that is, with a deep ontological and epistemological implication to it. So, it is amazing to me as well, more than anything, that those who actually study fear, and actually use the “culture of fear” critique of societies, even they refuse to use the “culture of fear” the way I do because it

¹⁹ Which does not mean a lot of people, and some academics, missed the message of the film and the central role of fear (and love); see e.g., Fisher, R. M. (2009). “Unplugging” as real and metaphoric: Emancipatory dimensions to *The Matrix* trilogy. Technical Paper No. 33. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

has to be understood (I argue) in conjunction with the ‘Fear’ Matrix. I have also used the notion of toxic fearism-t to pry into and reveal the architecture of the ‘Fear’ Matrix but that also has its problems and rare are academics citing that work of mine either.²⁰

Lots of other ideas and explanations could be offered but I’ll stop here and let readers digest this short study of revisiting the ‘Fear’ Matrix. I trust you’ll be inspired to actually read more about it yourselves and then share your findings, concerns, and questions with me and/or with the world at-large—that is how real growth and emancipation will happen.

²⁰ I have documented the actual (mis-)interpretation of my notion of “fearism” by many scholars in Migration Studies today (see Fisher, R. M. (2017). “Fearism”: A critical analysis of uses and discourses in global migration studies. Technical Paper No. 64. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.